Prerequisites for Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Lessons from the South African experience.

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Can swords really be hammered into plowshares?

Let me take you back to that glorious day in May 1994 in Pretoria. It was a day never to forget!
Images of the newly elected President Nelson Mandela on the steps of the Union Building - smiling broadly at the hundreds of thousands of South Africans in the gardens below, embracing foreign dignitaries, royalty, colleagues from the liberation struggle, his former opponents - were flashed on television screens across the world. Millions, in six continents, saw jet fighter planes pass by, trailing the colours of the new South African flag. They heard, many for the first time, the national anthem sung in Xhosa, English, Afrikaans, in different African languages: *Nkosi sikilele i 'Afrika* - God bless Africa!

We are celebrating too soon, one observer, a Catholic father, commented in the days that followed. We are leapfrogging from a time of struggle and pain right across to a time of jubilation and celebration. This is too soon, he said. In between, we needed a time for remembering, even for mourning. We had not, he contended, sufficiently dealt with our past - and it was time that we started doing that. It is impossible to simply close the books, to forgive and forget. "We have to face the past", Archbishop Desmond Tutu was fond of saying, "because if you don't face the past, it may return".

How to deal with the past?

How to deal with the past? This question was also uppermost in the minds of the delegates at CODESA, die multiparty conference who prior to the 1994 elections, had to struggle with on the one hand the plight of the thousands of victims of the apartheid years, and on the other hand, with the needs of the many perpetrators who were guilty of gross human right violations in the past. A blanket amnesty would not work. It would have been a total disregard for and dishonouring of the pain and the suffering of the victims. On the other end of the scale, Nuremburg type trials for the perpetrators were also not advisable, especially if reconciliation was the order of the day. One of the last decisions taken by the multiparty conference was to appoint a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to establish a complete picture of the apartheid past (1948-1994), to facilitate the granting of amnesty to perpetrators who applied to the TRC, and to establish the hereabouts of the victims, inviting them to relate their own accounts of the violations they suffered and to recommend reparations measures in this respect.

For two and half years the *Human Rights Violations Committee* of the TRC traveled across the country to collect statements and to arrange for public hearings in many cities and towns, in all the provinces of South Africa. Media coverage was extensive. The press carried daily reports, and night after night the faces of the many victims appeared on television screens: tearful faces of mothers who have lost their children, men and women who had lost their spouses, proud faces of comrades who fought in the struggle, high profile politicians and businessmen who arrived in BMWs and Mercedes Benzes, white farmers who lost loved ones in land mine attacks, innocent passers-by injured when a bomb hidden in a busy street

exploded. In the end, at no less than 140 public hearings, the names of 27 000 victims of gross human right abuses were officially registered. Tears flowed freely, but they were usually tears of healing.

At the same time the *Amnesty Committee* was hard at work: receiving the applications of more than 7000 perpetrators - from both sides of the struggle - who needed amnesty. The amnesty process took much longer to complete its work - almost six years - and was often touched by controversy. A number of well known victim families - notably the Biko, Goniwe, ande Mxgenge families from the Eastern Cape - strongly opposed the process. The amnesty process was favouring the perpetrators, they felt, while little is done to alleviate the plight of the victims and their families. On the other end of the scale a number of senior military officers refused to apply for amnesty. It was a shaming exercise, they argued, a witch hunt, and they would have no part in it. Eventually the Amnesty Committee did finish its task, and a large number of perpetrators did receive amnesty.

A third committee, the *Reparation and Rehabilitation Committee*, was tasked to assess the harm suffered by the victims as well as the communities they came from, and to draft recommendations on reparation and rehabilitation. Taking into account the different needs expressed by the victims, five categories of reparation proposals were decided upon: urgent interim reparation, individual reparation grants, community reparation, symbolic reparation and institutional reparation.

At long last the TRC was able to wind up its work, and to present its report to the nation. It is far too early to offer a final evaluation of the TRC's work. Future historians will, no doubt, have much to say in this regard, Suffice it for me to say that a comprehensive report *was* published - six volumes in all -that contained not only a well researched overview of the recent history of South Africa, but also summaries of the reports of the victims as well as of the many other interest groups that were asked to appear before the TRC, together with an extensive report on the amnesty process.

So, the TRC has presented its report. The "truth" - as had been established by the TRC - has been told. Not all South Africans were satisfied. Some praised the report, calling it an important step on the road to reconciliation and nation building. But there were detractors too, who thought the report one sided. Some ANC cadres protested that the report criminalised their role in the struggle, while conservative Whites rejected it as a witch hunt.

What about reconciliation?

Did the work of the TRC and the publication of the TRC Report contribute to reconciliation, to turning swords into plowshares? The Commission's lofty charge inspired many at the time:

> To provide a historic bridge between the past of a deeply divided society characterized by strife, conflict, untold suffering and injustice, and a future founded on the recognition of human rights, democracy and peaceful co-existence for all, irrespective of colour, race, class, belief or sex.
> The pursuit of national unity, the well-being of all citizens, of peace and reconciliation and the reconstruction of society.
> The recognition of the need for understanding but not for vengeance, the need for reparation but not for retaliation, for *ubuntu* but not for victimization *(TRC Report Volume* 1, pp 55-57).

But did the TRC, did the South African nation at large, succeed in doing that? I personally have come to the conclusion that we are, at best, only at the beginning of things. The journey has barely started. To publish a report is one thing, to break down centuries of misunderstanding and prejudice, quite another. Reconciliation can be attained. During the TRC years we were frequently amazed by what - by the grace of God - had taken place, but reconciliation can never be taken for granted. It can never be 'organised'. Microwave oven-reconciliation does not last. What I did realise, and what I would like to share with you, is that there seems to be a number of *prerequisites* for reconciliation to happen.

2.1 Reconciliation needs a clear definition.

If we want to succeed on the road to reconciliation, we need, firstly to have a clear idea of where we are going. We need a clear definition of what reconciliation - the goal we strive at - entails. Strangely, significantly, one of the major difficulties that the TRC had to contend with was that of definition. What does 'reconciliation' really mean? Lengthy discussions were held at Commission meetings. On the one hand there were the lawyers, jurists and politicians who, with feet firmly planted on the ground, warned that one need not be too starry-eyed when reconciliation is on the agenda. When the dust settles in the streets, when the shooting stops, when people let go of one another's throats, be grateful, they argued. That is enough. Declare it to be reconciliation! That is, in our context, often as far as one may expect to go. Desmond Tutu as well as the *baruti* (clergy) who served on the TRC favoured a loftier definition. When they spoke about reconciliation, they often clothed it in religious terminology (Meiring 2000, p 129). Referring to the Second Letter to the Corinthians, Tutu regularly quoted the apostle Paul:

> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5: 18f, Revised Standard Version)

Tutu unashamedly professed his conviction that only because God has reconciled us to Him by sacrificing his Son Jesus Christ on the cross, true and lasting reconciliation between humans became possible.
In similar fashion, spokespersons of other faith communities - Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, African Traditional Religion, et cetera - were encouraged by Tutu when they joined the debate, to refer to the deepest sources of *their* religious traditions and beliefs, in helping to define the true meaning of reconciliation. In spite of all this, the confusion was never completely lifted. Up to the very end of the TRC commissioners differed from one another. In his minority report Commissioner (advocate) Wynand Malan could not but once again distance himself from the 'religiously loaded' concept of reconciliation *(TRC Report Volume* 5, pp 439ff).

The debate was vehemently continued outside the TRC offices. Many researchers pleaded for a clear definition of the reconciliation we were striving for. If we do not succeed, they argued, the whole exercise will be in vain. If we ourselves are unsure where we were heading, how are we to lead people in that direction? (Hamber, pp 3ff). From time to time the question was even raised whether we need not find an alternative word for 'reconciliation', a less loaded term that could infuse the concept with a fresh understanding.

In this quest we need light from many lamps. Scholars in the fields of Philosophy and Linguistics may help analyze the history and meaning of the concept of 'reconciliation'. Sociologists and psychologists need to define the context as well as the process of reconciliation. And theologians are challenged to develop a 'theology of reconciliation' - Tutu called it a 'theology of *ubuntu'* (Hulley, p 103) - where not only the concept is redefined, but where the role that believers may play in the process is adequately described. Interestingly, that was exactly what the TRC had in mind for the faith communities, when it drafted its final proposals. The Commission recommended that:

> religious communities develop theologies designed to promote reconciliation and a true sense of community in the nation. Particular consideration could be given to the role of whites as beneficiaries of apartheid; with regard to reconstruction and reconciliation, the empowerment of black people and those who have suffered gross violation of human rights to move beyond 'victimhood' in regaining their humanity; the characteristics of good citizenship, the rule of law and the 'common good' in society; (and) the articulation of a global ethical foundation which is in keeping with the major beliefs of the various religions *(TRC Report Volume* 5, p 317).

2.2. **Reconciliation and truth go hand in hand.**

Central to the business of reconciliation and peacemaking is the quest for truth. When the then Minister of Justice Dullah Omar introduced the TRC legislation to Parliament, he exhorted all South Africans "to join in the search for truth without which there can be no genuine reconciliation" (Villa-Vicencio, p 128). But how does one determine 'the truth'? I vividly recall the discussions we had on the subject. During so many hearings, after

analyzing stacks of papers, how does one establish what *really* happened, what the motives of the people involved *really* were. Modesty, it seemed, becomes everyone in search of truth. We took some courage from the celebrated words of Michael Ignatief that although we will never be able to present a perfect picture to establish the final truth, the very least that we should be able to do was "to curtail the number of lies that up to now had free reign in society" (quoted by Charles Villa-Vicentio in *The Sunday Independent,* 7 June 1998).

But the quest for truth is more than collecting facts and weighing findings. It has a deeper side to it. In the traditions of all religions searching for the truth turns into a spiritual exercise. Finding truth goes far beyond establishing historical and legal facts. It has to do with understanding, accepting accountability, justice, restoring and maintaining the fragile relationship between human beings - as well as the quest to find the Ultimate Truth, God Himself. The search for truth, the TRC Commissioners concluded, needed to be handled with the greatest sensitivity. Would that not be the case during the TRC years, the nation could have bled to death. But if the TRC succeeded, the Commissioners hoped, it would lead to a national catharsis, to peace and reconciliation, to the point where the truth in all reality sets one free.

This indeed is what happened. When some perpetrators, after much anguish and embarrassment, unburdened themselves to the Amnesty Committee, when they made a full submission of all the relevant facts, after the questioning and cross-questioning came to end, it was as if a cloud was lifted. On the final day of his appearance before the TRC when he had to testify to his role in the Khotso House (headquarters of The S A Council of Churches) bombing, former Minister of Police Adrian Vlok, said:

> "When the final question was asked and when the legal team of the South African Council of Churches indicated its satisfaction ... my heart sang. I got a lump in my throat and I thanked God for his grace and mercy to me (Meiring 1999, p 357).

Victims had the same experience. The truth set them free too. At a hearing in Soweto an elderly gentlemen remarked: "When I was tortured at John Vorster Square my tormentor sneered at me: 'You can shout your lungs out. Nobody will ever hear you!' Now, after al these years, people *are* hearing me!" (Van Vugt, Cloete, p 190).

After a particularly difficult testimony at an East London hearing, when an aged Xhosa mother described the terrible tortures inflicted on her fourteen year old son - a story that had many in the audience in tears - she finally remarked on the relief it was to her to be given the opportunity to put the truth, her truth, on the table: "Oh yes, Sir, it was worth the trouble (to testify). I think that I will immediately fall asleep tonight - for the first time in sixteen years. Perhaps tonight I will be able to sleep without nightmares" (Meiring 1999, p 371).

But it was not only the perpetrators and the victims that needed the truth telling, the *nation* needed it as well: to listen to the truth, to be confronted by the truth, to be shamed by the truth, to struggle with the truth, to eventually also experience the reality of being set free by the truth. This process is not yet finished. It has to continue. During the life of the TRC, 22,4000 victims came to the fore with their stories; 7048 perpetrators followed suit. Many of them experienced healing. But in South Africa today there are still millions of people - victims as well as perpetrators - from all walks of life, from all communities, who are still struggling with the pain, the frustration, and the anger of the past. There are those who were arrested and convicted of petty apartheid offences, who were discriminated against, who were forcefully removed from their homes, who in a myriad of ways were abused and humiliated. And there are whites who also suffered, who lost their beloved in attacks on farms and by explosions on busy street comers, who sent their sons and their husbands to fight a border war from which they did not return. They too need the opportunity to tell, to be listened to, to be taken seriously, and to experience healing in the process. "Africa is a place of story telling", Ellen Kuzwayo wrote. "We need more stories, never mind how painful the exercise may be. This is how we will learn to love one another. Stories help us to understand, to forgive and to see things through someone else's eyes" (quoted from Vugt, Cloete, p 196).

2.3. Reconciliation and justice are two sides of a coin

Justice and reconciliation are two sides of the same coin. For reconciliation to take place, there has to be a sense of justice being part and parcel of the process. Lasting reconciliation can only flourish in a society where justice is seen to be done. In South Africa this brings a number of issues to the fore: not only the issue of proper government reparation to the victims of human rights abuses to balance the generous granting of amnesty to perpetrators of the abuses, but also the wider issues involving every South African: unemployment, poverty, affirmative action, equal education, restitution, the redistribution of land, reparation tax, et cetera.

Justice I came to realise, has many facets. Thabo Mbeki, while he was still Deputy President of South Africa, delivered an important address at the opening of Parliament in May 1998, in which he stressed the vital link between reconciliation and justice. To his way of thinking it was especially *economic justice* that was at stake. His definition of reconciliation was clear cut: the creation of a non-racial, non-sexist society, the healing of the divisions of the past, and the improvement of the quality of life of all citizens (Boraine, p 348). To reach this, first and foremost, the issue of economic justice needs to be addressed:.

> "South Africa is a country of two nations. One of the nations is white and well off, and because of their background and their economic, physical, and educational infrastructures, they are able to exercise their right to equal opportunity and the development opportunities that flow from the new Constitution. The second and larger nation of South Africa, is black and poor with the worst being affected women in rural areas, the black population in general, and the disabled.
> This nation lives under conditions of grossly underdeveloped economic, physical, educational, communication and other infrastructures" (Boraine, p 349).

In Rwanda another facet of the relationship between justice and reconciliation came to the fore. Tutu vividly describes in his book *No Future Without Forgiveness* his experience when he, after visiting some of the horrendous genocide sites where almost a million Rwandese died at the hands of their compatriots (February-April 1994), was invited to address a rally in the Kigali stadium. He made a passionate plea for forgiveness and reconciliation, in spite of everything that happened in the past, arguing that without that there is no future for Rwanda and its people. Neither his audience nor the Rwandese government, were persuaded. Forgiveness, blanket amnesty in a society where there was for years no rule of law, no sense of justice, was impossible, they maintained. They liked the South African TRC process, especially the opportunity given to thousands of victims to tell their stories, but blanket amnesty to perpetrators, guilty of heinous deeds, was unacceptable. Tutu's plea that they needed to move from retributive justice to restorative justice, fell on deaf ears.

> "The president of Rwanda responded to my sermon with considerable magnanimity. They were ready to forgive, he said, but even Jesus had declared that the devil could not be forgiven. I do not know where he found the basis for what he said, but he was expressing a view that found some resonance (among his people): that there were atrocities that were unforgivable (Tutu, p 209).

Thirdly, it must be clear to leaders that the message of reconciliation must never be brought *at the expense of social action,* never be used as an excuse for harboring injustice. Alex Boraine, deputy chairperson of the TRC, was very firm in his conviction on this, often quoting the Filipino poet J. Cabazares to stress his point:

> Talk to us about reconciliation
> Only if you first experience
> The anger of our dying.
> Talk to us about reconciliation
> If your living is not the cause of our dying.
> Talk to us about reconciliation
> Only if your words are not products of your devious scheme
> To silence our struggle for freedom.
> Talk to us about reconciliation
> Only if your intention is not to enrich yourself
> More on your throne.
> Talk to us about reconciliation
> Only if you cease to appropriate all the symbols

> And meanings of our struggle (Boraine, p 361).

Lastly, to stand for justice may be difficult, even hazardous. But is a price that needs to be paid. One has to *identify with the victim,* in order to be of service. When Beyers Naudé was standing trial in Johannesburg, the defence advocate questioned him on his understanding of the concept of reconciliation. Naudé answered:

> No reconciliation is possible without justice, and whoever works for reconciliation must first determine the causes of injustice in the hearts and lives of those, of either the persons or groups, who feel themselves aggrieved. In order to determine the causes of the injustice a person must not only have the outward individual facts of the matter, but as a Christian you are called to identify yourself in heart and soul, to live in, to think in, and to feel in the heart, in the consciousness, the feelings of the person or the persons who feel themselves aggrieved. This is the grace that the new birth in Jesus Christ gives a person - every person who wishes to receive it (De Gruchy, p pI71).

2.4. Reconciliation needs a confession as well as a willingness to forgive

Reconciliation requires a deep, honest confession - and a willingness to forgive. The TRC Act did not require of perpetrators to make an open confession of their crimes, to publicly ask for forgiveness before amnesty was granted. Yet it has to be stated clearly that lasting reconciliation rests firmly upon the capacity of perpetrators, individuals as well as perpetrator communities, to honestly, deeply, recognize and confess their guilt towards God and their fellow human beings, towards individual victims as well as victim communities - and to humbly ask for forgiveness. And it equally rests upon the magnanimity and grace of the victims to reach out to them, to extend forgiveness. A prime example of the latter, was Nelson Mandela who after suffering so much at the hands of the apartheid regime, returned from twenty seven years in captivity with one goal in mind - to liberate all South Africans, white and black alike:

> It was during those long and lonely years that my hunger for the freedom of my own people became a hunger for the freedom of all people, white and black. I knew as well as I knew anything that the oppressor must be liberated just as surely as the oppressed. A man who takes away another man's freedom is a prisoner of hatred, he is locked behind the bars of prejudice and narrow-mindedness. I am not truly free if I take away someone else's freedom, just as surely I am not free when my freedom is taken away from me. The oppressed and the oppressor alike are robbed of their humanity. When I walked out of prison that was my mission, to liberate the oppressed and the oppressor both (Mandela, p 617).

Tutu who has become the symbol of reconciliation in South Africa, has written movingly on the issue of forgiveness. In his *No Future Without Forgiveness* he, against the backdrop of his Truth and Reconciliation Commission experience, reflected on the many aspects of forgiveness.

Forgiveness is *a risky business,* Tutu explains. When one embarks on the business of asking for and giving forgiveness, you are making yourself vulnerable. Both parties may be spurned. The process may be derailed by the inability of victims to forgive, or by the insensitivity or arrogance of the perpetrators who do not want to be forgiven. But remember, the archbishop counsels, forgiveness and reconciliation are *meant* to be a risky and very costly exercise. Quoting the ultimate example of Jesus Christ, he writes: "True reconciliation is not cheap. It cost God the death of his only begotten Son (Tutu, p 218).

Tutu further discusses the misunderstanding that reconciliation asks for the glossing over of past mistakes and injustices, that reconciliation requires national *amnesia.* This is totally wrong:

> Forgiving and being reconciled are not about pretending that things are other than they are. It is not patting one another on the back and turning a blind eye to the wrong. True reconciliation exposes the awfulness, the abuse, the pain, the degradation, the truth. It could even sometimes make things worse. It is a risky undertaking, but in the end it is worth wile, because in the end there will be

> real healing from having dealt with a real situation. Spurious reconciliation can bring only spurious healing (Tutu, p 218).

Forgiveness, however, means *abandoning your right to retribution,* your right to pay back the perpetrator in his own coin. But is a loss, Tutu maintains, which liberates the victim.

A recent issue of the journal *Spirituality and Health* had on its front cover a picture of three US ex-servicemen standing in front of the Vietnam Memorial in Washington DC.
One asks: 'Have you forgiven those who held you prisoner of war?'
' I will never forgive them', replies the other.
His mate says: 'Then it seems they still have you in prison, don't they?' (Tutu, p 219f).

If individuals need to ask for forgiveness, and are called upon to grant forgiveness, the same goes for communities. And it especially goes for the *leaders* of these communities. There are shining examples of leaders who understood this, and who embarked on the difficult, humbling, road of confessing the sins of the past, asking for forgiveness for their own as well as their community's involvement. Willy Brandt, chancellor of West Germany knelt silently at the Warsaw War Memorial, as an act of confession and repentance for German offences against the Polish nation (1970). President Gerald Ford issued an official apology to the 120 000 Americans of Japanese origin who in 1941, after the attack on Pearl Harbour, were rounded up and humiliated by the United States government (1976). In March 2000 Pope John Paul II, in a solemn mass in St Peter's Basilica in Rome, acknowledged the errors and cruelty which had taken place in the history of the Roman Catholic Church, including the Inquisition, the forced conversion of native peoples in Latin America and Africa, and the Church's support of the Crusades whose victims included Muslims, members of the Eastern Orthodox Church, as well as Jews. In South Africa Willie Jonker, at the Rustenburg Conference (1986), made an eloquent plea for forgiveness to his black fellow Christians on behalf of Afrikaners, especially those belonging to the Dutch Reformed Church, for the atrocities of apartheid.

Fortunate are the countries where, at critical times in the history of the nation, leaders have emerged who dared to go against the tide, dared to apologize, to ask for forgiveness, and by doing so opened the door to reconciliation. Regrettably, great leaders of sensitivity and compassion are not easily found. John Howard, Prime Minister of Australia, who refused to apologize for the way in which Australians treated Aborigines, especially Aboriginal children, failed to seize the opportunity. The same applies to former South African State Presidents P W Botha and F W de Klerk, who according to the TRC Report, missed the opportunity to open doors to national reconciliation by publicly and openly, and without qualifications, acknowledging the pain and suffering they as well as their fellow white South Africans have caused to millions of Black and Brown and Indian compatriots (Boraine, pp 3470ff).

In a media statement (8 May 1997) Desmond Tutu called upon all political leaders in South Africa, to make some symbolic act of atonement, setting an example to all in the country. He asked Nelson Mandela to make a public act of atonement at the site of the Church Street bombing by ANC cadres in Pretoria, where many civilians lost their lives. He asked Mangosuthu Buthelezi to make a similar act of atonement at the village of Kwa Makhuta where women and children were massacred by IFP supporters. He asked Stanley Mogoba, leader of the Pan African Congress to hold a special service at St James' Church, Cape Town, in remembrance of the victims of the assault on the church in 1993. He finally asked F W de Klerk to travel to the site of the Boipatong massacre, on a similar mission. "Would it not be wonderful", Tutu said, "if all the leaders of these political parties could go to the site of a notorious atrocity committed by his side and say: 'Sorry - forgive us'. With no qualifications, no 'buts or ifs'" (Boraine, p 372). Sadly none of the leaders accepted Tutu's challenge, and the cause of reconciliation in South Africa suffered as a result.

2.5. **Reconciliation requires a firm commitment**

Reconciliation, history teaches us, is not for the fainthearted. To act as a reconciler, a builder of bridges between opposing individuals as well as communities, asks for a strong commitment, resilience, and nerves of steel. It is often a hard and thankless task. But, bridges are made to be trodden upon! Jesus Christ, the ultimate Reconciler put his life on line - and He expected of his disciples to follow his example. During the 1930s the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer repeatedly warned his fellow-Christians against the temptation of 'cheap grace', which is a mortal enemy to the gospel. 'Costly grace' should be the aim of all believers who, knowing and accepting their salvation as a free gift from God, offer themselves to Him, and to one another, as a living sacrifice. In our times and in our context, it seems to me, we are called to warn against a similar temptation, that of 'cheap reconciliation', reconciliation without cost, which too is a mortal enemy to the gospel of our Lord. We need to rediscover on a daily basis what 'costly reconciliation' entails, and dare to live according to our discovery.

In South Africa, God was good to us, providing us not only with leaders like Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, and Beyers Naudé, but tens of thousands of women and men, some young, some old, who *were* willing to rise to the occasion. In many instances they had to pay a very costly price for being harbingers of peace. The annals of the TRC contain the stories of many of them, ordinary citizens who reached beyond themselves, to facilitate reconciliation in their communities... "It never ceases to astonish me", Tutu wrote in between Truth Commission hearings, "the magnanimity of many victims who suffered the most heinous violations, who reach out to embrace their tormentors with joy, willing to forgive and wanting to reconcile" (Meiring 2002, p 68).

Men and women in the field of reconciliation are in need of a number of things: solid training, proper empowerment, resilience, understanding, faith, love, and - especially - a healthy sense of humour. Tutu's sense of the absurd, his explosive humour at the most unexpected times, often saved the day. At many an occasion, in a tragic circumstance, when the stories of the victims or perpetrators were almost too painful or too shocking to bear, the Archbishop would rescue the situation by relating a humorous story, or referring to a funny incident, often at his own expense. Tutu's stories usually contained a deep lesson that offered the audience ample food for thought.

Finally, a committed agent of reconciliation needs to know how much he or she depends on others, that in the business of reconciliation no one can exist without partners. Africa has introduced the concept of *ubuntu* to the world, the conviction that no person can live without the other. *Ubuntu* represents personhood, humanity, group solidarity, and morality. Its core belief is (in the Nguni language): 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu, motho ke motho ba batho ba bangwe', literally translated as 'a human being is a human being because of other human beings' (Boraine, p 362). A leader's commitment, therefore, is not only to the opposing individuals or parties he or she endeavours to bring together, the leaders themselves are inextricably bound to, and dependent upon, their fellow workers on whom they, even if they do not always realize it, depend. Desmond Tutu uses an allegory to illustrate this:

> There was once a light bulb which shone and shone like no light bulb had shone before. It captured all the limelight and began to strut about arrogantly quite unmindful of how it was that it could shine so brilliantly, thinking that it was all due to is own merit and skill. Then one day somebody disconnected the famous light bulb from the light socket and placed it on the table and try as hard as it could, the light bulb could bring forth no light and brilliance. It lay there looking so disconsolate and dark and cold - and useless. Yes, it had never known that its light came from the power station and that it had been connected to the dynamo by little wires and flexes that lay hidden and unseen and totally unsung (Hulley, p 103).

3. Nkosi Sikelel' i Afrika.

Twenty one years have passed since that glorious day in Pretoria in May 1994, when Nelson Mandela smiled at the crowds, when the music of the anthem filled the streets. After so many years of pain and suffering, of frustration and despair, freedom has come. Freedom at last! The dream has come true.

Mandela was not the first to dream, nor the first to intone the words of the anthem. More than fifty years ago, in the hey days of apartheid, a white Afrikaner, Justice H A Fagan, witnessed a great gathering of Africans, where *Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika,* was sung. He was touched to the core, and back home wrote a poem, celebrating the many South Africans from all communities who 'were bound in one great cord'. His turn of phrase, the words he used, may sound dated. His feelings, the dream he passed on to us, continue to inspire:

> From lips of thousands swells the music. Ah!
> I close my eyes, and like a seraph choir
> I hear these voices that my soul inspire:
> *Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika.*
> For Africa we crave Thy blessing, Lord.
> I look, and lo! The Zulu thousands stand,
> Xhosa, Shangaan and Sotho hand in hand,
> And I, white man - bound in one great cord.
> We many races seek the one reward,
> Blessing on our dear home, one fatherland;
> Rooted and grounded here at thy command,
> By one and all Thy blessing be implored!
> We many raise one song, one 'Gloria' –
> *Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika*
>
> (De Gruchy, p 63).

Africa still is a dark continent, a continent struggling with seemingly insurmountable problems. Hunger, drought, poverty, political instability, war, human rights abuses, and Aids, continue to ravage its people. But light dances on the horizon. After presiding over many hearings where South African victims and perpetrators tabled their stories of cruelty and suffering, after helping prepare a report on a country torn apart by racism and prejudice - but also taking note of the role that many have played to bring peace, to foster reconciliation - the chairperson of the TRC could not but rejoice. His words serve as an exhortation to all of us:

> "We have been wounded but we are being healed. It is possible even with our past suffering, anguish, alienation and violence to become one people, reconciled, healed, caring, compassionate and ready to share as we put our past behind us to stride into the glorious future God holds before us as the Rainbow People of God". (Meiring 1999, P 379)

Or, in the words of the ancient prophet, swords *can* be hammered into plowshares and spears *can* be turned into pruning hooks.

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