



REFLECTIONS IN THE AGE OF COVID



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Tutu and me: Perspectives on brokenness and wholeness

Desmond Tutu became the Bishop of Lesotho in 1975.

In September 1976 I was expelled from South Africa and with the agreement of my community, the Society of the Sacred Mission, I went to live in Lesotho, where SSM had been ministering since 1912. Soon after my arrival I applied to the National University of Lesotho to complete my undergraduate degree in English and Sociology. The bishop used his good offices to facilitate my immediate acceptance. Since I was already a priest when I was studying in South Africa, I soon assisted the Lesotho University Chaplaincy. This was the situation that led then Bishop Tutu to refer to me much later as the most obstreperous person he'd ever met! When I heard this I reflected and I realised that without excluding ego and other personality traits, the person he met in 1976 had been engaged in fighting on many fronts, not least church hierarchies, and had been traumatised by three years of living in and resistance to, Apartheid South Africa.

Later I told Bishop Tutu that I was considering joining Umkhonto We Sizwe, the military wing of the ANC. He responded that I was in danger of over-identification. His answer confused me. As I saw it, I was simply taking my beliefs to their logical conclusion in the tradition of Latin American revolutionaries like Nestor Paz and Camilo Torres. Theologically, wasn't the Incarnation God's identification with us? Had Jesus over-identified I wondered?

In 1982 the church expelled me from Lesotho after the Maseru massacre of that year "for my own safety and that of others". In 1990, I survived an assassination attempt in the form of a letter bomb in Zimbabwe, with the loss of both hands and an eye.

I went to Australia to receive medical treatment and returned to Zimbabwe the next year. I went to see the bishop, with whom I was about to start working at the time of the bombing, and he looked surprised to see me. He asked me what I could do since I was now disabled. I replied that I felt I could be more of a priest with no hands than ever I had been with two; and I could also still drive a car.

I returned to South Africa for a visit in 1991, by which time Desmond Tutu was Archbishop of Cape Town and, despite his diminutive stature, a towering giant on the world stage. Archbishop Tutu hosted me for dinner and invited me to come and work in his diocese. "I have one priest who is blind and now one with no hands. Wow!" Whereas my first bishop saw my disability as a liability and an obstacle to my ministry, the archbishop saw my disability as an asset. At the time, I was still getting used to my prosthetic hands and managed to spill my coffee over the archbishop. He asked if I wanted to go home. I replied, "No, let me have another cup of coffee".

Back home in South Africa the following year, I initially started working for an NGO but it did not work out and I went to see Archbishop Tutu for advice. He told me, "If you wake up and dread going to work you should quit".

The stars were aligning and shortly thereafter I was appointed as Chaplain, and as one of the first two employees, of the Trauma Centre for Violence and Torture. The Trauma Centre was situated at Cowley House in Cape Town, initially an Anglican monastery. It became a half-way house for families from all over Southern Africa to visit their relatives imprisoned on Robben Island.

Around the time of the first democratic elections, the archbishop made the arbitrary decision that priests could not be members of political parties. Since at that time I was not a South African citizen, my right to return from exile and live in South Africa was derived from my membership of the ANC. If I resigned from the ANC, I could no longer live in South Africa. The archbishop looked at me and said there could be no exceptions. We both knew he meant the opposite. The quid pro quo was that I kept a low profile.

Whilst I was at the Trauma Centre, together with other colleagues we created an experiential process called the Healing of Memories.

In 1998 we launched the Institute for Healing of Memories, conceived as a parallel process to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Archbishop Tutu agreed to be a Patron of the Institute and has remained so to date.

Often on public platforms he would refer back to those early days in Lesotho and how difficult he found me. It did not sit easily with me when the archbishop suggested that he was thankful for the transformation brought about in me as a consequence of the bomb and its aftermath. However, it is important to stress that the bombing was not God's will. God helped me to redeem that evil act.

Nevertheless I can say that I know that I am a better human because of the journey I have travelled.

In 2012 I published my memoir, *Redeeming the Past: My Journey from Freedom Fighter to Healer*⁽¹⁾ with my co-writer Stephen Karakashian. Archbishop Tutu wrote in the Foreword: "...Since his bombing Father Michael has become a marvellous advocate for healing and reconciliation in South Africa and other strife-torn regions of the globe. He has truly become a citizen of the world, and I have watched his work with a growing sense of awe and admiration. Although he was broken physically, he has become the most whole person I know, truly a wounded healer". It was deeply humbling to be described in such glowing terms.

Archbishop Tutu could have gained a proud place in history as a champion of the rights of black people to a place in the sun. However, the way he embraced and championed other struggles illustrates that he was not just a black man fighting for his people, as important as that was. Archbishop Desmond has championed the rights of all oppressed people regardless of whether it is a popular or unpopular struggle. For that he has my deepest admiration. Demonstrably, he lived out his own famous quote: "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor".

I attended the Provincial Synod of the Anglican Church in (then) Swaziland in August 1992, which was to debate whether to allow women to be ordained to the priesthood. Archbishop Tutu was in the chair but was not neutral. He was known to be strongly in favour. The archbishop had, in front of him, two piles of paper of those requesting to speak for and against the motion. He was alternating between the two piles. A number of people speaking in support had not always done so but were converted by women with vocations to the priesthood whom they met. Now I should mention that all of us clergy

⁽¹⁾ *Redeeming the Past: My Journey From Freedom Fighter to Healer*, Michael Lapsley with Stephen Karakashian, Orbis, New York 2012



were dressed in our black cassocks, full-length black dresses one might say. A man stood to oppose the motion. He said it would be wrong for women to be ordained, for that would mean women would be wearing men's clothing. The Synod collapsed in laughter. Shortly after, the archbishop asked us to bow our heads in prayer. Then we voted overwhelmingly in favour. Prayer used very strategically, I thought to myself. Immediately after, the archbishop asked us to be sensitive to those who had lost the vote and were hurting; promoting and advocating for justice while being pastoral to all.

It was on the rights of same-gender loving persons to an equal place in God's kingdom that the archbishop was an outspoken advocate. "I would refuse to go to a homophobic heaven. No, I would say sorry, I mean I would much rather go to the other place", Archbishop Tutu said at the launch of the Free and Equal campaign in Cape Town. "I would not worship a God who is homophobic and that is how deeply I feel about this."⁽²⁾

On a continent where 38 countries still criminalise homosexuality and many churches are stridently homophobic, the archbishop's statements were not well received in many quarters. Clearly for Tutu we are all God's children, all First Class, equally deserving to be treated with dignity with no exceptions.

In the face of growing corruption in South Africa during the democratic era, Desmond Tutu became the embodiment of the conscience of the nation. This brought him the ire of much of the political elite, whilst he was cheered on by millions of long-suffering citizens still living in abject poverty.

My final story sums up the tenderness and deep affection which has characterised our relationship over many years.

After FW de Klerk denied that Apartheid was a crime against humanity early last year, the Groote Kerk, Mother Church of the Dutch Reformed Church, organised a Day of Lament and invited me to preach the following Sunday. I told the archbishop about the invitation and said I feared that when I ascended

⁽²⁾ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-23464694.amp>

the pulpit the roof would fall in. Tutu responded that the angels would sing. Because of Covid-19, everything was cancelled. In 2021, Ds Riaan de Villiers invited me to preach on Good Friday. I wrote to tell the archbishop "...With a year's delay because of Covid I finally climbed the steps to the pulpit yesterdayroof intact and angels everywhere. Now planning a long-term partnership between the Institute and the Kerk.....". Tutu responded: "My dear Michael, How simply wonderful. God has a real sense of humour. Thank you and God bless you as God uses you as God's wonderful instrument. Yippee! Much love and Easter blessings, Arch"

As is well-known, the archbishop also has a deep personal spirituality that suffuses his whole being. He has a deep appreciation of the role of the religious orders in the Church. Sometimes his staff would call asking where our latest intercession list was. It was comforting to know that he was praying for all the brothers of the Society of the Sacred Mission by name. We also witness his embodiment of how worship and justice are two sides of the same coin. As the Institute for Healing of Memories and as the Society of the Sacred Mission, we are inspired by the example and witness of Archbishop Desmond Mpilo Tutu and give thanks for his 90 years of life.

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The journey to and from apology: Restoring the moral order

The act of apology is a key step on the journey to restore broken relationships and right wrongs. This is equally true in our intimate relations as it is in public life. Whilst there is a journey leading to an apology, of greater import are the actions which come after the apology.

Just when I was mulling over what to say in this paper about apology, something happened in public life in South Africa which brought the issue of apology sharply into focus.

This was in relation to FW de Klerk, the last white President of South Africa.

In 1997 a press report headlined “de Klerk apologises again for Apartheid”. The article reported that National Party leader, FW de Klerk made a renewed apology for Apartheid, saying the National Party took full moral and political responsibility for its policies, which resulted in gross human rights abuses.

Testifying before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) at a special hearing in Cape Town, de Klerk said the National Party was making the renewed apology in the full knowledge of the tremendous harm Apartheid had caused millions of South Africans.

“ I apologise in my capacity as leader of the NP to the millions who suffered wrenching disruption of forced removals; who suffered the shame of being arrested for pass law offences; who over the decades suffered the indignities and humiliation of racial discrimination.”

He told the panel chaired by TRC Archbishop Desmond Tutu a perception had developed that the NP was not accepting overall responsibility for its part in the conflicts of the past and that it was leaving the security forces in the lurch.

“ Let me state clearly that the National Party and I accept full responsibility for all our policies, decisions and actions. We stand by our security forces who implemented such policies and decisions and all reasonable interpretations thereof”, he said.

The NP accepted that its security legislation and successive states of emergency had created circumstances conducive to many of the abuses of human rights which occurred.

“We acknowledge that our implementation of unconventional projects likewise created such an atmosphere,” he continued. “However, many things had happened which the NP had not authorised or been aware of. The recent information of atrocities I find as shocking and abhorrent as anybody else.” (South African Press Association Report 14 May 1997)

As State President, he had gone out of his way to get to the bottom of the truth and to find and prosecute perpetrators of “dastardly” deeds. He had never condoned gross human rights violations and rejected suggestions that the violations had ever been the policy of the NP or the then government.

I am guessing that many of you will know the South African story to varying degrees. It was on 2 February 1990, that FW de Klerk announced that he was going to unconditionally release Nelson Mandela and urban political organisations. In 1993 Nelson Mandela and FW de Klerk were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. In 1997 at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, FW de Klerk made an apology for Apartheid, which is what I quoted above. Thirty years later, FW De Klerk was interviewed by the South African media.

In his latest interview, de Klerk again apologised. Towards the end of the interview, de Klerk was asked if he accepted that Apartheid was a crime against humanity. He stated categorically that he does not accept that it was a crime against humanity.

Apartheid had been declared a crime against humanity by UN resolution 2202 (XXI) of 16 December 1966 and endorsement (resolution 556 (1984) of 23 October 1984) and is also part of the Rome Statute which came into force in 2002.

A few days later, members of an opposition party objected to de Klerk’s presence in Parliament claiming that he is a murderer and Apartheid denialist. This in response to his (de Klerk’s) categorical claim that Apartheid was not a crime against humanity.

Before I continue, let me focus for a moment on what apology is and the important elements of political/collective apology.

Having explored many definitions, three main elements are evident. Firstly, there is an admission of wrongdoing or guilt, secondly, an expression of remorse and thirdly, a commitment to repair the harm done (or not to repeat it). The apology is either written or verbal. These elements contribute to the restoration of the moral order, the restoration of the dignity of the victims, and the commitment to implementing reparations.

However, political apologies are fraught with complex difficulties and have been characterised by some scholars as perhaps merely an “act of speech” (Harris et al); de Klerk and many others are a case in point of what may be called “verbalism”.

Examples such as Tony Blair’s apology for the Irish potato famine and Bill Clinton’s apology for the African American slave trade and his apology to the victims of the Tuskegee syphilis experiment come to mind.

Australia’s National Apology to the Stolen Generations came about as a recommendation from the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal Children from their Families. It highlighted the suffering of indigenous families under the Commonwealth, state and Northern Territory. The National Inquiry then led to the *Bringing them Home Report*, which was tabled in Parliament on 26 May 1997. The report contained 54 recommendations to redress the wrongs done to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by the race-based laws and policies of successive governments throughout Australia. Only as late as 1967 were Aboriginal people regarded as people under Australian law.

To illustrate the complex difficulties of such a highly publicised and politically motivated apology, a journalist, Jack Latimore, in 2008 wrote in the Australian Guardian that the apology was destined to become an ... “inoffensive showpiece within political culture that reduces ‘Aboriginal affairs’ to a problem best contained through a steady ration of prevarication, opportunism, empty symbolism and

cynical half-measures. At worst, the Apology merely assuaged white guilt and further delayed the struggle for truth and reconciliation.”

I lived in Australia from 1967 to 1973 and continue to have strong connections there till today. After the *Bringing them Home* report came out, the Prime Minister at the time, John Howard, refused to apologise. There was a groundswell of popular support for an apology, where the citizenry came out in their thousands saying, “even if the Prime Minister will not apologise, we will”. Eventually a new prime minister, Kevin Rudd, was elected and there was a formal apology in the Australian Parliament which was then ratified in both houses of parliament. I commented in my memoir, *Redeeming the Past*, “However, there has been no effort to pay restitution or compensation. The traumatic consequence of this terrible policy will linger for generations in the form of alcoholism, drug abuse, and domestic violence, all of which are endemic in traumatised Aboriginal communities, as they are in Native American communities, for many of the same reasons.”

My own organisation, the Institute for Healing of Memories, was invited by the Anglican Bishop of the Northern Territory, Philip Freier, to work with communities who were part of the Stolen Generation in Alice Springs. Some of the participants at our healing of memories workshops had experienced being stolen from their families over more than one generation, including from institutions run by the church.

We were able to provide spaces where pain was heard and acknowledged, to contribute to the restoration of dignity and steps on the journey to healing the psychological, emotional and spiritual wounds.

“I had a personal encounter with the toll that social problems take on indigenous communities. I was invited to spend the weekend at an Aboriginal community, called rather ironically Utopia, as the guest of an Aboriginal friend. Tragically, the day before I arrived, a family murder took place, said to be alcohol and drug related. The community immediately became involved in a grief process, and my visit was cancelled. Only a few days previously the mainstream nonindigenous media had headlined an assertion by a national Aboriginal leader that domestic, family, and sexual violence had reached epidemic proportions in the Aboriginal community and that it required urgent national intervention. This situation dramatically illustrates the complexity of the social environment in which the Healing of Memories process seeks to make a small and modest contribution, How do we break the cycle whereby victims become victimizers of others? It is easy either to have a highly romanticized view of the situation of Aboriginal people or to be overcome by hopelessness and despair in the face of the enormity and seriousness of the challenges facing these communities. The situation is not without hope but undoing the damage will surely take several generations and considerable resources, together with a deep willingness to heed the desires and aspirations of indigenous people themselves.” (*op.cit.* p.200-201)

The enduring difference in life expectancy, infant mortality, and numbers incarcerated, of aboriginal people compared with the white population indicate that what flowed from the apology did not dramatically change the lived experience of indigenous people even if children were no longer forcibly removed from their parents. However there has been incremental change for the better in infant mortality and life expectancy.

“Overall, Indigenous Australians experience widespread socio-economic disadvantage and health inequality. However, in recent years, there have been several improvements.

There has been a significant decline in child mortality rates (aged 0–4), from 217 deaths per 100,000 Indigenous children in 1998 to 146 deaths per 100,000 in 2016.

Between 2005–2007 and 2010–2012, the gap in life expectancy at birth between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians decreased from 11.4 to 10.6 years for males, and from 9.6 to 9.5 years for females.” (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, published 20 June 2018)

When it comes to incarceration the figures are much more disturbing. According to the 2016 census, Aboriginal people make up 3.3% of the total population. An article by Jens Korfi on the Creative Spirits website indicates that Aboriginal people made up 29% of the prison population in late 2019.

It is interesting to note that a wealth of academic literature, visual and performance art has been generated over the past two decades or so on apology. Following the work of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and work post-commission such as the Chilean Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Argentinian Commission, no discussion or scholarly article about its work is devoid of the discussion on apology. I’m aware of the work of Jose Pepe Zalaquett, Chair of the Chilean TRC and human rights lawyer and scholar as one of the most prolific academics on human rights. Pumla Gobodo -Madikezela, a past trustee on the board of IHOM, penned a deeply thoughtful and compelling book on forgiveness and apology.

In my own work in the Institute for the Healing of Memories, most personal stories, if not all, expressed the wish for the perpetrator to apologise. While, as I said elsewhere, the dynamic of individual and public apologies takes on a different dynamic.

Political apologies have some distinct features in my opinion: they are in the public domain; highly mediated; they generate tremendous conflict and are generated by controversy.

Political apologies also tread a delicate balance between an acceptance of responsibility for the violation/ offence, wrongdoing and the maintenance of credibility. Rarely, if ever, according to Harris, Grainger and Mullany, have political apologies involved an expression of absolution. The authors also outline different types of apologies and the qualitative difference between public and private apology. I hope that through citing a story later this distinction will be highlighted.

Let me return to the de Klerk story I started at the beginning of this presentation.

The following day, after de Klerk asserted that Apartheid was not a crime against humanity, his foundation issued the following statement.

“ The idea that apartheid was ‘a crime against humanity’ was, and remains, an ‘agitprop’ project initiated by the Soviets and their ANC/SACP allies to stigmatise white South Africans by associating them with genuine crimes against humanity - which have generally included totalitarian repression and the slaughter of millions of people.”

This statement caused a huge furore from many sectors in South African society, with demands for a retraction and apology including from the South African Council of Churches and the Desmond and Leah Tutu Foundation, the Nelson Mandela Foundation and the ANC, which is the ruling party.

The next day there was a statement from the de Klerk foundation retracting the previous statement.

“ The FW de Klerk Foundation has accordingly decided to withdraw its statement of 14 February unconditionally and apologises for the confusion, anger and hurt that it has caused.

The FW de Klerk Foundation has officially withdrawn its contentious statement that apartheid was not a crime against humanity and has apologised.

It has also agreed that apartheid was indeed a crime against humanity, as defined by the International Criminal Court.”

In a statement released by his foundation on Monday, de Klerk said he had taken note of the angry reaction to the statement that had insisted that apartheid was not a crime against humanity.

“I agree with the Desmond and Leah Tutu Foundation that this is not the time to quibble about the degrees of unacceptability of apartheid. It was totally unacceptable,” he said.

The foundation referred to the provision in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which included apartheid as a crime against humanity.

“It includes ‘the crime of apartheid’ as a crime against humanity and defines it as ‘inhumane acts ...committed in the context of an institutional regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over any other racial group’....”

So just to recap for a moment, de Klerk apologises for Apartheid but asserts in an interview that Apartheid is not a crime against humanity. A few days later he was called out in parliament. The de Klerk foundation then says that the resolution that Apartheid was a crime against humanity was always, and still is, a form of communist propaganda. Under gigantic pressure he then withdraws the statement, apologises and acknowledges that Apartheid is a crime against humanity.

Allow me to digress for a moment to share my personal involvement with this story of apology.

On 28 April 1990, I opened a letter bomb hidden inside the pages of two religious magazines. The explosion blew off both of my hands and destroyed one of my eyes. It was three months after the release of Nelson Mandela from prison.

When I gave evidence to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, I said that I held de Klerk politically and morally responsible for my bombing. My reasoning was simple. I was bombed by a death squad of the Apartheid state. de Klerk was head of state. He knew about the death squads but did nothing to disband them. The late leader of the opposition, Frederik Van Zyl Slabbert, told me that he had spoken to de Klerk personally about the death squads.

In response to what I said at the TRC, de Klerk said he knew nothing and did nothing wrong following the doctrine of plausible deniability, which had been perfected by the political leadership of the Apartheid state.

On the surface, the initial apologies looked great and seemed to be very full and far-reaching. On closer examination, it was clear that from the beginning the President was in fact taking no personal responsibility for the worst crimes, which were committed on his watch.

From the very first apologies, there was no universal acceptance of his apologies, especially by the activist community and those who were the direct victims of the regime, which to some considerable degree, included 80% of the country. Some of us would argue that evil systems imprison and dehumanise the victims, the perpetrators and the beneficiaries.

Speaking in parliament in response to the debate about his State of the Nation Address, President Ramaphosa said he personally considered denial that Apartheid is a crime against humanity to be an act of treason.

We must ask what is the worth of an apology which is simply a response to pressure. One could argue that de Klerk's claim that it was a communist plot reflected his honest beliefs. The Apartheid

state always claimed that South Africa was a bulwark against communism. Claiming that it was a communist plot would resonate with his former conservative white constituency, but 30 years later probably had little credibility.

It is still too early to tell, but important to ask, how will de Klerk's behaviour change because of his latest apology.

In the furore following the claim that Apartheid was not a crime against humanity, there were also many calls for de Klerk's Nobel Prize to be rescinded. In my view, de Klerk's depth of denialism and self-justification is a moral tragedy for him personally.

The scale of response to what de Klerk said is indicative of the degree to which we are a wounded nation and how close those wounds are to the surface. Some of the statements referred to the scale of pain and humiliation experienced during the Apartheid years. The woundedness was reflected in the anger and the pain expressed by individuals, organisations and across social media.

So, there is a journey to an apology, the apology itself and the journey from the apology. It is often much later, in retrospect, that victims decide whether an apology is genuine. The conversation about apology needs to be linked to contrition, to reparation and restitution. Political leaders often do not apologise, or they so carefully couch their words as to prevent facing the consequences of their crimes, including the need to make it up to their victims. It might be said that such apologies are worthless and merely, as said before, "acts of speech".

Since the retraction in February, there has been no indication that de Klerk has any intention of making reparation. With the benefit of a 30-year time lapse and the February outburst, it is difficult to accept any genuineness or moral worth in the series of apologies made by de Klerk. Maybe the long list of apologies was a kind of realpolitik. The agitprop comments ripped the curtain exposing the unwillingness to face the full extent of his complicity with evil.

The Apartheid regime always sought to mystify and mythologise their constitutionalised racism. The word apartheid literally means separateness. The Apartheid regime claimed that Apartheid meant separate but equal which was the ultimate myth. At the time when the National Party became the Government in 1948, white people made up 20% of the population. By law, they owned 87% of the land. Under Apartheid, there were hundreds of laws that only applied to black people. Many volumes have been written describing the full horror of life under Apartheid as a form of political oppression and economic exploitation. The Apartheid regime claimed they were defending Western Christian Civilisation. Their principal ideological weapon was a perverted form of Christianity especially championed by the Dutch Reformed Church. The roots of theological apartheid go back to the nineteenth century, when some white Christians were not willing to sit at the table of the Lord with black Christians. So, under Apartheid, I would argue, the moral order was inverted, as evil was called good.

The myriad forms of the resistance to Apartheid and colonialism, and the liberation struggle stretching back through the centuries, were all part of the fight to restore the moral order. Similarly, the different declarations of the United Nations helped to restore the moral order.

Whilst the South African Government used bad theology as an ideological weapon, different Christian formations declared that Apartheid was a heresy or false doctrine and that it was sinful and evil. Eventually even the Dutch Reformed Church came to the same conclusion.

Apology can be a watershed moment on the journey towards restoring the moral order.

As I mentioned earlier, when de Klerk said Apartheid was not a crime against humanity some white people came forward to apologise and to say unequivocally that Apartheid was a crime against humanity and that they were committed to reparations and restitution.

Following the national outcry about what de Klerk had said, including my own participation with articles and interviews, I received a call from Ds Riaan De Villiers, the minister of the Groote Kerk congregation, which is considered as the mother church of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa. His church was planning their own response on the forthcoming Human Rights Day on 21 March, the anniversary of a massacre in 1960. The Groote Kerk planned to have a whole day of lament, listening to the pain of communities affected by Apartheid and invited me to share and preach the following day. *(I told Archbishop Tutu of these plans, fearing that, given my involvement with the liberation struggle, the roof might collapse when I entered the pulpit, whereas Tutu said that the angels would rejoice.)*

The event never happened since by that date all public worship was banned because of Covid-19. In conversation with Riaan De Villiers, the DRC minister, he clearly saw that the planned events for 21 March were not the end of the journey but a further step towards restoring the moral order, including forms of restitution and reparation.

In response to what de Klerk had said and not said, there were examples of heartfelt forms of acknowledgment that helped to restore the moral order. These were particularly from individual white people who accepted their own complicity with Apartheid and the need not just for remorse but apology followed by lifelong reparation and restitution.

Liberation theologians make the distinction between orthodoxy and orthopraxis. Orthodoxy refers to correct or right teaching. Theologians of liberation began to point out that often there was nothing wrong with the teaching of the church. That was not the problem. The problem lay rather in the practice. Gutierrez states that there is a disjuncture between word and deed. I suspect that FW de Klerk wasn't into liberation theology.

So in the case of de Klerk the words of the apology seemed good at face value but nothing flowed from the apology by way of deeds. Even there it must be noted that on closer examination de Klerk's apology explicitly excluded the murdering of anti-Apartheid activists by state actors. This was despite his presence at all but one of the meetings of the State Security Council at which decisions were made to murder activists while using euphemistic terms like "elimination from society".

What do we mean by the moral order? This speaks to what is accepted as right and wrong.

Every parent seeks to teach a child what is right and what is wrong. There is also the development of conscience, the internal voice which tells us that what we are doing is wrong.

Internationally, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides a contemporary lodestar for the moral order.

Often when people's rights are violated, the victim is blamed for being the victim. We are doing this to you because you are a bad person. This can be seen in many contexts, including where torture takes place and in gender-based violence. Good is called bad and bad is called good and so the moral order is inverted. Apology is a key step on the journey to restoring the moral order.

Whenever we violate the moral order, we also cause moral injury to ourselves. People are often haunted for the rest of their lives by the things they have done to other human beings.

Apology followed by restitution and reparation are the antidotes, enabling us to find peace and quiet our consciences.

These ideas are also pertinent in relation to #Black Lives Matter and the now worldwide fight against racism and police brutality following the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis.

One of the goals of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission and its reparation policy was to restore the dignity of victims, those whose rights had been violated in the most egregious ways. The word dignity speaks to the innate spiritual character we all have as human beings. When people's rights are violated the perpetrator is morally injured because they have transgressed the moral code. At the same time there is spiritual injury because both the perpetrator and the victims are dehumanised by the violations. During the violation the victim becomes an object, something against whom someone acts. Apology is a key element of the journey of restoring dignity of becoming not a "nobody", not "something", but "somebody", a person with dignity and worth.

During the time of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission apology became a commonplace term, especially during the amnesty hearings. Many felt that the apologies delivered by those who had carried out the most heinous crimes were more form than substance, with little evidence of remorse or a commitment to reparation or restitution.

If the perpetrator of gross human rights violations fulfilled the legal requirements for amnesty, they would receive amnesty and could no longer be civilly or criminally prosecuted. Although they may have apologised, there was nothing further required. Those police who were torturers were free to continue employment with the police and to retain their ill-gotten financial gains.

Under Apartheid, every person of colour was discriminated against, which meant most of the population, who were also voteless. In a profound irony of history, when the disenfranchised got the vote in 1994, it was the new democratically-elected government which took responsibility for reparations to those 18000 people who were declared to be victims of gross human rights violations, not the direct perpetrators nor their political leaders nor those who benefitted from the evil system.



In very sharp contrast to the repeated and qualified apologies made by FW de Klerk is the one made by Stephanus Coetzee, who was one of the perpetrators of a Christmas Eve bombing in Worcester, in the Western Cape of South Africa, in 1996. The apology took place in 2013 whilst Stephanus was still serving a 40-year sentence for his part in the bombing, which took the lives of a woman and three children and injured 67 others. This specific apology was read out in the context of one of several victim-offender dialogues which were facilitated by South Africa's Department of Correctional Services. This followed an earlier encounter where a trainload of survivors had travelled by train across the country to meet with Stephanus in prison.

I include his entire apology as it is so powerful and genuine. In my opinion it is an example of private, remorseful, intimate apology with a sincere desire too for healing and reconciliation.

The apology Stephanus Coetzee read to the community of Worcester, when transferred to meet with remaining survivors after the Peace Train to Pretoria visit (September 2013):

“Almost twenty-two years ago I entered the town with one mission and one mission only, to kill as many people as possible. I believed in my cause. I believed in the idea that white people are superior to all others. A belief that was preached by my church, Real Israel Vision. A belief that was promoted by the Wit Wolwe (the white supremacist group to which I belonged). I refuse to shift the responsibility and the blame to other people. Apartheid may



have influenced my thinking, but I must take responsibility for the choices which I made. It was my choice to take the lives of innocent people, adults and children. I know now that my belief in white supremacy was wrong, that all people are equal in the eyes of God. Today God almighty granted me the opportunity to apologise to the town which I tried to destroy. I refuse to blame my past for my actions. I am Stephanus Coetzee. I accept responsibility for the Worcester bombing in 1997. I accept the blame for the pain, suffering and losses that you the survivors of the bombing had to endure because of my actions. I recognise that my actions were wrong and unjust and ungodly. I pray for your recovery in body, mind and soul. I am so sorry for the pain that I caused you. For the pain and suffering which I have caused you. For the cost to your lives. I offer my sincere apologies. I wish to communicate my deepest regrets and remorse for my actions. I live every day with the knowledge that I hurt innocent people, good people. God's people. I know that to ask for forgiveness would be unfair. No one can expect you the survivors of the bombing to forgive the person responsible for their suffering. It is for this reason that I do not ask forgiveness as I know that to do so would be a selfish act. All that I wish to do is to apologise for my actions, for the hurt and grief that I have caused. For the past five years I have been a facilitator for restorative justice. It was this programme that helped me to realise the importance of understanding the impact of my actions before apologising. It helped me to understand that I needed to appreciate how my actions changed your lives. I know that my actions showed no mercy and thus I cannot expect you to show mercy to me. Restorative justice also taught me to understand that apologising for a crime is not a method to achieve parole more quickly. A sincere apology for a crime has only two goals. The first goal is that of finding yourself as a person (coming to terms with your actions and taking responsibility). The second goal is that of trying to assist people who have been harmed by

me in their path of healing. My participation in the VOD process is driven by these goals. I needed to come to terms with what I had done. More importantly today I knew that I had to try to contribute to your path in healing. I know that meeting me will not undo the harm that has been caused. But if there is even the slightest hope that you may receive even the smallest amount of relief by speaking to me, then I feel it is my responsibility to ensure that that opportunity is made possible.

I thus want to be clear, my participation in the victim-offender dialogue is not to try and achieve parole. I started with this process in 2002. At that stage meeting with the victims would have no influence on the parole process. This dialogue is not about parole. It is about making amends. I was afraid of the VOD in Pretoria. I did not know how I would be able to cope with the pain and suffering of so many people. When I entered the hall at the VOD in Pretoria, I was expecting to be stoned. It was painful to stand in front of you, to see the pain in your eyes. To see what I have done to others. Instead of the hatred which I expected I was met by forgiveness by so many. I was so deeply shocked and humbled by the compassion and forgiveness shown by so many of the survivors. With each hug that I have received I realised how important this process is for the survivors and for myself. To those survivors who have forgiven me, I offer my deepest appreciation and thanks. Your compassion demonstrates that former President Nelson Mandela's message of forgiveness remains alive in the heart of South Africans. I am truly in awe of you, that those people I considered my enemy can show such kindness and humility. To those survivors who have not been able to forgive me, I want to say that I understand and respect your feelings. No one should demand or expect this from you. Again, I say I am not here to ask forgiveness because that would be selfish. I am here to apologise to you. To show you that I know that which I did was wrong. That I did wrong to you. That I have hurt you. It is my hope and prayer that God is able to heal the wounds which I have inflicted. That God can bestow the peace of which I have robbed you.

It is my deepest wish that God is able to heal your wounds, to bring peace into your hearts. It is my hope that those who died in Worcester are the last casualties in the conflict between races in South Africa. I believe that the strength and determination of the survivors of the Worcester bombing serve to inspire our nation. Over the course of the past month I have already begun VOD sessions with those victims who were not on the peace train. It was a very emotional experience. It was very hard. The smaller sessions gave me the chance to really speak to the victims, to have personal encounters. There were times when I could feel their anger, the pain. I have seen the suffering in your eyes. I have seen the suffering in your shaking hands. I will grow old with this image. The small VOD sessions gave opportunity for one-on-one moments afterwards. Where forgiveness was not just in words but in a touch, a handshake, a hug. One of the survivors said we have not celebrated Christmas since the bombing. I hope a candle was lit during these VOD sessions that you can find inner peace. To celebrate the birth of Christ. I wish to add that I remain committed to the process and will continue having VOD sessions with victims until I return to Pretoria. The VOD is for you to say that which you need to say to me, to ask the questions which you need answered in order to continue on your own journey of healing. I felt that the sessions that we have had here in Worcester really give a chance for healing. A chance for change. I found the sessions here in Worcester so valuable. I am Stephanus Coetzee. I accept responsibility for the Worcester bombing of 1996. I accept the blame for the pain, suffering and losses that you the survivors of the bombing had to endure because of my actions. I recognise that my actions were wrong and unjust and ungodly. I feel remorse and regret for the pain that I have caused you. I apologise for all the pain I caused. I pray for your recovery, in body, mind and soul. I am so sorry for all the pain I caused you."

There are several striking aspects to the apology by Stephanus. The first thing to note is that Stephanus was very keen to hear directly from the survivors and relatives of the victims, the impact of his actions on their lives before he spoke. The final words of the apology sum up his position. He accepted full responsibility for what he had done. He did not use his age as an excuse (he was 17 at the time of the bombing). He accepted that what he did was wrong, and unjust and ungodly. He expressed remorse and regret. He did not ask people to forgive him. At the same time Stephanus expressed his deepest appreciation for those survivors who had shown compassion to him and forgiven him. Stephanus remained committed to continuing with the victim-offender dialogues. Since his release on parole, Stephanus has continued to contribute towards healing the wounds he caused.

By his full acknowledgment of what he had done, Stephanus helped to restore the moral order and the dignity of those he had violated.

Deon Snyman, who was at the time head of the Restitution Foundation which was intimately involved in this dialogue process, commented that he thought Stephanus Coetzee was a much greater South African than FW de Klerk.

Conclusion

As the expression goes, “All that glitters is not gold”; so it is with apology. Apologies themselves need to be interrogated. When apology is followed by change of behaviour, by reparation and restitution, then in retrospect we can say that it was genuine and contributed towards the restoration of the moral order. The person offering the apology implicitly or explicitly accepts that they have done wrong, which inverted the moral order. Apology is thus a key first step in recreating the moral order. When the apology is not followed by a change of behaviour it is hollow.

Originally, I was supposed to present this paper at a Conference that was cancelled because of Covid-19. Now in June, after the murder of George Floyd, people are talking about the twin pandemics of Covid-19 together with structural racism and police brutality. This situation illustrates the distinction between orthodoxy and orthopraxis. According to the constitution of the United States, all people are equal. That is the orthodoxy or correct teaching. The orthopraxis is what happens, in this case, to people of colour. On 8 June the Huffington Post reported an announcement that the City Council in Minneapolis had resolved to scrap the Police Department and create “a new transformative model for cultivating safety in our city”. When that happens, the city will have moved from orthodoxy to orthopraxis. Within that process, a formal apology may be a watershed moment on the road to restoring the moral order.

The de Klerk story illustrates the problem of an apology that does not move from orthodoxy to orthopraxis, from the formal statement of apology to a change in behaviour in the form of restitution and reparation.

In the Institute for Healing of Memories, people share their stories of their life journeys and a key element is how the nation state has affected them psychologically, emotionally and spiritually. In many cases, no-one has accepted responsibility and apologised. Often those listening will say things like: “I am sorry about what has happened to you”. “It was wrong.”

This apology simply offered by other sensitive human beings often assists people on their healing journey. Sometimes when I have told my own story in a church from a demographic who were the main supporters of Apartheid, some individuals have stood up to apologise for what was done to me by “their people”. I was touched by their apology. The moral worth of the apology can be measured by what they are already doing or set out to do in the form of restitution or reparation in whatever form.

The de Klerk and Stephanus Coetzee stories illustrate that without genuine apology followed by reparation and restitution, it is not possible to restore broken relationships and right wrongs. This is equally true in our intimate relations as it is in public life. Whilst there is a journey leading to an apology, of greater import are the actions which come after the apology. It is not surprising that there is a complex relationship between apology, justice and politics, including moral, legal and philosophical issues. The complexity is furthered in that a state or political apology can never replace an apology offered by an individual who is genuinely remorseful. And most of all as a journey, apology links the past to the future.

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LCCL SA (Leadership Conference of Consecrated Life South Africa)

Dear Sister Nkhensani, President of this Leadership Conference of Consecrated Life
dear Leaders of religious congregations
dear Sisters and Brothers

Caring for self and others: the role of leadership in the time of COVID-19

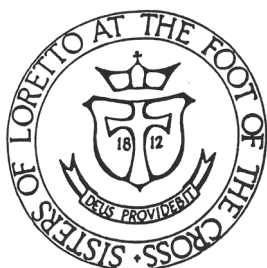
Behold I make all things new. Revelation, 21: 5

Thank you to each of you and to your congregations as you seek to respond to the call of Jesus. Thank you for preaching good news to the poor and, especially at this time, for binding up the broken-hearted.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

I was invited to speak to this same body in April 2003. I am not sure if any of you were present on that occasion. Following that presentation, together with my colleagues in the Institute for Healing of Memories, we had the privilege of working with many different congregations. We offered healing of memories workshops. I often say that if every congregation had given me their traditional habit my wardrobe would be full.

Having been part of a religious congregation since I was 17, as well as being the provincial of my own congregation for nine years, I hope it is fair to say that I have some insight into life in a religious house.



Last week I shared this presentation with some of the Loretto community based in Kentucky in the US. They said, "Don't forget to tell them that you are also a sister of Loretto!"

As I speak to you today on this zoom platform, I am wondering how you are emotionally, psychologically and spiritually? Is it well with your soul?

I assume that some of you have been in leadership positions for many years and some are more recent arrivals in the hot seat.

If you had been in leadership for a long time, you could be forgiven for feeling you had already seen everything and that nothing would take you by surprise. And if you were recently elected, no-one gave you advice about how to prepare for a pandemic.

Perhaps some of you have been in a war situation either in South Africa or somewhere else in the world. We can think about our experiences during the Apartheid years or the AIDS pandemic that still has an impact today.

But nothing quite like this has happened to the whole world since the flu pandemic of 1918. Perhaps some of the archives of our older congregations have accounts of what happened in 1918. How did congregations cope and what was the short- and long-term impact on each community?

In 1918, 300 000 South Africans died in six weeks...it is difficult to grasp the full impact of so much death and dying.

Here, as we know, we have lost 50 000 lives. Some academics believe that the actual numbers are much higher.

Since it's already a year since the pandemic began, maybe this is a good moment to take stock of how we did and how we are now. This is especially true as we are by no means at the end of this pandemic.

In the letter of invitation to me, Sr Nkhensane wrote, and I quote:

"Quite recently, we were left numb when 12 sisters from one congregation succumbed to Covid-19 all within 3 weeks. Most members helplessly watched the others die. Some communities are now getting infected resulting in trauma as they do not want to end up like the other colleagues who died.

All of this is having a negative impact on the mental wellbeing of individuals and communities, thus necessitating the need for healing.

As leaders, we have to be superhuman by finding extraordinary ways of maintaining normalcy in the middle of chaos and putting up a strong front in front of everyone as you want to become the beacon of hope even though you are broken inside. This leaves us wounded with no-one to nurse our wounds."

Too much pain, at times overwhelming. Too much grief and loss. But also kindness, generosity and compassion.

Good Friday is everywhere.

How have we shaped up as leaders? Have some of us changed permanently because of what we have experienced? Have we gained some new spectacles through which to view the world?

What are the things we did in the last year that we are proud of and can celebrate? What are the decisions we made that we regret? And what about the good decisions we made that had unintended negative consequences? As we know, in life the good, the bad and the ugly are often mixed together.

As leaders we are all public figures. People listen to what we say and how we say it. They also look at how we live our lives.

But as we know, being a leader can also be very lonely. There will always be information that we have which is privileged that we cannot share with other members of the community. We get blamed for things which were not our fault but we are not always free to defend ourselves. How does that make

us feel? Goes with the territory some might say, but it still can leave scars on us. Some of us complete our terms as leaders with our own unhealed wounds.

Do we sometimes fail to make tough decisions because we want to be loved by everyone?

In our Institute for Healing of Memories, we like to say that “All people have a story to tell” and “Every story needs a listener”.

Part of being a good leader is also to be a good listener. To listen not just with the ears but with the heart.

Some of you may know the book by the Jesuit John Powell, *Why I am afraid to tell you who I am*. I am afraid of how you might respond if I tell you. Will you believe me? Will you judge me? I remember a military veteran in the United States saying, “I have waited 42 years to tell this story”. For 42 years he had felt there was neither space nor permission to tell his story.

Is that true for us? Is it true for some members of our congregation?

Who listens to *our* stories? Maybe we all have spiritual directors and/or confessors who fulfill this role... People with whom we can share who we truly are and what we are going through? Or maybe not? Or maybe partially.

Do we have space where it's ok not to be ok?

In the early days of the first lockdown, I was fine in the day time but not always when I woke up in the early hours of the morning. How will I cope if I get the virus? What will happen if those I stay with were to lose their lives to the virus. When I preached, I spoke about my own fears. I believe that we are more use to people we lead when we give ourselves permission to be vulnerable. This is true even with those we lead in our communities. When I express my own doubts, it gives others permission to share theirs. Lord I believe, help my unbelief.

At 3 in the morning I found myself saying the Angelus asking for God's help and for God and Mother Mary to provide consolation. Perhaps our years in the religious life have made us think that showing our feelings and our doubts will make people question our faith.

Some of you will recall the night that President Ramaphosa spoke to the nation and was clearly close to tears. A few suggested that this display of emotion was a sign of weakness. Many of us were deeply moved as we saw our president being vulnerable and showing us the fulness of his humanity AND his concern for the whole nation.

A year into the pandemic, to speak of a wounded humanity resonates with people across the planet. Some would argue that the pandemic itself is a sign of how we as humans have messed up our relationship with the natural order...

“Our planet is broken,” the Secretary General of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres, has warned. Humanity is waging what he describes as a “suicidal” war on the natural world. “Nature always strikes back, and is doing so with gathering force and fury”, he told a BBC special event on the environment in late December 2020⁽¹⁾.

As leaders we need to integrate an ongoing response to the cries of our earthly home. In many parts of the world young people are showing more leadership in facing the climate crisis than we are.

⁽¹⁾ <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-55147647>

Grief and loss

Much has been written about death and dying. Many of you will be familiar with the writings of Elizabeth Kubler Ross from the 1960s, about the stages of grief beginning with denial, followed by anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. At the end of 2019, David Kessler published *Finding Meaning: The Sixth Stage of Grief*. In my own mind Kessler's work is linked with the Viennese psychiatrist Viktor Frankl's work, *Man's Search for Meaning*.

What has been your own experience of death and dying? While indeed there may be six stages of grieving, reality is not necessarily sequential or at the same pace for each individual.

Our faith tells us that those who have passed are with the Lord. Our spirituality helps us make sense of death and dying, but there can still be jagged edges in our hearts and minds.

Sometimes we who follow Jesus, including ourselves as leaders, need those with expertise to assist us. Most of us will go to the medical doctor because of our physical health but often we are much more reluctant to go and get help for our mental health.

We all know that in our communities there are often unhealed wounds between individuals that go back sometimes for decades. Those unhealed wounds also infect us physically and emotionally and sometimes cause whole communities to become toxic.

Because of Covid, or during Covid, suddenly people are taken from us. How do we deal with the unhealed wounds? For some the time of lockdown has brought unhealed wounds to the surface.

Would it be helpful to create intentional opportunities to speak about and celebrate those who have died, to laugh and cry together? Also to speak about the unhealed wounds and the unfinished business? And of course this can be tied to special liturgies, a bit like the month's mind and the year's mind, or in other ways connected to the liturgical calendar.

And of course our grief and loss are not just for those who have died.

I know that since I lost my hands, grief is a permanent part of my life.

The world as we knew it disappeared before our eyes as the pandemic spread across the world. There have been an immense number and variety of losses that we have suffered. I am sure each of us can list many. Which one hurt the most? Were you surprised at what you missed and did not miss?

What about the gains? What have been the silver linings? I am sure many of you have read the published study by Sr Nhensane and Joyzy Pius Engunjobi on *The impact of Covid 19 on Community Life*, with about one third of you as respondents. Many spoke of a deepening of the spirituality of the Community and drawing closer to one another.

Did some of us also develop new skills during the months of lockdown? Maybe some of us finally learnt to cook well.

With extended lockdowns, many of us, though members of active congregations, suddenly found that we had taken vows of stability. For many years I have had a global ministry. I still travel the world moving from the bedroom to the lounge and joining zoom.

My own congregation was unable to meet physically so I suggested that we have a zoom retreat. There was some scepticism about the idea. The retreat conductor was in the UK and we were in South Africa and Lesotho. It was a giant success.

As an Institute our greatest discovery was that if we prepared carefully it is possible on zoom to create emotional intimacy.

People are beginning to write, however, about some of the negative side effects of too many hours of virtual work and how to counteract them.

Your own research, Sister Nkhensane, indicated the key role of social media like WhatsApp in providing emotional support.

Many people in society generally have recovered and discovered the importance of our spirituality.

In the early days of the lockdown I used to wake up in the morning and turn on the radio just as they were announcing the Covid mortality figures for the previous 24 hours. So I would start the day feeling downcast and depressed. Although I am still a news junkie, I decided that silence or classical music was a better option to begin my day.

When it comes to self-care, the question is what do we find to be life-giving. We all need to care for the body, the mind and the spirit. As leaders we have much in common but we are also unique so when it comes to self-care, it cannot be one-size-fits-all. We need to nurture and make regular time for what feeds us. After all, the command was to love your neighbour as yourself. Healing is also about learning to love oneself in a healthy way, which frees us to love others in an equally healthy way.

My friend Fr Joseph Jeyaseelan, who is a Claretian Missionary Father in Sri Lanka, highlighted the call of Pope Francis:

“Under a mandate from Pope Francis, the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development has set up a commission to prepare for the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Holy Father has directed the Commission to approach the pandemic as a moment of major change and is stressing creativity about how the Church can face the social and economic challenges that will follow it.”⁽²⁾

Fr Joseph also said he is reminded of the words of the Letter of James 2:16 “and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,’ and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?”

How we contribute as religious congregations to food security and food sovereignty is going to be of critical importance for many years to come.

So the pandemic is a Kairos moment for the human family and for Mother Earth.

As leaders we need to attend to our own wounds, become increasingly healthy so that we can be full participants in God’s dream for us all. As our wounds heal, so we can become the healers of others.

As leaders we need to educate our communities and support the roll-out of the vaccine, as Pope Francis has encouraged us to do.

The theme for your conference is that verse from the Book of Revelation written after the destruction of the temple and the eruption of Mt Vesuvius: Behold I make all things new.

⁽²⁾ <https://mailchi.mp/92f172c3f878/cpn-special-issue-peacebuilding-post-pandemic-part-1?e=6e834e539f>

It was an apocalyptic time. The writer saw that God was at work doing something new, bringing new life out of death and destruction.

A challenge that we all face is how to read the signs of the times. What is God saying to our communities?

As we read in Mark 13:7–8 (NRSV): 7 When you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. 8 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.

Always our task is to seek to know and to do God's will.

For the rest, we leave it in God's hands.

Presentation on 10 March 2021

Building bridges: Dismantling racism for the common good

Pain and hope...the long struggle for racial justice and healing

May we begin with silence to honour those who died in the Greenwood massacre and all those who suffered and died because of racism.

Thank you my dear sister, Dr Tonnia Anderson and all of you at the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma (USAO)'s Dr Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher Center for Social Justice and Racial Healing. You dreamed and planned and worked for a very long time for this conference to happen.

The survivors and the descendants of those who suffered and died at Greenwood have fought for generations to right the wrongs of a hundred years ago in Tulsa. The testimony of Viola Fletcher has reverberated across the world.

“I’m a survivor of the [Tulsa Race Massacre](#),” Viola Fletcher, 107, told members of a House Judiciary Subcommittee on Wednesday, 19 May. “Two weeks ago, I celebrated my 107th birthday. Today, I’m visiting Washington, D.C., for the first time in my life. I’m here seeking justice and asking my country to acknowledge what happened in Tulsa in 1921.”

Viola Fletcher went on: “I have lived through the massacre every day. Our country may forget this history, but I cannot. I will not. And other survivors do not. And our descendants do not.”

Washington Post, 19 May 2021

The House Judiciary Subcommittee gave Viola Fletcher a standing ovation. Perhaps a more appropriate response would have been to rise to their feet and bow their heads in shame.

It is a stain and an indictment on the city and the state and the nation and the citizenry that so little was done to address the many wounds brought about by the killings and destruction of 100 years ago.

The time has come to heal the wounds of history. We need to heal the dead. We need to heal ourselves. What we do today will impact the next seven generations.

Anniversaries are important.

We know that in our personal lives. Often the first anniversary of the death of a loved one is especially painful when the loved ones died violently and when there has been no justice.

Here we are just a few days after the centennial of the horrific events that unfolded in Greenwood between 31 May and 1 June 1921.

In May last year, Human Rights Watch wrote in *The Case for Reparations*:

“The massacre occurred in a broader context of systemic racism rooted in the US history of slavery, white supremacy, racist violence, and oppression, which continues across the United States today.”

Many have written about how the Covid-19 pandemic has ripped the veil from the harsh reality of injustice and inequality across the world. Not least, institutionalised racism.

Covid-19 has helped lay bare the consequences of the two original sins on which the United States was built: genocide and slavery.

During the time of Covid-19, George Floyd was murdered by Derek Chauvin following the police killings of Eric Garner, Breonna Taylor, Ahmand Arbery, and ...and...and....the list is very long. Each person a human being of infinite value, all people of color, mainly men.

As we all know, the murder of George Floyd led to street protests and an outpouring of pent-up pain, anger and outrage, not just across the United States, but across the world. Black Lives Matter echoed across the globe. Racism is global in character and stretches back through the centuries.

I recently asked my Facebook friends about their gains and losses during Covid-19.

Mary Lyons wrote: “Here in the USA, with the horrible death of George Floyd, I am being gifted by the forced awareness of my deep and unrecognized racial prejudices and the white supremacy that is so deeply embedded in our institutions. I give thanks for the weight of the evil veil being lifted...it is a veil that can drown the love we profess to follow in Christ...the pandemic made many of us stop and see.”

Each of us comes to this conversation of building bridges and dismantling racism through the prisms of our own life journeys.

I would love to hear each of your stories with your joys and sorrows how racism wounded and still wounds you where you are on the journey of healing and what you are doing to help dismantle racism for the common good. The Dialogues and the two virtual Healing of Memories workshops will at least give some of you an opportunity to share and to be heard.

Today I would like to reflect with you on my own journey of becoming woke, as Marvin Gaye sang about 50 years ago. I will intertwine this with some of what we have learnt in the Institute for Healing of Memories during the last 20 years.

My own sensibilities about race and racism began when I was about 5 years old. I was born in Aotearoa New Zealand. I was quarelling with a Maori boy, the indigenous people of New Zealand. He said, “you are doing this to me because I am Maori.” He was conscious that his identity could lead to how he was treated.

During my training to become a priest in Australia, I became an active member of a Committee against racism. From childhood, in the family and in the Church, I learnt to see all of us as God’s children. Of course, that doesn’t mean that I wasn’t infected by racism, and a beneficiary of white privilege. I trained to be a priest with people of different racial backgrounds. At the same time racist language about indigenous people was commonplace, and was never called out.

The Anglican religious order to which I belong, the Society of the Sacred Mission, transferred me to South Africa in 1973, where we had been working since 1902.

Before travelling to South Africa, I knew a lot about it. I had plenty of head knowledge but nothing prepared me for the experience of living in South Africa. I often say that the day I arrived in South Africa, I stopped being a human being and became a white man.

Suddenly, every single aspect of my life was decided by the colour of my skin: the University where I studied, the suburb I lived in, the bathroom I could use, the elevator I could enter, even the part of the ocean where I could swim.

For me, whiteness became like leprosy.

In my naivety, I had thought that when I arrived in South Africa, I would find three groups of people, the oppressed and the oppressors, and a third group called the human race, to which I would belong. The rude awakening was that because I was white, I would belong to the oppressor group; even if I chose to be against Apartheid, I was still its beneficiary.

Also, I could choose never to use a gun, but the police would still shoot to kill to protect me and my white skin.

Despite being an Episcopalian, I realized that there was no fence to sit on.

As the well-known quote from Archbishop Desmond Tutu goes, “If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality.”

I was not neutral.

I was a student on a white university campus and also became a chaplain to that campus and I was also a chaplain to two black university campuses. Ministering to young people of all races brought some insights. It was true that all black people suffered under Apartheid and were oppressed. All white people had power, privilege and wealth because of constitutionalised racism. Oppression takes no prisoners. The oppression also dehumanises the oppressor.

I remember a survey of white people in South Africa in the mid 70s that showed their dominant feelings were guilt, fear and anxiety. That is not how you spell liberation. I realised that liberation had to be for everybody or it would be for nobody.

People often compare the civil rights movement in the US to the struggle against Apartheid. The key difference was, as I understand it, that African Americans and their allies were fighting for equality under the constitution. In South Africa the problem was the constitution, which is precisely what excluded the majority from political power and denied fundamental human rights to all black people. That is why ours was a national liberation struggle, against colonialism of a special type.

And military training was compulsory for every white male in South Africa. To refuse meant a six-year prison sentence. White people would say “I have to go to the army”, never “I have decided to go to the army”. The moral question was removed.

There were hundreds of laws which only applied to black people. Apartheid took away the dignity of black people. I have often felt that the deepest wound of Apartheid was spiritual, when people came to believe that they were inferior.



Much of what has happened at Greenwoods resonates with the South African struggle against racism.

The turning point for my generation was what happened in 1976. Black schoolchildren were shot in the streets until, over a period of a year, more than a thousand lay dead. Many thousands were detained and tortured. Thousands fled the country looking for better education and for military training.

What shook my faith to its roots was knowing that those who shot children read the Bible every day and went to church on Sunday. How could that be? Had racism so permeated their souls that they didn't see a child like their child, rather they saw something black.

In the midst of this unfolding nightmare, I was elected as National Chaplain for Anglican students by black and white students. Less than three months after that I was expelled from South Africa and only returned 16 years later.

I became a student at the National University of Lesotho, where there was only one other white student. I should explain for those who may be geographically challenged, that the mountain Kingdom of Lesotho is an independent African country completely surrounded by South Africa. We used to say that we lived in the belly of the beast. That experience of living in an independent African country helped me to recover my humanity, to live as a person among other persons.

I joined the liberation movement, ministering to exiles, assisting with their education from creche to university. At the same time, I was engaged in the theological battle for the truth of the Christian Gospel. Either it was true that we are all God's children or the most important thing about us is the colour of our skin. They cannot both be true. One has to be a lie.

The way I used to put it was very simple: Apartheid was an option for death carried out in the name of the Gospel of Life. My reward for speaking this truth was to receive a letter bomb in April 1990 from a

death squad of the Apartheid state, hidden inside the pages of two religious magazines. I opened the envelope at my home in Zimbabwe. In the explosion, I lost both my hands and one eye.

For the 14 years before the bomb went off, I had lived in Southern Africa but travelled the world to garner support for our struggle to defeat Apartheid. Consequently, when I was bombed, there were messages of prayer, love and support from across the world. My story was acknowledged, revered and recognised by people from many countries.

This is not what happened to the victims and survivors of the Tulsa massacre. The authorities in Tulsa blamed the victims and sought to punish the members of the community who dared to try to defend themselves.

The Tulsa City Commission issued a report two weeks after the massacre saying: "Let the blame for this negro uprising lie right where it belongs—on those armed negroes and their followers who started this trouble and who instigated it and any persons who seek to put half the blame on the white people are wrong ...".

The moral order was inverted. Bad was called good and good was called bad. There were a few white people who were horrified and reflected a sense of common humanity.

The Human Rights Watch report recounts that initially, some Tulsa officials acknowledged the wrongdoing and promised restitution and repair. "Tulsa can only redeem herself from the country-wide shame and humiliation ... by complete restitution of the destroyed black belt...Tulsa weeps at this unspeakable crime and will make good the damage ... down to the last penny", said Judge Loyal J. Martin, Chairman of the Executive Welfare Committee, a body formed on 2 June 1921 through the Tulsa Chamber of Commerce in response to the violence and for the purpose of rehabilitating the city.

Alva J. Niles, president of the Chamber of Commerce, made similar apologies and promised that "rehabilitation will take place and reparation made," adding that Tulsa feels "intensely humiliated," and pledged to "punish those guilty of bringing the disgrace and disaster to this city".

Those voices did not prevail.

100 years later Violet Fletcher asks for justice, for acknowledgment and for reparations.

Two days after the testimony of Viola Fletcher and two other survivors, Congressman Hank Johnson introduced the Tulsa-Greenwood Massacre Claims Accountability Act to provide access to the courts to seek restitution.

When I was reading the history surrounding the massacre, I did not understand why in 2021 people were still looking for bodies. Then I read: "the Oklahoma National Guard commanding general, Charles Barrett, issued an order denying funerals for the deceased on the ground that he claimed churches were already overwhelmed with helping the displaced. To this day no-one knows what happened to most of the bodies, though there is reason to believe at least some were buried in mass graves. An investigation into this possibility, after being dormant for years, was recently reopened

I have no doubt that for the descendants and the survivors, the fact that their loved ones were denied a proper funeral has been an added trauma crossing generations.

Would it not be appropriate that as well as reparations, there should be a service in the National Cathedral in Washington to honour all those killed in Greenwood, together with an apology by the President on behalf of the nation for what happened?

In my case no-one was ever found responsible for my bombing and attempted assassination. However, seven different governments invited me to come for free medical treatment.

In 1992 I returned to live in South Africa after 16 years away. It was the period of negotiations. The racist regime was forced to the negotiating table. They had not repented. They saw the spectre of power slipping from their hands and became even more murderous. Just to give one example, armed masked gunmen entered commuter trains and gunned down black workers as they sang and prayed on the way to work.

I realised that for millions of South Africans, unlike me, their stories had not been acknowledged, revered, and recognised. No one had said to them that what happened to them was wrong. All they had was their victimhood.

Yes, we were a resilient nation. The whole world had walked beside us. But centuries of slavery, of racism, oppression and exploitation had also wounded us psychologically, emotionally and spiritually.

And we all had stories to tell. We all had stories to tell about what we had done, what had been done to us and what we failed to do. We carried pain in us that crossed generations. In 1994 constitutionalised racism came to an end in South Africa but that did not bring an end to our woundedness.

A society built on racism had been constructed over centuries. It was built on the lie that our value derives from how much melanin we have.

A new democratic government was tasked with writing a new constitution and leading in the creation of a new nation on the ashes of the old. Easier said than done on the political and economic front, especially the economic front. Twenty-seven years into democracy we remain the most unequal society on earth, with black people as the poor majority.

Is this similar to what happened in the Reconstruction period in the US?

One of the questions that confronted us as a nation was how do we deal with the past. As probably you all know, one of the things we did was to have a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, following the examples of Chile and Argentina.

I gave evidence to the TRC and along with 18800 others, it was declared that we had suffered gross human rights violations in terms of the legislation and we were declared to be victims. So there was acknowledgment by the nation of what had been done to us. And it was declared that what had been done to us was wrong.

That acknowledgment by the nation has not yet happened for Viola Fletcher.

Although our democratic state was slow and ungenerous - although not as slow as the US - there were nevertheless some reparations for victims. Unlike for the community of Greenwood.

Before our TRC was established, I was asking the question: What about those who don't qualify to come to the Commission? The Commission only dealt with murder, attempted murder, torture and severe maltreatment.

But all 55 million of us were affected by Apartheid and had a story to tell. Just to give you one example: between 1960 and 1983, more than three and a half million people were forcibly removed from their homes because of their race.

And we carried within us deep feelings because of what we had experienced. Feelings which are all normal and natural but which, if we keep them inside us, will destroy us.

Some of us decided to create an experiential process, what we like to call safe and sacred spaces to begin to deal with the psychological, emotional and spiritual effects of the country's past upon us as individuals. We called this process a healing of the memories workshop. We will offer a shortened version twice during this week for those who have registered, although I know there is already a waiting list.

In 1998, we launched the Institute for Healing of Memories, conceived as a parallel process to South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The same year we were invited to two places outside South Africa, one was Rwanda four years after the genocide and the second was New York City.

The New York workshop took place at the famous Riverside Church. Many of the people who came to that workshop had been participants in the civil rights movement. They said it was the first time that they had had an opportunity to speak about their pain.

One of South Africa's great leaders once said that those who think of themselves as victims eventually become the victimisers of others. We give ourselves permission to do terrible things to others because of what has been done to us.

It has been said by many that when we have been traumatised or oppressed, we either transform it or transmit it. Or as the cliché goes, Hurting people hurt others. Without minimising the role of patriarchy, we should not underestimate the effect of trauma playing itself out in gender-based violence. Healing of memories is about breaking the chain that turns victims into victimisers.

When we consider the violence of genocide and slavery, together with the US addiction to war, we shouldn't be surprised at the scale of gun violence that characterises the US. Nor should we be surprised that the damned Second Amendment seems to have become an idol.

As we know, the killings by police against unarmed civilians is not new. Some years ago, in the south of Los Angeles as the Institute for Healing of Memories North America, we developed a programme with a local church in partnership with a local community and the LAPD to listen to one another's stories. As we listened to each other's pain, new journeys to mutual respect began to flourish between the police and the community.

I suspect that many of us are either activists against racism in communities or in academia. Perhaps some of us would describe ourselves as public intellectuals. Many years ago, I was interviewed for a visiting professorship at the New School for Social Research in New York. They asked me to explain in what way I was a public intellectual. I did not like to admit that I had never heard of the term.

After the end of Apartheid, a number of mental health professionals offered their services to torture survivors. At the first meetings, the survivors would ask the professionals, "Where were you when we were struggling for our freedom?"

I love the way the invitation to this conference speaks of the "need to bridge the gap between academic research and teaching and social activism beyond the university". So our research and teaching is important but not sufficient to dismantle racism for the common good.

Jim Wallace of Sojourners magazine observed that in the demonstrations following the murder of George Floyd he had never in his lifetime seen so many white people participating. Is that not a sign of hope?

My presentation is saying by implication that even as we advocate for justice out there, we need to be travelling our own internal journeys, facing our own demons. Healing of Memories was born as a considered response to the grave injustice of Apartheid racism. We realised that we needed to heal for our own sake so that we could return to continue the task of building a more just world.

As years passed we found tools of self-care essential if we were to avoid burn out. One of the tools was to find or create communities where we could be listened to and supported without judgment or advice.

A group of our healing of memories facilitators in California are members of All Saints Church in Pasadena, which has a long history of standing for social justice on a range of issues. These issues include racial justice, gender based violence, support for the LGBTIQ community and opposition to unjust wars, back to the days of the Vietnam war. They are all women: several of them women of colour, and all lifelong activists for social justice. We meet from time to time to listen to one another and give each other support. More recently our conversations have focused on racism and the killings by police, especially of black men, Covid-19, the Presidential election and the insurrection at the Capitol building.

As we sought to give one another new courage and find hope, we resolved to offer an online conversation which we called "Healing as a Revolutionary Act". We shared what we had learnt about how we could not participate in working for transformative justice without dealing with our own "stuff" and being supported as we travel this journey.

The title resonated and people joined from across the United States, Europe and from Southern Africa. We also shared different resources that have equipped us as activists to make us more aware in fighting and unlearning racism and what we need to do for self-care.

I hope that this conference will play a similar role for all of us and that we will embrace healing as a revolutionary act on our own journey of Building bridges and dismantling racism for the common good.

It has been encouraging to witness how Black Lives Matter has embraced the other original sin of the genocide of indigenous people, which is also global in character. There is also the painful but liberating journey of disabusing ourselves of the historical falsification and ignorance that we, especially those of us who are white, display as to the true history of the United States and the world. It is time we all gained several new pairs of spectacles to view reality.

When it comes, to working for transformative justice, I believe that seeing the intersectionality of different struggles can but strengthen all of us.

Today Asian Americans are also in the firing line and need our unequivocal solidarity.

Covid-19 is offering us some very sharp lessons if we have eyes to see and hearts to feel. It is well recorded that people of colour and indigenous people have fared much worse while the pandemic has been raging. This is particularly because of inequality. Covid-19 is also telling us that we are one human family and that we have one earthly home. Mother Earth is also crying.

Inviting someone from far away South Africa to present today speaks to the importance of internationalism and solidarity. As a person of faith I like to ask the question: what is God's dream for us and what is my role? Regardless of our faith tradition and spirituality, we all need resilience and hope.

We can be the generation that takes giant steps towards dismantling racism, travelling as we do on the shoulders of our physical and spiritual ancestors. At the same time we need to dismantle patriarchy and build a world of greater equality, characterised by kindness and generosity.

In one hundred years' time, let the descendants of Viola Fletcher and all those who died be able to say that finally there was acknowledgment, transformative justice and reparations.

"NOW, THEREFORE, I, JOSEPH R. BIDEN JR., President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim May 31, 2021, a Day of Remembrance: 100 Years After The 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. I call upon the people of the United States to commemorate the tremendous loss of life and security that occurred over those two days in 1921, to celebrate the bravery and resilience of those who survived and sought to rebuild their lives again, and commit together to eradicate systemic racism and help to rebuild communities and lives that have been destroyed by it."

In South Africa we sang and danced our way to freedom. Our artists, past, present and future will continue to inspire us and give us new courage.

For generations, African Americans sang the spirituals, songs of lament that were songs of defiance and resistance and the knowledge that this too shall pass.

We will, like Marvin Gaye, keep asking *What's going on?*

So we sing with Pete Seeger: *We shall overcome*

And finally, we say with Amanda Gorman in her poem, *The Hill We Climb*

"And so we lift our gaze, not to what stands between us, but what stands before us.

We close the divide because we know to put our future first, we must first put our differences aside.

We lay down our arms so we can reach out our arms to one another.
We seek harm to none and harmony for all.

Let the globe, if nothing else, say this is true.

That even as we grieved, we grew.

That even as we hurt, we hoped.

That even as we tired, we tried.

That we'll forever be tied together, victorious.

Not because we will never again know defeat, but because we will never again sow division.

Scripture tells us to envision that everyone shall sit under their own vine and fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid.

If we're to live up to our own time, then victory won't lie in the blade, but in all the bridges we've made."

I thank you.

University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma, 9 June 2021

Eulogy for Bishop John Osmers, 2 July 2021

Good afternoon dear Comrades and Friends

Thank you to the ANC for hosting this memorial service for Bishop John Osmers.

I am deeply honoured to be asked to offer this eulogy. What I have to say will be in three parts:

A reflection on John's life

A letter I wrote to John after his passing

A prayer

Since the news first broke of John's passing on 16 June, many of us have been going down memory lane recalling the innumerable ways Fr John touched our lives.

More than anything he ever said, as valuable as that was, John's actions were much louder than his words.

It was Isitwalandwe Trevor Huddleston's writing that first confronted John Osmers, in far-away Aotearoa, New Zealand, with the evil of Apartheid.

In 1958, when I was nine years old and many of us were not yet born, John came by boat to South Africa and spent six weeks travelling across the country on a motorbike.

From that time, South Africa and her people were in his blood.



John studied Sesotho in London and trained for the priesthood with Fr Huddleston's religious congregation.

Then, on advice from Fr Huddleston he came to Lesotho to work as a priest. Like many of us he became a Southern African.

John was involved with the progressive University Christian movement which helped shape and form a generation of young Christian social justice activists in South Africa and Lesotho.

As far back as 1970, Fr John was banned from entering South Africa.

Many of us here can bear witness to the key role Fr John played in their lives following the Soweto uprising. It was against this backdrop that we witnessed John's faith displayed in his practical solidarity with the refugee community.

John realised that the time had come to throw his lot in with the liberation movement. So he applied to join the ANC, which nearly cost him his life, unlike more recent times when some have joined to feed their greed.

1979 was another defining moment. A parcel filled with copies of Sechaba was intercepted and turned into a bomb injuring Fr John, Soks Sokupa and Wandile.

At the Memorial in New Zealand on Monday, John's sister Elizabeth recalled the conversation with the doctor. I am sorry, Father, you have lost your right hand. John replied, it's fine, I am left-handed. The doctor continued, I am sorry, Father, you have also lost a testicle. Father John responded, it's fine, I am a celibate priest.

It is worth noting that those present were three black people, including Phylliss Naidoo, a black South African of Indian descent, and a white internationalist. I say this in the context of the increasing number of unchallenged racist attacks on Indian South Africans that seek to destroy our nation.

When I was Chaplain to the National University of Lesotho, I had a large poster on my glass front door of Sam Nujoma after the Cassinga Massacre holding two babies in his arms, with the caption: *Babies of a colonial war*. A wealthy, although compassionate, white Lesotho resident went to my bishop to complain about the poster. The bishop called a meeting of his senior priests, including Fr John, to decide what to do with this political priest. Fr John said he didn't see any problem with the poster and by the way, he said, I gave it to him.

I tell the story to illustrate John's view that charity was not enough, it was necessary to advocate for and work for liberation, whilst feeding the hungry and clothing the naked.

In time, the Apartheid regime leaned on Lesotho to make Bishop John a persona non grata.

In the run up to the 1981 Springbok tour of New Zealand, Fr John played a key role in mobilising people across New Zealand to oppose the tour, waving the stump of his missing hand to emphasise his points.

In 2012, Fr John was presented with an ANC Centennial Award for his outstanding contribution to the international campaign against Apartheid.

When John became a parish priest in Molepolole in Botswana, he was able to provide a discreet safe house for MK soldiers being infiltrated back into South Africa. Once more Fr John became a target of the Apartheid death squads. He was tipped off by the Botswana security and had to leave Botswana at a moment's notice.

Strikingly, the attempts by the Apartheid regime only served to deepen his faith and commitment and never to intimidate him.

For a number of years Fr John served as Chaplain to the ANC in Lusaka whilst being very active in the Anglican Church in Zambia. When it was time to come home to South Africa, Fr John chose to stay in Zambia. He was elected unopposed as the first bishop of a new Eastern Zambia diocese, where his ashes will be buried.

Back in 2007, the New Zealand Government appointed him as a Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit for his services to the Anglican Church.

Along with Desmond Tutu and President Kaunda, in 2016 Archbishop Thabo Makgoba conferred on Bishop Osmers his Peace with Justice Award.

Several years ago, Bishop Osmers went blind but it did not deter him. Until his last breath he remained committed to the rights and welfare of refugees in Zambia from a number of African countries, especially Rwandese.

Just a week before his death, Bishop John, still recovering from pneumonia, was driven for eight hours back to his old diocese. The occasion was the opening of a new centre named after him. However, his motivation for going there was to meet the Prime Minister to hand over a letter and advocate for the plight of Rwandese refugees in Zambia, who for reasons of realpolitik are denied refugee status.

And then Bishop John caught Covid and died a few days later.

Bishop John had tried to get a South African pension but failed. Not to spend on himself but to help with the support of refugees. At his memorial, John's sister, Elizabeth Gordon, launched a memorial fund to complete the education of the Rwandese refugees with whom John was staying. I pray that some of us, in honour of John, will contribute to that fund. The details are on the Christchurch Transitional Cathedral Website.

I humbly ask that the ANC makes those details available on its website, perhaps with the recording of this service.

My prayer also is that the ANC would propose to the government that we give Bishop John a posthumous national award.

Fr John was a man of deep faith. We all have much to learn from him. He was a freedom fighter. He was also a saint. While he related with people of all faiths, and those with no religious faith, for many over the last 60 years he spent on our Mother continent, he was the face of Christ.

Bishop John was a victim of Covid. Now that he is in heaven I am sure he is praying that we all get vaccinated.

Bishop John has left us during one of the most momentous weeks in our history, as the country waits and watches to see if our last democratically elected president will accept, as he told us he would, his bitter pill of going to prison yet again.

As Nelson Mandela said at the inauguration of the Constitutional Court: "Today I rise not as an accused, but on behalf of the people of South Africa, to inaugurate a court South Africa has never had, a court on which hinges the future of our democracy"



I am sure Bishop John is sad that former President Jacob Zuma is going to prison as a consequence of his own actions.

I am equally sure he is delighted that the rule of law is triumphing and that the wheels of justice are beginning to hold the corrupt to account.

Bishop John Osmer did not give 60 years of his life to bless looting on an industrial scale. I have no doubt it pained him to see some of his erstwhile comrades betraying the country because of greed.

What would pain John particularly is to hear that there are political parties and some politicians fanning the fires of xenophobia.

Now that John is in heaven, when he is not chatting with OR and Albertina, and Helen Joseph and Phyllis Naidoo, I am certain he has God's ear, I am sure that he is telling God that the new saints of our time are whistleblowers, some investigative journalists, members of the SIU, judges like Sisi Khampepe and politicians of different parties who still have a conscience and who fight alongside the poor and the oppressed, as John did throughout his 86 years.

As Bertolt Brecht told us:

"There are those who struggle for a day and they are good. There are those who struggle for a year and they are better. There are those who struggle for many years, and they are better still. But there are those who struggle all their lives. These are the indispensable ones."

As for us, Judith February reminded us, in a quote from Coretta Scott King, "Freedom is never really won. You earn it and win it in every generation."

Letter to Bishop John Osmer

Dear John

It is just a few days since you left us to join the ancestors.

To me you were always an older brother....as we often say in our part of the world, a brother from another mother.

When we first met, you were already the priest at Masite parish in Lesotho and beginning to receive the Soweto generation of young people, fleeing Apartheid violence.

When I was expelled from South Africa as part of the class of 1976, you were there to meet me.

We were kindred spirits, both of us New Zealand-born, both Anglican priests, both members of the ANC, with a lifelong commitment to South Africa's liberation struggle and to the welfare and rights of refugees everywhere.

I only discovered since your passing that, like me, your conviction that Apartheid was evil and should be ended came from reading Trevor Huddleston's *Naught For Your Comfort*.

Our voices were important also for the anti-Apartheid struggle in New Zealand, as two Kiwis immersed in black communities in Southern Africa.

All of us were in awe of how you responded when you were grievously injured by the parcel bomb attack in 1979. Your indomitable spirit and even humour, in the face of that act of state terror, inspired and gave courage to many.

Throughout your ministry, you embodied the relationship between faith, compassion, kindness and transformative justice. Across Southern Africa, you were a comforter, a confidant and an advocate for countless freedom fighters and refugees.

When you had to leave Botswana under further threat of assassination, I was honoured to receive you in Zimbabwe. You never wavered in your belief in the justice of our cause as something noble and godly.

Your ministry, from Lesotho to Botswana to Zambia, touched the lives of thousands, inside and outside the Church. Indeed, all those who love peace and justice were your companions.

Even as we considered you to be part of our families, we have rejoiced that your birth family, Elizabeth and Derry, John, Susannah, Margaret and Charlotte were by your side in every way possible over the decades.

Even blindness did not deter you from your advocacy and support for Rwandese refugees in Zambia. Only John Osmer could commute between Christchurch and Lusaka not for selfish ends, but to get the resources to support and educate your extended Rwandese family.

My dear John, your life is both an inspiration and a challenge to each of us to continue as you did until God says, your time is up.

We consider you to be a hero. We wish more bishops and leaders of faith communities were like you.

Across the world, we will tell Father John Osmer's stories even as we carry you in our hearts.

Rest well, good and faithful servant....your work is over, your battle won.

So let us pray

Today we give thanks for the life of Bishop John Osmer, a freedom fighter, a bishop of the Church of God, a saint for our time. Rest eternal grant unto him. May light perpetual shine on him.

We pray for the well-being of every person whose life was touched by John throughout his 86 years.

We pray for the people of Lesotho, Botswana, Zambia touched by his ministry.

We pray for John's extended family of refugees in Zambia as they grieve for him.

We give thanks for John's family and friends in Aotearoa New Zealand, for Elizabeth and Derry and their children and grandchildren, especially John's niece, Charlotte, undergoing major surgery on Tuesday.

We pray for the whole human family affected by Covid-19 and for Mother Earth as she weeps.

Loving God, we bring before you refugees everywhere and ask that wherever they are they will find a John Osmer to comfort them and walk beside them on the road to dignity and a decent life.

As South Africans, help us all to recover a moral compass in our private and public lives.

Loving God, we ask your blessing on all whistleblowers everywhere.

We ask you to help us to defeat the corrupt and pray that the corrupt will turn from their wicked ways.

Thank you, God, for the judges of our constitutional court. Keep them safe and give them your wisdom.

We pray for Jacob Zuma and those who support him and ask that before he comes to you he will come clean and accept responsibility for the wrong he has done to our nation.

Help us as a nation to navigate this time with respect for one another.

We ask your blessing on the ANC and pray that it will rediscover its moral compass and self-correct to serve the whole nation with integrity.

We pray for the meeting of the NEC this weekend.

We pray for our President, that you will guide him and give him and all our leaders wisdom and courage.

As Trevor Huddleston taught us to pray

God bless Africa

Guard her children

Guide her leaders

Give her peace

We offer these prayers in all the holy names of God

Amen

Nkosi Sikelela iAfrica

First published in *International brigade against Apartheid – Secrets of the people's war that liberated South Africa*, December 2021

The role of faith communities in moral regeneration: a time for introspection

There is a permanent need for moral regeneration in South Africa, as in every society.

In our country around 80% of the population describe themselves as Christian. Religious minorities include Moslems, Hindus, Jews, Buddhists and those whose primary commitment is to an African traditional religious worldview.

Faith communities are the largest social formation in South Africa. All faith communities embrace a moral code which is taught to its adherents from childhood. The sacred scriptures of our faith are replete with moral teaching.

It stands to reason that faith communities are of critical importance in creating an ethical society.

As individuals it is our conscience that tells us what is wrong and what is right. From birth our parents, grandparents, guardians, caregivers and teachers tell us and show us what is right and what is wrong.

When we join a faith community, we are taught about ethical and unethical behaviour. For example, Jews and Christians subscribe to the Ten Commandments. Jesus taught his followers to love God with every fibre of our being and to love our neighbour as ourself. He said this was the summary of the law and the prophets. All sacred scriptures and cultures have similar moral injunctions.

During the dark years of Apartheid, for millions of South Africans it was our faith which motivated us and gave us hope.

At the dawn of democracy in South Africa, there was a Reconstruction and Development Programme. President Nelson Mandela began to speak about the need for moral reconstruction and called upon the faith communities to play a leading role in what became known as the Moral Regeneration Movement. According to the MRM website, at a meeting in June 1997, Nelson Mandela said:

“Our hopes and dreams, at times, seem to be overcome by cynicism, self-centredness and fear. This spiritual malaise shows itself as a lack of good spirit, as pessimism, or lack of hope and faith. And from it emerge the problems of greed and cruelty, of laziness and egotism, of personal and family failure. It both helps fuel the problems of crime and corruption and hinders our efforts to deal with them.”

On 7 February 1999, at the Groote Kerk in Cape Town, Mandela said “I spoke in Parliament on Friday of an ‘RDP of the soul’. It is our first task as government to change and improve the basic living conditions of people by providing housing, clean water, electricity, health care, decent education, jobs,

safety and protection. However, we learn daily that there is an even more basic task of reconstruction ahead of us to make our country and society become healthy, and to keep it viable. This is the task of a moral reconstruction. The best efforts of government will be fruitless if the people of a country do not undergo a change in their own lives and inwardly. Selfishness, corruption, a lack of community spirit and neighbourly service - these are the spiritual enemies of our efforts to build a new society in which we can all live together in decency. It would be superfluous for me to elaborate on the role of the church in this task of moral reconstruction; you will know it much better than I do. What I may say is that the way in which the different churches and religions work together and reach out to each other will itself set an example to the rest of the country.”

However, we were and still are, a deeply wounded society suffering from moral and spiritual injury. As well as political oppression and economic exploitation, the Apartheid state inverted the moral order.

As in Nazi Germany, much of what Apartheid did was legal but totally immoral. There were hundreds of laws which only applied to people of colour.

White males were required by law to do military service. Anyone tempted to become a conscientious objector faced a six-year prison sentence. Many of those who did go to the army continue to be haunted by their moral and spiritual injuries.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission said that there can be no moral equivalence between Apartheid, which was declared a crime against humanity (FW De Klerk notwithstanding), and the struggle for liberation. Professional torturers were promoted and given golden handshakes when they retired.

Our Truth and Reconciliation Commission was in part an attempt to restore the moral order.

It was agreed that those who were refused or did not seek amnesty would still be liable to prosecution. About 300 cases were recommended for investigation and prosecution. Through political interference, and some would argue, a secret deal, no prosecutions took place. Families, unsupported by the state, have fought for decades for the inquests of those who died in detention to be reopened. The moral order has remained inverted. So, tragically it was our democratic state that undermined the TRC and facilitated impunity.

The old order continues to infect the new.

The MRM movement eventually produced a Charter of Moral Values. In time Jacob Zuma was to become the patron of the MRM. At the time of writing Jacob Zuma is on trial for corruption. At the Zondo Commission, Jacob Zuma has been implicated in massive corruption. Despite a constitutional court order, Zuma has refused to account for his actions. So we have a former head of state consciously and deliberately inverting the moral order by refusing to be accountable.

In that regard, President Ramaphosa has done better by acknowledging that in relation to corruption the ANC is in the dock as the number one accused.

The case of Zuma illustrates the obstacles to moral regeneration when the head of state becomes a negative role model.

We have seen similar situations within faith communities when self-appointed leaders of churches are immoral and committed to self-enrichment, like Shepherd Bushiri, or the sexual exploitation of young women, like Omotoso.



There is also the problem of verbalism in both the political class and in faith communities. Sure we have the Charter of Moral Values and the Ten Commandments. That we say we are for moral regeneration and against corruption does not mean that we are. The Latin American theologians of liberation speak about the difference between orthodoxy and orthopraxis. We have correct teaching but do we have correct practice?

Our children always notice not just what we say but what we do, how we live our lives.

I am reminded of a film that older readers will recall: The Godfather. Scenes of a child's baptism were interspersed with contract killings. People can be religiously observant, without it being translated into moral behaviour.

During the Apartheid years, most of the white community were keen churchgoers but still voted election after election to keep the evil Apartheid government in power.

It was part of moral regeneration at that time, to declare that Apartheid was a heresy or a false doctrine. In a form of idolatry, obedience to God was transposed with obedience to the State.

Faith leaders were in the forefront of the struggle against Apartheid. Many of us were motivated by our faith to oppose Apartheid and participate in the liberation struggle.

Our moral degradation and depravity reached an all-time low during Covid-19. There was an avalanche of corruption and self-enrichment by the political class, reaching even the highest levels of the Ministry of Health.

When it comes to moral values, faith leaders often assert that they are the conscience of society. My question has always been, but who then is the conscience of the faith communities? Sometimes we have been too quick to point fingers whilst our own house is not in order.

Also, many faith communities have been preoccupied, even obsessed, with sexual morality, whilst remaining silent about public morality.

What will enable moral regeneration to happen?

It has to begin with me, with self-introspection. Am I leading a moral life? Am I a role model in my family and in the community? What do I say to my children and what kind of example am I to them?

It is never too late for repentance and redemption.

As a person of faith, I like to ask myself, what is God's dream for South Africa and what is my role in making that dream come true? To put it another way, in what kind of world would I like my children and grandchildren to grow up and inherit from my generation?

Even as I bewail the corruption of the big guys, do I countenance and even participate in small-scale corruption? Unless there is moral regeneration, our society is doomed.

Sometimes it seems like we are in a cosmic battle and that the forces of darkness are in the ascendancy. Watching the Zondo Commission has brought anger and despair into the hearts of millions of South Africans. The recent evidence of what happened at the SSA is not unlike what happened during the Apartheid years. The outcome of Infogate and Muldergate during the Apartheid years caused heads to roll.

Mike Pothier of the Catholic Parliamentary Liaison office writes in a response to the SSA revelations:

 How the ANC government of 2021 deals with the SSA and with those of its senior members and officials named last week, such as current Deputy Minister David Mahlobo and former Minister Bongani Bongo, and former intelligence Director General Arthur Fraser, will tell us a lot about whether or not we have come full circle."

At a Christmas Eve Mass in 2019, Archbishop Thabo Makgoba said he hoped that 2020 would be "the year of the orange jump-suit" as those involved in state capture were brought to trial and convicted. Now it is June 2021. The wheels of justice are much too slow but they are turning. Successful convictions will bring renewed hope to weary South Africans.

So legal consequences for unethical behaviour are part of moral regeneration.

Ironically, as I was writing this article I kept being interrupted by power outages. We would not be having power outages today if it were not for the scale of corruption at Eskom over many years.

Imagine for a moment where South Africa would be today if it had not have been for corruption. We would be much further along the road to creating the South Africa of our dreams.

For years we have been having a national conversation about corruption. We need a new national conversation about how to create an ethical society.

This conversation should be spearheaded by all faith communities and their leaders should be in the forefront.

Because most of us belong to faith communities, we all need to be part of a conversation, publicly and in our homes, about how we develop our conscience and remain true to a moral compass.

Perhaps we need to revisit and see if we can sharpen the syllabuses for life orientation from creche to university, and engage traditional leaders and faith leaders to elevate and focus on inculcating ethical behaviour during rites of passage from childhood to adulthood.

Whistleblowers are the saints of our time. In the face of corruption, we are all called to be whistleblowers. It is so painful to hear that they cannot find work. Let the faith leaders challenge those in business, civil society and government to ensure that these heroes are given appropriate work. As faith communities we can also employ whistleblowers within our institutions.

Let us invite whistleblowers to come and tell their stories during our services of worship.

Let us design special interfaith awards for whistleblowers, including monetary rewards to express our gratitude.

The NPA, the Independent Directorate, and the SIU need to be publicly prayed for, lauded by our faith leaders and informed of our support.

Let us all pray every day for Judge Zondo and his team.

It is noteworthy that the least corrupt societies in the world are more equal, such as Norway and New Zealand, and there is no tolerance for corruption.

Becoming activists as faith communities for transformative justice and equality by building a new economic order, are all antidotes to corruption and are a form of moral regeneration.

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Healing old wounds of women and men to end gender-based violence and femicide

On one occasion I was in a healing of memories workshop in Hawaii. I and my colleague were the only two men present. Women told stories of gender-based violence and abuse, crossing generations. At one point I felt moved to say “I feel guilt and shame as a man for what you as women have experienced at the hands of men”. One of the women began to cry. She said it was the first time in her life that she had heard a man apologise for the pain she had experienced as a woman.

The violence of men against women represents the oldest unhealed wounds in human history. It has existed since time immemorial and has increased exponentially in this time of Covid-19.

According to UN Women, globally an estimated 736 million women have been subjected to intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, or both, at least once in their life (30 per cent of women aged 15 and older).

Even before Covid-19, gender-based violence was of epidemic proportions in South Africa.

As President Ramaphosa said

“South Africa holds the shameful distinction of being one of the most unsafe places in the world to be a woman. We have amongst the highest rates of intimate partner violence, and recently released data from Statistics SA show that rape and sexual violence have become hyperendemic. This is a scourge that affects us all: young and old, black or white, rich and poor, queer or cis, rural or urban. It pervades every sphere of our society. Women and girls are being abused, assaulted and murdered in our country every day - at the hands of men. We are in the throes of a deep crisis that must be brought to a decisive end.”

– Mr Cyril Ramaphosa – National Strategy on GBVF

Just for a moment let me go back in time a little.

As a response to what was then the forthcoming Truth and Reconciliation Commission, some of us created an experiential process which we called a healing of memories workshop. Our focus at the beginning was with the psychological, emotional and spiritual wounds caused by Apartheid. Over the last 20 years, the Institute for Healing of Memories (IHOM) has offered workshops in five continents.

In a healing of memories workshop, all the participants are invited to share their life stories. The two most frequent themes of people's stories across the world have been childhood trauma and gender-based violence. Gender-based violence is an issue for the whole human family but very especially here in South Africa.

Fatima Swartz, programme director of the Institute has noted:

“ This moment in history is calling for an extraordinary effort to stem the continued, sustained and escalating onslaught on the life and wellbeing of women and children at the hands of men. We are called to act on multiple fronts to change the reality for woman and children today, tomorrow and for years to come.

As we hold men accountable for their actions, we also need to create the space for men to reflect on their life journey. What has brought them to where they are now? At the start of a healing of memories process we ask people to reflect on how the history of the country has affected them? The violent behavior, attitudes and actions of men has a long history. The efforts to change the trajectory has never been as urgent as now. An integral part of that change is the healing journey of men.

During the healing of memories process, we ask people to reflect on three questions to assist them in taking one step towards their healing. What did you do? What was done to you? What did you fail to do? Men have a story to tell. The IHOM creates safe spaces for men to share their stories, to lift the veil on secrets kept, hardships endured, pain inflicted and to acknowledge wrongs that have been done. It seeks to assist men to take responsibility for the choices made, where possible to make amends and become active participants in building a better world.”

The Institute for Healing of Memories launched a campaign *At the Hands of Men* in November 2020. While it is true that women can abuse and be violent against women, the overwhelming proportion of violence is by men against women.

We deliberately focused on men. Even in the language we use about gender-based violence, it is spoken of in the passive voice without mentioning the victimisers, who are most frequently men.

We partnered with organisations of women who have been abused by men. However, this particular media campaign focuses on men who are or have the potential to be either perpetrators or activists against gbv.

The Institute commissioned graphic artist Rudi Oosterwyk to produce posters to provoke debate in relation to gender-based violence and femicide. Please look carefully at the attached posters and allow yourself to be challenged and provoked to act.

A press release of the Institute in November 2020 noted:

“ The campaign is geared towards contributing meaningfully towards the eradication of Gender-Based Violence, Femicide, and Human Trafficking globally with our partner organisations on the continent, North America, and Asia. More importantly, we also aim to contribute to the HEALING of survivors.

Through our engagements on the continent, what has emerged is that GBV has a strong link to cultural beliefs and practices e.g. marriage customs – sexual intercourse with a virgin heals HIV, and so on. Although this myth has been slated by medical experts, the reality is that it persists within our society today.”

People living with disability are much more prone to violence and abuse than their able-bodied peers.

We must come to a point where we strive for and envision a culture in which we are all safe, empowered, and free from violence in all its multiple facets.

Many women who have been violated as children speak about how they tried to tell a parent and they were shut down. The victim was blamed for being the victim. This then severely damaged their relationship, most often with their mothers, for decades and sometimes forever.

It is common knowledge that the lockdowns linked to Covid-19 led to a spike in gender-based violence across the world.

In the United States, #Me Too became a viral hashtag following the New York Times and New Yorker investigations into the sexual misdeeds of Harvey Weinstein.

Women across the world spoke out in increasing numbers about what they have endured at the hands of men.

What has most often happened in private, came into the public domain.

Some women who come to our healing of memories workshops tell us that it is the first time to speak about what they endured.

When women are attacked, the moral order is inverted. Women tell us how important it is that they are listened to and that they are believed.

Here in South Africa, the Me Too reverberated with Jennifer Ferguson laying a rape charge against Danny Jordan 24 years after the alleged rape took place.

Transgendered people and lesbians, especially black lesbians, here in South Africa, suffer rape and murder at the hands of men.

What is the root cause of gender-based violence?

My friend Chris Ahrends says:

“My view is that the root of all systemic violence as we know it today lies in patriarchy, which is the continued domination over the many institutions of life, including religion, education, economics, family life, especially Caucasian patriarchy. We need to undermine it, deconstruct it, replace it in its entirety..... Let's start with Christianity...”

I asked my Facebook friends what they thought were the most effective antidotes to gender-based violence.

Sello Moshoeshoe said: “The issue of masculinity needs to be addressed time and again, to reinforce the idea of a man whose manhood is not based on violence.”

Much has been written about toxic masculinity. Some have suggested that the rally at Nkandla the weekend before Jacob Zuma's incarceration was a vivid display of toxic masculinity with firearms being discharged.

Many of us recall Jacob Zuma's rape trial, where he was not found guilty but nor was he found innocent. What was striking, was how many women demonstrated in support of Jacob Zuma rather than Khwezi, the daughter of his friend, who was his victim. This suggested that in a patriarchal society, women as well as men, have internalised a patriarchal narrative that blames women for being violated.

Jennifer Henry says: “We need a movement of male allies, working collaboratively with women leadership, but dedicated to working with men directly. I imagine grandfathers dedicated to eradicating



male violence and male clergy confronting the ways in which religion implicitly or explicitly degrades and denies an understanding that women are made co-equally in the image of God.”

The Omotoso trial yet again showed the nation the kind of humiliation and degradation women have to undergo in the courts to be able to get justice. Little wonder that women who have been raped, in the majority of cases, do not press charges.

What is the opposite of toxic masculinity? Or, conversely, what does healthy masculinity look like?

From early childhood, boys and girls have to be helped to discover healthy ways of expressing their emotions especially anger. Men are violent towards women as an expression of their anger. Anger is the tip of the iceberg. Below anger there are many other emotions, especially issues around powerlessness, emasculation, self-worth, and vulnerability. In many countries I have visited, I am told that men don't cry. Then we have a healing of memories workshop and many of the men cry their hearts out, often for the first time in their adult lives. As much as women do, men need safe places where they can deal with what we carry inside ourselves in ways that don't cause further harm to themselves or others.

Levi Singh stresses the importance of Comprehensive Sexuality Education for children and adolescents. “Most of the data we have of properly implemented, science-based CSE show that in countries where children and young people access CSE, lower levels of violence are observed, an uptake in health seeking behaviour, as well as better general understanding of concepts such as consent.”

Dr Molefi Manoto argued that socialism is the antidote, where the burden of social expenditure or cost of living is evenly distributed.

To put it another way, only by dismantling patriarchy and creating a society where there is more equality, and gender equity in particular, will we eradicate gender-based violence.

All the interventions of the Institute for Healing of Memories, including in relation to gender-based violence, are aimed at prevention or advocacy, healing and empowerment. We have four patrons, three of whom are women.

Kirsty Sword Gusmao is the Former First Lady and founder of the Alola Foundation in Timor Leste, which focuses on the empowerment of women and girls. “Traditional Timorese societal norms and an entrenched patriarchy, along with trauma associated with conflict and violence in its past, place women at risk of experiencing gender inequality and gender-based violence. Family violence was the single most reported crime throughout the period of the UN Transitional Administration and continues to be rife today. Silence is the preferred option of many Timorese boys and girls, men and women experiencing violations of their human rights, particularly when the perpetrator enjoys political or some other form of power and when reporting the violations may lead to loss of employment and/or privacy.”

Just recently, Helen Clark, former Prime Minister of New Zealand and former Administrator of UNDP, was a signatory to an open letter to Facebook, Google, TikTok and Twitter CEOs calling on them to tackle the abuse of women on their platforms.

“38 per cent of women globally have directly experienced online abuse. Better tools are needed to manage safety and report abuse.

The social media giants mentioned above made commitments to action on online abuse against women at the #GenerationEquality Forum recently, but effective actions must now follow words.”

HRH Maria Teresa, the Grand Duchess of Luxembourg, set up an organisation called “Stand, Speak, Rise up” to continue the fight against sexual violence in conflict zones. Specifically, it is fighting to stop rape as a weapon of war. “Even if we cannot end war, we can and must end rape as a weapon of war.”

The campaign to end violence against women and girls is predicated on the view that a better world is possible.

We envision and strive for a world where the feminine and masculine in all human beings will be celebrated.

First published in *Leadership Magazine*, August 2021

Homily at St George's Cathedral, Cape Town, 29 August 2021

O God of eternal light, your word is truth: make us quick to listen and slow to speak, that the word implanted in us will take root to nourish all we say and do.

It has been a terrible week for South Africa, especially for women, more especially for black women.

Firstly there was the gruesome murder of Nosicelo Mtebeni, a third-year law student at Fort Hare, apparently by her boyfriend.

While we were still reeling from that news, the nation was shocked by the news of the assassination of Babita Deokaran, a whistleblower in the Gauteng Department of Health.

This week was also the second anniversary of the rape and murder of Uyinene Mretyana, a UCT student who went innocently to collect a parcel from home at the post office.

All this and more as Women's Month comes to a close.

And still the death and dying from Covid-19 continue.

For us as Church, we know August to be the Month of Compassion.

With what I have just said and all that is happening in our personal lives, we have come to this Mass today.

The Collect for today is lifted almost verbatim from the Letter of James. James tells us unequivocally to be quick to listen, and slow to speak. As we have just done, the Liturgy of the Word is about listening to the Word of God.

I have come to see that there is a vast difference between *listening* and *hearing*.

When I do media interviews, I am often struck how a journalist will ask me a question, which I will answer. The second question makes it obvious that they did not hear what I said. They appeared to be *listening* but they did not *hear*.

When you listen, is it just with your ears or is it also with your heart?

If we truly hear with our hearts, we will respond with empathy and compassion, especially sensitive to the pain of another.

As many of you know, as well as being the Canon for Healing and Reconciliation of this Cathedral, my day job is with the Institute for Healing of Memories. We like to say that all people have a story to tell and every story needs a listener.

How many of us have stories of things that have happened to us that we have never told another human being? And why not?

One of my favourite books is by the Jesuit, John Powell, *Why I am afraid to tell you who I am*. If I tell you who I am, will you reject me?

In the United States, as in South Africa, the Institute for Healing of Memories works with military veterans. I recall one veteran saying “I have waited 42 years to tell this story”.

Those who participate in war carry in their souls the horror of what they have witnessed and done. Even as they are haunted by guilt and shame they fear being judged.

All of us carry the burdens of what we have done, what has been done to us and what we have failed to do. Sometimes our guilt and shame are not just about what we have done individually. It is about what has been done by the group to which we belong or in our name, or on our behalf.

On one occasion I was in a healing of memories workshop in Hawaii. I and my colleague were the only two men present. Women told stories of gender-based violence and abuse, crossing generations. At one point I felt moved to say “I feel guilt and shame as a man for what you, as women, have experienced at the hands of men”. One of the women began to cry. She said it was the first time in her life that she had heard a man apologise for the pain she had experienced as a woman.

The violence of men against women represents the oldest unhealed wounds in human history. It has existed since time immemorial and has increased exponentially in this time of Covid-19.

Today the Letter of James tells us that it is not enough to be hearers of the word, we are called to be doers. As James most famously said, faith without action is meaningless.

Babita Deokaran came from the Hindu faith community. In the context of Covid-19, she organised prayer meetings regardless of people's faith tradition. At her funeral, Pravin Gordhan described Babita Deokaran as “a hero who sacrificed her life so that future generations would live in a crime-free South Africa”.

Together with the Claremont Main Road Masjid (CMRM) we welcome the arrest of seven suspects linked to the cowardly assassination of Babita Deokaran. We demand justice and call for the swift and successful prosecution of the perpetrators of this heinous murder.

And we also agree with the Masjid when they say that

“It is important for South African Civil Society to condemn the cowardly assassination of Babita loudly and vociferously, since the intention of the assassins is to scare and silence future whistleblowers. CMRM extends our sincere condolences to the family of Babita Deokaran. May they take comfort from the knowledge that she courageously stood for a South Africa free from corruption”.

As a South African, I feel guilt and shame that in our country whistleblowers are murdered.

Whistleblowers are the saints and martyrs of our day, inviting and challenging us to emulate their example.

Last week I was in Ghana. A young Ghanaian told me that he felt that South Africa had betrayed the continent.

As a participant in the liberation struggle, I feel guilt and shame that we are the most unequal society on earth, characterised by corruption. This is not what we fought for.

The ubiquitous presence of gender-based violence in our world, in our country, and within our faith community fills me with guilt and shame.

On Thursday I gave a Memorial Lecture for Paddy Kearney, for many years Director of the Diakonia Council of Churches, on *Healing old wounds of women and men to end gender-based violence and femicide*. I was asked about the role of patriarchy within faith communities. Perhaps because patriarchy is the lived experience amongst most, if not all, faith traditions, we have accepted it uncritically. A sober assessment may well reveal how our teachings and practices have played their part in the acceptance of violence by men against women.

I feel guilt and shame as a man because of what women experience at the hands of men. Guilt and shame are often paralysing emotions.

I believe that having listened with a heart of compassion to the pain of so many, I am now called to act. I need God's help to transform my guilt and shame into struggling for transformative justice, for women, for children, for men, for people who are excluded, for Mother Earth.

For today, especially for women.

Four years ago today, in this Cathedral, I was inspired by this hymn by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette. I hope you will be too:

God of the women who answered your call,
trusting your promises, giving their all,
Women like Sarah and Hannah and Ruth -
Give us their courage to live in your truth.

God of the women
Who walked Jesus' Way,
giving their resources,
learning to pray,
Mary, Joanna, Susanna, and more-
may we give freely as they did before

God of the women long
put to the test,
left out of stories, forgotten, oppressed,
Quietly asking:
"Who smiled at my birth?"-
In Jesus' dying you show us our worth.

God of the women
who ran from the tomb,
prayed with the others
in that upper room,

Then felt your Spirit on Pentecost Day-
may we so gladly proclaim you today.

O God of Phoebe and ministers all,
may we be joyful in answering your call.
Give us the strength of your Spirit so near
that we may share in your ministry here.

Brave New World: With Jesus into an unknown world

Following Jesus in a strange new world

Dear Friends

Thank you, Ds Andre Bartlett, for the privilege of speaking once more at your Conference of the Centre for Training for Ministry on *Following Jesus into a brave new world*.

Thank you for the opportunity to share some thoughts with you today.

Often, we Christians have been much more comfortable with worshipping Jesus than following him and becoming his disciples.

Today I would like to focus on the challenges of being a Christian in South Africa today. In particular, I wish to speak about being a white Christian and especially a white male Christian.

My alternative title for today's presentation is *Transforming guilt and shame into a commitment to transformative justice*. Or how and when do shame and guilt become healthy?

The world we now find ourselves in is something that we could never have imagined before the lockdown in March 2020. Since the first lockdown, gender-based violence, which was already gargantuan, increased. Perpetrators and victims were forced to share the same space 24 hours a day.

South Africa has the ignominious distinction of being the most unequal society on earth. Unemployment has mushroomed since Covid-19 hit us. Still today, the majority of the poor are black. A disproportionate amount of wealth remains in white hands.

We also know that within the political class and those to whom they were connected, there was a frenzy of looting coterminous with the onset of Covid. It cost the fiscus, and therefore us, the taxpayers, billions of rands.

There is also a mental health pandemic running parallel to Covid, manifesting in fear and anxiety. All around us there is death and dying

We have all experienced grief. Often as faith leaders we who have been wounded by our own grief, as well as the grief of others, have not given ourselves space and permission to travel through this grief and these losses.

As if that was not enough, Mother Earth is also screaming out in pain because of our behaviour.

Covid brought to the fore, in many of us, our unhealed wounds from the past.



In the age of Covid, old and new wounds have coalesced within our hearts and minds and in our troubled souls.

Just when we thought nothing could get worse, there was an attempted insurrection with mass looting and mass destruction. Many people died. In our hour of greatest need the citizenry was abandoned by our own government.

It is also fair to say that in the midst of Covid, we have seen not just the worst in us, but also the best: our ability to be kind, loving and generous.

In the face of insurrection, the majority of South Africans came together across all lines of division and said unambiguously, No to looting, no to destruction, no to chaos. The nation will not forget that when the people were in greatest need of protection, none was provided by our own government and its security forces, till the worst was over.

But where does all that leave us as people of faith?

Since Covid besieged us, many have looked to their spirituality for solace and comfort.

A few days ago, I was in Ghana. Many religious people I met kept repeating as a kind of mantra, “God is in control”, even as their lived experience told another story.

Many people, perhaps some of us, have felt overcome by hopelessness not just about South Africa but about the world. Our faith is very fragile. This is even more challenging when people are looking to us for inspiration, for guidance and for leadership.

Even though some of what we face is unique, we are not the first who have had to confront what it means to be a disciple of Jesus in the face of overwhelming odds.

The book of Micah tells us very clearly what is required of us in this and every age: to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with your God.

Jesus says in Luke’s Gospel that he has come to preach Good News to the poor, to free the captives, to bind up the broken-hearted.

Galatians 6:2 tells us to bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Many of us carry guilt and shame because of what we have done, what was done to us, and what we failed to do.

For many White South Africans, the burden we carry of guilt and shame is not just what we did, as important as that is, but what was done in our name and on our behalf by previous generations. That past shaped and poisoned our present.

Is it any wonder that we seek to bury and forget, to deny rather than to face our complicity with evil.

We sought to assuage the horror of what we were doing to each other by singing about *Braai vleis*, *Rugby*, *Sunny Skies and Chevrolet*.

Perhaps therein lies the explanation of how we started to worship the idol of materialism which continues till today.

Maybe this was inevitable, given the role of greed and accumulation for the few that underlay slavery and Apartheid.

As Paulo Freire points out, the oppressed's idea of being free, of being human, was to be like the oppressor. What a tragedy for our nation then and now.

When Apartheid came to an end we had a Truth and Reconciliation Commission rather than Nuremburg. The Afrikaans press said it was a white-bashing exercise.

White people turned off the TV, didn't listen to the radio, didn't read the newspapers, preferring to remain in denial.

The few who did were often changed forever. When I told my story in Kimberly Town Hall there were a thousand people present. The number of white people you could count on the fingers of one hand.

People would often say, we never knew. Would it not be more honest to say, we didn't want to know?

How many white people were involved in the forced removals of three and a half million people?

How many were involved in torture, including of the 80% of children under the age of 18 detained in the mid 80s?

And then there were the conscripts who saw and did terrible things in Namibia and Angola.

Not forgetting the everyday forms of humiliation and discrimination suffered by every person of colour in South Africa.

When we say we did not know, what do we mean?

I could go on.

How many of our families carry the burden of silence, of guilty secrets to cover shame and guilt which cross generations?

Among the recommendations of the TRC was the proposal of a one-off wealth tax. It went down like a lead balloon. The white community went ballistic....You can have the vote, we can even say sorry... but you cannot touch our money.

Even for those of us who have spent our lives fighting racism, it doesn't mean that we did not and do not benefit from white privilege.

Often in the faith community we are quick to say that we are against racism and then we let ourselves off the hook from the painful, and yet liberating, journey of unlearning racism.

Evidence suggests that gender-based violence is no less rampant in communities of faith than in the rest of society.

At the Institute for Healing of Memories, a while back, we launched a campaign we call *At the hands of men*. Of course, it is true that women can abuse men but the overwhelming percentage of violence is by men against women.

On one occasion I was in a healing of memories workshop in Hawaii. I and my colleague were the only two men present. Women told stories of gender-based violence and abuse, crossing generations. At one point I felt moved to say "I feel guilt and shame as a man for what you as women have experienced at the hands of men". One of the women began to cry. She said it was the first time in her life that she had heard a man apologise for the pain she had experienced as a woman.

We cannot face gender-based violence squarely without looking at the role of patriarchy. Which of our faith communities are not patriarchal institutions?

How do we liberate and disinfect our theology and our churches from patriarchy - some would say, especially from Caucasian patriarchy?

As a young white person in the South Africa of the 70s our response to the guilt and shame we felt was to drink too much Tassenberg.....but all that did was to give us babalaas.

I realised that an infinitely healthier response to my guilt and shame was to join the liberation struggle, to make common cause with the oppressed, to become an ally, for the sake of my own humanity.

I was inspired by all those who had gone before me including my spiritual ancestors, living and departed, black and white, women and men, Christian and Communist.

In my case they have included the greats like Oliver Tambo and Nelson Mandela, Helen Joseph and Albertina Sisulu, Desmond Tutu and Beyers Naude, Bram Fischer and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, not forgetting Trevor Huddleston.

I recall that for centuries, for the majority of South Africans, their oppression was steadily increasing.

Yet they never gave up. They dared to hope, from generation to generation.

As we face dark times today we can draw strength and hope from the courage of our foremothers and forefathers.

I remember, soon after democracy came to South Africa, reading a report from our national intelligence agency. It listed the major threats to the security of the state. They were poverty, unemployment and inequality. There was no mention of any military threats.

There was a proposed arms deal. Rank and file ANC MPs rebelled and the deal was shelved. The arms manufacturers went to work behind the scenes. The deal was brought back to parliament and every political party voted in favour of the deal. Then the corruption began to emerge.

South Africa faced no military threat and has had no need of most of the hardware it bought. It is time for the swords to be turned into plowshares.

In the face of the Covid-19 pandemic, the military arsenals of the world, including our own, do not help and do not protect us. The money could and should be spent on universal health care.

The nexus of Covid-19 and the climate crisis is a Kairos moment for the whole human family.

We all have a part to play if the human species is going to survive.

I feel guilt and shame about what we humans are doing to our Earthly home.

I feel guilt and shame about what we as white people have done to people across the centuries, up until today.

I feel guilt and shame about what we men have done to women since time immemorial.

I feel guilt and shame about what the ANC has failed to do after 27 years in power.

I feel a deep sense of grief because of all the death and dying.

God helped me to transform my own grief and loss into an open heart to respond lovingly to the grief and loss of others.

My shame and guilt are fuelling my commitment to act compassionately and work for transformative justice.

That is the work of redemption in which God invites all of us to share.

Many people say that the Sermon on the Mount captures the heart of the message of Jesus.

Every morning, I receive a short meditation from the great spiritual writer, Richard Rohr. I guess he is known to some of you. Fr Rohr also references other spiritual writers. The focus a couple of weeks back was on the Beatitudes.

We are used to hearing the Beatitudes expressed passively:

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.

Megan McKenna points out that a much better translation of “Blessed” in the original Aramaic would be “Get up, go ahead, do something, move”.

“When I understand Jesus’ words in Aramaic, I translate like this:

Get up, go ahead, do something, move, you who are hungry and thirsty for justice, for you shall be satisfied.

Get up, go ahead, do something, move, you peacemakers, for you shall be called children of God.

To me this reflects Jesus’ words and teachings much more accurately.”

Is this not the discipleship to which we are called in this brave new world?

Is this not what we are called to do in honour of Babita Deokaran?

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can and wisdom to know the difference.

Guide me, O Thou great Redeemer
Pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but Thou art mighty,
Hold me with Thy powerful hand.
Bread of heaven, Bread of heaven,
Feed me now and evermore;
Feed me now and evermore.

Centre for Training for Ministry of the University of Pretoria, 16 September 2021

The pain caused by the demonisation of African culture at the altar of Apartheid and colonialism

I have long felt that the deepest wounds caused by Apartheid were spiritual.

Denying the humanity of indigenous people was the cover for greed. This has culminated in South Africa becoming the most unequal society on earth.

We convinced ourselves that unlimited accumulation would make us happy. Lurking below the surface of white society was guilt and shame as we worshipped idols.

Both the perpetrator and the victim were spiritually injured. People's souls were scarred as they internalised a belief in their own inferiority or superiority.

As Chief Lutuli put it so eloquently, "Apartheid insulted God for daring to make a human being in the black form".

Gonville French Beytagh, a predecessor of Desmond Tutu as Anglican Dean of Johannesburg, wrote a book called Encountering Darkness. He argued that Apartheid projected on to black people the shadow side of all of us.

Patric Tariq Mellet eloquently and devastatingly articulates the pain and damage caused by the demonisation of African culture. He writes:

“The attack on the soul of any people is the root of cultural genocide which is part of ethnocide, genocide and forced assimilation. These are all crimes against humanity noted in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. The attack on the soul of African society was proudly touted by those who conducted conquest, colonisation and imperial dominance, as the civilising mission. This was underwritten by the Papacy and other Christian Church leadership.

This included the Christian driven notion led by the Catholic Church that lands were not occupied if not by Christians and Christian culture. Christian and European became synonymous. From this the notions of primitive cultureless savages (Noble Savage theory) and Terra Nullius (empty land) theory led to bloody massacres, seizure of wealth and resources and colonisation. The symbol of this "Civilisation", perversely became the Cross or Crucifix.”

So we cannot make sense of what happened in South Africa without considering the history of western colonisation with its theological underpinnings.

The Papal Bull “Inter Caetera,” issued by Pope Alexander VI on 4 May 1493, played a central role in the Spanish conquest of the New World. The document supported Spain’s strategy to ensure its exclusive right to the lands discovered by Columbus the previous year.

This came to be known as the Doctrine of Discovery. Later it was claimed in the US congress that the Doctrine of Discovery had the force of international law.

In a private audience with Pope Francis in 2019, I said that indigenous people across the world were advocating for a revocation of the Doctrine of Discovery. This would be a step on the journey to healing the Church’s complicity in genocide.

Patric Mallet continues “All African beliefs about the soul were labelled barbaric, uncivilised and satanic and literally beaten out of people. Some Africans were assimilated and de-Africanised and labeled “Coloured”. African spirituality was demonised in this assault. African culture including social cultures, dress, language, medicine and indigenous knowledge and sciences were written off as “mumbo jumbo” and forcibly purged from society. Those who continued with such practices were denied advancement within the colonised societies and marginalised. European terminology (eg: tribes, witchdoctors, etc.) diminished discourse between African and other world cultures.

This frames the pain as a consequence. It also resulted in the brainwashing of colonial descendants who kept injury going and it also created a colonisation or acculturation of the mind of the oppressed. Pain continues to be exacted and dispossession of the soul and demonisation continues into the present.... hence it continues beyond the colonial era and Apartheid era.”

Writing in his recently published seminal work, ‘Nation on the Couch: Inside South Africa’s Mind’, Wahbie Long references how “the anti-colonial icon Frantz Fanon explains that, in the colonial encounter, ‘it is not possible to enslave men without logically making them inferior through and through.’ Henceforth, the native population looked on helplessly as the occupying powers set about obliterating their cultural forms, imposing on them ‘a pejorative judgment with respect to [their] original forms of existing, of such magnitude could mean only one thing — that ‘God is not on [their] side’. They were not recognised as human, being nothing more than accidental objects in virgin land.”

The untold consequences

My friend Horst Kleinschmidt quotes from the South African History Archives: “In 1954 Fr Trevor Huddleston gave **Hugh Masekela** his first trumpet, passing it on from Louis ‘Satchmo’ Armstrong. He then asked the leader of Johannesburg Native Municipal Brass Band, Uncle Sauda, to teach Masekela the basics of the instrument.” and then goes on to say:

“What the SAHA article does not say is that Huddleston reflected on this later in his life. It went something like this: ‘If the trumpet I gave a young boy I met in the street produced one of SA’s foremost creative musicians, how many people has apartheid (and oppression more widely) denied the means, the right, to discover their talent?’ To which I say: the denial of the best education to the majority of the people has left hidden the cultural contribution (besides other contributions) so many people could have made. Those like Hugh, Miriam, Miriam Tlali, etc. etc. are gems who made it in spite of a system that said: you are fit only to be the hewers of wood

There are many parallels between the experience of Apartheid and colonialism in South Africa and that of the foundation nations of the human family across the world.

Only in 1991 did the High Court of Australia overturn the legal fiction of Terra Nullius.

During the last twenty years, as part of the Institute for Healing of Memories, I have been privileged to listen to the stories of First Nations across the world. Let me share a couple of examples.

The First Nations of Canada

Travis Enright, who belongs to the Cree nation in Canada, writes

“With all honesty and humility, it must be confessed that, at least in part, the Churches find their basis in a gross distortion of the Christian faith that is aptly described as “colonial Christendom”. This is, in effect, a heresy, which seeks to co-opt the message of Jesus and the mission of the Church into a system of supports for the historic and present sins of white supremacy, the doctrine of discovery, the enslavement of fellow humans, and cultural and racial genocide.

These roots are the very same that grew the system of the Indian Residential Schools and the wider project of colonization in this land we now call Canada. The bodies being recovered in former Indian Residential schools these last days in places like Kamloops, Brandon, and the Cowessess First Nation, and the more announcements that will come, are evidence of how these roots have gone very deep into the ground. The part played by the churches in planting of those seeds is shameful and tragic. It must be named and addressed.”

The Sami people in Norway

Advocate Ingar Nikolaisen Kuoljok of the Sami indigenous people in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia says

“The Sami People have been living for thousands of years on the territory which we now call Norway.

About year 1100 AD Norwegian settlers began coming to Sami areas. At that time Norwegians became Christians and they were forbidden to take part in Sami religious ceremonies. The Samis kept following their old religion and traditions, but in the beginning of 1700 this was not tolerated by the Norwegian and Danish kingdom.

Norwegian officials and priests complained about Samis as ‘a people who lived outside the control of the state and the church’.

A Norwegian priest, Thomas von Westen (1682-1727), was appointed to start the work against the Samis. In 1716 he made an instruction for the teaching of the Samis. Here he went through several of the things that he considered to be the delusions of the Sami, including:

- ‘Their idolatry’,
- ‘Sami parents’ reluctance to use physical punishment against their children’, and
- ‘The Sami women’s domination and tyranny against their husbands’.

The clergy then began the introduction of patriarchy among the Sami - which meant that men were considered to be more valuable than women, and worst of all that Sami women were ranked lowest of all.

That was the beginning of the darkest period in Sami history. Sami language, culture, religion and way of life were considered to be things that should be replaced by a 'civilized' culture.

From about 1850 Samis were seen as a race of lower value than Norwegian and European races. This massive stress began to transform the Sami societies, and some decades ago some of the Samis began to believe in this. This created a kind of shame within Sami societies that caused cultural and language losses.

We are now working to handle this stress and to restore culture, language, way of life and our dignity.”

The African diaspora in the United States

Mayowa Alero Obasaju, born in Nigeria and living in New York City, writes

“ The destructive power of colonization - the assumptions based on stereotypes that benefit those in power, that become ‘facts’, that are turned into stories that are passed down through generations - can have a devastating impact on individuals, especially children. Children who are taught that because of their country of origin, they are inherently less than, not good enough, and in need of salvation. It can lead to people disconnecting from their history and culture, leading to internalizing of negative stereotypes, and lowered sense of self. Additionally, the impact is felt at levels greater than the individual. These negative stereotypes are used to justify collective violence and exploitation across the continent of Africa. In Nigeria, it has led to western multinationals, such as Shell oil, directly and indirectly exploiting our country for financial gain. Leaving communities destroyed as rivers that are ways of life are destroyed, all in the pursuit of oil. Leaving environmental degradation after oil spill upon oil spill. Leading to other sectors of the economy and society being underdeveloped and under resourced. For specifics see ‘To Cook a Continent: Destructive Extraction and the Climate Crisis in Africa’ by Nnimmo Bassey.

Colonization also operates by attempting to define what is normal and abnormal. That white, middle to upper class, heterosexual, able bodied Westerners are the norm all should aspire to and should be the ones that decide what is acceptable in dress, language, culture, religion, and beliefs, what is best way of being, what is legitimate, and what is normal. Writers have pointed to a history of gender diversity and a range of sexualities in pre-colonial Nigeria. However, after colonization and missionary contact, traditions were reshaped, histories were re-written, and homosexuality was decried as immoral. A new story of judgement and oppression was created. British colonizers imparted methods of surveillance and provided examples of laws and regulations to try and destroy same gender loving expression. This expression is criminalized in Nigeria today. This criminalization and accompanying marginalization have had a horrific impact on the LGBTQ+ community in Nigeria.

I believe that because of the individual, communal, and societal destruction caused by colonization, healing is necessary for those of us who are descendants of those who have been colonized. A healing that is based on interrogating what parts of the oppressor we still have within us, claiming the strengths, beauty, and wisdom of our culture and traditions,

questioning and disregarding or transforming the oppressive beliefs and values that are part of our cultures, and seeking agency and liberatory practices that help us create the worlds that we want to see.”

When I first arrived in South Africa in 1973, Black Consciousness was rapidly becoming a potent force among students on black campuses. Their foremost leader, Steve Biko, was murdered in detention in 1977.

As Steve Biko said in a speech in Cape Town, 1971, “The basic tenet of black consciousness is that the black man must reject all value systems that seek to make him a foreigner in the country of his birth and reduce his basic human dignity.” And “So as a prelude whites must be made to realise that they are only human, not superior. Same with Blacks. They must be made to realise that they are also human, not inferior.”

The antidotes to spiritual injury: Black Consciousness and the transformation of guilt and shame into working for transformative justice

Twenty-five years into democracy a resurgence of black consciousness can bring balm to weary souls and free black people on their journey to liberation.

Guilt and shame can become healthy when they are transformed into a commitment to transformative justice.

As Horst Kleinschmidt says “Racism is lurking underneath all this and is just as large as the unequal economic playing field. We need an articulation of White Shame, of Acknowledgement, of Contrition, of Atonement. We need a space or a means by which thousands of good white folk can bow or ‘do the knee’. They say: to you and me: Yes we want to express what we genuinely feel, BUT to whom do we say it AND what do we say? It’s what Steve Biko said to us: ‘If you want to help go and work amongst your own people’.”

We all have a role to play in healing the wounds of history so that, as Steve Biko said, we can bestow upon South Africa “a more human face”.

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Homily at St George's Cathedral, Cape Town, 28 November 2021

Seeing with the heart

Seeing through the stomach

How has this last week or so been for you? For me it has been emotionally and spiritually confusing on many fronts.

Wondering what is on your heart and mind today. The latest news about a new Covid variant was just the news we did not need, a body blow to the nation, one month before Christmas.

How are you feeling?

I pray that in this Mass we will all experience God's tender loving embrace, whispering in our hearts that we are created in love, and that we will leave today's Mass with renewed hope and inspiration to act with kindness and tenderness to all.

It is Advent Sunday. Whilst the world focuses on how many shopping days it is before Christmas, the Church traditionally invites us to meditate on the Four Last Things: Death; Judgment, Heaven and Hell...just enough to cheer us up.

Though I have to say that the Advent hymns are among my favourites.

The reading from Jeremiah invites us to trust in God and to look forward to a day of righteousness and justice; that day will surely come, "not a day too soon" many South Africans cry out.

The parable of the fig tree is an invitation to read the signs of the times.

A few days ago I participated in the Annual Assembly of the Loretto Sisters from Kentucky in the United States. They chose the theme *Seeing through the heart*. We explored what it means to see differently with hearts of compassion.

The Arrente nation in the centre of Australia speak about "seeing through your stomach". Many ancient people saw the stomach as the seat of the emotions but we can also relate it to food sovereignty.

During Covid, even while some looted and there was a horrible increase in gender-based violence, many people began to see things through the heart. We asked ourselves, what is really important about our lives as human beings on Mother Earth?

On Thursday our friends in the US celebrated Thanksgiving, although Native Americans remind us that for them it's about stolen land and genocide.

And of course, incidentally, some say that Black Friday, which we recently imported from the US, began with the selling of black people as slaves the day after Thanksgiving.

For many years a dear friend of mine in New York, Mary Lanning, on Thanksgiving and on other days, mobilised a small army of volunteers to serve a splendid Thanksgiving dinner to thousands of New Yorkers who live on the streets.

This year, on our Human Rights Day, she went to heaven. Poor people all over New York wept because their angel had left them. I was upset with my friends for not yet organising a memorial service for her.

Then on Thursday, Thanksgiving Day, on Facebook I saw the pictures of the same friends of Mary Lanning, serving food to homeless New Yorkers. What more fitting memorial, to do as she did.

I am reminded that Jesus himself never asked people to worship him. He did ask us to follow him. Often, we as Church people are more comfortable worshipping Jesus than imitating his life.

Seeing with the heart

Seeing through the stomach

Last week the nation responded in greatly varying ways to the passing of FW de Klerk. I am sure many of us have very diverse views, including around issues of apology and accountability.

One man was so incensed with what I said on national television he wrote to say he was sorry that the letter bomb had not done more damage. I wrote to tell him that I and my community are praying for him. He wrote back saying he didn't believe in prayer and then began to tell me about his pain and told me he admired my courage. We are in dialogue.

Personally, I believed the passing of FW provided a new opportunity, especially for those of us who are white, to acknowledge that Apartheid was a crime against humanity, to accept that we continue to benefit from white privilege, and to work for reparations, restitution and transformative justice as healthy responses to our guilt and shame, including the demand for the speeding-up of cases like the Craddock 4, and others who were murdered in detention, where relatives still carry too much pain because of the lack of accountability on the part of those who were responsible.

Seeing with the heart

Seeing through the stomach

In 1994, whilst we were having our first democratic elections, genocide was happening in Rwanda... The world looked the other way until 800 000 people were dead.

For more than a year there has been a civil war raging in Ethiopia with human rights violations by all sides, immense suffering and starvation.

Today all the signs are there for the beginning of genocide against the Tigrayan people by the Federal Government of Ethiopia supported by Eritrea.

Our prayer is for our own government to support decisive action by the Security Council to stop the genocide and bring the parties to the negotiating table.

Seeing with the heart

Seeing through the stomach

Now our three Western Cape dioceses are seeking to respond to the pain of our earthly home with a beach clean-up on Saturday 4 November from 9 to 11. The Diocese of Cape Town Environmental Team, together with YPM, looks forward to seeing families of the diocese at Hout Bay beachfront, Harbour Road, Hout Bay.

Since my bombing, I have often meditated on how the Jesus story of suffering, death and resurrection relates to our own stories and indeed the whole of humanity.

This week in his Daily Meditations, Richard Rohr put it this way:

“For Christians, Jesus’ life is the archetypal map of Everyman and Everywoman: divine conception, ordinary life, betrayal, abandonment, rejection, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. It all comes full circle, as we return to where we started, though now transformed. Jung saw this basic pattern repeated in every human life. He called it the Christ Archetype, ‘an almost perfect map’ of the whole journey of human transformation. Jung’s notion of an Archetype or Ruling Image can help us understand the ‘Universal Stand-In’ that Jesus is and was meant to be.”

Then something else I read this week that cheered me up:

As many of you will know, our Roman Catholic sisters and brothers have begun a synodal process. As Anglicans we have our own mixed experiences of synods.

However, the purpose of this Synod called by Pope Francis, and I quote, is not to “produce more documents. Rather, it is intended to inspire people to dream about the Church we are called to be, to make people’s hopes flourish, to stimulate trust, to bind up wounds, to weave new and deeper relationships, to learn from one another, to build bridges, to enlighten minds, warm hearts, and restore strength to our hands for our common mission.”

Is that not what we need too?

Let us ask God to help us see with our hearts and see through our stomachs.

As we shall say before we receive the Sacrament:

Behold who we are

May we become what we receive.

Amen

The ANC's Church Front

I like to think of myself as a New Zealand-born, Southern African internationalist.

My first introduction to Apartheid was when I was still a child in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Our priest brought a petition to our local church called *No Maoris No Tour*. The Springboks had invited the All Blacks to South Africa providing they left the Maori players behind.

Secondly, as an adolescent, I read Trevor Huddleston's *Naught For Your Comfort* about forced removals. From that time, I was clear that the Apartheid version of Christianity was the opposite of what I had learned at my mother's knee.

However, personally I was on another mission, to follow Jesus. At the age of 17, I went to the monastery in Australia, training to be a priest and joining the Anglican religious order, the Society of the Sacred Mission (SSM).

As a newly-ordained priest, I was sent by SSM to South Africa in 1973 to become a university student and later a university chaplain.

I often say that the day I arrived in South Africa, I stopped being a human being and became a white man. For me, joining the liberation struggle was about recovering my own humanity in solidarity with black people struggling for their own basic human rights.

From early on, during my time in South Africa, I was very attracted to the ideas of Black Consciousness and the goals of the ANC. While on home leave in New Zealand in 1975, I read Nelson Mandela's *No Easy Walk to Freedom*. It helped me to see clearly that the Apartheid government was an extremist and terroristic regime.

When I arrived in South Africa in 1973 I was a convinced pacifist. In the face of the killing of school children in 1976, my pacifism fell apart and I became convinced that in our context and with our history, armed struggle had become morally legitimate, necessary and justified.

In July 1976, I was elected as National Chaplain of Anglican Students, at a time when students were being detained, tortured and killed.

It is worth noting that the Church had long been a site of struggle inside and outside South Africa. It is not accidental that the first three presidents of the ANC were ministers of religion.

At the end of September 1976, I was expelled from South Africa. In agreement with my religious order, I went to Lesotho and completed my degree at the National University of Lesotho.



With about 20% of the students coming from South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe, the politics of national liberation were centre stage on the campus, with strong support for all the Southern African liberation movements.

A citizen of two countries

A year or two after arriving in Lesotho, I formally applied to join the African National Congress of South Africa. The way I looked at it, the illegitimate government of South Africa had expelled me. The ANC were morally legitimate representatives of the people of South Africa. By becoming a member of the ANC, I was becoming a citizen of a country for which we were still struggling. My fellow Kiwi, Bishop John Osmers, also applied to join the ANC.

For a time, I was the Chairperson of the only above-ground unit of the ANC, based at the National University of Lesotho, directly accountable to Comrade Chris Hani.

As a unit we had to communicate and popularise the vision of the ANC for a free South, win support and recruit for the ANC and its People's Army to help make South Africa ungovernable. We worked with Basotho students as well as the many South African students who could still cross the border. Our clandestine activity included smuggling banned ANC literature and recruiting courier to deliver messages to key operatives inside South Africa. All our work was coordinated with the underground political and military structures of the movement.

Our public role included organising fund-raising dinners to buy sporting equipment for the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College at Mazimbu in Tanzania.

I decided to apply to become a teacher at SOMAFCO and was accepted. I told my bishop that this was my prayerful decision. My decision was countermanded by ANC President Oliver Tambo, who said that other people could teach but it was more important for me to remain in Lesotho. I had to go back to the Bishop and tell him that actually God wanted me to remain in Lesotho. The Bishop wryly asked if the name of the Holy Spirit was Oliver Tambo.

As well as the public role, I was involved in facilitating contacts between church people in South Africa and the ANC in exile. In time, within the ANC some of us became part of what was known as the Church Front and later morphed into the Religious Front and the Interfaith Chaplaincy.

There was also a pastoral role of caring for young South African exiles who were en route either to school or to military training.

The vast majority of South Africans considered themselves Christians and most South Africans belong to a faith community. At the same time a perverted form of Christianity was the major ideological weapon used by the Apartheid state. Accounts of the liberation struggle that deny or gloss over the major and critical significance of the faith communities, are seriously revisionist.

Those of us in the ANC in exile were in dynamic contact with leaders and activists in all the member churches of the South African Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Churches. These included leaders such as Ds Beyers Naude, Dr Allan Boesak, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Archbishop Dennis Hurley and Frank Chikane.

Whilst so many of the nation's political leaders were either in prison or exile, the liberation-oriented faith leaders became doubly important.

Over decades, the fight for freedom was fought theologically within and by the structures of faith communities and para church bodies like the Christian Institute and years later, the Institute for Contextual Theology and the Call of Islam. Many of the Christian student organisations saw themselves as part of the struggle, such as the NCFS of the Catholic Church, the Anglican Student Federation, YCS and SUCA.

Churches were part of worldwide denominational bodies like the Anglican Communion, the Lutheran World Federation as well as ecumenical bodies like the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the World Council of Churches.

It was these bodies that proclaimed Apartheid to be a sin and a heresy or false doctrine.

A high point in the theological battle against Apartheid was the publication of the Kairos Document in 1985 entitled Challenge to the Church: A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa. State theology, Church Theology and Prophetic Theology were the three theological strands described, with the authors, mainly black, all embracing Prophetic or Liberation Theology.

Liberation Theology, which was increasingly accepted by progressives in Churches across the country, was a theology of endurance, resistance and hope. It also found echoes in similar thought and practices among Moslems, Hindus and Jews.

The global reach of the faith communities played an enabling role to mobilise people to support the world-wide anti-Apartheid movement and the liberation movement.

In 1969, the World Council of Churches (WCC) had set up a Programme to Combat Racism and a Special Fund. The Special Fund made financial contributions to liberation movements to the fury of the Apartheid regime and especially of conservative white churchgoers. At some point, Bill Burnett, who was Archbishop of Cape Town, said that the Church of the Province of Southern Africa, which included Lesotho, did not support the PCR and the Special Fund. Fr John Osmer and I succeeded in passing a motion in the Lesotho Diocesan Synod in support of the Program to Combat Racism and we took a collection for the Special Fund. We then wrote a polite note to the archbishop asking him to stop saying he spoke for the whole church in relation to the WCC.

Meanwhile I began to write some articles for the ANC's monthly magazine Sechaba and the African Communist, including an analysis of how Just War theory related to our liberation struggle.

On 9 December 1982, the South African Defence force massacred 42 people in Maseru. Although I was away from Lesotho at the time, Church authorities and the local leadership of my order argued that if I was allowed to remain in Lesotho, the troops would come back and that some of them might die in the crossfire. Members of my order in the Free State also said that my presence in Lesotho endangered their lives. Sadly they did not see that Apartheid was THE problem.

The massacre had taken place whilst I was in the midst of one of a number of speaking tours through the length and breadth of New Zealand organised by the local anti-Apartheid movement.

I relocated to the UK. My order freed me to work full time for the London office of the ANC. I wrote an article for a World Council of Churches publication asserting in its title that *The struggle is also my life*. I travelled the length and breadth of the UK and beyond, focusing especially on mobilising the faith community inside and outside South Africa to oppose Apartheid and be part of the struggle for freedom.

During that year, the World Service of the BBC interviewed me over a period of four days as to why I, as a priest, had joined the ANC.

My message became increasingly simple and direct: Apartheid is an option or a choice for death carried out in the name of the Gospel of Life and therefore it was an issue of faith to oppose it.

Before going to Zimbabwe at the end of 1983 I participated in a joint ANC-SWAPO speaking tour of Canada, visiting 20 cities in six weeks and strengthening support for our two liberation movements.

Once I arrived in Zimbabwe to do a Master's degree at the University of Zimbabwe, I was integrated into ANC structures. This included chairing an ANC Education Committee which facilitated the education of exiles from creche to university.

Together with Kingsley Mamabolo and Jabu Moleketi, we edited a popular magazine for the Zimbabwean public called *Struggle Update*.

In 1985, I had the honour of being elected as a delegate to the National Conference of the ANC at Kabwe in Zambia.

After completing my Master's degree, I became a parish priest in Mbare, an African township in Harare. Living in a township made it possible to discreetly recruit youth to act as couriers between the internal and external structures of the ANC and MK.

From time to time, I was able to provide a safe house for MK leaders and operatives including comrades such as Joe Modise and Thabang Makwetla.

As a chaplain of the ANC, I was also on hand for the weddings and funerals of cadres. When it came to the funerals of exiles, I felt it was important to be a voice of hope: God is with us. Our cause is just. One day we shall triumph.

After a fall-out with the Anglican Bishop of Harare, I was employed by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in Zimbabwe. Firstly I worked on a Development of Theology Programme and later a Church and Liberation Project.

My task was to raise consciousness specifically among Lutherans across Zimbabwe about Apartheid and its policy of destabilisation through popular education.

During this period, I had the privilege of participating in an ecumenical solidarity visit to Nicaragua and Cuba. This was the beginning of my love affair with the Cuban people and deep admiration for the achievements of the Cuban revolution. Shortly after my return from exile in 1992, together with comrades from the South African Communist Party, we formed the Friends of Cuba Society. I was the Chairperson in the Western Cape and I became the first national President. It was an opportunity to return the compliment of what Cuba had taught the world about international solidarity.

Whilst working for the LWF, I participated in the ongoing mobilisation of the faith community in South Africa and globally, including discreetly meeting Church people from South Africa visiting Zimbabwe.

By the mid 1980s, the Apartheid regime had detained more than 10,000 children under the age of 18, 90% of whom had been tortured. To focus worldwide attention, a major international conference was convened in Harare from 24 to 27 September 1987 on Children, Repression and the Law in Apartheid South Africa.

The LWF seconded me full time to assist Horst Kleinschmidt with organising the conference. I was tasked with recruiting many township youth as volunteers. The Conference also enabled a large South African delegation to meet directly with President Oliver Tambo.

Around 1987, the Zimbabwean authorities called me in to inform me that I was on a South African government hit list. From that day I was provided with armed police guards 24 hours a day.

Why would a government wish to kill me? Yes, it is true that I was a freedom fighter but the only automatic weapon I have ever used is my tongue.

Shortly after the release of Nelson Mandela, the Canadian Churches invited me for a national tour to speak about the significance of his release. I said, the curtain has just gone up on the last act of the Apartheid drama but we don't know how long it will take and at what cost. A big focus on that visit was the campaign to abolish the death penalty. After Canada, I visited Cuba once more.

On my return, I was due to relocate and become a parish priest once more in a township in Bulawayo. On 28 April 1990, two days before the first formal negotiations between the ANC and the government, I opened an envelope containing two religious magazines. When I opened one of the magazines, it exploded, destroying both my hands and an eye and damaging my ear drums.

I knew immediately that the Apartheid regime had got me. I also knew that they had lost and I had won as I was alive. I would spend the rest of my life appropriating that victory.

I felt God's presence with me. Zimbabwe and Australia provided excellent medical treatment. Because of my writing and speaking tours to a number of countries, I became a recipient of international solidarity in the form of messages of prayer, love and support from across the globe. The peoples of the world accompanied me on my journey of healing.

People often ask me why the Apartheid regime sent me a letter bomb. I don't know, but I do believe that it was primarily because of my work of unmasking and delegitimising their claim to be Christian. By seeking to kill me, they illustrated my point that Apartheid was an option for death.

I returned to South Africa to live in 1992. A year later, I became Chaplain to a Trauma Centre for Victims of Violence and Torture. I saw that, as a nation, as well as political and economic transformation, we had to deal with our psychological, spiritual and emotional wounds.

With other friends, we created an experiential healing of memories workshop as a parallel process to South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In 1998, we founded an Institute for Healing of Memories. We are a social-healing NGO that works globally.

The Friends of Cuba Society is seeking to do for Cuba what Cuba taught the world, including South Africa. In a similar and modest way, I am trying, with others, to accompany people across the world on their journey of healing just as I was accompanied on mine.

Today I am the President of the Healing of Memories Global Network.

First published in *International brigade against Apartheid: Secrets of the people's war that liberated South Africa*

Wounded humanity and planet and Christian witness as healing and reconciliation in a multi-religious world

The first step towards healing is recognising our own woundedness. No human being fully escapes from woundedness, although degrees of pain and suffering vary hugely.

“Our planet is broken”, the Secretary General of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres, has warned. Humanity is waging what he describes as a “suicidal” war on the natural world. “Nature always strikes back, and is doing so with gathering force and fury”, he told a BBC special event on the environment in late December 2020.¹

I want to share with you my reflection on a wounded humanity and planet from my own life journey, from my birth in Aotearoa/New Zealand, to my adopted country of South Africa, and to becoming truly an internationalist.

I am writing this essay in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic has changed life for everyone on the planet. We have all been confronted with the fragility of our lives and the scale of death and dying has also reminded us of our mortality. Consequently, a conversation about wounded humanity is more possible than ever before.

Many have commented that the pandemic has laid bare our woundedness as a human family as well as that of Mother Earth. Across the planet, between countries and within countries, inequality has greatly affected access to health care. In country after country, millions of people have become unemployed overnight and there is a lack of food security. The Secretary General of the UN has observed that we are all swimming in the same sea but we’re not all sharing the same boat.²

Because of the lockdown in many countries, people have been confronted by themselves. For some, that has brought to the surface old and unhealed wounds.

I would like to share how a defining moment of woundedness in my own life has profoundly shaped my view of and response to woundedness. However, my own experience of woundedness has always been in relation to others and never just as an individual. As is said in many South African languages: “A person is a person through other persons”. “I am because you are”. In that spirit, I have reached out to and included a diverse range of voices in this essay, not confining it to my own experiences.

¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-55147647>

² <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/07/united-nations-inequality-racism-sustainability-covid19-coronavirus/>

I travelled a journey of Christian discipleship from an early age. At the age of 17, I left Aotearoa/New Zealand to train for the priesthood and join the Anglican religious congregation, the Society of the Sacred Mission (SSM), in Australia.

The South African experience

Shortly after my ordination, SSM transferred me to South Africa to continue my studies, where I also became a university chaplain.

On a daily basis, I bore witness to multiple manifestations of woundedness that Apartheid was causing to the souls and bodies of all South Africans. To be a person of colour was to be among the oppressed; to be white was to belong to the oppressor and to benefit from oppression and exploitation. In my naivety, I did not realise that living in South Africa would mean that objectively I would belong to the oppressor group and be a beneficiary of institutionalised racism. Even as I fought racism, I still benefitted from white privilege.

As a university chaplain on two black and one white university campus, I ministered to students of all racial backgrounds and made lifelong friends. I witnessed the innumerable ways people of all communities were wounded. People of colour were denied their basic human rights by myriad racist laws. White people had privilege, wealth and power but lived lives characterised by guilt, fear and anxiety.

For me, joining the struggle against Apartheid was about recovering my own humanity, which was also wounded by Apartheid. My commitment to social justice and activism against Apartheid brought about my expulsion from South Africa three short years after my arrival.

Lesotho – Becoming an exile

I went to live in Lesotho, an independent country completely surrounded by South Africa. I became part of a community of people exiled from their homeland. Exiles experience a different kind of woundedness. “By the rivers of Babylon we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion” as we read in Psalm 137:1.

I joined the liberation movement and became one of its chaplains. In December 1982 when I was away, the South African army crossed into Lesotho, hunting for refugees, and killed 42 people. When I returned, I found a nation in shock, having had its sovereignty trampled upon and its people terrorised. I was forced to leave, as it was argued, for my own safety and that of others.

Zimbabwe and receiving a letter bomb

From the end of 1983 till 1992, I lived in Zimbabwe. In February 1990, Nelson Mandela was released from 27 years in prison. Three months later, I received a letter bomb hidden inside the pages of two religious magazines. My hands were blown off. I was blinded in one eye and my ear drums were shattered and...and...

I felt God’s presence with me. I had a feeling that Mary who watched her son being crucified understood what I was experiencing. Actually, my participation in the liberation struggle had prepared me for death, but not the woundedness of major physical disability.

I had excellent medical treatment first in Zimbabwe and then in Australia. But what about my spiritual woundedness? The attack on me was an evil act by the operatives of an evil regime.

At the same time people of many different faiths and goodwill from all over the world sent me messages of prayer, love and support. I was the object of interfaith and human solidarity from people of different faiths and ideologies.

For a time, I became the beneficiary of all that is beautiful in the human family: our ability to be tender, loving, kind and compassionate.

But what about the perpetrators? What about their humanity, their spiritual and moral woundedness? If they are prisoners in their own hearts, I often say that I have a key and I am willing to turn it. But what if their only regret is that they didn't succeed? What if they remain committed to doing evil? My prayer for them is for repentance.

Becoming a wounded healer

While I was in hospital in Australia, a South African friend, Horst Kleinschmidt, called me to say that there were proposals to open a Trauma Centre for victims of violence and torture in Cape Town. He said he thought it was work that I could do. Horst was telling me that my curriculum vitae had improved. That was the first hint for me that my physical woundedness had become an asset; indeed, less had become more. My physical wounds are dramatic and visible. Through the years and across the world many people have told me that my visible wounds have made them feel free to share their invisible wounds.

Coming back to South Africa after 16 years away, it was clear to me that we were a wounded nation damaged in our humanity by what we had done, by what had been done to us and what we had failed to do.

How could the nation heal after centuries of war, oppression and injustice? Obviously, the creation of a just and inclusive society was of key importance.

Truth and Reconciliation

South Africa opted for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission as one way of dealing with the past under the leadership of the moral giant, Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Subsequent Truth and Reconciliation Commissions tended to speak not just of truth and reconciliation but also of justice.

For Christians, reconciliation is a Biblical imperative reflected most explicitly in 2 Corinthians 5:18-20: "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." NRSV

I came to see that for wounded people, often before reconciliation could take place, there needed to be an acknowledgment of the truth. Also, what does the survivor do if the perpetrator is unknown or not forthcoming? There can be a journey of reconciliation with self and with God, even where reconciliation with the "other" remains elusive.

The scale of inequality and structures of injustice are enduring obstacles to reconciliation at a societal level. However, where previous enemies embrace common dreams and commitment to transformative justice, reconciliation can flourish. Nor should we underestimate the grain of grace working in the human heart.

Healing of memories³

What about the psychological, emotional, spiritual and moral injuries that crossed generations? Would it be possible for our memories to heal? Many years previously I had read a book about healing of memories by Dennis and Matthew Linn. I loved the book. It focused on me and Jesus and me and the family.

My problem was, what if the wounds were about me and the nation and how the nation's history had wounded all of us? What did healing of memories mean if you are Moslem, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, a believer in African traditional religion or, as increasing numbers are, totally secular?

With other friends I succeeded in creating a *healing of memories experiential methodology* which would work for people of different faiths and belief systems.

At its heart, what we call a *healing of memories workshop* is two and a half days of intense emotional work and reflective storytelling, during which people are often astonished at the strength of the bond they develop with others on the journey that transcends race, culture, and nationality.^[3]

When seeking healing, human beings naturally turn for guidance to whatever framework they have come to rely on. For me as a priest, that framework includes my faith. Lying in my hospital room after the bombing, I experienced an outpouring of care and concern from around the world. My reflection on my own journey became the starting point for imagining what a *healing of memories workshop* might be like. Above all, it is a deeply interpersonal experience wherein we listen to one another's pain as well as our own and acknowledge our suffering. Participants become the healers of one another.

The depth of pain touched in some workshops is almost more than the human spirit can bear. I think of a workshop we held in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. There, one Haitian mother said simply, "I have been humiliated all my life." The words seared my flesh and entered my soul. I prayed that the workshop would give this woman an experience of being valued and respected for once in her life. In some groups the intimacy can feel transcendent and holds those present in a loving warm embrace, even when great pain, anger, and grief have been the dominant emotions.

All humans, whether religious or not, are spiritual beings. In a *healing of memories workshop*, we use the physical enactment of liturgy to access the world of the spirit. For some people the workshop provides an extremely deep experience that can be the turning point in a long journey. It can be the point where people leave victimhood behind and see new possibilities.

On reflection, I have come to believe that, while there are indeed cultural differences among people, human beings are human beings the world over. People know when they are being treated with the love and respect accorded a child of God, whether it is articulated in those words or not.

Janet Pitt, who has been a translator at a number of workshops in Luxembourg, observed

“Humanity is wounded on both a universal and an individual level. Those wounds often derive from conflicts - between racial, ethnic, or national groups or between family members - prompted by differing world views which are sometimes influenced by religious beliefs that do not always reflect what the religion actually teaches”.

I have seen for myself at *healing of memories* workshops how the recognition that we are all wounded somehow brings people closer. They realise that individual suffering, whatever its cause, finds an echo

³ This section on the healing of memories workshop methodology is based on Chapter 12 of my memoir *Redeeming the Past: My Journey from Freedom Fighter*, Lapsley M and Karakashian Orbis, 2012.

at a universal level and that for those who are believers, the name they give to God is less important than the sense of sharing a belief in a higher being who wants only the best for us. The methodology is flexible so that it can be cloaked within individual faith traditions or an interfaith or inter-spiritual milieu or a completely secular context.

One of the earliest *healing of memories* workshops had participants from Moslem, Jewish, Buddhist and Christian backgrounds. All workshops culminate in a ceremony or a rite of passage. On that occasion we read relevant texts from different sacred scriptures.

In Canada, our ceremonies have included *smudging*, practised by many first nations, as a way to cleanse a space and invite positive energy.

In Sri Lanka, we held workshops together with Buddhists, Moslems, Christians and Hindus. Also in Sri Lanka, we held a workshop with a group of Buddhist monks from Myanmar. Priyanka Mendes wrote about her experiences with healing of memories in both her homeland of Sri Lanka and in South Africa where she did not always speak the language of the participants:

“I didn’t understand the words – except papa, mama, AIDS... and the body language and the sadness – the silences, the excited words, the quiet sobbing and the occasional smile even through the tears. Both in Durban and the North and East of Sri Lanka – I listened to hundreds of stories with translation and sometimes without translation.”

The lesson I learned is that you don’t have to understand the words to empathise with the feelings of the heart. In the *healing of memories* workshop process – and yes, the ‘process’ is the most important feature of the journey – the use of non-verbal activities to bring out the pain is important. Personally, the ‘super-power’ one develops to understand everything without understanding much of the language is what I learnt about responding to wounded humanity with a view to journeying towards healing and reconciliation. My life has been impacted at its deepest core through the workshops I’ve been involved in.

Moral and spiritual injury⁴

The concepts of spiritual and moral injury are helpful in illuminating some of the kinds of woundedness experienced by individuals and communities.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, known simply as PTSD, has become a commonplace term to describe the psychological effects of trauma.

However, especially in situations of armed conflict, what combatants often suffer from is moral or spiritual injury. There is a growing discourse around moral and, to a lesser degree, spiritual injury, which is helpful in making sense of our wounded humanity. This is especially true in relation to military veterans.

War damages all who wage it. Even among those who return physically unharmed, elevated rates of suicide, automobile accidents, domestic violence and abuse of drugs are among the visible indicators of war’s toll, and there are hidden costs as well. Many of these remain locked up in the veteran’s heart and mind unspoken, emerging only years later, if at all.

In the United States, the Institute for Healing of Memories North America that I founded, works with war veterans in Minnesota and Arizona. Quite a few of the veterans that we work with there are

⁴ This section is largely drawn from an essay written by Lapsley, M. and Karakashian, S. in *War and Moral Injury: A Reader*. Editors: Christa Davis Acampora, Robert Meagher, Douglas A. Pryer, Cascade Books 2018.

homeless, some from as long ago as the Vietnam War. Nationwide, a disproportionate number of war veterans are homeless. They are held prisoner, in part, by their unspoken memories.

An older veteran told me, “I’ve waited 42 years to tell my story.” He had never felt permission to speak about it before, nor been given the safe and confidential space where this might be possible.

The truth is, that if a war is unpopular, we give veterans the message that they should go away, integrate themselves into civilian life and disappear. On the other hand, if the war is popular, we hold parades honouring them, write articles about their bravery and bestow symbolic perks on them like moving to the head of an airport queue. But in neither case do we actually want to sit down and listen to the raw truth and the nightmares of what they have experienced. In a veteran’s family, this can become the elephant in the room that no one wants to talk about, either because they fear they will not be able to handle the destructive emotions that emerge or they don’t know how to begin. Is it any wonder that veterans feel isolated and misunderstood?

Years ago, when I was Chaplain at Cape Town’s Centre for Survivors of Violence and Torture, I ministered to those who had lived through Apartheid’s violence and torture. I gradually came to the conclusion that we often overpathologise people’s reaction to trauma. Some people do indeed have serious psychological and emotional issues, in some cases predating the trauma, and they need to be seen by mental health professionals, but others need a different form of care that takes questions of human agency and moral values into account.

As a person of faith, I look at the matter with a rather different set of spectacles. What has been left out of the clinical perspective is the matter of moral agency. Apart from the physical damage that is the loss of life and limbs, war creates damage at three other levels - the emotional, the moral, and the spiritual. Damage at the emotional level is now widely recognised as PTSD and is seen as a mental health issue. So, we send those suffering from it to psychiatrists. But what is left out of this perspective is that a soldier’s emotional reaction is often intertwined with her moral angst and that cannot be treated with medication.

We teach our children that it is wrong to kill another human being. We send our young men and women off to boot camp where they are given permission to kill and are taught that obedience is not only a virtue, but that their very survival and that of their fellow soldiers depends on it. So, when they go to war they do as they are told and what the situation seems to require. Then, when they return to civilian life, we withdraw permission to kill and again condemn it as a deep moral wrong, yet we are surprised that they are afflicted with what we call PTSD. War presents soldiers with impossible moral choices. In the aftermath, many veterans choose suicide.

Spiritual Injury

There is another kind of damage to human beings that is spiritual in nature. The great Abrahamic faiths of Islam, Christianity and Judaism share a fundamental belief that all human beings are made in God’s image and likeness. Accordingly, there is something of the divine in all of us. Or as Hindus bow and say, Namaste, often translated as “The divine light in me bows to the divine light within you”.

Christians often express this by saying we are all children of God. In war, we are attacking the divine in the other, and the attacker is also morally transgressing the divine in him or herself. This is spiritual injury.

From this perspective an important part of healing involves restoring the moral and spiritual order, which is a redemptive act, an act of spiritual and moral alchemy that brings good out of evil and life out of death. In traditional Christian theology, a sinner’s relationship to God can be restored through

confession and penance and ends with God's forgiveness. In a more secular context we might say that healing requires accepting responsibility for one's actions, which might well include apology and some form of making amends to those harmed when this is possible. In the US, many Vietnam veterans, for example, have found healing and self-forgiveness by returning to Vietnam and working with its people in some way.

Moral and spiritual healing, in order to be complete, often needs to culminate in forgiving oneself - not by minimising or forgetting what was done, but by accepting the transgression and expiating it in some way. This is not a quick or easy process. It can take a very long time and for some, may never be complete. What is important is to be on the journey. I would like to suggest that moral injury also affects nations and healing at this level requires a communal process that calls for courageous conversations. Nations, like individuals, avoid facing the consequences of their choices.

All forms of oppression and the trauma caused by poverty and exploitation take away our dignity. It also causes spiritual woundedness.

Patrick Byrne, who is the Chair of Healing of Memories Luxembourg, writes:

“ My work as a prison chaplain over the last few years has made me increasingly aware of the woundedness – the fragile nature – of so many inmates of many different faith backgrounds, even those we describe as ‘hardened criminals’. When we organised our first *healing of memories workshop* at the Luxembourg prison, we were not sure how it would work in that particular environment. Would prisoners feel safe enough to share their life stories? They did! And, as in so many other workshops, a bond clearly developed between them in those three days, not through their criminality, but through their shared pain, vulnerability and a realisation of their common humanity. It was deeply moving to hear their words of mutual encouragement and to see them hug one another during the workshop's closing ceremony, as well as share about the healing impact of the whole experience.”

Racism asserts that worth comes from pigmentation and is used to justify exploitation. The worst is when we internalise and believe our own inferiority or superiority.

In the work of the Institute across the world, the most common narratives are gender-based violence and childhood trauma. The violence of men against women is the oldest wound in human history. Stopping that violence and healing its wounds is the responsibility of everyone on the planet. This is undergirded by the all-pervasiveness of patriarchy. A contributory factor to violence by men against women and children is situations like ours in South Africa, where adult African men were treated as children. Men were emasculated and often took out their frustration against their intimate partners and their children. When a child is given the message that she or he is inferior, not wanted or bullied, the woundedness can profoundly affect the person's sense of self value.

For many, the key first step on the journey to wholeness lies in the power of acknowledgment. Firstly, I hear myself speaking of what has happened to me. As others listen without judgment, I experience what Prof Jerry Diller called “the healing power of multiple witnesses”.

I invited people from different parts of the world to reflect on what they have learnt about wounded humanity and planet and Christian witness as healing and reconciliation through participation in *healing of memories workshops* and their own life journey.

Karen Hayes, an African American from California and a *healing of memories* facilitator, reflects upon encountering the other, a war veteran: “I came to the circle with the fresh memory of shouting in the streets - protesting the war you so valiantly served in. And I was fearful that I would be offended by

your patriotism. You came to the circle knowing that in my ignorance of your journey I might hurt you; that I might not appreciate all that you sacrificed. But in the stillness, you and I somehow allow the barriers to fall away. In the stillness, we allow Grace to join our circle. Who knew that forty-five minutes of deep listening could be so mystical? And I was truly grateful for your story. I was humbled that you trusted me to hold it. And I learned many things [...] one being that I myself have been complicit in your suffering. But even so, after I shared my story, you said the unexpected. You said, with your words and your eyes, 'Thank you Karen, for sharing your journey'.

Surviving pain is something we have in common, perhaps the only thing we have in common.

But maybe it is the most important thing. [...] And we are both grappling with shame and forgiveness - of ourselves and the ones who have hurt us. And we are both blessed that healing of memories has given us the opportunity to find each other [...] and we will hold that gratitude for each other's stories for the rest of our lives".

Through the years an underlying question of healing of memories work has been about the relationship between healing and justice.

Fr Joseph Jeyaseelan CMF from Sri Lanka writes -

“ Healing does not come about overnight. It's ongoing. It's a journey. The possibility of healing often becomes contested when we talk about it in relation to justice. The usual tendency is to think that healing can happen only when justice is fully realised. However, from my experience in the field as a facilitator of healing, I have come to the following three convictions:

- 1) Healing can take place even if justice is slow to come, or denied altogether. There are well-known cases of individuals setting out to reclaim their lives with a strong sense of agency and determination. It's a choice one makes as an individual, or a community of affected individuals.
- 2) The search for justice and the journey of healing must go hand in hand. If people give up the search for justice and focus only on healing, this may leave room for further victimisation and stigmatisation. Similarly, when they seek justice alone without being attentive to healing, they may become locked in depression and live in perpetual misery. Justice and healing should be undertaken as journeys to embark on rather than goals to achieve.
- 3) Faith in a higher power (God) certainly aids healing and gives survivors the moral and spiritual support they need to reclaim their lives".

Steve Karakashian, the co-author of my memoir *Redeeming the Past*, himself an Armenian American born in Jerusalem, speaks about how living in South Africa shaped his thinking about woundedness and redemption:

“ People often ask how my experiences of South Africa and the Institute for Healing of Memories in particular changed me. The courage, self-sufficiency, and sheer resilience of people in the face of the immense suffering that I encountered was both humbling and inspiring and opened me to a new dimension of understanding about what was even possible in the human experience. At the same time, despite this resilience, Apartheid damaged everyone caught in its grip, and the Institute for Healing of Memories afforded me an opportunity of working with this new understanding to help people heal the damage that had been done to and by them, and this was for me a deeply redemptive experience".

We held an interfaith seminar to enrich this essay. Dr Nontando Hadebe and Imam Rashied Omar were the two respondents to an incomplete draft of this essay.^[5]

Wounding theologies⁵

Dr. Nontando Hadebe highlighted the role of *wounding theologies*. Let me refer to three major examples of wounding theologies -

“Patriarchy is implicit and explicit in the sacred texts of many of the world’s great religions. Religion has played a major role in keeping women in positions of domination and inferiority. In the pervasiveness of gender-based violence, notions of forgiveness and subordination are frequently weaponised to send women back into abusive relationships. Countless women have suffered immeasurably as a consequence.

In Apartheid South Africa, what was later called a heretical form of Christianity was the principal ideological weapon used to defend and sustain racial oppression. Scriptural passages were used and abused to justify racial oppression and as weapons of subjugation.

If we think of the two original sins of the United States, slavery and genocide, wounding theologies have played an integral role in in both cases. The Black Lives Matter movement, following the murder of George Floyd and many other black people, has resonated across the world. Despite the formal victories of the civil rights movement and the end of Apartheid in South Africa, the lived Black experience speaks volumes to the continuing wounds of racism.

Sexual minorities continue to suffer oppression from wounding theologies that do not uphold their dignity. Christians are called to accompany all with compassion and respect, which have not always been present. In some cases, the attitude of organised religion in regard to sexuality can be a source of immense pain, alienation, and suicidal tendencies, as well as encouraging unbelief.

Personally, I have long dreamt of a day when the leaders of the world’s great religions would make an apology to sexual minorities for our part in their pain and oppression. I first made that call in my closing homily to the World Council of Churches Assembly in Busan in 2013.

Dr Hadebe makes the point that -

“All oppressions are linked together so that we do not have the luxury of choosing to focus exclusively on one oppression in isolation of others, which has caused incredible wounding and polarisation among Christians. Oppressions are not a buffet for us to pick and choose but a whole range of intersecting realities that cannot be separated from the other”.

This essay would be incomplete without the contribution of Imam Rashied Omar. Imam Rashied was present at the May 2006 consultation at Lariano in Italy which began the process leading to the eventual adoption of “Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct”.

⁵ Responses to a draft of this paper at a webinar hosted by Goedgedacht Forum in partnership with Institute for Healing of Memories and Claremont Main Rd Mosque in Cape Town delivered by Dr Nonthando Hadebe and Imam Rashied Omar chaired by Dr Deon Snyman

The obsession with converting others

Imam Rashied noted that the final Christian Witness document excluded the Lariano interreligious call for faith communities to “heal themselves from the obsession of converting others”. Some of the greatest crimes, wounds and shameful acts carried out in the name of religion relate to that obsession.

Whilst the drafters of the Christian Witness document do not use the term “heal themselves from the obsession to convert others”, it does state unequivocally - Christians affirm that while it is their responsibility to witness to Christ, conversion is ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit (cf. John 16:7-9; Acts 10:44-47). They recognise that the Spirit blows where the Spirit wills in ways over which no human being has control (cf. John 3:8). (n.7)

Call for the revocation of the Doctrine of Discovery

The Doctrine of Discovery promulgated by Pope Alexander VI in 1493 provided the religious sanction for colonisation. That colonisation, with its immense racism, pain and dehumanisation leading to genocide and woundedness, shaped the world that we know today.

When I met Pope Francis in a private audience on 15 June 2019, I told him that one of the dreams of indigenous peoples across the world is for the explicit revocation of the Doctrine of Discovery by the Catholic Church. Acknowledgement is often the key first step on the journey to healing the wounds of history.

Dr Nontando Hadebe cautions us that -

“Before going to the world with a message of healing, justice and reconciliation, we need to confront the wounding messages from our religions through listening to stories of those affected and together re-imagining theologies, beliefs and practices so that healing starts in the healing of wounding theologies».

Both Dr Hadebe and Imam Omar referenced the major significance of the two papal encyclicals of *Laudato Si* and *Fratelli Tutti* as urgent calls to action in relation to saving humanity and Mother Earth, particularly by acting in solidarity with one another.

I am sure both God and St Francis smiled when Cardinal Bergoglio chose the name Francis. Many have commented that in the life of St Francis of Assisi we see the embodiment of a brotherly and sisterly relationship between wounded human beings and the whole created order.

Healing our earthly home

Bishop Geoff Davies, known affectionately as the Green Bishop, has, together with his wife Kate, mobilised faith communities to act in protection of, and live in harmony with, our earthly home:

“We now know that in abusing nature, we abuse ourselves, for we are an inextricable part of the web of life. We are totally dependent on the wellbeing of this planet and its life-support systems.

The error promoted by the Abrahamic faiths is the belief that God’s primary concern is the wellbeing of people and their salvation. In the Lord’s Prayer Jesus instructs us to pray that God’s will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

In reading our Scriptures with green spectacles we see that we are called upon to care for all life. Because of our separation, our planet – Earth, our only home – is now so wounded

that we need to take urgent remedial action to restore planetary wellbeing. We must end the alarming loss of biodiversity and the warming of the planet. There can be no greater sin and denial of God than to cause the extinction of other forms of life. Our current valuing of material wealth over planetary wellbeing is bringing millions of species into extinction.

Healing can be brought about by upholding the ethical principles of Christian scriptures – principles held by most faiths – to seek justice and equity for all of life, not only human, and to love and care for this planet and its incredible, amazing and beautiful variety of life. A polar bear, a sunbird or a protea, have as much right to be alive as you and me.

Recognise the sanctity of life. Show the love and compassion taught by Jesus Christ, to all life, not just human, and God's creation will begin to heal itself - and flourish!"

Imam Rashied Omar framed his response to the first draft of this essay with the title which is also a plea: **What we can do together, we should never do separately**. We are all called to act together, seeking healing for ourselves as we collaborate for the healing of our wounded humanity and planet.

As I write this, wounded humanity is in the eye of the Covid-19 storm. The day after his inauguration, President Biden pointed out that more people in the US have died from Covid-19 than during the Second World War. The decision of the US to immediately re-join the WHO and the Paris Climate Accord are tangible signs of hope for a wounded humanity and planet. In his inauguration speech, Biden linked the need for the nation to heal with the necessity of remembering.

At the same time there is a stark warning from the Director General of the WHO, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus: "I need to be blunt: the world is on the brink of a catastrophic moral failure and the price of this failure will be paid with lives and livelihoods in the world's poorest countries".⁶

Pope Francis reminds us that the example of Jesus is the doctor of integral divine love that is a physical, social and spiritual healing. To survive as human beings and to save the planet, all of humanity has to travel the long journey, as Pope Francis says, from "individualism and indifference to interdependence and solidarity".⁷ Through recognising the woundedness of humanity and planet and by working together in the power of God, redemption and transformation will happen for us and future generations.

The quotes from Janet Pitt, Priyanka Mendis, Patrick Byrne, Karen Hayes, Fr. Joseph Jeysaseelan, Stephen Karakashian and Bishop Geoff Davies are all from private correspondence with the author.

⁶ <https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-who-idUSZ8N2HS00V>

⁷ http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200819_udienza-generale.html