

Reconciliation and the Reconstruction of Humanity

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- 1 We are building a new building at Cedara. To do it we had to knock down some old buildings, clear the land, hire an architect and a building constructor decide what materials were required, buy them and hire workers to do the job. Its a tough and complicated job. The buying list of things required is so complicated that special people called quantity surveyors just do that.
- 2 A building is made of bricks and mortar and that's complicated enough, but when it comes to reconstructing the humanity of a nation almost mortally wounded by the ravages of colonialism and apartheid we are faced with an infinitely more complex task. The shopping list itself encompasses everything of Maslow's hierarchy of human needs from the most basic physical ones for air, food and water to the highest ones of self actualisation and personal and social transcendence.
- 3 Fortunately our topic today concerns only one aspect of this vast undertaking of reconstruction: the role of reconciliation in the reconstruction of humanity. But even just this one aspect raises complex and thorny problems and so today I will reduce it even further by addressing just one small, though fundamental, and, I would claim, often overlooked, aspect of the reconciliation process. But first to the meaning of Reconciliation itself.
 - a The Dictionary provides us with a number of definitions of this term. Reconciliation means:
 - i Making friendships after estrangement or:
 - ii Purifying after desecration
 - iii Healing what is sick
 - iv Harmonising what is conflicted and distorted
- 4 This seems to be something that everyone would want to happen. It seems to be such a good thing to strive for. So why does it not seem to be happening? Why do we seem to fail to do these things in our society today? Why is there so much conflict rather than harmony, unwellness rather than healing, abuse rather than purification and hostility rather than friendship around the question of reconciliation in our society today? What is the real problem?
 - a Is it because our people are just bad? Well some are but I think that's not it. Most people are basically good
 - b Is it because we really do hate one another? Well there are some people who hate those different to themselves but this is a neurotic condition and I think that's not it either. In fact most people just want to get along with others and have a happy life.
 - c Is it because we as a people are actually just stupid in that we haven't the intelligence to understand one another? Well I guess some people are stupid. But again I don't think that's it. Most have sufficient brain power to make sense out of the world around them.
 - d So is it because we actually cant see things properly? Are we in fact just blind and in our blindness we are just stumbling about banging ourselves against one another? I think that here we are closer to a real problem. We are in fact not completely blind but we are a nation of peoples who are only partially sighted . One of the main

obstacles to reconciliation lies here. As the people of this nation we do not in fact SEE reality in the same way and so we are blind to one another's views. And it is this blindness and the stumbling it causes which leads to more injury and more confusion. We need new eyes to see one another more clearly.

- e The ability to see is in fact a great gift. The bible teaches us that we are actually all somewhat blind and the great gift Jesus offers is the gift of sight to the blind.
 - f We do not reconcile because we do not see our human society in the same way. And so when we talk to one another we are talking about the things we see: different things. And then we make the false assumption that other people are seeing what we see and in fact they are not.
- 5 The science of cultural anthropology teaches us that people of different cultural backgrounds perceive reality differently. Our perceptions of what is in the world, how it is constructed and how it works are not the same and so we are indeed often blind to the reality of one another's priorities and problems. The structure of perception exists within us and the categories of perception are conditioned by our culture.
- a A simple example from the culture of sport teaches us this basic truth. Any disputed penalty in a pirates/chiefs match or a Sharks/province final shows that perceptions are governed by factors different to our eyes. This is the reality of the influence of culture over perception. The problem of reconciliation begins with this difference in perception and the selective vision it leads to. What one group sees is not what another sees and it is this difference which leads to dispute, animosity and division.
 - b Indeed, perception is a cultural issue and it is on the level of culture that we need to recognise our diversity. Culture is not only the rituals, traditions and customs of a social grouping but also the structure of that group's belief system, value system and categories of thought. In this way culture informs the very way we perceive the world, reflect about and make our judgements about it.
 - c Two examples will illustrate
 - i The example of the old man and the lift.
People today, both black and white, know what a lift is. But it was not always so. The story is told of the old Zulu man who came to Pietermaritzburg from the rural area for the first time in the 1950's. He went into a tall building and saw an old woman go into this machine which appeared to be an enclosed box. And he wondered why a person would walk into a box like that. Then the doors closed and he heard a funny noise and then they opened again and a young woman came out. At this he was very startled and he enquired of the person next to him where he could get a machine like this to take home as his wife was very old and he would also like to make her young and beautiful again.
 - ii The priest and the isigege/isibamba
The other story concerns a young white priest who was working with the Zulus and wanted to make the mass more African. One day, in a curio shop, he saw some beautiful long beadwork decorations. He bought them and used them as the stole for the mass the next week. When he came in for the mass the people were horrified but out of respect kept quiet. Then the next week he did the same and so they discussed amongst themselves and asked one of the men to explain to Father that what he was wearing was isibamba around his neck together with isigege hanging down his back. Both of these are intimate articles of clothing worn by women and it was as if he had gone into a western church using a bra and girdle

for his stole and vestment.

6 Seeing and believing as a cultural act

- a All of us tend to think that other people see the world the way we do. But the fact is that they do not
- b We all tend to think that our values, beliefs and priorities are the beliefs values and priorities of other people. But in fact they are not
- c We tend to think that what is common sense to us is common sense to others but once more this is not the case. Common sense is the sense of a community: it too is cultural.
- d It is only when we go right back to this fundamental principle that we can begin to lay the groundwork for a deeper level of reconciliation for all the people in our society. Of course the apartheid solution to this problem was to keep people apart and to allow the different world views to operate separately within different social and geographical contexts. It was an unworkable alternative. It denies the factuality of our common humanity and that we share a common land, a common world and many economic and social ties. Indeed to the extent that we are in social communication we also share a common culture. Apartheid can only work when people do not know of one another's existence and have no social relations at all.
- e In the new south Africa, as in the Global village the problem of cultural difference has not disappeared as some would have us believe. It is part of our human condition our society and we have to face it. The mistake that is being made today is the assumption that difference does not exist and that because we are now on liberated nation we are in fact all the same and all see the priorities for our new nation in the same way. This is another unworkable alternative.
- f So what to do? The first step is a consciousness moment. We have to begin to recognise that different groupings of people in our society are perceiving our new society in different ways. This means moving out of our own world to encounter the other. We are quite poor at this because of our apartheid past. As we move out of our world to encounter the other we need to ask one another how do people see things today. We have to ask the others what is important and what is less so. We have to ask about their values and their beliefs: their aspirations for our new society. And what are the priorities.
- g Asking these questions will lead to many different answers and it is coming to hear and understand what those different to us are perceiving that we can enrich one another, create relationship, recognise commonalities and respect differences. In other words, begin to be reconciled.
- h What reconciliation is not is making people see and believe what I and my group see and believe and rejecting as irrelevant what we don't perceive. That is ethnocentrism at best and easily degenerates to colonialism and racism. It is currently endemic throughout our society.

7 What then is the way forward

I would like to propose that to rid ourselves of this blindness we have to do four tasks:

- 👉 first recognise that there are different world-views or cultures operating in our society.
- 👉 second, affirm and disseminate to all peoples the principal values in each of these so that we can learn good from one another;

- 👉 third recognise the status of the current relationship between these world views in our society and
- 👉 fourth, recognise that healing requires mutual affirmation and up building in order to create a base for dialogue and then reconstruction by recognising how we have destroyed one another and what is required to rebuild us anew as a nation.
 - a Recognise that there are different world views operating in our society
 - i Xolile Keteyi in his book "Inculturation as a strategy for liberation" identified four principal cultural paradigms, or world-views, existing in our society today. These are: "ethnic group", dominant heritage, The "Anglo-Boer/Black" cultural paradigm and "the emergent democratic culture". In a response to this work, I have suggested that this could be increased to eight separate cultural paradigms. Whatever the number it is clear that we live in a culturally complex society. For the sake of simplicity here I would like to focus on two principal ones: the Modern Western world-view and the African Traditional world-view.
 - ii One of the roles of world view is to provide us with an explanation for our experiences. The world is very complex and so our world view searches for ways to make sense out of this complexity. Without this explanatory function of world view we would be unable to make sense out of events such as a lightning strike on one house rather than another; sickness affecting some people but not others; the fact that some people have fortune in life whilst others don't and so on.
 - iii The world view searches for ways to find unity underlying apparent diversity, simplicity underlying apparent complexity, order underlying apparent disorder and regularity underlying apparent anomaly.
 - iv Every culture tries to find a set of basic entities or forces which are in fact operating within or behind our world of experience and a set of laws which explain the behaviour of these entities. In this way the world view allows us to refer to the entities and the laws in order to explain the world of our experience. It is these entities and laws around which the principal myths of the culture emerge. Note that myths are always true for the people of the culture. Only other peoples myths are false.
 - v In this regard Modern Western culture and African culture could not be further apart and it is only in the recognition of this difference by BOTH groups that the process of *communication* can begin let alone reconciliation.
 - vi In modern Western Culture these basic entities are impersonal, material, concrete and particular in the sense that they are particles. They are photons or atoms or molecules or cells or organs. The laws are scientific (verifiable repeatable) like the atomic theory of matter and the cell theory of life and the germ theory of disease. These laws are developmental or evolutionary because reality and experience emerges from the aggregation and complexification of the constituent parts.
 - vii In African Traditional Culture these basic entities are personal, spiritual, intangible and relational. They are ancestors, other people, communities and spirits. That is the very opposite of the Western model in each category. Small wonder then that we misunderstand one another. The laws are based on customs regarding correct interpersonal and communal conduct based on values such as respect, status and social responsibility particularly to the family. These laws are based on reality emerging as a result of change within the interpersonal and

- communal relational field and so this gives rise to understandings of human experience based on social harmony and its distortion or rupture.
- viii When there are problems or difficulties in the community, Westerners will ask the question “what is the problem” and search for the scientific reason behind the issue. Traditional Africans will ask “who is to blame?” and examine the interpersonal relational breakdown in the social fabric.
 - ix When people get sick Westerners get confined to the organic issues whereas Traditional Africans will look for an interpersonal cause: social disharmony resulting from interpersonal jealousy, bad relationships with the ancestors or evil expressed in witchcraft? Much of the HIV-AIDS conflict is around this kind of difference of perspective. The ethnocentric person only sees his own view as correct and cannot understand the stupidity of people with a different view.
 - x Human Social life in the Western model is about development and progress. It is about setting up efficient scientific systems of social function.
 - xi Human social life in the African model is about maintaining harmony and fulfilling ones duties to one’s family both the living and the living-dead (ancestors).
 - xii This leads to all kinds of conflicts. Someone who has accumulated lots of wealth and property is adjudged successful and effective in the western model whereas such a person would be looked on as somewhat strange in the African model where sharing amongst the community is a primary value. The question would be asked as to how this person got so wealthy when everyone else is so poor. And the problem would be compounded if such a person did not share his wealth particularly with his kin ie his immediate family and all those he is related to. Sharing one’s wealth with one’s kin is something that usually only happens at death in the Western model.
 - xiii This is why issues of racism today and restitution for crimes of the past are so important in the African mind set. The whole social fabric is compromised when such evil, witchcraft, sorcery is not removed from the society and when the culprits have not been identified and performed the social rituals required to restore the harmony and balance in the Nation. Only then can the spears be washed and the nation be healed.
 - xiv Yet for Westerners this is a waste of time and precious resources. There is so much to do to develop and progress that our time and resources should be spent on setting up infrastructure and growing/developing our economy to bring material concrete wealth to the nation.
 - xv Is one group wrong and the other group right? It is precisely when we rush to make judgements of this nature that we rupture the possibility of real reconciliation between one another.
- b Having recognised the profundity of our difference. What is the next step? It is to move towards one another in an attempt to discover the values in one another’s views values and priorities. It is to open our eyes wider so that we can embrace that in another’s vision which also speaks to our own humanity.
- i Unfortunately this has not happened very much. What we have seen with many of our leaders and the people in the communities they lead is a degeneration into squabbling and mutual recrimination. One group cries “fight back” but this is heard as “fight black” as though the war must continue! Another leader refuses

- even to communicate with “the White politician” as men are supposed to in “indaba”, “lekotla” or “bosberaad”: an value which has entered into many of our cultural communities as the three languages used suggest. In another context the African value of unity in the community is abused to prevent those from other political groupings to live in a particular isigodi by intimidation and the burning of houses.
- ii Attitudes like these are a return to the apartheid past and leaders and groups who use them for political purposes fail to lead the people into a post apartheid reconciled community. They display an astonishing blindness in their stumbling about.
 - iii Many of our leaders today have abrogated their responsibility on all sides to transcend the limitations of each approach and look for ways to reconcile. Reconciliation implies the recognition of our common destiny and our common humanity within the reality of our difference.
 - iv The greatness of some men and women of our day has been the ability to transcend their own background and recognise the value in the other. Affirmation of the good in our diverse expressions of humanity is indeed the way forward today.
 - v Nelson Mandela’s greatness has been his ability to stand for that and to be seen to affirm the value of the many cultural backgrounds and world views of our peoples is that he has the ability to do this by affirming the values in both. Other leaders like John Dube, Gandhi, Tutu, Luthuli and Biko had the same gift.
 - vi It is perhaps been more difficult for Westerners. Since they belong to the dominant culture and mainly avoided being socialised into Traditional African culture in the way that most Africans have been somewhat Westernised. Yet there have been some like Beyers Naude, Alan Paton and Helen Suzman and amongst them we could clearly include our own Archbishop Hurley whom we remember today. These are the heros who point to the way forward as a reconciled society which recognises the values coming from all of its cultural roots.
 - vii This Western difficulty highlights a further aspect of the cultural problematic in South Africa which is blocking reconciliation. This is the relationship between culutres in South Africa. This relationship mirrors the traditional social relationships between social groups in this culture. It is one of domination and subjugation. The Western world view is considered to be superior, more civilised and more evolved that the traditional African one. This brings us to our third task
- c Reconciling the relationship between cultures
- i When African Traditional culture and Modern western culture interact in our nation. They do not do so as equals and it is very important to recognise that the relationship between them is one of domination and subjugation. This relationship itself is a cultural one since it comprises a set of beliefs and values regarding the superiority of Western culture over primitive African culture.
 - ii Reconciliation must then be concerned with the deconstruction of this relationship since their cannot be a common humanity between masters and slaves. For Africans this is a consciousness moment where people affirm their own beliefs values and perceptions. The black consciousness movement recognised this as an essential step in liberation. For Westerners and in particular for South Africa Whites this means the deconstruction of the what a white student of mine called

- the “experienced texture of superiority”. This is a most difficult task and almost nothing has been done here mainly because we as Whites are so blind to it.
- iii Melissa Steyn in her important article “white identity in context” compares “Whiteness in South Africa” to what she experiences in the USA. There she sees it is “an optimistic construction of America as the land of limitless opportunity” whereas here it is one of superiority driven by fear and pessimism. For us she suggests Africans were the “primitive of primitives”, the restless majority to be controlled by whatever means possible so that the whites, relatively isolated from the rest of their tribe could survive. Sanctions and the Anti-apartheid campaign brought a sense of being “abandoned by our kind” as the savages burned, necklaced and spread violence.
 - iv Adding to this I would add that the emergence of the New South Africa has provided this fear with a new expression as a hidden sense of guilt for how we have treated people is gradually exposed. This expression is a further attempt to hide it behind the continued affirmation of the superiority of our civilisation and lifestyle.
 - v I would suggest that the deconstruction and clearing away of the negative aspects of White culture in South Africa remains one of the most difficult challenges to reconciliation and yet it is a theme which remains almost universally untreated. This too is blindness.
- d And so to our final task. The mutual affirmation of our humanity as expressed in our cultures.
- i How can we open our eyes to one another? The first step here is to recognise that both Western culture and African Traditional culture have something to offer to our new society and all our people need to discover, affirm and embrace the principal values and views of each as the basis of a new emerging South African society. A society rooted in the good of all its cultures.
 - ii What then do these two cultures offer to the reconstruction of a new humanity in our society today? Let us attempt to indicate some of them.
 - 1 Western culture brings the values of efficiency, pragmatism, hard work; individual human rights, tolerance of difference, freedom, equality, democracy, the scientific approach to solving problems, technological progress, financial accountability, infrastructure and many others. These are values upon which our nation can stand and walk bravely into the global future
 - 2 African culture brings values such as the following:
 - i *inhlonipho* means respect for others; This respect begins in the family and the family is yet another value which tells us that we do not live in this world just as individuals but come from families and it is here that we learn responsibility for others.
 - ii But such responsibility also transcends the family in the notion of *ubuntu* which expresses that human beings are important and precious and called to a mutual solidarity as a people.
 - iii From this we see the African value: *ukuphila*: poorly translated as life. Life which is the fullness of relationship: a morality of the interconnectedness of human beings in society (*umuntu ungumuntu ngabantu*).
 - iv And so society is called to be a harmony and all are called to fight social

evil in order to restoring harmony in social relationships (*ukwanda kwaliwa umthakathi*).

- v And finally a notion of time which is not only a commodity that is consumed but the place is which our humanity can be celebrated and recognised.
- vi These too are values which all the peoples of our country whatever their background could profit from and indeed many of them resonate with values of all people.
- iii We destroy one another when we refuse to recognise our mutual giftedness and also when we recognise how we have failed to live up to our own values. The first requires openness to be freed from our blindness to see the other and the second requires contrition to recognise our failures

8 Conclusion

- a The journey to reconciliation in our nation is a long one. All reconstruction and transformation processes have three dimensions to them The first entails physical transformation. This is relatively easy if you have the financial and skills resources since physical change just requires people to carry out instructions. The second level of change is structural change. This is a much slower process. We have still not completed the outlines of our transformed political structures in South Africa. The local elections will be complete the process of setting up legislative structures. But we are still struggling to develop new educational, judicial and financial structures in our society. Structural change takes years. But even more difficult than that is cultural change. Beliefs and attitudes are communicated from generation to generation and so culture change is a change that occurs over units of at least tens of years, from generation to generation.
- b This means that we should not lose heart bu rather press on with the challenge of reconciliation. Change will come because our society is made up of men and women of good heart and already we have accomplished a lot. My purpose today was to uncover some somewhat hidden aspects of the cultural problematic in reconciliation and to realise that it has its own time scale which should enjoin on us patience
- c In 1970 Archbishop Hurley wrote (prophesied) that Apartheid would collapse within ten years. At that time I was asked as a young Christian to write my response to his words. That article appeared in the Sunday Tribune under the title. Why I agree with Archbishop Hurley”. In fact we were out by 15 years and perhaps even more because it continues to exert its influence on our society as i have pointed out today.
- d I am happy to be here today honouring him in the new South Africa a young society with so much promise and hope. It will take time but we will be reconciled