

Justice, Retribution and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

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In making this contribution to the debate about the truth and reconciliation process in South Africa, we are deeply troubled by the following introspective consideration. Have we as religious people really earned our right to lead the process of reconciliation and truth in the democratic South Africa? Were we really committed to the destruction of apartheid and the creation of a non-racial South Africa? Or were we merely content with enjoying a parasitic relationship with apartheid South Africa and theologically justifying it by claiming that we were apolitical?

A Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Religious Institutions and Leaders

The Dutch Reformed Church leaders are certainly not the only religious people who need to make confessions with regard to their complicity in the apartheid crime against humanity. Influential sectors of other Christian denominations, Muslims, Jews and Hindus were also guilty of collaborating with the apartheid authorities, often to the detriment of the liberation struggle. It is vital for the spiritual reconstruction of a future South Africa that we as religious people take the lead in calling for sincere confessions on the part of many religious people who have been complacent amidst racism and apartheid.

Reconciliation Through Economic Restitution

Religious people more than anyone else should know that all good and sincere confessions should be accompanied by some form of penance. An idea which was succinctly brought out by the historic Kairos Document. It proposed that no true reconciliation between oppressor and oppressed is possible in South Africa without repentance and a fundamental redistribution of wealth and power. It is my firm conviction that this is exactly what Islam would demand for reconciliation (*sulh*) between perpetrator and victim. /pp.1-2/

In Islamic terms it is known as *taubah* (repentance) and *qisas* (just retribution). According to all classical commentators of the Glorious Qur'an the term *qisas* is almost synonymous with *musavah*, i.e. "making one thing equal to another thing." If we as religious people do not commit ourselves to this form of reconciliation, of making equal what has been unequal for over three hundred years, then I do not believe that we are sincere in our commitments to a just South Africa.

For even if we have managed to scrap all the apartheid legislation and dismantled all of the apartheid structures, our fundamental goal of justice and reconciliation would still not have been achieved. For we would still have to contend with the tragic legacy of three centuries of deprivation. We do not claim to have any blueprint as to how precisely this redistribution of wealth and power needs to take place. What we do know however, is that we need to collectively apply our minds creatively in order to find the most compassionate route that should and could be followed in this endeavour. Religious people should be in the forefront in advocating this idea of reconciliation founded on economic justice, for it is our view that religious people have the ability to implement it with mercy and compassion. If we fail in this responsibility, God forbid, it might well be administered with vengeance.

If religious people are truly committed to the reconstruction of a just South Africa then indeed they have a vital role to play in ensuring that the reconciliation process goes beyond the legal and other constraints of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.