

Editorial

Dear Readers,

Soren Kierkegaard has communicated to us a very important lesson that he learned from Sacred Scripture, a lesson that he internalized not only for himself in his coming to maturity as a philosopher but for all who would read what he had to say with openness of mind. This is his affirmation:

“As a sinner man is separated from God by a yawning qualitative abyss. And obviously God is separated from man by the same yawning qualitative abyss when He forgives sins. In case it were possible by a converse kind of accommodation to transfer the divine attributes to a human being, in one respect man will never in all eternity come to resemble God, namely, in forgiving sins.”¹

A number of articles in the present issue of *Africa Tomorrow* focus on the theme of forgiveness and reconciliation. When we, as human beings, grow in our interior awareness that eternal life is central to our personal desire for happiness, we also become painfully conscious of the fact that we do not deserve eternal life and that there is no human being who would dare to make a reasonable claim that he or she can give eternal life to another person. We are in need of the grace that only God can give according to the measure of his divine love and tender mercy. This is the grace of reconciliation.

A landmark event not only for the history of Africa but for the political history of the world was President Nelson Mandela’s decision to choose a churchman, Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu to the president’s chair of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in December, 1995. When Egil Aarvik presented Tutu with the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984 he represented a good number of international leaders and people of

¹ S. KIERKEGAARD, *The Sickness unto Death*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1941, 141. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1441, harmonises with Kierkegaard’s conviction when it states that “only God can forgive sins.”

influence when he stated: “We feel ourselves united with him in the belief in the creative power of love.”

Archbishop Tutu, for his part, realized that Mandela’s appointment signified a sharp separation from the secularist tendencies of governments all over the world. Archbishop Tutu and President Mandela shared the conviction that the wise leader does everything possible to keep God and religion within the political process.

Archbishop Tutu spoke as a Church leader who recognized fully the political implications of giving God first place in a judicial process:

It is interesting that the President [Nelson Mandela] appointed an Archbishop as chairperson of the commission and not, for instance, a judge... The President must have believed that our work would be profoundly spiritual. After all, forgiveness, reconciliation, reparation were not the normal currency in political discourse. There it was more normal to demand satisfaction, to pay back in the same coin, to give as good as you got, for it was more common to have the ethos of “dog eat dog” in the jungle world of politics.

Very few people objected to the heavy spiritual and indeed Christian religious emphasis of the commission. When I was challenged on it by the journalists, I told them I had been chosen as who I was, a religious leader. I could not pretend I was someone else.²

Nor could Africa pretend to be someone other than who she is – a continent wisely aware of her dependence on the Divine Reconciler.

The Archbishop proceeded in fidelity to who he was as a religious leader. Theological insights and religious perspectives informed much of what the commission did and their manner of doing it. The Archbishop gave two cardinal examples of how the commission worked: (a) in a spirit of prayer and (b) with a set of guidelines that reflected its true nature. First, the prayer:

And then I prayed: “O God of justice, mercy and peace. We long to put behind us all the pain and division of apartheid together with all the violence which ravaged our communities in its name. And so we ask You to bless this Truth and Reconciliation Commission with Your

² This and all other citations concerning Archbishop Tutu and the TRC come from his book, *No Future without Forgiveness*. New York: Doubleday 1999.

wisdom and guidance as it commences its important work of redressing the many wrongs done both here and throughout our land.

“We pray that all those people who have been injured in either body or spirit may receive healing through the work of this commission and that it may be seen to be a body which seeks to redress the wounds inflicted in so harsh a manner on so many of our people, particularly here in the Eastern Cape. We pray, too, for those who may be found to have committed these crimes against their fellow human beings, that they may come to repentance and confess their guilt to almighty God and that they too might become the recipients of Your divine mercy and forgiveness. We ask that the Holy Spirit may pour out its gifts of justice, mercy, and compassion upon the commissioners and their colleagues in every sphere, that the truth may be recognized and brought to light during the hearings; and that the end may bring about that reconciliation and love for our neighbour which our Lord himself commanded. We ask this in the holy name of Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.”

And now, the guidelines:

1. Truth is not relative: there is one supreme Truth that governs us all. Conscience is intended to perceive the truth, not fabricate it. All of us, therefore, inhabit a moral universe that receives its unambiguous definition from the one, true God: what is good and what is evil are objectively determinable; and judgment can be passed on whether individuals or groups have acted according to these determinations.
2. No matter how depraved the monstrous acts committed by the human beings who appear before the commission, the perpetrators continue to be moral agents and children of God; consequently, they remain capable of repentance and moral transformation.
3. The commission places even the most conspicuously guilty person within the Good Shepherd’s supreme desire to find the lost sheep and restore to it its proper dignity.
4. Because God has loved each human person from all eternity, there is nothing we can do to make God love us more; but wonderfully there is nothing we can do to make God love us less.

Do you believe in the true God? Do you believe in his intention to reconcile you to Himself and to all of your brothers and sisters in humanity? Eternal life is a gift that wells up like a spring from within God’s intention to forgive and reconcile. Eternal life, in other words, is the atmosphere that we breathe when we are fully

alive within God's tenderness and mercy. All who live by this breath of freedom and unity form an eternal "togetherness", the communion of saints, all united in their diversity because they have joyfully immersed themselves in the everlasting love of the divine Person-Gift, the Holy Spirit.³

Divine tenderness and mercy are the purifying streams that, to use the language of the Bible, "wash away" our sins.⁴ His tenderness and mercy cradle us so that communion with God becomes the loving and trusting disposition of the child towards the parent. If we do not become as this little child we cannot enter into eternal life. St. Therese of Lisieux could not hide her joy when she explained communion to be a bond of full trust, the total surrender to God's tender mercy, and hence the eternal abiding, together as joyful children of God, within his loving Heart.

The grace of reconciliation that lies at the heart of the formation of the communion of saints is the focus of Fr. William Ngowi's article, "From Estrangement to Reconciliation: The Overarching Inclusion between Gen 3:23-24 and Rev 21:1-8." Fr. Ngowi presents key Scripture texts that illustrate the fact that reconciliation is a theme that weaves together quite significant moments in the history of God's love for the human person.

Fr. Leonce Rambau concentrates on the Book of Tobit and its protagonist. Tobit's history reveals who God is: He allows the innocent to suffer; He accepts the suffering as a plea not only for the individual sufferer but for all those who need reconciliation with God and are not seeking it; he restores the innocent sufferer to a life of bliss and incorporates the just man and his life of suffering into his promise and plan to redeem the world.

Fr. Marcel Mukadi uplifts the overall investigation into the divine choice to reconcile the world to himself by elucidating the charism of the Society of the Divine Saviour, known to the people as the Salvatorians. "I am your salvation" is a phrase dear to the heart of Fr. Mukadi; and he gives a very convincing suggestion that this phrase encapsulates very well the Salvatorian charism. Fr.

³ JOHN PAUL II, *Encyclical Letter "Dominum et Vivificantem"* (18 May 1986), 10.

⁴ See, for example, Psalm 51:7.

Francis Jordan, the founder of the Salvatorians, poured forth his heart and soul into the mission of proclaiming Jesus as the Saviour. A Salvatorian should identify himself with Jesus.

Jesus graces the Salvatorian with a special mission of bringing the Saviour to the world and bringing the world to the Saviour. Fr. Mukadi specifies the Salvatorian privilege of going to the street, to the forgotten, the unloved, the marginalized, the betrayed and the abandoned so that these beloved of God may come to know and befriend the Saviour, savour the grace of reconciliation, and so enter into eternal joy. Jesus wishes to say to them, and indeed to all of us: “Salvation has come to this house” (Luke 19:9). The highways and the byways of the world are God’s meeting places for the human race. That is where the Salvatorians ought to be.

Sadly, we are not living in the communion of saints. There is a world – a world that contradicts itself by energizing itself with that which leaves it exhausted – money and the things that money buys, the sensuality that reduces the human person to an object for pleasure and gratification, and the power that leaves the person of influence with the false belief that he can do whatever he wants with himself and with other people. This is the person who believes that he or she can create their own norms of truth independently of God.

In this issue of *Africa Tomorrow* Grzegorz Trela reminds us that there are philosophers who persistently doubt that we can know the truth that corresponds to an empirical reality that exists independently of the knowing subject. There are those who doubt that the human being is capable of including God – the data of divine revelation – in the many-sided discussion about the nature of truth. A melange of conflicting views about truth brings to the surface a need for philosophers to reconcile with each other.

Fr. Jacek Gorka brings to light the challenges that the Church faces when she accompanies the youth of today; and the challenges the youth face when they commit themselves to the Church.

Fr. Gibson brings into the public forum once again a crucial dilemma that Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere brought to Africa’s attention. He asked: Is Africa a continent that balkanizes? Or does Africa grow in the responsible exercise of freedom so that

she may move forward as a unified family, a family that finds its own happiness by labouring for the happiness of others?

Fr. Gibson directs our attention to a severe wound in some African social settings, a wound that societies in the Balkans and indeed in all corners of the world have suffered – a wound that could be lethal for the family and for the continent that does not pay attention to it or diagnose it properly. The wound in question is that of relationships between men and women: those who should be loving each other tenderly, responsibly and joyfully, those who should be trusting each other and pledging their desire to stay united with each other are precisely the persons who balkanize each other: men and women who enter into sexual relationships without a true intention to love each other as a married couple with the potential to be parents and so use each other to satisfy their own egoistic impulses.

Whether it is the murder of the Missionaries of Charity in Sierra Leone or the continuing, mind boggling rate of femicide in South Africa – the killing of women precisely within intimate partner relationships – the issue has reached a point of ultimatum: put away your balkanizing attitude and stop humiliating the one you purport to love, accept the trust of your beloved with gratitude, and entrust yourself to your beloved with joy. If not, you are wounding Africa.

Is this idealistic? A consecrated woman from the Balkans sets the tone for us with her outstanding capacity to forgive her rapist. What she does exemplifies precisely the attitude and conduct that Mwl. Nyerere advocates for all of us if we are to live our freedom responsibly and accept the unity God offers us gratefully.

The Editor