

SEPTEMBER 2023

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace [unmerited favour] and truth.” John 1:14 (AMP)

Dear Friends,

Your generous giving remains a huge encouragement to us! When I have a hectic travelling program like recently, with visa challenges, delayed flights and the like, I remind myself that we are partners in this, and I press on to honor those of you who give so sacrificially to Advocates!

In August I was privileged to speak at a conference at Naivasha in Kenya, jointly hosted by the Kingdom International Legal Network (KILN) and the Kenya Christian Lawyers Fellowship (KCLF). The theme was *“Restoring pathways to justice, refining words”*. An excellent program focused amongst others on how to align our spiritual gifts and words in the legal profession, whether judges can allow their personal faith to lead them in their judgments and what the impact of our words (voice) in the public square can be.

I spoke on how, after Apartheid, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa contributed to the healing of our nation. Given my own painful journey of repentance, forgiveness, and healing, I could not to speak only about the healing of our nation but had to also speak about my personal healing.

I was part of the organizing committee of the first Advocates Africa conference held in Hekpoort, South Africa in 1999. In retrospect, it was the beginning of great things for Advocates Africa, but us White South African Christian lawyers were in trepidation of meeting our brothers and sisters from the rest of Africa. Would they accept us as fellow Africans, would they hold us liable for our part in Apartheid or blame us for not doing enough to end Apartheid or to prevent the human rights atrocities which were committed?

To understand how Apartheid came about, I gave a historical background about how the White Afrikaners, after being humiliated by the British during and after the Anglo – Boer war (1899-1902), swore to never again be dominated or governed by anyone. They accordingly devoted themselves to the ideology of self-determination which lay the foundations of Apartheid.

In 1948, after WWII, the more liberal United Party lost the elections to the National Party. The electorate, now consisting of White people only, were determined to establish their superiority through legislation. A host of laws were passed which were designed to separate races on a large scale. These laws not only formalized racial classification but compelled people to live in separate places determined by their race. Each race was allotted its own area and if a Black person was living in a “White” area, they were forcefully removed. Marriage between persons of different races was prohibited, and sexual relations with a person of a different race made a criminal offence.

Separate amenities were reserved for a particular race, creating separate beaches, parks, buses, hospitals, schools, and universities. The Bantu Education Act crafted a separate system of education for African students - designed to prepare Black people as manual laborers. Pass laws compelled Blacks to always carry with them their identity pass or “dompas” (stupid pass). If found without a pass they were at the mercy of White police officers and got arrested without hesitation.

Contraventions or even perceived contraventions of the abovementioned Apartheid legislation was dealt with swiftly and harshly. Detention without trial became the order of the day.

Growing up we learnt that Nelson Mandela was the epitome of evil! To publish either his name or his photograph was illegal. You cannot imagine the overwhelming sense of being deceived I experienced after Nelson Mandela's release from prison in 1990 when this gentle, forgiving old man went to every possible length to embrace my people and include us in the future of South Africa. Enormous anger and shame came over me. For a long time, I refused to admit that I was an Afrikaner and I tried to keep the fact that I had served in the military during Apartheid a secret.

Against this backdrop, our TRC was established in 1995 and Archbishop Desmond Tutu appointed as its chairman. He said afterwards: "*Ours was not to judge the morality of people's actions but to act as an **incubation chamber for national healing, reconciliation, and forgiveness**. We were wounded people, all of us, because of the conflict of the past. No matter on which side we stood, we were all in need of healing. As members of the commission, we ourselves, were wounded healers*".

Daily South Africans watch the televised hearings of the Human Rights Violations Committee. As victims and perpetrators told their stories, we were filled with disbelief at horrendous occurrences and the sheer magnitude of how many deaths had ensued because of gross human rights violations. Seeing the grief of the families of victims was often just too much to bear! Very often, even the Commissioners were in tears.

Perpetrators could apply for amnesty from criminal persecution from the Amnesty Committee - less than 200 out of the 9000 amnesty applications were though granted.

We had a lot of knowledge about what had happened during Apartheid, but collectively, there was almost no acknowledgement of its cost in human terms. Unintentionally, the distinct Biblical notion that the truth sets people free, undergirded proceedings of the TRC. It showed that truth is central to any healing process - you cannot forgive if you do not know who you should be forgiving or why you should be forgiving them.

Grace and truth are a key distinction of Christianity. In other religions the deity either dispenses justice at the expense of grace or grace at the expense of justice and truth. In Ps 86:15 David prays: "*But you O Lord are a God who is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness and truth.*" The Apostle John makes it clear John 1:14 that you cannot separate truth from grace or grace from truth as they are both embodied in the person of Jesus Christ. Without it being intended, the TRC in many instances resulted in grace (unmerited favour) being extended to those who were prepared to admit and own up to the truth.

At the end of my presentation, I recounted how, during the 1997 Global Consultation on World Evangelism, at an unplanned and unexpected opportunity, I could be part of a group of White South Africans who repented and asked for forgiveness of our African brothers and sisters.

Several of those who attended the 1999 Advocates Africa conference were in the audience at the KILN conference where I spoke. I was able to thank them for how, over the last 24 years, their love, acceptance, and forgiveness had contributed to my personal healing.

Let our daily walk be saturated in grace and truth emulating our Saviour!

Warmly in Christ



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