RECONCILIATION, FORGIVENESS AND VIOLENCE IN AFRICA

BIBLICAL, PASTORAL AND ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES

EDITORS

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INTRODUCTION

This book is the result of an inter- and trans-disciplinary engagement with three ethical themes from an African perspective by researchers from Stellenbosch University. The themes in question are reconciliation, forgiveness and violence. The contributors firstly engaged with one or more of the identified ethical themes from their specific disciplinary perspectives in their respective contributions. Thereafter, a symposium was held at the Beyers Naude Centre for Public Theology at Stellenbosch University on the 13th of April 2017. The aim of the symposium was to expose colleagues working in different disciplines in the Faculty of Theology to the contributions of those working in disciplines other than their own. This resulted in an enriched multidisciplinary perspective on these complex themes within the African context. The contributors each reflect on issues that arise from their varied African contexts. However, it needs to be acknowledged that the character of the project is informed by the theological points of view of a group of scholars linked to a particular institution – the Faculty of Theology, Stellenbosch University. It is, however, the hope of the contributors that this publication will serve as a first step towards a much more dynamic and inclusive conversation with scholars elsewhere in Africa, throughout the varied contexts of the Global South, and the wider world.

The publication is structured in such a way that it draws upon the disciplinary experience of three theological disciplines (Biblical Studies, Practical Theology and Systematic Theology – with a particular focus on Public Theology and Ethics). The engagement of these three disciplinary perspectives facilitates a nuanced and textured understanding of the complexity of reconciliation, forgiveness, and violence in various African contexts. The aim of the engagement of these three disciplines is to enrich the understanding of notions of human dignity in relation to this conversation. The relationship between the discourses of human dignity, violence, reconciliation and forgiveness offers a wealth of material for interdisciplinary academic research. This, in turn, enriches and further develops the disciplines from which the original contributions came.

This book is premised on an understanding that human dignity is a complex concept that requires careful and rigorous consideration in order to explicate the implications for sound theology and practice. One of the challenges with human dignity discourses is that they are easily collapsed into utilitarian discussions of human rights and planetary rights. While this is a necessary outcome of responsible scholarship in the field, it cannot replace the need for a primary engagement with the multi-faceted notion of dignity that precedes the discourses around responsible rights – namely the dignity discourse.

Violence against persons and creation stems from an inadequate and jaundiced view of the other (whether it be other persons, communities, or aspects of creation). The expression, or performance, of violence is predicated upon a poorly developed understanding of the dignity and value of the other. This research project engages such beliefs and constructs with an aim to enrich the understanding and development of the descriptive and applied ethical considerations of dignity-based justice. A multifaceted understanding of the dignity, value and beauty of human persons impacts the ethical engagement with concepts of forgiveness and reconciliation.

This publication therefore brings together a variety of disciplinary, and intersectional identity, perspectives to enrich and texture the discussion. The disciplines it draws upon are Biblical Studies, Practical Theology and Systematic Theology (with a particular focus on Public Theology and Ethics).

The first three chapters focus on reconciliation, forgiveness and violence in the New Testament. **Marius J. Nel** focuses on Matthew 1:21 in order to understand how the author of the First Gospel appropriated the first century Jewish messianic hope for salvation for his particular community living within the context of the violence of the Roman Empire. Nel attempts to discern what Matthew wanted to achieve with his intertextual engagement with the Old Testament and argues that the manner in which Matthew addressed his context can provide contemporary African churches with appropriate hermeneutical guidelines for how to engage with their own analogical socio-political contexts. **Endale Sebsebe Mekonnen** studies violence from the perspective of Paul's letter to the Romans. He argues that in the context of the Roman Empire where violence was ubiquitous, Paul presents such violence as being part of the concept of evil (κακός). Paradoxically, Paul perceives violence constructively in the experience of the Messiah as a means of creating reconciliation, peace and glory. **Godwin Etukumana** focuses on reconciliation as an important topic in contemporary political, social, economic, and religious spheres, since it has the ability to redefine human relationships therein. The specific focus of his chapter is on the various ways in which the Gospel according to Luke describes the reconciliation of those who had become estranged from their communities with special reference to the case of lepers in Luke 5:11-16. Using a socio-historical hermeneutics he further investigates whether the metaphors used in Luke are similar to those used in African society's engagement with lepers.

The next three chapters approach the three themes from the perspective of Systematic Theology (with a particular focus on Public Theology and Ethics). **Dion A. Forster** engages the complexity of a politics of forgiveness in South Africa 25 years after the end of political apartheid. He draws upon a four-year qualitative empirical study of how Black and White South African Christians understand the processes and notions of forgiveness in the light of South Africa's complex economic, social and political context. **Alease A. Brown**, in turn, uses a postcolonial hermeneutic to demonstrate the ways in which a re-conceptualisation of the human renders possible a theology that uncouples humanity from political subjectivity. She draws on Sylvia Wynter's ontology of the human in order to argue for substituting the conception of Jesus as Man, for the conception of a Jesus in his kenotic, Kyriotic, and mediating human genres. Brown also argues that the incidence of violence in the life and teachings of Jesus is a warrant for apprehending aspects of the life and teachings of Jesus as constitutive of violence. Finally, she suggests that Jesus' human genres may be understood as demonstrating a necessary engagement in violence by those who would be like Jesus, and who would pursue the flourishing of creation. **Jaco Botha** investigates empire, structural violence, and the *missio Dei* by using the social location of Mgecineni Noki, who was killed in the conflict between Lonmin's Marikana mine management and their workforce life, as a lens to critique the Church's engagement in issues of violence which undermine the dignity of the most vulnerable peoples in the new South Africa.

The last three chapters focus on the topics from the perspective of Practical Theology. **Christo Thesnaar** investigates how the lack of implementing the recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) as well as the reluctance of government, civil society and the religious groupings that has resulted in a “frozen conflict” in the current South African society. He therefore proposes a contextual pastoral approach to address the vacuum this has caused. **Benaya Niyukuri** examines the ethnic conflicts that have been a cause of the political unrest in Burundi in order to emphasise the role of Practical Theology in peacebuilding and the church in reconciliation in Burundi. **Oholiabs D. Tuduks** examines the praxis of reconciliation among the religious groups in Northern Nigeria with the intention of finding the factors that affect the success of reconciliation. Nigeria is known for its periodic religious crises among Christians and Muslims. Through a pastoral care hermeneutical approach the chapter suggests a number of ways for effective reconciliation. Some of these include a focus on inter-religious understanding and learning, inter-religious hospitality, healthy inter-religious dialogue, and tolerance that promotes interest in diversity.

In the concluding chapter **Wilhelm Verwoerd** invites the reader to commit to the complex, and arduous task, of reconciliation that is coupled with justice. He does so by sharing aspects of his own journey towards reconciliation, and experience that he has gained from sharing in the journeys of others who are on this path. His contribution brings together insights from South Africa, the broader African context, and some lessons learned in Ireland. Verwoerd emphasises the importance of an authentic, and textured, spirituality as a foundation for biblical, theological, and practical embodiment of reconciliation and justice in Africa.

We are grateful to each of the colleagues for their hard work that makes this collection of essays such a diverse disciplinary, and contextually varied, contribution on the themes related to reconciliation, forgiveness and violence in Africa. We are particularly grateful to Dr Lee-Anne Roux who did a superb job of proof-reading and editing the text. The volume is dedicated to the memory of H Russel Botman. It was Professor Botman’s commitment to human dignity that was the genesis of this project. The process out of which this volume comes was supported by the HOPE funding that he secured for the Stellenbosch University. We trust that the scholarship contained in these chapters will invite conversation, deepen reflection, and contribute towards our understanding of human dignity and the fostering of lasting hope for justice, peace, and flourishing in Africa.

After the completion of this manuscript, one of the contributors to the volume, Dr Alease Brown, passed away from a sudden illness. She was a promising and brilliant theologian, as you will see from her chapter in this book. We are deeply saddened by her untimely death. We hope that the work that she was so committed to will serve as an inspiration and invitation to others to think deeply and act courageously for justice. Alease will be missed.

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