

More than Justice

The Impact of Christus Victor on the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission

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Introduction

This article seeks to investigate the correlation between Gustaf Aulén's book *Christus Victor* and the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) which took place between 1996 – 1998.¹ There are many good reasons why the South African TRC has become well known around the world: the conspicuous crimes of apartheid that had to be sorted out, the absolute public and media friendly nature of the hearings, also the fact that the Christian presence was so striking.

The question is: What role does theology (and the church) have in relation to society? And also, in a country where the majority is Christian, what role do theological models of reconciliation and atonement have in the formation of a reconciled community and nation?²

If not before, this question was constantly in the air during the years the hearings of the TRC were on. The commission, which was set up by the newly elected and first democratic govern-

ment in the country, focused on three areas: hearings of victims and perpetrators, amnesty proceedings and assessments of reparations for victims.

Victims, those who had suffered under the apartheid regime for example through torture, and next of kin of those who had died, were encouraged to come forward publicly and give their story. Perpetrators, who were also asked to come forward into the public arena, were promised amnesty on the condition that they made a whole, coherent and trustworthy confession. However, being a state commission at work, they were not asked to show remorse.

The number of Christian leaders and personalities were striking in this commission, appointed only after a lengthy and public selection procedure. Archbishop Desmond Tutu was elected chairperson. The Chilean ambassador at the time made the following comment:

The powers and resources are much more significant than those of the Chilean commission... Yet, ironically for a body with such strong statutory powers, the South African Commission stands out for the relative absence of lawyers (except the amnesty committee) and an extraordinary religious component. Sitting at the hearings..., watching Archbishop Desmond Tutu say a prayer..., I could not help but reflect that this would have been unthinkable in many countries... Yet it seems to have worked in South Africa, where there is a great religious diversity but where the strongly Christian subtext of repentance and forgiveness that pervades the Commission's pro-

¹ See the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report* (Cape Town: TRC 1998).

² In 2001 John de Gruchy was writing his book on reconciliation, *Reconciliation, Restoring Justice* (London: SCM Press, 2002); one day he asked me, what about Aulén's *Christus Victor*, did it have any impact on Swedish society at the time? Perhaps slightly mischievously I promised to ask a scholar and friend in Lund. So I wrote an e-mail to Göran Bexell who answered quickly without much hesitation: I don't think so.

ceedings conveys both the right message as to what reconciliation is all about.³

A state commission which was so theologically charged has intrigued and inspired me as a scholar.⁴

Basically I am here only going to try two things: first look at *Christus Victor* with my South African perspective, to evaluate what is promising and appreciated and what is problematic, second, look at the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission with *Christus Victor* as a guide, in order to find out whether there is a correlation, and even an impact.

Christus Victor in my South African Perspective

An 80 year old text, written for the Olaus Petri Lectures in Uppsala, does it have a life today and does it relate to events like the South African TRC? While his self-description as strictly descriptive and historical seems dated the main message in the book remains remarkably fresh.⁵

In my comments I am going to fuse my own understanding of Aulén with what also seems to me to be a South African reading. These will be about the Biblical and early church world view, the granting of grace in relation to the demand for justice, the indivisibility of the Father and the Son, the dualistic drama where sin, death, and

the devil figure prominently, troubles with, as I would call it, God's 'split' personality, problems with Aulén's reading of Luther and problems with Luther, especially regarding 'law' and 'wrath'. Finally I will also try to elaborate on the sometimes thin line between the Classic and Latin type of atonement and the passiveness of the classic type.

There is no doubt in my mind that the dualistic, dramatic world view is quite easy to accept here. Personalisation of evil also makes sense. We must talk about God in dramatic terms as God is the creator and in charge of the universe, a place full of drama.⁶ It is also fully justifiable to imagine that God has to act in relation to evil powers, i.e. the devil. It is God's initiative, not that of humans. It seems to me also fully defensible to maintain the Biblical understanding of a dualist world view as Aulén explains it, where evil is portrayed as a power that ensnares humans but does not have an absolute, eternal character of Evil as opposed to Good.⁷ It is not difficult to tune into the views of the Bible and the early church. Aulén's dealing with Irenaeus is to the point. Few here would worry about him being too naturalistic;⁸ on the contrary. Irenaeus makes sense today in his ability to keep incarnation and atonement together as one whole. The same goes for his ability to keep creation and redemption together through his concept of *recapitulatio*, which takes us far beyond the mere conquering of the powers of evil, as "it continues in the work of the Spirit in the church".⁹ A lasting impression is that Aulén manages to uphold the theological convictions of Irenaeus as a common denominator of what is the classic model of the atonement. His text bears the hallmark of Irenaeus.

In Aulén's presentation it is clear that the Latin idea of atonement developed especially by Anselm of Canterbury is to be associated with God's justice in the first place, while the Classic idea of atonement first of all would speak to

³ Piet Meiring, "The *baruti* versus the lawyers: the role of religion in the TRC process", 123-131 in *Looking Back Reaching Forward. Reflections on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa* (eds. C. Villa-Vicencio & W. Verwoerd, Cape Town: UCT Press, 2000), 131.

⁴ I have, together with Antjie Krog, author, run a postgraduate course for the 5th consecutive year on "The South African TRC and its Theological Perspectives". Aulén's text has become a standard text.

⁵ "My aim in this book has been throughout an historical, not an apologetic aim... I have not had any intention of writing an *apologia* for the classic idea, and if my exposition has shaped itself into something like a vindication of it, I would plead that it is because the facts themselves point that way", Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor, An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement* (London: SPCK, 1931), 175f.

⁶ An Easter sermon in KwaZulu, South Africa, illustrates this well, see Bengt Sundkler, *The Christian Ministry in Africa* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1960), 282ff.

⁷ Aulén, 20f.

⁸ Aulén, 34.

⁹ Aulén, 37f.

God's grace. If Aulén is correct the Latin version is characterized by a legalistic framework and speaks of the necessity of seeing justice to be done and avoid any tendency towards laxity.

The legal understanding of atonement has roots in the thinking of Tertullian, who was influential in developing the penitential system in the Western church. Terms like penance, satisfaction and merit were getting currency already here. "This point of view, of a legal relationship between two parties, is now used to interpret the work of Christ;"¹⁰ and the argument is according to Aulén that God demands justice for the damage done by the fall of sin of humanity; there is a debt to be paid; it must be done through the human, but due to continued sinning, no one is eligible to do this, except one, Christ, who is without sin; the point of the whole action is then that in order to satisfy God's demand for justice the debt has to be paid by Christ, as the human Christ. It is vital to see the alternatives to Anselm clearly: "either a forgiveness of sins by God, which would mean that sin is not treated seriously and so would amount to a toleration of laxity, or satisfaction." The latter is the only one possible. "[M]oral earnestness" and the need to weigh "the gravity of sin" have pushed "the doctrine of the Atonement into a juridical scheme".¹¹

Anselm felt indeed justified to exclaim "*nihil rationabilius*, nothing can be more reasonable than the demand for satisfaction, and the way in which the demand is met". It is about *lex et ratio*.¹² Aulén summarizes the two first models of atonement thus: "The classic idea shows a continuity in the Divine action and a discontinuity in the order of justice; the Latin type, a legal consistency and a discontinuity in Divine operation."¹³

As Aulén contends, the first kind of atoning action is more than anything characterized by grace. "It is God's Love, the Divine agape, that removes the sentence that rested upon mankind, and creates a new relation between the human race and Himself, a relation which is altogether different from any sort of justification by legal

righteousness."¹⁴ This whole arrangement, this whole "dispensation is the work of grace". One cannot but accept here that Aulén's words seem to be a very true reflection of what Irenaeus has in mind: "Mankind, that had fallen into captivity, is now by God's mercy delivered out of the power of them that held them in bondage. God had mercy upon His creation, and bestowed upon them a new salvation through His Word, that is, Christ, so that men might learn by experience that they cannot attain to incorruption of themselves, but by God's grace only."¹⁵

It is also evident that to Irenaeus this is a real cosmic drama, as real as the fact that the Incarnation had taken place, and also a drama with a necessary double sidedness; incarnation and atonement understood in such a way may indeed be rejected on rational grounds. The sovereign act of God is here well captured by Aulén: "The work of atonement is therefore depicted in dramatic terms, as a conflict with the powers of evil and a triumph over them. This involves a necessary double sidedness in that God is at once the Reconciler and the Reconciled. His enmity is taken away in the very act in which He reconciles the world unto Himself."¹⁶

Furthermore it is of utmost importance to be able to address the indivisibility of the Father and the Son in the act of redemption. If there is anything that speaks directly in favour of the classic version of the atonement, it is God's unified act in redeeming humanity from all sin. Here the Anselmian model could rather easily lend itself to severe abuse. The fact that the Father demands justice from humanity and that in the end the only one who can effectuate this justice is God's own Son is, to say the least, highly problematic. In talking in terms of 'demand' in the name of absolute justice, one has already created, if not a division, at least a severe tension in the Godhead. One cannot use human images to create the impression that the Father leaves out his Son in the cold and in the darkness of death without being involved or being part of this action in any sense. Even a kenosis theology

¹⁰ Aulén, 97f.

¹¹ Aulén, 105f.

¹² Aulén, 107.

¹³ Aulén, 107.

¹⁴ Aulén, 51.

¹⁵ Aulén, 51, Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses.*, V., 21.3, see also 2 Cor. 5: 19.

¹⁶ Aulén, 51.

here seems to be able to take care of this problem (see below in next section).

This one-line action of God in terms of the atonement also takes care of another aspect of God's wider salvific act that is easily forgotten, which could also be seen as an integral part of atonement: "Christ became man that we might be made divine", or in Irenaeus' words: "we could not otherwise attain to incorruption and immortality except we had been united with incorruption and immortality."¹⁷

Despite one long convincing argument throughout the book regarding the Classic model, I also see disturbing problems. It starts well and good with the dualistic drama that also makes sense in African Christianity today. The keeping together of three enemies of God and humankind, namely sin, death and the devil is a virtue of the early church but also of Martin Luther. So far, so good; Luther elaborates on what it means that Christ is our Lord: "It is this, that He has redeemed me from sin, from the devil, from death and all woe... He has snatched us poor lost men from the jaws of hell, won us, made us free, and brought us back to the Father's goodness and grace."¹⁸ My contention here is thus that the objectification and personification of evil and sin are not out of the way.

Persuasively it is shown that Luther has clear connections with the early fathers and has taken in the dualistic perspective as well as the classic view of atonement. But Luther goes further than the early fathers and Aulén gives him company without hesitation. Even though there is some support to gain from Paul and the epistle to the Galatians, Luther goes too far and is in my opinion close to creating what could amount to the split personality of God. To him it was not enough to see sin, death and the devil as express enemies to contend with. The Law and God's wrath are also sworn enemies to deal with. Seen from the point of view of the gospel one may understand part of the reasoning: the law can achieve nothing in terms of salvation, on the contrary, it will bring humans to the ground and make them failures. Likewise, God's wrath no-

body can endure and it will certainly destroy all of us unless there is some mercy around. However the dialectic that Luther develops very forcefully in his understanding and description of God is not necessary to accept. He creates an unbearable internal conflict in the Godhead that is simply not convincing. What is not mentioned by Aulén and as is exemplified in the TRC process, is Luther's conviction that the law also has a salvific effect: it can drive a person closer to God and to the Gospel (see next section).

What is alleviating part of the unbearable tension in God between love and law, between blessing and wrath (curse) is the fact that the love and the blessing are the ones that prevail, which come out victorious.¹⁹ And yet, in view of the above, Aulén's words sound like an understatement: "[I]t would seem almost as if the conflict were carried back within the Divine Being itself."²⁰

In an attempt at discerning what Luther is after, one should thus bear in mind his overarching concern for the Gospel. His fear of an early return of the Latin piety built on merits, satisfaction and other human efforts to attain acceptance in the eyes of God was real. Aulén adds: "With regard to Satisfaction, it is well known that Luther spoke very severely about the use of this word: we will not allow it, he says, in our schools or on the lips of our preachers, but we would rather send it back to the judges, advocates and hangmen, from whom the Pope stole it."²¹ Here a barrier is created between those who believe in Christ as their only Saviour and the fulfilment of the law in society; this is not all. While a TRC process by definition would move away from retributive justice, to Luther it is alive: "[I]n Luther the Wrath of God takes the place of the retributive justice (*justitia retributiva*) of the mediaeval scheme."²²

It is significant that Aulén fully supports Luther the whole way and even suggests that his understanding of the classic type atonement is

¹⁷ Aulén, 34, Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, IV., 33.4.

¹⁸ Aulén, 121, *Martin Luther's Works* (Weimar Edition), XXX., i. 186.

¹⁹ The tension between Matthew 5:17 and Paul/Luther is obvious.

²⁰ Aulén, 130.

²¹ Aulén, 134.

²² Aulén, 130.

the most powerful and impressive in its history.²³

Despite of what is said there is also evidence of only a thin line between the classic and the Latin type of atonement. Aulén quotes Irenaeus to the effect that one at least has to acknowledge that Christ needs to exercise both natures in order to defeat the enemy (death, sin etc.): "If man had not defeated the enemy of man, the enemy would not have been fairly (juste) overcome. Again, if God had not bestowed salvation, we should not possess it securely. And if man had not been united with God, he would not have been able to become partaker of immortality."²⁴ Aulén may be correct in saying that Irenaeus does not necessarily lend support to the Latin view.

However, the quote clearly shows the thin line between the two types of atonement. The overarching principle, namely that there is a divine intervention in a consistent way, in the form of a persistent line of action, is clear. That must not be broken. The forensic view that God's justice has to be satisfied in order that salvation will become available seems to break that line. However, Irenaeus' quote also shows that the human element in this salvific act is as essential as the divine.²⁵ We are here served with Aulén's interpretation of the Latin version. God's presence in Christ's work in his human nature may be too little stressed by Aulén. It is hardly conceivable that Anselm would see Christ's only role as paying the debt of humankind alone, without God the Father's assistance. It is possible that Aulén here is taking this type to its extreme. It should also be born in mind that Anselm indeed saw atonement as also an act of God in the first place, initiated by God self.

Secondly, could God the Father not have been with the Son Christ in his humanity, when he paid the ultimate price? And could humans be inspired by Christ's sacrifice so as to offer themselves to others? Or rather, could they, as part of the body of Christ, become part of this sacrifice, this atonement, this satisfaction, so as to over-

come the passiveness that characterizes the classic type when it comes to the role of humanity? Could this human activity with Christ, the human, be seen as an act of grace, God's grace? Or is it just a severe payment, a punishment for sin?

Thirdly, then, the passiveness of God's created humanity and the whole creation for that matter, is a matter for concern. It is a weakness, but of course has to do with basic views regarding salvation and the humans' role in that process. Augustine's conflict with Pelagius springs to mind. The classic model may give a sense of detachment and it may well be that the other models do have a role to play as well.

The South African TRC with *Christus Victor* in Mind

All three types of atonement may well have some value and relevance in the TRC process. One should here also comment on the fact that 'atonement' and 'reconciliation' often are used interchangeably. Traditionally the English word 'at-one-ment' has been confined to the actual theological ideas about God's ways of overcoming enmity between God self and humanity.²⁶

In this section there will be reason to open a discussion on forgiveness in relation to theology and culture, and then identify the thin line between theology and politics. There will be reason to widen the scope into political reconciliation without giving up on grace. We will then, finally, look at Desmond Tutu's theology and comment on how he undoubtedly even though in a general sense subscribes to the classic model of atonement and reconciliation.

One should not forget that South Africa is part of a tremendous world historical shift; the downfall of the Berlin wall and the collapse of the Soviet Empire created an unforeseen vacuum of post conflict scenarios; South Africa is one of them. The end of the cold war opened for constitutive, democratic initiatives. To some, this expansion of democracy was best described as reconcilia-

²³ Aulén, 160.

²⁴ Aulén, 49.

²⁵ See also Aulén, 147f, where it is said that Lutheran theologians also hold that the satisfaction was made by 'both natures' of Christ.

²⁶ de Gruchy, 45.

tion.²⁷ Of fundamental importance is also to see that before 1990 the term reconciliation was of little currency, neither in theology nor politics.²⁸

The need to forgive is apparent in all reconciliation processes, but is it a matter of theology or culture? According to Antjie Krog the readiness to forgive (especially among some African women) in all likelihood has far more to do with African culture than with Christian faith convictions. One victim saw his pain as above all “a loss of wholeness”. One woman could testify to the following:

After a meeting in which the killer of her son asked forgiveness, Mrs Ngewu formulated her understanding of reconciliation as follows: ‘This thing called reconciliation ... if I am understanding it correctly ... if it means this perpetrator, this man who has killed Christopher Piet, if it means he becomes human again, this man, so that I, so that all of us, get our humanity back ... then I agree, then I support it all.’²⁹

Cultural and Christian elements may be intertwined. On the other hand here is also a great tension. Krog tends to say that these forgiving attitudes and this craving for wholeness and the maintaining of a common humanity are thoroughly African. One could also say that there is a sharp line between two understandings of forgiveness: Christian and human. My reflection has been: “We have thus a most intriguing question before us. Is there a human dimension of forgiveness that has wholeness as spiritual resource? What is Christian forgiveness in relation to this? Is Christ’s sacrifice making the unforgivable forgivable?”³⁰

²⁷ Göran Hydén, “Post-war reconciliation and democratization”, (conference paper, Oslo: Chr. Michelsen Institute, 2000), 2, 19.

²⁸ See for example Robert Schreiter, “Reconciliation as a new Paradigm of Mission”, 1-5 (Conference for World Mission and Evangelism, Athens, 2005).

²⁹ See Antjie Krog, “This thing called reconciliation: forgiveness as part of an interconnectedness-towards-wholeness”, 140-147 in *In the Balance. South Africans Debate Reconciliation* (eds F. du Toit & E. Doxtader; Auckland Park, South Africa: Jacana Media, 2010), 141.

³⁰ Hans Engdahl, “Reconciliation as Unfinished Business – the Church and the TRC”, 1-24 (paper deliv-

It may seem as if African culture could assist in forgiving what to many seems unforgivable. Is this so, or is it merely a way of condoning a crime for the sake of wholeness?³¹ One could also add that there is a level here where theology would play no role at all.

The TRC process has reminded the keen observer that there also is a thin line between theology and politics. Ralph Wüstenberg has made a very compelling analysis in this regard. Adopting Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s distinction, rather than Luther’s two kingdoms or Calvin’s lordship of Christ, between the pen-ultimate and the ultimate, he is from the start able to keep theology and politics closely together.³²

Using the interrogation of a Mr Benzien at one of the TRC hearings, who had been a torturer, as an example, he is able to identify an essential shift in the ensuing conversation between him and two of his victims. The TRC requirement was to confess what had happened, if possible in a straightforward way, so that the truth was told, without asking for remorse. During the interrogation of Mr Benzien exactly this happened, but then two additional questions from the victims paved the way for a real shift: did he have talent for torturing as such and, secondly, what kind of person was he, who could carry on with such torture year after year?

Here Mr Benzien appears completely defenceless and readily admits that he has asked himself this question so many times, even to the point of seeking psychiatric treatment. Using Luther’s distinctions *usus legis* and *usus secundus legis* as well as *coram hominibus* and *coram Deo*, Wüstenberg draws the following conclusions. It is quite clear that from the first to the second question there is a shift from a legal to a moral and then to a theological perspective. In asking himself, fully agreeing with the tortured victim’s

ered as the Desmond Tutu Peace Lecture at the Western Cape Province Council of Churches, 11 October 2007), 18.

³¹ See Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 27-60.

³² See Ralf Wüstenberg, “Reconstructing the Doctrine of Reconciliation within Politics”, 257-270 in *Theology in Dialogue* (eds L. Holness & R. Wüstenberg; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 257ff.

rhetorical question (today by the way, one of the articulate and well off ANC leaders in the country), what kind of person he was who could conduct such things on a regular basis, he has moved quickly to a position *coram Deo*. This is TRC South Africa at work. The theological work can begin. "The law has worked on him in its second use so that he must do something drastic. The law cannot save him, but the law can urge him to respond to the call of the gospel, the gospel of forgiveness."³³ Here no doubt "the political context became saturated with theological meaning. This does not mean that politics can save; no, 'there is no direct link between political and theological language'. Instead there is 'an ontological breach at the point where we enter the theological understanding of the process'"³⁴

What we find is that theology is neither dissolved into politics, nor politics into theology; yet, politics and theology are here very close. Luther has also come to good use and we see a different picture from the one where he comments on satisfaction as only belonging to the lawyers and advocates, having been stolen from them by the Pope.³⁵

One of the main questions in relation to the South African TRC has indeed been what place theology might have in a government appointed commission. One can also see here the severe shortcoming of any theory of the atonement or reconciliation that is confined to a theological understanding only. Is there perhaps some force field that might keep the two together?

There may well be. The research director of the TRC, Charles Villa Vicencio has certainly grappled with this issue, himself a theologian. In a well known essay on reconciliation as a metaphor he has tried to make himself clear on this matter. A tentative but very cautious definition is to say that reconciliation is a process and a goal and that "to the extent that a word is what it produces, it has something to do with the engaging of people in an attempt to overcome enmity".³⁶

³³ Engdahl, 15.

³⁴ Engdahl, 15, Wüstenberg, 269.

³⁵ See Aulén, 134.

³⁶ Charles Villa Vicencio, "Reconciliation as Metaphor", 224-244 in *Theology in Dialogue* (eds L. Hol-

An ambition of Villa Vicencio over the years has been to develop a notion of political reconciliation and the question is how such a notion would fare in a theological landscape.³⁷ In his 'Reconciliation as Metaphor' there is an underlying current of a theology of grace, which seems to give free reign to also a political understanding of reconciliation. It is the quest for a "viable political ethic that seeks not revenge that may well provide short-term relief, but satisfaction of the kind that results from enduring peace which is dedicated to the restoration of human dignity and the beginning of a more equitable society".³⁸

To Villa Vicencio the way forward is not to preach 'the big four': confession, repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation. Inevitably something else has to come in before.

Indeed some would argue they are only authentically possible in the wake of a reconciling process that has at least been initiated. There must be a context of grace or acceptance... for individuals or communities to make themselves vulnerable in confession (acknowledgment) and repentance (transformation).³⁹

In short Villa Vicencio's theological framework for a politics of reconciliation should be shaped accordingly: "[W]hat has to precede actual repentance and restitution is a situation of grace, hope or assurance of being forgiven... What we easily forget is that 'the only sin we know is sin that has already been forgiven. We do not see the problem until we have seen the solution'".⁴⁰

ness & R. Wüstenberg; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,, 2002), 239.

³⁷ See also his *Political Reconciliation in Africa* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 2009).

³⁸ Villa Vicencio, 226, Engdahl, 16, 23. Villa Vicencio could also be seen as advocating a political compromise, that amounts to little new and has been criticized for taking justice too lightly, see for example Edwin Arrison, "Kairos/prophetic theology's view of reconciliation in a post TRC environment" (unpublished MA paper, University of the Western Cape, November 2009).

³⁹ Villa Vicencio, 227, Engdahl, 23.

⁴⁰ Engdahl, 23, Villa Vicencio, 232, see also Dirkie Smit, "The Truth and Reconciliation Commission – Tentative Religious and Theological Perspectives" in *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 90 (1995), 6.

Tensions remain between the political and the theological but maybe this is exactly the point: What we do need is “a friendly, reconciling, and potentially forgiving context... Implicit... is a theology of grace. It is not a theology of cheap grace. Its end is restitution and justice. What distinguishes it from a more rigid theology of law is process. It is about how to reach the agreed end. It is pastoral. It is pragmatic. It is also goal oriented. The latter means that any neat distinction between the pastoral and the prophetic cannot in practice be sustained.”⁴¹

A towering figure in the TRC process is no doubt Desmond Tutu. Important to note is that Tutu did not hold back his theological convictions in chairing the TRC; on the contrary. It gives us then ample opportunity to investigate what his theological impact was and in how far that impact went on par with a particular view of reconciliation and atonement.

Tutu has drawn inspiration from various quarters. As an African he has at an early stage articulated his understanding of African culture and religion. He has appropriated the notion of ‘ubuntu’ to underline the inherent qualities of togetherness and communal sharing in African societies. He is an exponent of African theology in various ways as well as one of Black Theology, drawing from Black Consciousness philosophy. In addition, he has also integrated the ecclesial and theological traditions from the Anglo Catholic movement and he is indeed influenced by the Ecumenical movement, especially the World Council of Churches.

The following three traditions are to me significant in Tutu’s theology: Black and African theology, Kenosis theology and a theology of Transfiguration. I will here deal with the second and the third.

Tutu’s theology may be summed up in this quote close to 2nd century theology but also to *Christus Victor*: “We believe that when our Lord..., assumed our humanity, he did so not as a temporary measure. He became a human being forever so that our flesh has been united permanently with divinity, meaning that we have the capacity to be deified. He became as we are, so

said St Irenaeus, so that we could become as he is.”⁴²

Kenosis theology draws its inspiration from Paul’s text in Philippians 2:6-11; in Tutu’s case one can see a recurring feature in that it is God who empties God self and the impression is created that the very outpouring is not confined to the man Christ but is a constant interaction between the divine and the human. The impression is further that we have moved a long way away from talking about the almighty God as being impassible.

This God... is a blazing furnace of holy love in which the Father pours forth all... being to the Son who, coequal and co-eternal with the Father, pours back in equal measure his entire being in an eternal self-emptying to be filled without ceasing – with the Holy Spirit, binding the Father and the Son together for ever.”⁴³

Kenosis helps define who God is: “This kenosis, this self-emptying, this self-giving is an abiding characteristic of our God.”⁴⁴ Also, such a theology soon enough leads to a situation of atonement or reconciliation due to human failure and sin: “God created this world because God loves and when things went wrong, because of sin, God redeemed it. God, in Christ, emptied God’s being of divine glory and God paid the price for our sin.”⁴⁵

God’s self-giving in the death and resurrection paradigm seems to have a bearing on politics: “God... can neither tolerate aggressive schemes of power nor allow deterministic cosmologies to fix human identity.”⁴⁶ When he comes at his closest to the kenotic text in Phil 2:6-11 he does that while at the same time defending his allegiance to Liberation theology: “Liberation theology is not just an aberration thought up by those who have a predilection for that sort of thing. It

⁴¹ Villa Vicencio, 232f.

⁴² Michael Battle, *Reconciliation. The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1997), 62, Tutu, “Suffering and Witness”, (undated address), Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 33.4.

⁴³ Battle, 77, Tutu, “Sermon, printed after October 7, 1989”.

⁴⁴ Battle, 77.

⁴⁵ Battle, 77.

⁴⁶ Battle, 135f.

is biblical through and through, and utterly consistent with the God who is revealed to Moses. Jesus Christ has such a remarkable identification with those he came to save to the extent that for them and the world he was prepared to empty himself of his divine glory, to take on the form of a slave, and become obedient unto death, yes even the death on the cross.”⁴⁷

A “retributive God accords with our understanding of goodness.” But God is not a retributive God. “God is, rather, looking for ways to redeem us from the prison of our errors. Instead of being the chief prosecutor, God is the lead defence attorney, if not the doting mother of the miscreant.”⁴⁸

Tutu’s stress on the emptying action of God as a divine action comes close to notions of transformation. The new life in Christ is able to transform evils in this world. In a sense we are able to make world history through our actions: “We must work to bring the time when history is ready for all people to be free, to be fed, and to live in peace, because as God’s partners, we help to determine the time frame in which God’s plan unfolds and God’s dream is realized.”⁴⁹

My conviction is that an important key, and that is so far little understood, to Tutu’s theology is his firm emphasis on transfiguration.⁵⁰ Here, the physical is transformed and therefore accepted as God’s good creation: “It was this revelation of Jesus’ divinity, of this luminosity, that the disciples saw on the mountaintop.”⁵¹

It sets forth a paradigm of detachment and attachment: “The Spirit of God sends us into the fray, as it sent Jesus, but we must observe the sequence in his life and we will see that disengagement, waiting on God, always precedes engagement. He waited to be anointed with God’s Spirit, which made him preach the Good News to the poor and the setting free of captives. He went into retreat in the wilderness. He had experience of the transfiguration and then went into

the valley of crass misunderstanding and insistent demand. If it was so vital for the Son of God, it can’t be otherwise for us. Our level of spiritual and moral growth is really all we can give the world.”⁵²

God wants us to reflect his character to the world as the transfiguration experience is becoming authentic only through engagement in this same world: “The authenticity of the transfiguration experience would be attested by how it fitted us to be God’s presence, healing, restoring, forgiving, reconciling, admonishing, comforting in the world.”⁵³

So, from the point of view of having a glimpse of a transfigured world Tutu is compelled to say and he said it at a meeting in Belfast: “(You are) part of the cosmic movement toward unity, toward reconciliation, that has existed from the beginning of time.”⁵⁴

In the South African TRC process the same has to be asserted: “Theology helped us in the TRC to recognise that we inhabit a moral universe, (and) that good and evil are real and that they matter... For us who are Christians, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is proof

⁴⁷ Battle, 142f.

⁴⁸ Desmond Tutu & Mpho Tutu, *Made for Goodness* (London: Rider, 2010), 131.

⁴⁹ Desmond Tutu, *God has a Dream* (London: Rider, 2004), 126.

⁵⁰ Centred on the Transfiguration story in Matthew 17.

⁵¹ Tutu, 93.

⁵² Tutu, 109. One is here reminded of A. M. Ramsey who published a monograph titled *The Glory of God and the Transfiguration of Christ* (London: Longmans, 1949). He also says that the transfiguration does not seem to belong to the central part of the gospel tradition. However in a unique way this event has the ability to draw together all that could be contained in Christian faith: “[I]t stands as a gateway to the saving events of the Gospel, and is as a mirror in which the Christian mystery is seen in its unity. Here we perceive that the living and the dead are one in Christ, that the old covenant and the new are inseparable, that the Cross and the glory are of one, that the age to come is already here, that our human nature has a destiny of glory, that in Christ the final word is uttered and in Him alone the Father is well pleased”, p. 144; one comes remarkably close to what Tutu says about such theology in a TRC process. It is not about accepting things as they are, nor a flight from them. It is an attitude “which is rooted in detachment...but which so practises detachment as to return and perceive the divine sovereignty in the very things from which the detachment has had to be”, 145f.

⁵³ Tutu, 111.

⁵⁴ Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 263.

positive that love is stronger than darkness.”⁵⁵ Finally he states unequivocally: “It was theology that enabled me to assert that this was a moral universe. That theology undergirded my work in the TRC.”⁵⁶

The fear of laxity vis-à-vis sin unless one has a strict forensic understanding of atonement (Aulén on Anselm) is uncalled for.⁵⁷

[W]hen I realize the deep love God has for me, I will strive for love’s sake to do what pleases my Lover. Those who think this opens the door for moral laxity have obviously never been in love, for love is much more demanding than law. An exhausted mother, ready to drop dead into bed, will think nothing of sitting the whole night through by the bed of her sick child.⁵⁸

What brings Tutu close to the classic view is no doubt that grace and love take preference to justice in his argument.⁵⁹

Conclusions

As is evident, no comment is as yet made on the subjective type of atonement. It could be done and there are many ways in which a more individually based type would attract those who were part of the TRC process, pious or secular; but here the focus has been on those types with a cosmological reach.

I will end off with three points, which to me are most essential; they can merely be stated as drawn from the material presented, but not elaborated upon.

First, one must ask, confronted with Aulén’s fear of coming close to any forensic understanding of justice, was God not incarnated enough so as to reach those levels of human activity? Is it really not possible that Christ would be able to act within the juridical system as well? The dire

need to somehow calculate the damage done during the apartheid years in quantifiable terms, speaks for itself, on individual as well as on collective basis. The discussion around forgiveness as culturally conditioned has clear elements of the need for wholeness. There is also an ongoing discussion on reparations, which could be said to be *aporia*; they have to be concrete and somehow measure up to the damage done, at the same time they can never be paid or properly calculated.⁶⁰ There is in the end metaphysical guilt.⁶¹ All such considerations have more of a bearing on the Latin type of atonement.

Secondly one would be just as entitled to ask, was God not enough incarnated into this world, so as to also tackle the political sphere of life, or does it belong to another domain of godly activity? I will here give an example, not to make Luther the culprit in the first place, but probably rather to state that we have come a (long) way since the Reformation era. He spoke powerfully of God’s wrath, in effect God’s retribution. If one imagines that Luther overheard the interrogation of Mr Benzien, it would not be unreasonable to expect the following remarks. When Benzien confessed that he was questioning his own existence as a human because of his life as torturer, i.e. Benzien *coram Deo*, he would have said, ‘receive Christ in faith and you are a forgiven and redeemed person’; but the law would still have to take its course; in a 16th century context, Benzien should be hanged. In the TRC process on the other hand, God’s mercy seems to have reached deeply into the juridical.

Thirdly, and this has already been stated repeatedly in this article, the classic type of atonement is needed as an overarching model to safeguard the essentials in God’s atoning work: it is God’s initiative from beginning to end, it is one unbroken line of divine outpouring love, redeeming humankind and creation and also in a great Irenaean way, bringing God’s creation back to God. I mean we have two striking examples in the text of how the TRC process articu-

⁵⁵ Tutu, 86.

⁵⁶ Tutu, 87.

⁵⁷ See Aulén, 145.

⁵⁸ Tutu, 85.

⁵⁹ It is not as if justice is overlooked, but retributive justice is challenged, restorative justice advocated, by Tutu and others in the TRC process, Tutu, *No future without forgiveness*, chapter 4.

⁶⁰ Mark Sanders, *Ambiguities of Witnessing. Law and Literature in the Time of a Truth Commission* (Johannesburg: Wits UP, 2007), 114-116.

⁶¹ Karl Jaspers, *The Question of German Guilt* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978), 32, Engdahl, 10.

lates just this: it is a matter of grace from beginning to end.

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Pristagarna kommer att föreläsa i samband med den
högtidliga prisutdelningen
den 18 mars kl 13.15 i sal 118

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Välkomna!