

**Archbishop Thabo Makgoba**  
**The Garvey Lecture**  
**‘Forgiveness Made Concrete:**  
**Lessons from the South African Experience’**  
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Thank you for the invitation to give the Garvey Lecture. It is a great privilege and honour. I am particularly grateful to Dr Dixie Madden, and her colleagues at the Garvey Institute of Law, for all they have done to make me feel so welcome.

I am particularly glad to be able to come to Kansas, to Wichita – a part of the US I have not visited before. Though I must say, when I saw news of last weekend’s blizzards, I wondered if I was going to make it!

My task today is to speak about ‘Forgiveness Made Concrete: Lessons from the South African Experience.’

What I hope to do is this:

- first I shall describe South Africa’s apartheid history; and how it was that – broken, battered, and torn apart by our past – we would feel the need to pursue a new, and healing form of justice, and so set up the Truth and Reconciliation Commission,
- then I shall explain what was the Truth and Reconciliation Commission – or TRC, as we tend to call it: how it operated, what it hoped to achieve, and what was realised;
- then I shall conclude by reflecting on the lessons about forgiveness we should draw, both for South Africa as we continue with our democratic journey, and for the wider world.

In these reflections, I want to consider two particular questions.

- The first is the place for so much religious, and specifically Christian, imagery in what was a government-sponsored body.
- The second is to explore what resources a commission set up to address politically motivated violence can offer us at a time of global economic and environmental crisis, and what is the place of forgiveness here.

### Setting the Scene

Let me begin at the beginning, though it is hard to know where the beginning actually lies.

Perhaps you know that the world’s oldest traces of anatomically modern humanity lie in South Africa!

However, today's story dates from 1652, when the first European settlers arrived.

Colonial expansion inevitably led to struggles for power – between settlers and indigenous peoples, and between the Dutch and British.

When these two sides finally reached agreement, the increasing exclusion of the black population from the political arena followed.

Racial discrimination were already extensive when the National Party came to power in the 1948 elections.

Now a full-blown policy of apartheid was pursued with ruthless single-mindedness.

It is hard now to grasp quite how vicious apartheid was, and how far it was designed to treat the vast majority, close to 90% of the population as, frankly, less than fully human.

Everyone was classified by race. This classification determined:

- Where you could live.
- What work you could do.
- Which shops you could use.
- Which bus you could catch.
- Which hospital would treat you.
- Even who you could make out with or marry.

Everywhere, the best, the finest, was reserved, often exclusively, for the whites – who were the only people with a real vote.

Everywhere, the worst, the poorest, and often no provision at all, was for those classed as black Africans.

I struggled to finish school, studying by candlelight in a crowded township house with no electricity, and no money for extra candles.

Though my grades gained me provisional acceptance at the traditionally white Witwatersrand University, deliberate government administrative delays prevented my studying there for three years, through a discriminatory policy called 'Ministerial Approval' intended to bar Blacks seeking entrance at these institutions.

Once there, I was determined to make the most of every opportunity, reading widely outside my major, and developing the insatiable love of books I still have!

But the whole process scarred me emotionally.

My intervening years at a black university were counted as nothing – and there I had been traumatised by police and army, when students demonstrated at the nutritionally inadequate food we were given.

Even the right to protest against injustice was denied by law!

Those, of whatever background, who opposed the system were met with the harshest response, including beatings, torture and death.

And the government tightly censored the media, so the full truth of what was happening was hard to come by within South Africa – though the rest of the world watched with condemnation.

### The Challenge to the Churches

Instead of 'apartheid', the minority government often spoke of [quote] 'separate development' [unquote] between races – claiming biblical support, particularly Old Testament teaching that the ancient Hebrew people were to keep apart from, and certainly not intermarry with, those of other tribes.

In response, the World Council of Churches decreed that apartheid, which denied even basic rights to so many, was a heresy.

Most of the South African Churches – and some very brave individuals within the Dutch Reformed Church – said a clear no to apartheid. They said:

- it is all of humanity, equally, that is made in the image of God;
- it is all of humanity, equally, that Jesus embraces in his incarnation;
- it is all of humanity, equally, in whom the Spirit dwells by baptism;

These churches argued that everyone, equally, is deserving of respect and dignity. God's promises of justice and true shalom peace are so everyone may prosper and flourish, here and now – and not only in the heaven that is to come.

During this time, our churches enjoyed significant support from around the world. We shall always be grateful for the strong links between my own church, the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, and Episcopalians and others in the United States.

Even though most churches spoke out against apartheid, it took more determination to avoid being complicit in other ways.

Some denominations had separate structures, or even parallel churches with different pay scales. Congregations tended to reflect regulations over who could live where, and often clergy appointments did so too.

The Anglican Church later apologised to Archbishop Desmond Tutu for not fully supporting him, including over his call for international sanctions.

There was even less agreement within the churches over whether Christians could, in certain circumstances, support the armed struggle; that is, support opposing the apartheid regime by force.

### The Path to Democracy

The beginning of the end came in 1960.

First, the African National Congress – the ANC – and other African political groups were banned.

Second was the Sharpeville massacre, when police fired on a demonstrating crowd, leaving 67 dead and 186 wounded.

Political violence escalated.

People disappeared, others were beaten and abused, tortured and even killed in custody, or sentenced to lengthy imprisonment often with hard labour.

Between 1960 and 1994, some 2,500 were given the death penalty for political crimes and hanged.

In 1976, when school children in Soweto protested at being forced to study some subjects, like math, in Afrikaans, the whole country seemed to boil over.

Many townships and rural areas became extremely unstable and violent.

By the late 80s it was clear the situation was unsustainable internally and externally. International isolation and economic pressure had also grown, with the United Nations declaring apartheid a crime against humanity.

Finally, with little alternative before him, President de Klerk dared to begin dismantling apartheid.

In 1990 the ANC and other political parties were unbanned; and Nelson Mandela was released after 26 years in prison.

Nelson Mandela and F W De Klerk worked together for a smooth transition, and were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993.

In 1994 we held our first ever fully free and fair democratic elections.

Mandela became President, and though the ANC had a 63% majority, he formed a government of National Unity.

This symbolised commitment to seeking unity for the whole country and all its people.

### Living with Democracy

Well, this has been a long introduction, but I hope you now appreciate the enormity of what the new democratic government faced.

Many had predicted that apartheid would inevitable be followed by a blood bath, as those who had suffered so much and for so long, responded with the justice of retribution, and revenge.

But that was not the vision that inspired the new leadership.

At his trial, 30 years earlier, Nelson Mandela had said:

I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for ... But if needs be, it is an ideal I am prepared to die for.

After all he had suffered, Mandela still desired freedom and harmony for everyone, no matter what their race or background or political affiliation.

To achieve this, the country needed a fresh start, and a new beginning: one that did not deny the horrors of the past, but somehow allowed people to acknowledge them fully, deal with them appropriately, and then move forward into a better place.

The past must not hold the future hostage.

As we shall shortly see, the key that sets us free lies with forgiveness.

### The Truth and Reconciliation Commission

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established by an act of Parliament in 1995 with the objective [quote] 'to promote national unity and reconciliation in a spirit of understanding which transcends the conflicts and decisions of the past' [unquote].

To achieve this, it was to uncover and record the extent of gross human rights violations, to evaluate amnesty applications, to propose reparations, and provide a comprehensive report on those dark days from 1960 to 1994.

The Commissioners were selected through public consultation and interview, and the recently retired Archbishop of Cape Town – my predecessor-but-one – Desmond Tutu was appointed chair.

In the next two years they addressed over 50,000 cases of gross human rights violations.

These ranged:

- from deliberate killings and deaths that resulted from extreme maltreatment;
- to torture, beating, burning, shooting, mutilation, and mental and sexual abuse;
- through to abductions and all manner of other serious infringements, and all as politically motivated acts.

The great majority of the violations were committed, directly or indirectly, by the apartheid government's forces; but other violations were the responsibility of movements opposed to apartheid – some of which opposed each other.

The 140 public hearings that were held across the country are what most people know best about the TRC.

In addition, over 20,000 individual statements were taken, and over 7000 amnesty applications received. There were also special investigations and research projects.

The stories that people told of what had happened to them or to their loved ones, and the admissions people made of the atrocities which they had carried out, are almost beyond comprehension.

At one point, I had to stop watching the nightly television broadcasts of the day's hearings, because it was too traumatising, even at that distance.

It was not surprising that the TRC had to set up a mental health unit to support victims and perpetrators, communities, and also the TRC's own personnel.

### The Question of Justice

So then, what could be done with this unimaginable burden of past pain and injury?

Of course, some people had argued for something like the Nuremberg trials, the 'victor's justice' that followed the Second World War.

This was never feasible.

Further, it would have only exacerbated division, and undermined the reconciliation and healing to which the country dared aspire.

No, trials and retribution could not be the way forward.

But neither could we do nothing.

This would have further victimised the victims, by silencing their past, and so denying the awfulness, and the lasting legacy, of their experiences.

### Justice and Freedom

Perhaps you remember Ariel Dorfmann's play *Death and the Maiden* – made into a film with Sigourney Weaver and Ben Kingsley. [Desmond Tutu refers to this in the TRC Report.]

A woman by chance encounters a man whom she believes raped and tortured her years previously. She is ready to kill him, as long as he denies these acts.

But when he admits what he did, she lets him go.

His admission has acknowledged the reality of what she faced. It has restored her dignity, her identity.

She is affirmed truly as who she believes herself to be – and as herself, even bearing the scars of her now-acknowledged past, she can go forward feeling respected.

By choosing to be free of the past herself, somehow she can also grant freedom from the past to her torturer.

There is something profound at work here.

Of course, it is encapsulated in Christian theology – but the fact that it can be depicted in such powerful theatre demonstrates that it is not only Christians that can grasp this mysterious reality.

‘You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free’ said Jesus – himself called the Way, the Truth and the Life.

It is my belief that those who walk in Jesus’ way, and pursue his truth – even if they do not realise, or do not acknowledge, that this is what they are doing – will nonetheless experience his life-giving grace, and so shall find the path to freedom which he promises.

In other words, this principle really works throughout human experience – because it reflects, and therefore taps into, God’s best and loving purposes for humanity.

In ways that we may not be able to explain – but which we can nonetheless powerfully experience – the truth does indeed set us free, free from the power of evil.

It sets free those to whom evil acts were done – and it also frees those who were caught up in those evil acts.

They too were, in a strange way, victims of evil. In South Africa, we knew that everyone, even those who had benefited from apartheid, had to be set free from the past, in order to be able to participate in the new future we dared to pursue.

### Truth and Forgiveness

Forgiveness is an unavoidable part of this process of finding freedom through truth-telling.

What do we mean by forgiveness?

The TRC report says this

‘Forgiveness is not about forgetting. It is about seeking to forego bitterness, renouncing resentment, moving past old hurt, and becoming a survivor rather than a passive victim.’

This is a very important insight.

It underlines how, first of all, a person who forgives is, as it has been described, 'doing themselves a favour'.

It is reaching a point where one can let go of the stranglehold of the past – and be freed to go forward, not on terms dictated by the past and its pains, but on one's own terms.

To offer forgiveness to another is also to set them free.

None of us can change our past.

But forgiveness offers us the gift of a new future, a future free from being held hostage by the past.

But freedom comes at the cost of truth that can often be heart-breaking – and we must not forget this.

This is why those who had participated in human rights violations, had to be fully honest, if they wanted to receive either forgiveness from their victims, or the official amnesty that was part of the TRC's task.

St John, in his first epistle, sums up the principle:

'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness' (1 John 1:8-9).

The forgiveness we receive from God in Christ, came the price of his own death on the cross – yet it was a death freely given, in order to set us free, and give us a new future of abundant life as beloved children of God.

If you read accounts of how, through the TRC, perpetrators sought forgiveness from those they had hurt, or whose loved ones they had killed; and how many of these, often against their own expectations, were able to offer forgiveness, it will move you to tears.

So often, through forgiveness both victims and perpetrators found immense, and often unanticipated, relief and release.

Often they did speak of God's influence on them, but let me stress that Christians do not have a monopoly on forgiveness.

Yet, because forgiveness is God-shaped, we should not be surprised that the power of forgiveness to bring new, free, futures, through truth-telling, has been found to work elsewhere in human experience.

### Restorative Justice

Let me mention just one such example.

Perhaps you have heard of Restorative Justice.

This is an approach that is increasingly used in the secular world, often alongside what we call Retributive Justice – the traditional approach of a punishment for every crime.

It is used because experience shows that very often, punishment alone does not solve underlying, far more fundamental problems – whereas restorative justice can indeed bring restoration of an all round better solution.

Restorative Justice can also be used to break log-jams when relationships have gone sour in other ways.

In the United States, I understand it is being applied in areas that range from prisons to child welfare. It can even be used in breakdowns of relationships in a place of work.

Let me explain what Restorative Justice is all about.

The aim is to bring about solutions that do far more than merely address wrongdoing, but instead aim to bring healing and wholeness – not least, to the victims of injustice, but also to the entire underlying situation.

Restorative Justice recognises that sometimes wrong-doing is only a symptom of something greater that is not as it should be – and that needs to be addressed too.

Therefore, it is as though the bad situation itself becomes the very crucible in which new beginnings are forged; and the wrong-doing (and there may be wrong-doing on more than one side) is transformed into a stepping stone to a better future.

This happens as part of deep and honest encounter between all the concerned parties, that emphasises healing the wounds of everyone involved – whether offended against, or offending, since all are damaged by division.

At the same time, questions are pursued about what will make for greater wholeness in whatever is the wider context or community.

The desired outcome is that everyone will become contributing members of a community that grows and shapes itself to minimise the possibility of similar harmful actions finding fertile ground in the future.

Though not identical to the TRC procedures, I hope you can see that there are a lot of parallels. There is certainly a shared goal of transformative reconciliation – in which forgiveness sought and offered plays an inevitable role.

But let me stress, neither the TRC amnesty process nor Restorative Justice are soft options.

Neither lets perpetrators off the hook lightly. They have to face what they have done, and the human consequences of their actions. They have to admit guilt and, to use a word from religion, they have to repent.

Restorative justice expects those who have caused injury to take steps to repair it, and they may also have to face legal consequences – Retributive Justice may well be part of the picture too.

And in South Africa, while the TRC granted 849 applications for amnesty, 5,392 were denied.

In the majority of refused cases, people were trying to give a political justification – an excuse, in fact – for what was no more than a straightforward criminal act, in the hope of avoiding prosecution. That could not be allowed. They had to face the music.

Others were refused because they denied their guilt, or failed to give the full story, or seemed to be in pursuit of personal gain.

But where people had been caught up in the greater evil of the apartheid political system itself, no matter on which ‘side’ they had been, the country decided it was prepared to give them amnesty, if they told the truth, and were truly sorry.

I find Restorative Justice profoundly ‘gospel shaped’.

It breaks into negative cycles with redemptive hope.

This is what St Paul promises in the letter to the Romans( [ref](#)), when he writes that God can and does ‘work for good in all things’, in every circumstance of life, no matter how desperate, if only we are prepared to let him.

This is perhaps a new way of thinking about justice that we ought to consider more widely – at every level from personal disputes to the global community.

[ PAUSE ]

### The Goal of Justice

Let me raise the fundamental question of ‘What do we want from justice?’

Traditional justice, Retributive Justice, the justice of an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, on its own is zero-sum justice.

Rarely is anyone left better off; the underlying situation is seldom improved; and little account is taken of the victim’s needs.

What help is such justice?

We know we are all ‘only human’, and struggle with the failings of our humanity. We do not want to be trapped in our worst selves. We need redemptive hope.

In South Africa, retributive justice would not have promoted national unity and reconciliation, nor helped us transcend our past.

In contrast, Restorative Justice, handled properly, can lead to a win-win situation. Taken overall, it can move us forward into a better situation than the one we left behind, and open up a better future.

Isn't that what we all need, whatever injustices we face?

This is what we dared to hope for through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

### Shortcomings of the TRC Process

Of course, as the Commission itself admitted, the TRC had shortcomings, though these are outside the scope of what I want to address today.

Of greater concern is that its undeniable achievements were not adequately built on, and its recommendations not fully implemented.

It is often said the TRC delivered Truth, but this was not sufficiently matched by Reconciliation – and for this the South African, ANC-led, government must take its share of the blame.

First, the Commission judged that some level of reparation to victims of gross human rights violations was a necessary complement to truth seeking.

This would express a nation-wide public moral responsibility towards victims and shared national commitment to healing the wounds of the past.

It was part of the overall justice package, though one cannot put a price on life nor trauma.

Yet payment of reparations was delayed and fell significantly below what the Commission proposed.

The 'justice' element of the restorative justice nature of the TRC was also undermined by government failure to address proposals addressing land ownership and business.

But two other shortcomings have been more serious in their consequences.

The first is the failure of the new government to address sufficiently urgently or adequately the economic legacy of apartheid upon the poorest sectors of the population, in relation to everything from pensions and child-grants to education to health provisions.

This (along with land and business questions) brings into the equation a further form of justice – 'distributive justice' – but this lies outside the scope of what I have time for today.

Secondly, government failed to act on recommendations to consolidate the TRC's achievements through deliberately promoting a *nation-wide* culture of reconciliation, tolerance, human rights and unity.

This was a particular concern to the TRC, since it was not itself asked to address the fact that 90% of the population suffered oppression under apartheid.

And though the TRC hearings were cathartic for many – including those who felt their own stories were told through the testimony of others with similar experiences – some were left with uncovered trauma, and feelings of anger and disappointment. Certainly, we have inadequate mental health resources in this country to handle the emotional pains of the past.

So, even though we are undoubtedly better off than if we had pursued a route of retributive justice alone, we are nonetheless left with a double burden – of material need, and of emotional need.

Both were partially addressed in the TRC, but governmental completion of the task has been sadly lacking.

#### Shortcomings of Government and Society – in South Africa and Beyond

I have to say that government negligence seems to reflect a focus by too many of the new black elite on gaining power and wealth and status; and leaving behind their old roots with hardly a backward glance.

Well, perhaps who can blame them?

Democracy came, and with both hands, they grasped what democracy in the West has been about for far too long: rampant easy consumerism with little thought for the true cost, for sustainability, or for the effect on others.

As Gordon Gecko said in the 1987 film, *Wall Street*, 'greed is good'.

Globally, we are now facing the economic and social consequences of such behaviour.

Though the credit crunch is hitting places like the US very hard – and I guess Wichita's aviation industry is facing very uncertain times – in fact the greatest and most lasting effect will be among the poorest populations and nations of the world.

These are also the ones who are increasingly experiencing the most severe consequences of that other result of rampant consumerism: global warming and environmental degradation.

In Southern Africa – my own country, the other countries of the Province of which I am archbishop, and our neighbours – the last few years have seen unprecedented floods, unprecedented storms, unprecedented droughts. And the trend is steadily worsening.

Yet it will not do for us to sit back and put all the blame on a few greedy bankers, a few greedy oil barons, a few greedy politicians.

Actually, all of us, who have consistently voted in economically liberalising governments over the past two or three decades, and who have enjoyed rising consumerist standards of living with little thought for the real cost, must take our share of the blame too.

The TRC required admissions of guilt. Restorative justice requires readiness by all to admit shortcomings and complicity in allowing unhealthy contexts to persist.

In this season of Lent, we are all called to self-reflection. Have we demanded the unsustainable from our politicians? Have we pursued lifestyles with destructive carbon footprints? Is not each one of us called to humility, to seek forgiveness, to repent?

Remember: in the Greek of the New Testament, to repent is to change direction.

We most certainly need a change of direction if we are to rebuild our economies in ways that will allow the world and all its inhabitants to flourish.

So let me turn now to the final section of my speech, and what other lessons the Truth and Reconciliation Commission can offer South Africa and the world – especially in relation to forgiveness, justice, and our desire to find a new and better direction for the future.

### The Role of Community - Ubuntu

A better future must be for everybody, if it is to make any sense whatsoever.

The TRC was designed for the healing of the whole nation; overcoming the legacy of apartheid, which aimed to divide every community from all the others.

Restorative justice also situates itself within the wider community, wanting to change the context to minimise the possibility of repeating past injustices, and maximising potential for a better future for all.

In contrast, unregulated consumerism upholds the cult of the individual, and undermines social cohesiveness.

So the first lesson is that, at every level, we need to recover a sense of community, as the place where healing and hope can best happen.

In South Africa we often speak of the concept of ubuntu.

We say 'Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu', which means 'people are people through other people'.

In other words, we discover and experience our humanity in our relationships with others, and not only with the people of our choosing, but with everyone.

The fullness, the best, of our humanity can only be found if we pursue it together.

Similarly, restorative justice processes in North America often draw on community-level experiences of First Nations people in dealing with disruptive issues.

When it comes to sorting out current economic problems – and certainly when it comes to tackling climate change – we have no option but to work as a global community.

You may not agree with Hilary Clinton or her politics, but she was right when she said earlier this year, that ‘America cannot solve the problems of the world alone, and the world cannot solve them without America.’

Or perhaps you prefer the words of the Bible ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’.

In today’s globalised world, we are all neighbours.

Economically, and environmentally, we will stand or fall together.

Therefore we have no option, but to learn what it means to act lovingly towards everyone, and to be good neighbours to the whole human race.

### The Golden Rule

This means following another principle that the Bible shares with other religions and with philosophy – often known as the Golden Rule.

Jesus put it this way ‘In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you.’

This means treating everyone with the same respect and dignity that we would like to be treated with ourselves.

First of all, this includes paying attention to others – listening respectfully to their experiences, their understandings.

Such listening also acknowledges the huge diversity of humanity – whether in personality or culture or ability or experience or age or gender or anything else.

This mutual listening is rooted in the recognition that we are enriched when we can all share our own perspectives freely with one another. None of us has the whole truth, and together we can uncover a fuller picture.

We certainly need to continue affirming human diversity within South Africa, where we have 11 different official languages, and many more besides, spoken by those who live among us! We are truly a global microcosm!

Such community listening by everyone to everyone is at the heart of ubuntu and of First Nation practices.

It was reflected in the hearings of the TRC, where people could recount their stories, and know they had truly been heard.

### What is Truth?

As well as challenging our ideas of justice, the TRC also challenged our understanding of truth.

The TRC report speaks four types of truth:

- First is factual or forensic truth, about times, dates, events and so forth.

Learning the details of when, where and how people had died, could help bring some closure to their loved ones.

Conversely, concealing truth disempowers and demeans people – even where it does not abuse them.

This is why complete financial transparency is a non-negotiable in rebuilding healthy economies – transparency in everything from off-shore investing, to lending practices, to currency and commodity speculation, to betting against the market, to directors' bonuses.

- Second, is personal or narrative truth.

This is the truth that was heard and acknowledged as people recounted, in their own words, what they experienced and the effect it had on them.

By being heard and respected by the Commission, people felt themselves respected and heard by the Government and nation that had appointed the TRC.

This is also the truth that perpetrators were called on to offer – to acknowledge what they did in ways that recognised the human dimension of their acts, and their need of forgiveness.

I have already spoken of our need to be honest about our own shortcomings as part of greedy societies that have brought about our own downfall.

Future global economic systems must also explicitly acknowledge human truths – that some things matter more than dollars on balance sheets, that we live in a world of finite resources, and that the human consequences of economic policies and practices must always be part of the equation.

- The third truth that the TRC sought was social or 'dialogue' truth.

This was the attempt to portray a full and complex picture of the many interrelating meanings, motives and perspectives that were at work within South Africa during our darkest days.

This is the truth that the Commission sought to express in its Report.

In today's world, social, dialogue, truth reminds us that we are a single global neighbourhood, who must therefore pursue joined-up thinking and joined-up policy-making.

No person or nation, no sector of human activity, is independent of any other. Everyone and everything must take into account everyone and everything else.

More than this, social truth acknowledges our diversity, whatever its source. It acknowledges too that our differences may entail differentiated responses – especially responses that most protect the dignity and well-being of the weakest and poorest. There are rarely simple 'one-size fits all' solutions.

- Finally, the TRC sought healing and restorative truth.

This is the truth the TRC tried to promote for the future, through the processes it followed, in the way it presented its Report, and in its recommendations.

Healing and restorative truth is the acknowledgement of all that has happened in a way that opens the door to new and transformative possibilities.

How do we go about finding such truth for our world today?

### From Truth to Justice

The TRC Report reminds us that while truth precedes reconciliation, reconciliation requires not only truth telling and the admission of guilt, but some sort of justice – and that the most effective justice may not be the limiting dead-end justice of retribution.

Likewise, restorative justice requires offenders to make reparations.

Our global community needs more than apportioning blame.

We need new beginnings – and these must be built on deliberately overturning and rectifying the injustices of the past.

All of us need to ask, 'How can we be part of the solution, not part of the problem – not only for ourselves, but for the world?'

I must say that the world has high expectations of the United States.

As Scripture says, 'from those to whom much has been given, much will be required'.

Yet it is something of a tragedy that a country founded upon the ideals of the Declaration of Independence, that are enshrined within your Constitution:

- has become so entangled with the horrors of Guantanamo;
- or too often appears narrowly self-serving in its economic aspirations, foreign policy and military engagement;

- or has failed to join international efforts to combat climate change, or oppose racism, or take up so many other important causes that are promoted, rightly, through the United Nations.

Now, we have listened to the rhetoric of your new president, and we dare to hope of new beginnings, of community and partnership and neighbourliness.

We know that his first responsibility is to care for Americans – but we also believe he understands that Americans will be safe only when the whole human family lives in safety and security.

We also know that economic justice, political justice – the justice of mutual respect, of honesty in word and deed, of listening to others, of following the Golden Rule, is at the heart of a safe and secure global community.

So we pray for you, acknowledging that the road ahead is not easy, and that the burdens your country bears are very great – and yet also daring to believe that, if you and we act together, the crises of our current times can indeed become the crucible from which a new and better future is wrought.

### The Voice of Faith

Finally, let me say more about the voice of faith in public life.

It is true that the TRC was headed by an Archbishop, who openly prayed at the beginning of hearings, and on other occasions. When he was absent, often a candle was lit, and silence observed.

He and other Commissioners often used Christian language – as did many of those who came before the Commission.

This has been criticised. The Commission itself noted that the Christian community has not always given enough space or respect to other faiths, or to those of none.

But drawing on Christian principles provided a foundation on which the TRC could effectively build.

In a country where Christianity remains very strong, it gave us a language for addressing our pains, and pursuing our hopes – and much was achieved – we were blessed indeed.

Yet, as I hope I have shown, gospel-shaped principles of truth, justice, forgiveness and reconciliation are also effectively used in secular contexts.

South Africa's secularism is of course very different to America's.

Our Constitution recognises that every citizen has their own culture, language, beliefs, sexual orientation, marital status, and so forth – and it is with all these particularities that we participate in our nation's life.

In other words, while our Constitution guarantees neutrality and outlaws discrimination between all faiths and none, it does not ask us to pretend that somehow we all lose humanity's spiritual dimension whenever we step outside our private homes.

In this country, separation of state and religion happens in other ways – and perhaps we can talk about this in the question and answer session.

Yet the whole world watched while two sets of prayers were said at the President's inauguration, and as he placed his hand on the Bible while taking the oath of office.

So all Christians – and here, finally, is a lesson, a challenge, for every one of us – all Christians should use whatever opportunities are open to us, to promote gospel-shaped principles such as truth, justice, forgiveness and reconciliation

Because we know that whatever is gospel-shaped will, through the mysteries of God's love, know his grace, and the blessing of his promises.

Amen. May it be so.