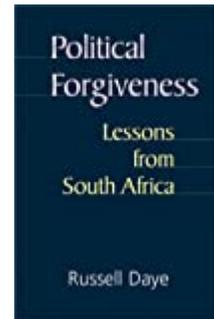




Russell Daye. *Political Forgiveness: Lessons from South Africa.* Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004. xiv +210 pp. \$25.00 (paper), ISBN 978-1-57075-490-6.



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The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC): A Case Study in Political Forgiveness

Having published my own Truth Commission book in 2002,[1] I eagerly anticipated Russell Daye's recent work, *Political Forgiveness: Lessons from South Africa*. My anticipation turned to disappointment, however, as I found few new insights about the work of the South African TRC or any practical application of the lessons learned for other nations moving through post-conflict transitions.

Based on Daye's doctoral dissertation in religious studies at Concordia University, the book focuses on political forgiveness, or what Daye alternatively calls "deep reconciliation," which was pioneered by South Africa through its Truth and Reconciliation Commission.[2] He argues that such political forgiveness is desperately needed in diverse places such as Northern Ireland and Israel. Daye chooses to develop his argument, however, primarily by citing the theorists who preceded him. He cites the dialogue between Jean Hampton and Jeffrey Murphy in *Forgiveness and Mercy* on interpersonal forgiveness.[3] He discusses Everett Worthington's five-step model, highlighting the importance of empathy for the perpetrator as a vital step towards forgiveness.[4]

He then moves on to those who have analyzed political forgiveness, or forgiveness between groups, beginning with Hannah Arendt and proceeding to contemporary Protestant theologians such as Donald W. Shriver and Miroslav Volf.[5] Daye describes Shriver's four-step process of political forgiveness, which begins with memory and a moral judgment of a wrong committed, the abandonment of vengeance, empathy for the enemy, and ends with peaceful co-existence.

What model does Daye himself see at work in South Africa? He sees something akin to a five-act drama: 1) Truth-telling; 2) Apology and the Claiming of Responsibility; 3.) Building a Transitional Justice Framework; 4) Finding Ways to Heal; and 5) Embracing Forgiveness. How is this any different from Shriver's four-step process? It is not, except for one distinction: Daye's model envisions the more ambitious goal of "deep reconciliation." Shriver is more modest in his expectations about what political communities can achieve, arguing that learning to live together in peaceful co-existence is a practical, worthy aim for divided communities. Martha Minow has also argued that peaceful coexistence, the

point “between vengeance and forgiveness,” is a laudable goal of truth commissions.[6] Daye’s addition of a fifth act that advances deep reconciliation is based on his belief that grassroots peacemaking “requires [a high] level of passion, commitment, and sacrifice [and thus] needs a more profound vision” (p.179).

In his discussion of truth telling, Daye turns to Priscilla Hayner’s definitive work on truth commissions, *Unspeakable Truths*, about the potential value of truth-telling processes.[7] He notes Hayner’s argument that assumptions that revealing the truth necessarily leads to reconciliation and that publicly telling one’s story inevitably leads to healing are untested. Nevertheless, he downplays these concerns, making truth-telling the necessary first stage of the political forgiveness model.

In his chapter on apology, Daye borrows heavily from Nicholas Tuvuchis’s *Mea Culpa: A Sociology of Apology and Reconciliation*, which describes the sequence of steps that culminates in a successful apology.[8] First is the naming of the offence, followed by an apology without defense, excuse, justification, or explanation, accompanied by an expression of regret. The injured party then responds by either accepting the apology, refusing the apology, or acknowledging it while deferring a decision on forgiveness. Daye provides some examples of proper apologies from Amnesty Committee hearings as well as apologies that were incomplete by Tuvuchis’s definition. I would reckon that only a handful of amnesty applicants passed muster by Tuvuchis’s definition, since being sorry was not a requisite for receiving amnesty.

Daye next examines the transitional justice framework. He looks at the controversial decision to grant amnesty from prosecution, citing TRC chairman Desmond Tutu’s argument that Nuremberg-style prosecutions were not possible since “neither side (the state or the liberation movements) had defeated the other and hence nobody was in a position to enforce so-called victor’s justice”(p. 83). Daye repeats the oft-made arguments for the preference of a truth commission over trials: more truth would be revealed in the process (defendants would not be hiding the truth, since amnesty would be granted for full disclosure of the truth); victims would be better served in this non-adversarial forum; and perpetrators would participate more fully. These are arguments that have been made by many others before him.[9]

In taking up the issue of restorative versus retributive justice, Daye cites Susan Jacoby, author of *Wild Justice*, who defends state-sanctioned retributive justice as a de-

terrent to both impunity and the unrestrained wild justice of the vigilante.[10] He also cites the work of Jose Zalaquett, Elizabeth Kiss, and Jennifer Llewellyn and Robert Howse, who all clearly favor restorative justice that privileges reconciliation over punishment.[11] Was amnesty morally defensible? Daye argues, “Yes, because while the retributive character of the amnesty process was quite soft, it was strong enough, combined with truth-telling, significantly to undercut impunity” (p. 123). However, he faults the government’s delaying and weakening the reparations recommended by the TRC. The ensuing imbalance between what perpetrators and victims received, with successful amnesty applicants walking away scot-free while victims waited years for minimal reparations, was unjust. Again, his point about the lack of immediate and substantial compensation for victims has been raised by many others.[12]

Healing is the subject of the next chapter. Daye relies extensively on Judith Hermann’s work, *Trauma and Recovery*, about the value of vocalizing one’s pain in order to heal one’s memories.[13] He repeats the oft-cited quote from one victim, Mr. Sikwepere, who testified at a hearing: “I feel what ... has brought ... my eyesight back is to come back here to tell the story. But I feel what has been making me sick all the time is the fact that I couldn’t tell my story. But now ... it feels like I got my sight back by coming here and telling you the story” (p. 126). Surely by now Mr. Sikwepere has become the poster child of the efficacy of speaking out at the TRC hearings. He has been cited in the TRC Final Report, and in many other accounts of the healing power of sharing one’s traumatic memories.[14] But some scholars have noted that publicly testifying may not be universally therapeutic. Not only Alcinda Honwana and Carolyn Nordstrom on Mozambique but also Rosalind Shaw and Tim Kelsall on Sierra Leone, have made the point that engaging in indigenous or religious rituals may be more valuable in promoting reconciliation than victims voicing their traumas, or perpetrators making confession.[15] Where does this leave Daye’s model?

In his chapter on the fourth act, “Embracing Forgiveness,” Daye turns to the work of two theologians, Desmond Tutu and Miroslav Volf. He examines Tutu’s understanding of the African traditional concept of *ubuntu*, and Volf’s theology of inclusion as prisms through which to view the work of the TRC. He depends upon Tutu’s own work on the TRC, *No Future without Forgiveness*, and Tutu’s major interpreter, Michael Battle, to explicate the meaning of *ubuntu*, which loosely translates as “people are people through other people.”[16] For

Tutu, *ubuntu* emphasizes the indivisibility of the community and the need to reintegrate evil doers back into that community. Likewise, the Christian doctrine of *imago Dei* (man as the image of God) means for Tutu that “they [white people] too are God’s children” (p. 163). These insights, writes Daye, “enabled Tutu to empathize with perpetrators” (p. 162). Daye is right when he says that Tutu’s views had much to do with the way hearings were conducted and the TRC’s emphasis on restorative justice.

Daye deserves credit for introducing his readers to the theology of Miroslav Volf.^[17] For Volf, the movement from exclusion to embrace include four “moments”: repentance, forgiveness, making space in oneself for the other, and the healing of memory (p. 156). Daye points out that Volf’s moments correspond with his own five acts: “Volf’s description of the first ‘moment,’ repentance, closely resembles the work of act two in my drama of forgiveness–apology and the claiming of responsibility” (p. 156). Daye finds one point made by Volf especially germane for South Africa—his call for victims to repent. Daye agrees that oppression erodes the inner life of victims, leaving them vulnerable to hatred and resentment.

My main criticism of Daye’s study is that it offers nothing new about the TRC, although one would expect that the publications after the first wave of TRC books would offer fresh insights or perspectives. Those of us working in the field of transitional justice are well versed in the work of Tavuchis, Jacoby, Hayner, and Minow. However, most scholars are probably less familiar with the theological literature on forgiveness, and Daye’s review of the work of Shriver and Volf will introduce many readers to this interesting literature. While not appealing to scholars of transitional justice, for whom Daye’s arguments are all too familiar, the book may be of interest to those who know nothing about the TRC, especially those with a strong interest in Christian theology.

Notes

[1]. Lyn S. Graybill, *Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: Miracle or Model?* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002).

[2]. Russell Daye, “Baptizing the Nation with Tears: Political Forgiveness in South Africa” (Ph.D. diss., Concordia University, 2001).

[3]. Jeffrie G. Murphy and Jean Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

[4]. Everett L. Worthington, ed. *Dimensions of For-*

giveness: Psychological Research and Theological Perspectives (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 1988).

[5]. Donald W. Shriver, *An Ethic for Enemies: Forgiveness in Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). See also Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996).

[6]. Martha Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998).

[7]. Priscilla B. Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths: Confronting State Terror and Atrocity* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

[8]. Nicholas Tavuchis, *Mea Culpa: A Sociology of Apology and Reconciliation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

[9]. Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York: Random House, 1999). Ronald C. Slye, “Amnesty, Truth, and Reconciliation: Reflections on the South African Amnesty Process,” in *Truth v. Justice: The Morality of Truth Commissions*, ed. Robert I. Rotberg and Dennis Thompson (Princeton: Princeton University, 2000).

[10]. Susan Jacoby, *Wild Justice: The Evolution of Revenge* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983).

[11]. Jose Zalaquett, “Confronting Human Rights Violations Committed by Former Governments: Principles Applicable and Political Constraints,” in *Transitional Justice: How Emerging Democracies Reckon with Former Regimes*, vol. 1, ed. Neil Kritz (Washington, D.C.: USIP, 1995); Elizabeth Kiss, “Moral Ambition within and beyond Political Constraints,” in *Truth v. Justice*; Jennifer J. Llewellyn and Robert Howse, “Institutions for Restorative Justice: The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission,” *University of Toronto Law Journal*, 49:3 (1999), pp. 355-388

[12]. See Wendy Orr, “Reparation Delayed is Healing Retarded,” and Nomfundo Walaza, “Insufficient Healing and Reparation,” in *Looking Back, Reaching Forward: Reflections on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa*, ed. Charles Villa-Vicencio and Wilhelm Verwoerd (London: Zed, 2000).

[13]. Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

[14]. *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South*

Africa Final Report (Cape Town: Juta & Co, 1998). See also Wendy Orr, *From Biko to Basson* (Saxonwold: Contra Press, 2000); Alex Boraine, *A Country Unmasked: Inside South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); and Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York: Random House, 1999).

[15]. Alcinda Honwana, "The Collective Body: Challenging Western Concepts of Trauma and Healing," *Track Two*, 8:1 (1999); Carolyn Nordstrom, *A Different Kind of War Story* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1997); Rosalind Shaw, "Rethinking Truth and Reconcilia-

tion Commissions: Lessons from Sierra Leone," USIP Special Report 130 (February 2005); Tim Kelsall, "Truth, Lies, Ritual: Preliminary Reflections on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Sierra Leone," *Human Rights Quarterly*, 17 (2005), pp. 361-391.

[16]. Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York: Random House, 1999); Michael Battle, *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1997).

[17]. Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996).

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