1999 Sydney Peace Prize Lecture

Peace through Reconciliation

Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu

CPACS Occasional Paper No. 00/1



The Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies



ISBN 1 86487 290 X
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Introduction by Professor Stuart Rees
Transcribed from audio to written format by Sheelagh Douglas and Jane Fulton
1st published in January 2000 by the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Sydney, NSW 2006, Australia.
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Introduction by Professor Stuart Rees, Director of the Sydney Peace Foundation

Welcome to the Seymour Centre and welcome to the Sydney Peace Prize Lecture for 1999. This prize attempts to raise public interest and awareness of the meaning of peace. You will get some idea of what we are struggling to achieve in terms of the titles of previous lectures: last year the title was "Peace is Freedom from Poverty"; this year the title is "Peace through Reconciliation". When the jury was deliberating about a year ago as to who would be the appropriate Peace Prize winner this year we had high on our agenda the responsibility for reconciliation in Australia with our own indigenous people. We wanted to make a connection between the inspirational thinking that had led to the design of the South African Constitution, and the even more inspirational leadership of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission by today's prize winner.

Desmond Tutu began his professional life as a teacher, then studied theology and was ordained a priest. In the 1970s in London, he was an Associate Director of the Theological Foundation for the World Council of Churches. He returned to South Africa where he became the first black Dean of Johannesburg (1975), Bishop of Lesotho (1976-1978) and the General Secretary of the South African Council for Churches (1978-1985). He was elected Archbishop of Cape Town in 1987. He won the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1984. The Prize was awarded for his leadership of South Africa's struggle for democracy and against racial oppression. In receiving the Prize he acknowledged he was receiving it on behalf of all the people in that struggle. He made particular reference to the women of South Africa.

So, it is our great honour today to welcome one of the significant fighters for social justice in the twentieth century. At a time when we are told Australia's economy is doing well, and when the major political parties wish to be as mean as possible to prospective refugees, we need some inspiration.

Your applause is an appropriate cue to give me the honour to ask Archbishop Emeritus, Nobel Laureate and 1999 Sydney Peace Prizewinner, Desmond Tutu to give the 1999 Peace Prize Lecture.

PEACE THROUGH RECONCILIATION

1999 Sydney Peace Prize Lecture by Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu

Professor Stuart Rees, all of you very, very dear friends it is a very, very great privilege to have been awarded this prestigious prize. Thank you very much for doing so Professor Rees and your Sydney Peace Foundation.

I have been speaking about peace and reconciliation and how to deal with the aftermath of conflict and repression quite a bit since our efforts at coming to terms with our often horrendous past in South Africa through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission - the TRC process. I could tell it all even in my sleep.

I don't know whether you heard the story of the very brilliant Professor of Physics who used to go around giving a brilliant lecture. It was the same lecture, fortunately not to the same audience or at the same venue. One day he said to his driver: "I know that I give a good lecture but I have been giving it so often I've got tired", and the driver said: "Oh, I have heard your lecture so often I know it off by heart". The professor said: "You can't be serious", and the driver said: "Try me". The driver gave a scintillating performance, word perfect. So they decided that they were going to swap places. The professor would become driver and the driver would become professor, with the proviso that there would be no time left over for questions.

Well the evening came and the driver-turned-professor was superb. He gave a scintillating performance. Unfortunately he did leave a little time left over and as you know there are always those people in the audience who seek to trip up the speaker. And so someone got up and asked the most convoluted question and the driver- turned-professor said: "Is that all? Even my driver there at the back can answer that question!" [laughter]

I have been struck by the responses everywhere I have told my story or rather our story [about the TRC] - in Tel-Aviv, in Dublin, in Belfast, in Mexico, in Canada, in the United States. It would seem that those who have heard the story derived hope that this perhaps could turn out to be a viable way of dealing with a legacy and aftermath of conflict and repression. So many countries are convulsed by internal civil strife - the Sudan, Angola, Sri Lanka, Burma, Northern Ireland, the Middle East. We could go on and on with a doleful

catalogue. And others must deal with the consequences of recent blood-letting and strife. Not far from your shores, East Timor is having to rebuild after its recent trauma. Other lands want to come to terms with the consequences of their histories, and the memories and myths that different groups in those lands cherish is what gives them a coherence and identity. Others nurse hurts and resentments at past incidences of injustices and discrimination, real or imagined. All want a way out of a nightmare, out of a present that is somehow less than satisfying. They are aware that things are not quite as they should be. There is a nagging feeling of discontent, of guilt, of rage. They have heard our story and having heard it wonder whether this might be a viable alternative to the other solutions that have been tried and that somehow have seemed to miss the bus.

We are celebrating the tenth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall when the so-called 'Evil Empire' disintegrated. That was in 1989. If you had asked: "But what is going to happen in South Africa?" nearly everyone would have replied that that benighted land was doomed. It was headed, as sure as anything, to the most awful disaster. It was going to be overwhelmed by the most ghastly bloodbath and the world waited with anguished, baited breath for this Armageddon. And it did seem as if the dire predictions were about to be fulfilled. Violence was so endemic in our country that when the daily statistics were announced and it was reported that six or seven people had been killed, South Africans sighed with relief: "Only six or seven people have been killed". It did indeed seem that we were on the verge of a catastrophe, but it did not happen.

Instead the same world watched in amazement and thankfulness as South Africans of all races stood for hours on end in long lines snaking their way slowly to the voting booths on 27 April 1994. The world saw a veritable miracle unfolding before its very eyes. That world exulted as it witnessed Nelson Mandela being inaugurated as the first democratically elected President of this new, this free, this democratic non-racial, non-sexist South Africa.

What a spectacular victory had been won over the awfulness of apartheid's injustice and oppression. Yes, it was a great victory but one that would have been totally impossible without the support, the love and the prayers of the international community. You have, in Australia, supported the anti-apartheid movement magnificently. Our victory is your victory. On behalf of millions at home: "Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you".

I was in this country a few years ago and I was addressing 2,000 young people at a camp and I said part of our problem is that we don't celebrate who we are. And I said to these young people: "How about giving ourselves a warm hand", and they nearly took the roof off which was wonderful. And then I said: "Well let's give God a standing ovation", and a real humdinger they produced. Without thinking I said: "Thank you". [laughter]

Some said: "Well, the bloodbath did not happen at the time of the transition, just wait until a black-led Government is in place then no doubt there will be an orgy of revenge and retribution. The blacks are surely going to vent all their resentment on the whites for all the years of oppression and exploitation they suffered." Mercifully this prediction was not fulfilled. Instead the world saw the Truth and Reconciliation Commission process where perpetrators, often of some of the most gruesome atrocities, received amnesty in exchange for the truth. We have chosen quite deliberately a costly path, the costly path of confession, of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Now, what normally happens in such post-conflict or post-repression periods? Most frequently people would choose the Nuremberg Trial option - let the perpetrators face the full rigour of the law. Basically it is a call for retribution, a call for *lex talionis*, an eye for an eye. But for us Nuremberg was not a real option. After World War II the Allies defeated the Nazis comprehensively and so could impose so called 'victors' justice'. In South Africa neither the Apartheid Government nor the liberation movements had inflicted a defeat on its adversary - there was a military stalemate. Most importantly, there is no way that the security forces would have supported a transitional process at the end of which they would have had to run the gauntlet of a judicial process.

Now as a result of the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission we know that the right wing in South Africa had stashed arms caches all over the country and we were indeed only a whisker away from the disaster so many had predicted. The security forces would have scuppered any transitional arrangement that would have meant they would have faced criminal charges. We know what a discontented military can do. Just ask the former Prime Minister of Pakistan, the latest victim of a military coup. Our judicial system already stretched to its limits could not have managed increased pressure placed on it, and our

country could not have afforded it financially nor through having to have distressing accounts of harrowing events being repeated for months on end. It would all have played havoc with a vulnerable stability. So the Nuremberg option was rejected.

In other cases the choice was a general amnesty, as happened in General Pinochet's Chile. That was rejected. Firstly, because it is morally reprehensible and repugnant for offenders to pronounce absolution over themselves - to forgive themselves for their often ghastly offences as would have happened where a general amnesty is pronounced. Secondly, general amnesty is really a kind of general amnesia, victimising the victims a second time round by saying what happened to them had not really happened or, if it had, that it really was of little consequence. Mercifully our country rejected this option of "Let bygones be bygones" because bygones do not become bygones. Unless dealt with effectively they return to haunt us. Over the entrance to the museum of the Dachau concentration camp near Nuremberg are George Santayana's haunting words: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

Our country rejected both of these extreme options and chose a third way where perpetrators of politically motivated crimes could tell all and receive amnesty. Without this provision, our peaceful, miraculous transition would not have happened. And this is an arrangement that does not encourage impunity. Quite the contrary, for only those who admit accountability are eligible for amnesty on an individual basis. They tell their story. If a gross human rights violation is their offence for which amnesty is applied - and according to the law under which we are operating, a gross human rights violation would be torture, abduction, killing and severe ill-treatment - if that was what you were applying to have amnesty for then that story had to be told in an open hearing, not behind closed doors but in the full glare of media publicity. So the applicants, the perpetrators, have in fact paid a heavy price through this public humiliation. It has often been the very first time that wives got to know that their husbands, who looked to be paragons of virtue, were people who used torture routinely, that they were members of death squads that assassinated apartheid government opponents. And in quite a few instances this has resulted in spouses leaving their husbands, which is a heavy price to pay. There is justice here even if you think only of retributive justice.

But you see our country was saying retributive justice is not the only kind of justice. There is another kind of justice - **restorative justice** - based on something that we find difficult to put into English. *Ubuntu* is the essence of being human; it speaks of compassion and generosity, of gentleness and hospitality and sharing because it says: 'my humanity is caught up in your humanity'. I am because you are. A person is a person through other persons. An offence breaks a relationship, ruptures an interconnectedness, a harmony so essential for a full human existence. *Ubuntu* does not give up on the perpetrator but sees his capacity to change for the better and so *ubuntu* seeks to heal a breach, to restore relationships, to forgive and to reconcile.

The victims have forfeited their right to sue the perpetrators for civil damages and that has been a very, very heavy price to ask people to pay. But they have in fact been willing to do so for the sake of their nation. Instead of being able to sue, victims are eligible for reparation when the nation acknowledges the wrong they have suffered. They have been able to tell their story in an official public forum, which has given them a sympathetic hearing and thereby their human dignity which, for so long trodden underfoot, has been rehabilitated. We discovered that for many, the simple act of telling their story was therapeutic, was healing. A young man blinded by police action in his township came to tell the story of that incident. At the end of the testimony, asked how he felt, he replied quietly: "You have given me back my eyes".

This process of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has delivered up much truth that had been hidden under layers of official perjury, denials and cover-ups. Now we know from the mouths of the perpetrators themselves who bombed Khotso House, headquarters of the South African Council of Churches in Johannesburg. When it happened the then Minister of Police, knowing full well that he was lying, accused the ANC [African National Congress] for the outrage and a Ms Shirley Gunn was detained without trial for several months. Now it turns out that this very Cabinet Minister had received instructions from the then State President, P. W. Botha, to render the building unusable. This is what he himself told us in his amnesty application. To his credit he did apologise handsomely to Ms Gunn.

Many activists were abducted by the security forces, killed and buried secretly. As a result of the TRC we have been able to exhume some of these secret graves. On one occasion, when the grave had been opened, a member of the family said: "Yes, that is my brother, I remember those shoes, I bought them for him". Such families have been able to experience a closure.

Forgiveness and reconciliation are not easy. They are not cheap, soft options. Most of us find it difficult to say "I am sorry" even in the privacy of our bedrooms as spouses. Imagine how much more difficult it would be to do so in public. It is also not easy to forgive. Who could find it easy, as a mother or a father, to forgive someone who said of your son: "We abducted him, gave him drugged coffee and then shot him in the head. We burnt his body and since it takes seven or eight hours for a human body to burn we had a barbecue on the side." You gasp almost at this revelation of the horrendous depravity, the capacity that we seem to have for evil. And yet that is just one part of the story, for we have witnessed some extraordinary examples of confession and forgiveness. Mrs Beth Savage is a white woman who was so severely injured in a hand grenade attack by members of a liberation movement that when she returned from hospital where she had had open heart surgery it was her children who had to bathe her, to clothe her, to feed her. And she said: "You know, even now I can't walk through the security check-point at an airport because I still have shrapnel in me and all kinds of alarms will go off." Incredibly, of the experience that has left her in this condition, she says: "It has enriched my life." It is mind blowing isn't it? And then she goes on to say: "I would like to meet the perpetrator in the spirit of forgiveness - I'd like to forgive him", and then she astounds you by adding: "and I hope he forgives me."

Then we had a hearing on the Bisho massacre when the defence force of the former homeland of Ciskei opened fire on an ANC rally challenging the 'no go' policy of Brigadier Gqozo, head of the Ciskeian homeland. The hall in which we held this hearing was packed to the rafters with those who had lost loved ones in that incident or those who had themselves been injured. The tension in the room was quite palpable. The first witness was the former head of the Ciskeian Defence Force. He riled virtually everybody, not so much by what he was saying but how he said it, so that the temperature in the room rose. And then the next set of witnesses was four former officers of the Ciskeian Defence Force, one white and three black. The white officer was the spokesperson for the group and he said: "Yes, we gave the orders for the soldiers to open fire on the demonstrators", and I can tell you that admission did nothing to diffuse the situation in the hall. Then he turned towards to the audience and said:

"Please forgive us, please accept back into the community my comrades here." Well, that highly incensed audience did a surprising thing, it broke out into deafening applause. And I said, after the clapping had subsided: "Let us keep quiet for a while for we are in the presence of something holy." Yes, often the only appropriate response to what we were privileged to witness would have been to take off our shoes since we were standing on holy ground.

South Africa experienced its transition about the same time as Russia. The Berlin Wall fell at the end of 1989 and Nelson Mandela was released from prison at the beginning of 1990. Nine years later, if we compare these countries, we have to say South Africa has experienced a remarkable stability despite serious crime and unemployment problems. Russia has been plagued by considerable upheavals: bombs exploding in Moscow; the Mafia having a free run; there is almost a revolving door for Prime Ministers; uncertainty about succession to the ailing President Boris Yeltsin. It is not in order to gloat when I say South Africa has had two very successful democratic elections and our Presidential succession of Thabo Mbeki after Nelson Mandela was so uneventful that most of the world did not pay too much attention. Those are very considerable achievements given where we have come from. We have not been reduced to the situations of Bosnia, Kosovo, Rwanda, Northern Ireland as we could so easily. We have got so far because we chose deliberately to walk the costly and difficult path of peace through reconciliation.

No one possesses a magic wand that could be waved over South Africa to reconcile those who for centuries were alienated from one another - one group being dominant, privileged, affluent and powerful, whilst the other was exploited, downtrodden, without even minimal rights in the land of their birth. You know Nelson Mandela had to wait until he was 76 years of age before he could vote for the first time in the land of this birth. I was 63, whereas a white kid of 18 enjoyed the franchise by virtue of his colour. It is impossible to transform such societies overnight into a reconciled society totally at peace with itself. But a beginning has been made. It is a very long process to which all South African must make their contribution.

Again it is salutary to compare and contrast South Africa with another land. Germany was divided into two after World War II. We are talking of people of one race, speaking one language who look alike and who had a common history until 1945. In 1989 the Berlin Wall

fell and Germany began to be united. We have heard of the resentments and frustrations that former East Germans have with their Western counterparts. We in South Africa have eleven official languages, we have blacks, we have whites, we have Indians, we have Chinese, we have coloureds. You name them and more or less we have them. If Germany has such difficulties being reconciled perhaps people will be a little more appreciative of what has been achieved in South Africa.

We have been blessed because so many in other lands such as this one have prayed for us. If a miracle had to happen anywhere, then South Africa was the best candidate, for no other country has been prayed for quite so intensely and for so long and by so many. And I doubt that a cause has evoked so much committed, passionate and enthusiastic support as has the anti-apartheid movement. It captured and held the imagination and attention in a way that no other cause that I know of has done. We are the beneficiaries of all of that so that the credit of that must at the very least be shared. And do believe me, it isn't just being conventionally nice when one seeks to express our appreciation, it is that without you we wouldn't be where we are today. And we have been singularly blessed that we had a Nelson Mandela, an icon of forgiveness, of reconciliation and magnanimity in the world, as President at a crucial period in the history of the Rainbow People of God in South Africa.

It would be the height of presumption to suggest South Africa has a paradigm for similar situations of crisis. And yet, as I said at the beginning, people in other parts of the world have seemed to derive hope for what have, up to then, appeared to be intractable situations. Perhaps the old ways have failed to deliver the goods. Retribution, resentment, revenge have left us with a world soaked in the blood of far too many of our sisters and brothers. It is a world far too riddled with conflict and blood-letting, where the vicious cycle of reprisal provoking counter reprisal, which in turn provokes its own counter reprisal, seems inexorable, defying many attempts to break it. What has happened in South Africa is giving people hope that there just might be a way out of the vicious cycle.

We stand on the eve of a new century, a new millennium and perhaps we might just devise a way that will enable us to live in peace with one another. What we are seeing is people beginning to realise that forgiveness is not some otherworldly nebulous thing to be indulged in by idealistic dreamers. No, it is being seen as very much *realpolitik*. Psychologists are

saying that to forgive is good for one's emotional and psychological health. To nurse grudges and to plan revenge are bad for one's blood pressure!

What is true for the individual seems to apply as well to communities and nations. So forgiveness and confession become currency, not considered out of place in the political arena: President George Bush apologises on behalf of the American nation for the treatment that was meted out to Japanese Americans during World War II; a German Chancellor accompanies an Israeli Prime Minister to a former concentration camp to carry out a ritual of confession and forgiveness; an earlier German President, speaking on behalf of the German nation, asked Jews to forgive the Germans for the Holocaust; President Clinton went to Goree Island in Senegal, from which slaves embarked on boats to America never to return. He too spoke words of confession, asking for forgiveness for the part that the United States played in the horror of slavery. Recently it is reported that Prime Minister Barak spoke rather sharply in connection with Israeli-Palestinian affairs. Afterwards he did something that had not been done by any of his predecessors, certainly not his immediate predecessor: he telephoned President Yassar Arafat to apologise for his acerbity.

Asking for forgiveness and perhaps receiving it changes the dynamics of a situation. It is not small people who ask for forgiveness. It is large-hearted, magnanimous, courageous people who are ready to say what are some of the most difficult words in any language: "I am sorry". But once uttered they open the way to a new opportunity, the possibility of a new beginning, a chance to start again having learnt a lesson from the past.

We once had a serious crisis in the TRC. A witness accused one of our commissioners of being implicated in a massacre in a Cape Town tavern. We had before this decided not to take further similar allegations in a police document arguing that if the police had this on their files they should have investigated and perhaps indicted this particular individual. But this time, as a result of this very public accusation, we asked President Mandela to appoint a judicial commission as a matter of urgency to investigate the allegation. The President appointed Judge Richard Goldstone who presented his report to the President with commendable speed. President Mandela, wishing to put the involved commissioner out of his misery, got in touch with him to assure him that Judge Goldstone exonerated him. I immediately got in touch with the President's secretary and asked her to tell Mr Mandela that

I believed he had breached protocol for as Chair of the Commission I should have been the first to know the contents of the judicial commission report. Within minutes of my call Nelson Mandela was on the line to say that I was quite right, he had broken the rules and he apologised profusely. That is the measure of the man's greatness. Big people are the ones who are ready to make concessions. It is the insecure who are almost always the rigid ones who do not compromise.

We have seen the power of asking for forgiveness and how potent it can be to begin the process of healing for people who have been alienated and traumatised. It is far more powerful than the aggressive, macho refusal to budge an inch. Very few victims in our experience held on to their anger and lust for revenge when they were confronted with expressions such as: "I am sorry, please forgive me."

Perhaps you in this land might do worse than take the risk of asking for forgiveness from those who have felt themselves to be victims and have been discriminated against for long in the land of their birth. As I pointed out, we were amazed too at the extraordinary effectiveness of people telling their story. Perhaps you too here might try to have a forum where people can have a safe space and where they can tell their story and know that they will receive a sympathetic hearing. And do not despise the power of even small symbols: a handshake, an acknowledgement that your adversary is actually still a fellow human being and so we should be 'oh, so very careful' about our rhetoric. Beware what you call your adversary because one day he/she might become your colleague. In South Africa a terrorist, so-called, became a most admired and revered President and those who were formally at one another's throats ended up serving together in the Government of National Unity. Your enemy is someone waiting to be a friend. Symbols can be potent. Who can ever compute the power of Mr Mandela wearing a number 6 Springbok jersey walking on the turf of Ellis Park at the 1995 World Rugby Cup final (which we won! I had to put that in. I have suffered all kinds of deaths - I was at Twickenham you know.). [laughter] That gesture did for reconciliation in South Africa what the speeches of several politicians could not have accomplished in a month of Sundays.

God has a sense of humour. Who could have thought that South Africa would be an example of anything but the most awful ghastliness? Precisely. God wants to be able to say to those

flashpoints in the world - Sudan, Kosovo, you name them - just look at this unlikely bunch:

South Africa, not even smart. Anyone having a system such as apartheid for so long cannot

be too bright. And I mean they could not even make it to first base in terms of virtue. I must

tell you, it is an old story but deserves repetition. The story of the South African who gets

upset that America and the Soviet Union are getting all the praise for the space program and

this South African announces that we in South Africa are going to launch a space probe to the

sun. And the American says: "Long before it reaches the sun it is going to be burnt to

cinders!" And the South African replied: "You think we in South Africa are stupid? We are

going to launch it at night!" [laughter]

God wants to say to those flash points in the world, just look at what happened in South

Africa. They had a nightmare called apartheid. It has ended. Your nightmare is Northern

Ireland, East Timor, Sri Lanka, Burma. Your nightmare too will end. South Africa had a

problem which so many regarded as intractable. It is being solved. Your problem too is not

intractable, it can be solved.

Give peace a chance.

Thank you.

26 November 1999

Seymour Centre

Sydney

Australia

This lecture was televised by the ABC and screened the following day on

27 November 1999 on the 'Straight Talk' Program.

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