

FOREWORD

This book provides an important corrective to the tendency among some participants in the transitional justice debate to relegate reconciliation to the status of a poor cousin of punitive justice. Reconciliation, in the cautious sense discussed in this book, is essential for a successful political transition in the aftermath of violent conflict and authoritarian rule. To reach out to your former enemies is not merely altruistic. It is central to self-interest and sustainable peace building. What dehumanizes you dehumanizes me. And the outcomes of this dehumanization are anger, resentment, greed, and revenge, which constitute a sure and certain recipe for ongoing conflict.

If a political transitional does not result in the creation of a society within which former enemies are willing and able to work together to overcome a nation's woes, it is likely to do little more than fuel the fires of the very conflict it seeks to overcome. In this sense reconciliation is the summum bonum, the most likely notion of the common good that nations are likely to experience this side of the grave.

Charles Villa-Vicencio builds his argument around "political reconciliation," providing social substance for a category that critics often dismiss as religious nonsense and political obscurantism. He suggests that reconciliation does not necessarily involve forgiveness and that former enemies and adversaries need not forgive one another in order to live together in an acceptable manner. This level of political reconciliation is, of course, an essential start to any peace process. I continue, however, to believe that we need to strive for more. This is why I chose to title my book on the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission process *No Future without Forgiveness*. Forgiveness in the fullest sense involves a change of heart and mind, which takes a special effort from all concerned and much mutual understanding. So traumatic is the hurt suffered that some are indeed never quite able to forgive. Understandable as this is, the option for forgiveness is an ideal that the world cannot afford to give up on. It is a lure that draws us increasingly forward to deeper levels of integration and healing.

For former enemies to work together in the healing of nations, there can be no justice without the level of political reconciliation described in this book. For justice to prevail, it can be neither your justice nor mine. It needs to be a form of justice that unites us. It must be “our” justice—a form of justice that reconciles our different perspectives and interests. This takes time, hard work, and the transformation of both us and our enemies. This is what reconciliation is all about. It unites “us” and “them” into “our.” To get to this point and to agree on a common understanding of justice to which we are all prepared to submit ourselves, we must engage in serious political, moral, and intellectual work. We are required to think through and understand the contours that have shaped our different views, driven us into conflict, and caused us to exploit one another. Reconciliation is a process or gradual growing into a common space that allows us to trust one another enough to work together, eventually to be friends and neighbors, and, yes, even to forgive and love one another. This is what makes this book so important. It points the way to the beginning of a process that by God’s grace can reach beyond its goal, which is “political reconciliation,” to a deeper level of forgiveness, harmony, and love. But I am now into theology, which is where this book chooses not to go!

In South Africa we opted for amnesty as a way of drawing perpetrators into the new society. We did not fully succeed in this regard. It is, at the same time, clear that we would not have succeeded in persuading the country’s former political leaders and generals in the security forces to sit down at the negotiation table if they knew they would have their day in court and be required to spend time in prison. So, on balance, I think we did the right thing. We said peace is more important than fulfilling the niceties of punitive justice. In so doing we required those who applied for amnesty to acknowledge their crimes. We traded truth for justice. The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission did not offer blanket amnesty or crass impunity, and I continue to believe that there is a place for the prosecution of those who refuse to acknowledge their complicity in evil. Sometimes it takes the imposition of punishment to bring criminals to their senses. If those guilty of gross violations of human rights do, however, seek to live a new life and contribute to transforming the country, then we need to talk with them and where necessary strike a deal. This is sometimes the only way of putting a stop to the brutality of the past, as a basis for initiating the kind of society within which hatred and revenge are replaced by respect for one another. This, in principle, was what we tried to do in South Africa. We still have a long way to go, but we have made a start.

Drawing together the insights of scholars and practitioners of political negotiations, conflict resolution, and peace building, this book reflects the importance of engaging one’s adversaries in dialogue and participatory decision making. It provides insights into the views of Western seers and scholars on the possibilities of human encounter, and, of particular importance, it in-

tegrates the wisdom of African traditions and grassroots people into Western thought patterns. In so doing it provides practical guidelines for people who have lived in conflict over many years to assist them in learning to listen to one another and speak honestly as a basis for building both trust and lasting peace. The chapter on the national conversation in South Africa provides an insightful account of the successes and failures of the dialogue leading to the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as well as the debate during the commission's process, which was at times as acrimonious as it was healing. The chapter on *ubuntu* reaches beyond the simplistic and romantic understandings of a vital African contribution to conflict transformation. The discussion on traditional African forms of justice provides important perspectives on how people in different parts of the continent have resolved conflicts over the years. These practices are discussed in a thoughtful and critical manner, probing ways in which international norms of justice and traditional African practices can enrich and complement one another in the quest to bring lasting peace to a continent torn apart by decades of colonial rule and postcolonial dictatorships.

Peace building is not an easy process. No single intervention by the United Nations, the International Criminal Court, or the African Union is enough to give Africans the cherished prize of peace and relative prosperity. The book fits into the philosophy that underlies the international Council of Elders that it is my privilege to chair. It poses vital questions concerning the need for the Court and local initiatives for justice and peace to find common ground. The international community can help bring peace to situations such as those in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, and Zimbabwe. Indeed, the United Nations, the African Union, and neighboring countries have often been far too reluctant to confront tyrants, dictators, and warmongers in such countries. Where dictators, criminals, and perpetrators fail to respond to reason, the international community needs to pressure them to do so, and where necessary they need to face the International Criminal Court's full wrath. If, conversely, political leaders are ready to comply with international human rights standards, as was the case in South Africa in the early 1990s, we need to seek a way of settling the conflict in a manner that is as mutually beneficial as possible for all concerned. This is the most likely way of making and sustaining peace between former enemies. Where offenders are not prepared to acknowledge past wrongs, as is the case with President Robert Mugabe, they need to be removed from office. They cannot have it both ways.

This does not, however, mean that the international community should be allowed to dictate the terms for local and regional peace settlements. There can be no lasting peace if local populations and their leaders feel that a peace settlement fails to take their moral and cultural values into account, or if it fails to address their priorities. International agencies and the legitimate leaders in

situations of violent conflict *both* have a role to play in peace building. This is clearly emphasized in this book.

Reconciliation is an inherent part of a holistic understanding of justice and sustainable peace. It is an essential ingredient for forging meaningful, respectful, and participatory democracy between former enemies. My prayer is that this level of peace may descend on Africa in the manner that its people so richly deserve.

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