Towards a pedagogy of hybridity, reconciliation and justice

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1.Introduction

The past eight years colleague Xolile Simon and I teach a course on reconciliation and justice in South Africa. The fifth year class, i.e. our Masters of Divinity class of this year, in line with their predecessors, posed various challenging questions. Various students who come from a variety of ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds articulated questions that suggest a plurality and clearly contradictory points of view. Some of these questions sounded more or less as follows:

Can't we forget the past and just go on? Why do some want to forget the past as if it is not important? Can't we do away with categories like perpetrators, victims (or survivors) and beneficiaries because they cause division, and it is not that easy to say who belongs where? How do I succeed in forgetting the past in a morally acceptable way?

Why do we keep on defining ourselves in terms of apartheid? Can't we define ourselves in terms of the vision of a new society, the same vision that the struggle against apartheid adhered to and that was documented in the Freedom Charter and at the launch of the United Democratic Front, and that is now to a high extent articulated in the Bill of Rights of the South African Constitution? Does the language of shame and guilt, pain and anger not betray a negative theological anthropology that expects nothing good from human beings? Does this discourse in fact not under-estimate the forgiving, transformative and renewing power of the triune God?

What is the relationship among confession of guilt, confession of faith and confession of hope? How do I get rid of the exhausting and passifying uncertainty in me and the anxiety that I unwittingly might be doing something wrong against my brothers and sisters of other ethnic groups?

For how long do we have to say sorry for wrongs that we did not commit ourselves but that our fore-parents have committed? Reparative measures are important but for how long will affirmative action discriminate against so-called beneficiaries and bereft them from the opportunity to fully actualise their potentialities to the honour of God and for the sake of the well-being of others? A few years ago a white student expressed how his was hurt by the fact that he lives very conveniently whilst some of his classmates do not always have access to food. He struggles with the reality that he was born in a relatively affluent family, and asked with urgency how he personally as a student, who benefits from the material care of his parents, can address the immense inequalities of our society.

Would it not be helpful and illuminating and even energising for current debates about the wrongs of apartheid to broaden our focus and discuss other collective wrongs, e.g. the wrongs committed by the British against white Afrikaans people during the two wars of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the collective wrongs of people against each other in other parts of Africa and the world?

Why do the wronged always have to forgive and pay the price for the fixing of problems caused by others? Is the Christian notion of forgiveness not bad news for the wronged? Does it not justify a form of sado-masochism, i.e. does it not legitimise the sadism of the perpetrator whilst it calls the wronged to a life of masochistic self-sacrifice and self-hate?

The questions of our MDiv class are the questions of broader South Africa. These questions continuously surface in our private and public discourses. And these questions, we experience, are posed by an increasing number of people in various parts of the world.

This paper suggests that we pay attention to the notion of a pedagogy of hybridity as a category that might provide some guidelines for dealing with these unavoidable questions. The meaning of the notion of hybridity in contemporary social scientific discourse is briefly analysed. In the last part of the paper some guidelines for addressing our initial questions are constructed on basis of this analysis.

2. Hybridity

Hybridity is used in contemporary social scientific discourses in the contexts of postcolonisation and globalisation.[1] The word, which literally means mixture, has its origins in the contexts of different plant species and different racial groups. It refers for instance to the mixing of races. In modern race discourses these hybrid or mixed races were viewed as the most inferior races.

A more positive use of the concept of hybridity has developed the last few decades. In racial discourses the idea of a so-called pure race without any form of hybridity is increasingly rejected. In Apartheid-South Africa the work of the historian, Hans Heese, which traced the roots of some extremist white apartheid ideologists to amongst others the Khoi-San indigenous groups, caused quite a stir, and paved the way for a revaluation of the notion of hybridity.[2]

It is especially the employment of the notion of hybridity in social scientific discourse that is of interest. Hybridity challenges certainties and essentialisms. It resists monophony and promotes the idea of polyphony. It carries the notion of liminality, which refers to an in-between state during which old certain, clearly defined identities are re-negotiated and the door is opened for the new, imaginative and surprising. Hibridity acknowledges complexity

[1] Some helpful sources on the notion of hybridity are : R Young, *Colonial desire: Hibridity in theory, culture and race* (London: Routledge, 1995); J Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and culture: global mélange* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004); Homi K Bhabha, *The location of culture* (London: Routledge, 1994). I use the notion of hybridity heuristically. It might open new imaginative possibilities in our reflections on themes like justice and reconciliation. I also use it rhetorically. It helps to make Christian convictions accessible to contemporary public life. I lastly use the concept existentially. Although all races are hybrid in nature, I belong to an ethnic group that is described as the most hybrid one!

[2] HF Heese, *Groep sonder grense: die rol en grense van die gemengde bevolking van die Kaap,* 1652 – 1795 (Pretoria: Protea Boekhuis, 2005, first edition 1984).

and ambiguity. Although there are also criticism against the notion of hybridity, amongst others that it is too theoretical and that it is employed in questionable ways, e.g. with regard to sexuaIity. I nevertheless do think that it is worthwhile to explore the constructive potential of the notion of hybridity.

Hybridity, it seems to me, does not advance a type of mixing that dissolves the entities that mix, and that brings forth a totally new uniformed entity. Hybridity rather refers to a mingling, exposure to the other, dialogue with the other, interaction with the other, participation in the life of the other, hospitality to the other, learning from the other. This exposure does not leave you unchanged. You have internalised something of the other.

Through the participation in each other's lives it becomes increasingly difficult to talk about yourself as merely Coloured or South African. Participation in the lives of my black, white and Indian brothers and in the lives of my brothers and sisters from other countries have not left me unchanged. This exposure affects me and now co-defines me. I am still a Coloured but I am also more than that. I am still South African but at the same time I am more than that.

Through sharing in the lives of my Dutch Reformed brothers and sisters my ecclesial identity has became more complex. I am still Uniting Reformed but I am also more than that. And through exposure and hospitality to other confessional traditions I have become something other, something richer than just a Reformed Christian. I am still Reformed, but I am simultaneously something more.

This "something more" applies to all the others that I mingle, commune, share with and with whom I live in a relationship of interdependency, and in whose lives I participate. These others include other genders, sexual orientations, socio-economic groupings, age groups, and also dis- or differently abled persons as well as the natural environment. And where this proximity and mingling, sharing and solidarity grow, there a life of reparative and healing forgiveness also takes shape.

3. Features of a pedagogy of hybridity

In the last part of this paper I suggest some ways in which a pedagogy of hybridity can serve processes of inclusion, reconciliation and justice. We might deal more constructively and faithfully with the challenges of reconciliation and justice on our campuses and in our societies if the following features of a pedagogy of hybridity guide and drive us. I suggest at least seven features of a pedagogy of hybridity in service of inclusion, reconciliation and justice..

3.1 Plurality

Our MDiv class discussions illuminate the plurality of voices, opinions and perspectives on challenges like reconciliation and justice. These voices are manifold and more than often contradictory. A pedagogy of hybridity accepts this plurality and deals constructively with it through exposure of views to each other, through dialogue and the search for consensus, or

even peaceful co-existence and continuous deliberations in the case of incommensurable positions.

3.2 Ambiguity

Ambiguity refers to the fact that the same phenomenon or reality can be described in different and even contradictory ways by different people and in different contexts. Ambiguity also refers to the shifting meanings of words, sentences and concepts. We more than often want to avoid ambiguity.[3] People who cannot live with ambiguity either choose for absolutism or relativism. Absolutism implies that only my interpretation, description and solution is right. Absolutism and paves the way for judgementalism, fundamentalism, even some form of anti-intellectualism or irrationality, and also the stereotyping, stigmatisation, demonisation and annihilation of the other. Relativism feeds an attitude of passivity, *acedia*, melancholy, pessimism, internal emigration and nihilism.

In our reconciliation and justice discourses we witness how either one of these two, absolutism and relativism, are the more popular options. To travel on the road of ambiguity asks for wisdom, courage and patience. It also asks for the ability to communicate very sophisticated positions in clear and intellectually accessible ways. Ambiguity should not be confused with unclarity and vagueness.[4]

3.3 Complexity

The students in our class also pleaded that we investigate the lessons that South Africans can learn from the quests for reconciliation, justice and transformation in other post-liberation contexts like amongst others the post South African War period, the post Second World War period in Germany, the post- civil rights struggle context in the United States etc.. This broader focus will shed more light on our own struggle. Thorough historical analyses and cross-national analyses of our own and other quests for reconciliation and justice will help us to describe our own challenges in a more nuanced way. It will also help us to find strength and hope from others who also struggle hard to actualise this good society of unity and reconciliation, justice and peace. Moreover, it helps to develop the right emotional orientation and sensitivity for our local challenges. It might free us from both over-sensitivity and un-sensitivity that form stumbling-blocks in the road to peace.

3.4 Duality

To address the challenging questions regarding reconciliation and justice we also need to live with duality. Thereby I mean the capacity to live with the notion of both and, and not only

[3] For a discussion of our resistance to ambiguity see Donald N Levine, *The flight from ambiguity: essays in social and cultural theory* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1985).

[4] For one of the best discussions of the notions of plurality and ambiguity see D Tracy, *Plurality and ambiguity: hermeneutics, religion, hope* (Chicago: Chicago University Press,1994/1984).

with the more famous either or. We need to say yes to more than one thing simultaneously, even though it might look as if these things contradict each other.

Take the question whether we should talk about the past as an example. Should we still continue to talk about the past. Yes! Yes, because if we do not talk about the past the undealt anger and pain, shame and guilt will keep on haunting us. Should we stop talking about the past? Yes, because if we do not stop talking about the past we might keep each other trapped in the past and foreclose the wonderful prospect of journeying together and energetically into the future.

Or take another question: Do we need to refer to each other in colour categories? Yes, we need to do this for the sake of trying to do some reparation for wrongs that were done along colour lines for centuries, on condition that this is a fairly applied and interim arrangement, and as long as we also address other categories of injustices like those pertaining to gender, class, disability, age and the environment. Do we need to stop referring to each other in colour categories? Yes, we need to avoid racial categorisation for the sake of working together to actualise the vision of a non-racial South Africa!

A pedagogy of hybridity teaches us to live simultaneously with more than one yes to contradictory questions.

3.5 Paradoxality

Church Reformers like Martin Luther formulated the paradoxical nature of human anthropology. We are simultaneously sinners and justified ones. This paradox, this apparent but not real contradiction, permeates human existence. Faithful servants of reconciliation and justice learn to live with the tension of paradoxality. Last year the first black.Coloured rector of the Free State University wrote about his positive experiences at the rugby test match between South Africa and New Zealand in Bloemfontein. A Sotho person sang traditional Afrikaans folksongs. The mainly white spectators loudly supported the brilliant black Springbok prop forward. Earlier at a soccer match that he had attended, the main hero of the mainly black spectators was a white player of the South African national soccer team. After reading this I watched the next rugby test a week later at the reunion function of University residence Huis Visser where I am warden. A few hundred former residents of Huis Visser watched the match in a tent on a big screen. They jointly sang South Africa's national anthem. They sang the non-Afrikaans part just as loud and enthusiastically as the Afrikaans part. They knew all the non-Afrikaans words. I was energised. To think that these men, of whom some are in their eighties, sang the new anthem of a new society on the same grounds where they sang the anthem of apartheid South Africa for many decades. One of them even shouted out: we should have recorded this on video!

With these experiences of hope in my mind and heart I attended the celebration of a friend's fiftieth birthday later that evening. While we stood in line for food one of the guests told me that he cannot support the Springbok rugby team. He explained that at the test match in Bloemfontien – i.e. the one that filled Jansen and me with hope for reconciliation and justice, - a few white supporters insulted coloured supporters who were wearing Springbok support

jerseys. They told these coloured people that they were wearing the jerseys that actually belong to white people.

The same country, the same rugby stadium, seemingly contradictory experiences. To serve reconciliation and justice we need to hold on to both. We cannot absolutise one of the two only. We need to say yes, there are good things happening in South Africa - otherwise we will become discouraged, melancholic and apathetic and *acedic* and unfaithful to our god-given calling. And we need to say yes, there are still bad things happening in South Africa – otherwise we will become unrealistic and naive, and we will be unsensitive to the pain and anger in our society. With this paradoxality we need to live.[5]

3.6 Proximity

A pedagogy of hybridity also advances the notion of proximity amongst people. The logic of the three articles of the Belhar Confession is that visible, concrete, experienced unity, where people develop sympathy, empathy, interpathy and solidarity (article 1), stands in service of reconciliation (article 2) and justice (article 3). Reconciliation and justice grow where people do not live outside of hearing distance[6], but where we hear each other, see each other, feel each other, participate and share in each other's lives, in our joys and sorrows, in our guilt and shame, in our anger and pain.

3.7 Absurdity

The last feature of a pedagogy of hibridity has to do with a logic that seems to be absurd, ridiculous and foolish. For reconciliation and justice to materialise we need forgiveness. Forgiveness opens the door for recognition of guilt, contrition, remorse, confession of guilt in the face of overwhelming forgiving love, confession of faith which accepts forgiveness, confession of hope which says yes to a new life of sanctification and restitution. In the light of this logic Archbishop emeritus Desmond Tutu calls his famous book *No future without forgiveness*.[7]

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[5] Dirkie Smit recently demonstrated the complex and paradoxical nature of our contemporary *Zeitgeist*. In a lecture on the future of systematic theology he argued that our *Zeitgeist* is one that is simultaneously becoming both more secular and more religious, both anti-foundational and fundamental, both positive about globalisation and negative about it. See D Smit, *Quo Vadis, Sistematiese Teologie?* Paper read on the 10th of June in the Faculty of theology, University of Stellenbosch, at conference with the theme *Quo Vadis, Teologie*?, to celebrate the 30th birthday of *Scriptura: International Journal of Bible, Religion and Theology in Southern Africa.*

[6] In the apartheid era South African philosopher and public intellectual, Willie Esterhuyse, wrote a book to describe the distance, separation and alienation amongst South Africans. See WP Esterhuyse, *Broers buite hoorafstand: skeiding van die kerklike weë* (Kaapstad: Tafelberg, 1989).

[7] See D Tutu, *No future without forgiveness* (London: Rider, 1999). For a very helpful explication of this logic see D Smit, Confession – guilt – truth – and forgiveness in the Christian tradition, in E Conradie (ed) *Essays in Public Theology* (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2007).

South Africans are continuously surprised by private and public experiences of this absurd love, this forgiving love. This love is embodied in the life and person of Nelson Mandela. This absurd, forgiving love was experienced at the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Manifestations of this love granted South Africa the wonder of a transition to democracy without civil war. The sustainability of our peace is dependent upon our commitment not to make this forgiveness cheap. We live with the hope and expectation that the wonder of a love that forgives will open the gates to a responding love that repents and repairs, a love that heals the brokenness and that rights the wrongs.

5. Conclusion

This pedagogy of hybridity is a pedagogy of hope. It does not only have relevance for classes dealing directly with the theme of inclusion, justice and reconciliation. It might have healing implications and relevance for all of campus life, including the spheres of academic work, academic support, academic residences, social life, cultural life, sport, free time, amongst others. The pedagogy of hybridity might bring hope to broader societies in their struggles with exclusion, enmity and injustice.