A wonderful example of the nobility to which the human spirit can rise came from the Eastern Cape. One of the liberation movements, the Pan Africanist Congress, through its armed wing, the Azanian People’s Liberation Army (APLA), decided to intensify its armed struggle by declaring 1993 as the "Year of the Great Storm" even though meaningful negotiations had already begun. In this atmosphere, an early target was King William’s Town golf club in November 1992, during a wine-tasting party. Four people were killed. Ms. Beth Savage was among those badly injured. She underwent open-heart surgery and remained in an intensive-care unit for several months. When she was finally discharged she was still so badly disabled that her children bathed her, clothed her, fed her, helping her to do those things that you and I take very much for granted. Her parents found it particularly baffling because they had been quite scrupulous in bringing up their family to respect everyone regardless of race or status. In the South Africa of those days that was a courageous thing to do, and they could not understand how a child brought up in a family that opposed apartheid and all its madness should end up being targeted by the very people whose lot they were striving to improve. They were unable to accept that the attack was arbitrary and random—any and every white person would be a target since in the kind of gathering that was being celebrated in the clubhouse there was no way for anyone to differentiate between the white person who supported the system and one who did not.

Beth Savage told us she thought her father died of a broken heart. She said that even at the time of the hearing in 1996 she could not go through the security checkpoint at an airport. All sorts of alarms and lights would flash because she still had shrapnel embedded in her body. What she said of the experience which had left her in this condition was quite staggering and unbelievable:

"All in all, what I must say is, through the trauma of it all, I honestly feel richer. I think it's been a really enriching experience for me and a growing curve, and I think it's given me the ability to relate to other people who may be going through trauma."

She said it had enriched her life! Now that, for my money, is breathtaking and shows once again that we are blessed with some remarkable people. If that was all she had said it would still have stood out as a most noteworthy comment. But then she went on to say, when asked how she felt about amnesty for the perpetrator:

"It's not important to me, but, and I've said this to many people, what I would really, really like is, I would like to meet that man that threw that grenade in an attitude of forgiveness and hope that he could forgive me too for whatever reason. But I would very much like to meet him."

That ought to leave people quite speechless with the wonder of it all and make you want to be still in the presence of something so sublime, filled to overflowing with a sense of deep thankfulness that nearly all the victims, black and white, possessed this marvelous magnanimity. It did seem to augur well for our country.

At this same East London hearing we listened to the testimony of the widows of the Cradock Four and the daughter of one of them, Ms. Babalwa Mhlauli. Babalwa means "the blessed one" and what she said at the hearing was indeed to bring the grace of blessing to those who heard her words. These four men were dedicated to work for a new and just dispensation in their rural communities which, as was usual, suffered even more severely from the depredations of apartheid than their urban counterparts. (Though you could hardly convince urban dwellers of this: they all believed that their existence was sheer hell.) The four had all been frequently detained, tortured, threatened, and harassed by the Security Police before their abduction and killing.

Nomonde Calata, wife of Fort, one of the victims, testified at our first hearing:
"During the time when the [Eastern Province] Herald was being delivered, I looked at the headlines. And one of my children said: 'Mother, look here, the car belonging to my father is burnt.' At that moment I was trembling because I was afraid of what might have happened to my husband. . . . Nyami [Goniwe] was always supportive, I was still twenty at the time and I couldn't handle this. So I was taken to Nyami's place and when I got there Nyami was crying terribly. . . .

At this point in her evidence Mrs. Calata broke down with a piercing wail. In many ways her cry was the defining sound of the TRC—as a place where people could come to cry, to open their hearts, to expose the anguish that had remained locked up for so long, unacknowledged, ignored, and denied. I adjourned the proceedings so that she could recover her composure and when we restarted, I led the gathering in singing "Senzenina [What Have We Done?]."

Mrs. Nombuyiselo Mhlauli described what they had done to Sicelo, her husband and Babalwa's father:

"I read the post-mortem documents. . . . In the upper abdomen were twenty-five wounds. These wounds indicated that different weapons were used to stab him, or a group of people stabbed him. Now in the lower part he also had wounds but the wounds in total were forty-three. One other thing that we understood, they poured acid on his face. After that they chopped off his right hand below the wrist, I don't know what they did with that hand."

In fact, the hand was preserved in alcohol at police headquarters in Port Elizabeth. Detainees were intimidated with it—"the baboon's hand," as the police called it. They were told that and worse could be their fate if they did not cooperate with the police and make statements.

Babalwa knew all this. She lived through all the harassment and humiliation that her mother suffered at the hands of the Security Police. She told her story as the child of an activist, what it meant in the warm support and affirmation of the township community and having to run the gauntlet of police activity.

When she had finished telling her story, she said she wanted to know who had killed her father. She spoke quietly and, for someone so young, with much maturity and dignity. You could have heard a pin drop in that hushed City Hall when she said, "We do want to forgive but we don't know whom to forgive."

At that time the identity of the perpetrators was still unknown. The apartheid government had held inquests and inquiries and appointed a judicial commission to try to get to the bottom of this gruesome episode. The police turned these into a sham by perjuring themselves until they were blue in the face. The truth was eventually to surface only when the perpetrators took advantage of the amnesty process. In their applications they disclosed the ghastly truth that it was the police who murdered the Cradock Four.

In September 1992, what came to be known as the Bisho massacre happened. Bisho was in the Eastern Cape, the capital of the "independent" homeland of Ciskei ruled by Brigadier Oupa Gqozo. At first he was friendly toward the ANC but relations soured, especially when he decreed the Ciskei a virtual "no go" area for the party. The ANC decided to stage a march on Bisho to highlight its campaign for free political activity in all the homelands and particularly Ciskei, Bophuthatswana, and KwaZulu. (These and other homelands were established under apartheid's "divide and rule" master plan, which sought to strip all black South Africans of their citizenship and make them citizens of a patchwork quilt of ethnically based Bantustans scattered around South Africa. KwaZulu resisted government efforts to make it take "independence" but the leaders of all three felt threatened by the ANC.)

Thirty people died as a result of what happened on the day when the ANC marched for free political activity and Ciskeian
Defense Force soldiers fired on unarmed demonstrators. Twenty-eight protesters died in the immediate aftermath of the shootings, together with a CDF soldier shot by his colleagues. Another ANC supporter died from his injuries in 1995.

The commission held two hearings on the Bisho massacre, the first of which took place in Bisho itself, not far from the scene of the massacre. The hall in which we met was packed to the rafters with those who had either been injured in the incident or had lost loved ones, as well as those who had participated in the doomed march. The tension in the room was palpable. Some high-profile ANC leaders were going to testify. They had been in the march—Cyril Ramaphosa, at the time secretary-general of the ANC and then chairperson of the Constituent Assembly that gave us our much-admired Constitution, and Ronnie Kasrils, now Deputy Minister of Defense.

One of the first witnesses was the former head of the CDF, Major General Marius Oelschig, who incensed the audience not so much by what he said as by how he said it. It may have been that he was carrying himself as a soldier, with his feelings very much under control. This may be how soldiers should conduct themselves, but when people have been traumatized and their feelings are raw, such an attitude comes across as hard, unsympathetic, and cynical. The temperature had gone up a few degrees by the time he finished testifying.

The next witnesses were former CDF officers, one white and the others black. The white officer, Colonel Horst Schobesberger, was their spokesperson. He said that it was true that they had given the orders for the soldiers to open fire. The tension became so thick you could, as they say, cut it with a knife. The audience could not have been more hostile. Then he turned toward the audience and made an extraordinary appeal:

"I say we are sorry. I say the burden of the Bisho massacre will be on our shoulders for the rest of our lives. We cannot wish it away. It happened. But please, I ask specifically the victims not to forget, I cannot ask this, but to forgive us, to get the soldiers back into the community, to accept them fully, to try to understand also the pressure they were under then. This is all I can do. I'm sorry, this I can say, I'm sorry."

That crowd, which had been close to lynching them, did something quite unexpected. It broke out into thunderous applause! Unbelievable! The mood change was startling. The colonel's colleagues joined him in apologizing and when the applause died down I said:

"Can we just keep a moment's silence, please, because we are dealing with things that are very, very deep. It isn't easy, as we all know, to ask for forgiveness and it's also not easy to forgive, but we are people who know that when someone cannot be forgiven there is no future. If a husband and wife quarrel and they don't one of them say 'I am sorry' and the other says 'I forgive,' the relationship is in jeopardy. We have been given an example by our President and by many other people."

No one could have predicted that day's turn of events at the hearing. It was as if someone had waved a special magic wand which transformed anger and tension into this display of communal forgiveness and acceptance of erstwhile perpetrators. We could only be humbled by it all and be deeply thankful that so-called ordinary people could be so generous and gracious.

A few days before Christmas 1985, South African forces raided Maseru, the capital of the landlocked mountain kingdom of Lesotho. Nine people were killed in the raid. Four days later a limpet mine placed in a shopping complex in the KwaZulu/Natal coastal town of Amanzimtoti killed five upcountry holiday makers doing their Christmas shopping. The young ANC activist, Sibusiso Andrew Zondo, aged nineteen, maintained it was in retaliation for the raid on
"There were also plans to contaminate medication used by President Mandela at Pollsmoor [Prison] with the untraceable, heavy metal poison Thallium. In a conversation with [another researcher] Andre Immelman shortly after Nelson Mandela's release . . . he was very confident that Nelson Mandela's brain function would be impaired, progressively, for some time."

Thank God they were so incompetent. Our country owes its survival very largely to Mr. Mandela for being such a passionate advocate of forgiveness and reconciliation.

I had received an invitation to preach at a posh white Dutch Reformed Church in Lynnwood, Pretoria, the weekend after the CBW hearings. This was the parish church of some of the members of the former government. It was an important, prestigious congregation and my second foray, as it were, into that particular lion's den.

Until fairly recently the white Dutch Reformed Church (Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk) had been steadfast in its support of apartheid. It had provided the theological rationale for apartheid and had even preceded the politicians by proposing certain legislation to effect the God-sanctioned separation of the races. The stories of the Tower of Babel and the subsequent dispersal of the races, which were unable to communicate because they could not understand one another's languages, and the curse of Ham were also used to put the natives properly in their place. It was odd exegesis to use punishment for human sin, in the case of the story of the Tower of Babel, to reveal the divine will, ignoring the fact that the story of the first Christian Pentecost, recorded in Chapter 2 of the Acts of the Apostles, was seen in the Church as a dramatic reversal of all that had happened at the Tower of Babel. Most churches had condemned apartheid as a heresy, whereas the DRC harassed and declared to be heretics those of its members who criticized its stance—among whom were outstanding people such as Dr. Beyers Naude, who succeeded me as general secretary of the SACC.

But then this Church that had upheld apartheid theologically for so long abandoned this position. It invited those it had previously persecuted, those who had witnessed prophetically, to its General Synod and apologized handsomely and publicly for all it had made them suffer. It was wonderful to see God's stalwarts such as Beyers Naude being publicly vindicated and rehabilitated. You felt at such moments that there is a great deal of goodness in the world and that God is truly good. Very few churches have been as forthright in acknowledging the error of their ways. My own church, the Anglican Church, was always opposed to apartheid in its formulations and in many of its conferences and synod resolutions, yet it lived out an apartheid form of existence. Of course South Africa was racially segregated, so it would have been difficult to have nonracial parishes, but my Church was painfully slow to acknowledge that it was living a lie at variance with its pronouncements. Many white parishioners opposed receiving Holy Communion alongside their domestic workers although apartheid did not prohibit it. The first black Anglican bishop was appointed only in 1960, more than a century after the establishment of the church. It was no government decree that made the Church pay different stipends to its clergy according to race, with white clergy being paid a great deal more than their black counterparts. So we Anglicans can't be smug and gloat over the Dutch Reformed Church.

I was feeling tense and apprehensive as I prepared to go to Pretoria because many in the white community, especially Afrikaners, had regarded me as an ogre, barely Christian, and they wondered whether I was not now presiding over a witch hunt against Afrikaners. I received a very warm welcome, however, in a church that was quite full. The music was superb. A group of children processed in with symbolic candles. My text was Romans 5:8, my special favorite: "Whilst we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." I preached my only sermon—that God loves us freely as an act of
grace, that we do not have to impress God in order for God to love us as a reward.

And then I said that Afrikaners imagined that they had only two options in South Africa’s political, social, and community life—either to be top dog, domineering, or to be underdog, subservient, the doormat of others. I said there was an exciting third option, that of embracing the new dispensation enthusiastically and using their enormous resources in money, skills, and experience to help make the new ordering of society succeed for everyone’s sake.

I told them I had been devastated by the revelations at the CBW hearing and prayed that there might arise leaders in the white community, specifically in the Afrikaner community, who would help us to come to terms with all of this and who would unequivocally apologize without trying to be too clever by half and qualify their apology out of existence. It was an electric moment. A few people in the congregation, it appeared, were weeping and one of the "dominees" or pastors, Ockie Raubenheimer, came to stand next to me in the pulpit. His eyes were filled with tears as he spoke, sobbing. He said he had been an army chaplain for thirty years and had not known that such things were being planned or done. In a broken voice he asked me for forgiveness and, as we embraced in the pulpit of that church, the congregation gave us a standing ovation.

God has done some strange things in the history of our land. That was one of the more unusual. That it should have happened in a Pretoria suburb in a Dutch Reformed church made it particularly poignant. It was something approaching a white Southern Baptist in the deep South apologizing for Jim Crow segregation in his church when a black was preaching, or the former Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Netanyahu, going to the West Bank and apologizing for Jewish settlements among the Palestinians. There really was hope for our common motherland. Only the most cynical would have remained unmoved. This was one other example of the extraordinary reconciliation that God was accomplishing through the work of the commission.
Like the Curate's Egg—Good in Parts

Quite unexpected and truly beautiful acts have occurred because of our commission. At one of our Human Rights Violations Committee hearings in Port Elizabeth, Ms. Ivy Gcina described the kindness of her white wardress, Ms. Irene Crouse:

"The same night I saw a light at night and my cell was opened. I did not see who was opening my cell. I did not look at the person. She said to me, Ivy, it is me. I am Sergeant Crouse. I have fetched your medicine.' She rubbed me. She made me take my medicine. I told her that I could not even hold anything but I can try. I told her I was going to try by all means. She said, It is fine, do not worry yourself. I will help you.' So she made me take the medicine and then she massaged me. Then after that I could at least try and sleep."

A few days later the local newspaper, the Eastern Province Herald, carried a large front-page picture of Ivy Gcina hugging Irene Crouse, accompanied by the following report:

Tortured activist Ivy Gcina was yesterday reunited with her Angel of Mercy—the kind jailer who held her hand and tended her wounds after hours of brutal interrogation by security police. "I never thought you'd remember me," said Irene, 37, as the two women threw their arms around each other on the stoep, crying and laughing at the same time. Ivy, 59, replied: "But after I was assaulted it was you who was there to help me, who entered my cell at night. Can you ever forget someone like that?

'We met as human beings, as women," Ivy recalled. "There was such communication there. Ensuring I had a clean towel, asking me how I was. The relationship was so good." Irene felt she was "only doing her duty" when she helped Ivy.

It would be less than honest and entirely counterproductive to pretend that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was perfect or that it was serviced by people who were infallible. That was patently not the case.

We were in some respects flawed, mere mortals with some gifts and some faults, like other human beings. No one could have accused us of being paragons of virtue. To our chagrin and considerable frustration, we were anything but. It is an entirely unprofound observation to note that the commission was so like the celebrated curate's egg—good in parts. There were splendid things about the commission and it has notable achievements to its credit, but there were, alas, things we might have done differently, and things we might have done a great deal better. But that is in the nature of things. We were traversing uncharted waters and often having to improvise as we went along. It is to the credit of all who were part of our process that so much was achieved.

For me, one of the greatest weaknesses in the commission was the fact that we failed to attract the bulk of the white community to participate enthusiastically in the process. It might very well be because of faults on our side. It certainly was one on the side of our white compatriots. It paralleled the way in which, on the whole, they have refused to embrace the new dispensation wholeheartedly. They have spent far too much time, in my view, whining, being quick to find fault and gloating shortsightedly at the imagined and real shortcomings of those at the helm nowadays. They are filled with far too much resentment at the fact that they have lost some
political power. The trouble is that they have believed that there are only two possible positions in any sociopolitical setup. You are either the top dog or you are the underdog. There is no place in this kind of scenario for participatory, shared power.

White South Africans, tragically, have no white leader—for it has to be one of themselves ethnically—of any substance who could say to them: "Hey, fellow whites, wake up! You may indeed have lost political power, if you mean exclusive political control, but you have a heck of a lot of power still at your disposal. You have the bulk of economic power; you have lost little of your money; you have not been kicked out of your beautiful homes; you don't live in shacks. You have a great deal of power deriving from the superior education you received, which was a great deal better than that of blacks. You can embrace the new dispensation enthusiastically and make available your considerable skills, your resources, your money, to make this thing work. We have been very, very fortunate. Let us invest all we have to make this thing succeed, otherwise one day the blacks will really get angry that political change has brought no change for them materially and there will not be a Mandela to help control them. Then we will have had it. It is in our best interests that this whole enterprise succeed. Without our cooperation it will fail dismally and we will go down with the sinking Titanic."

Despite our sustained efforts we were also unable to gain the committed participation of the Inkatha Freedom Party. We really did try. Their official participation was lukewarm at best. Far more frequently it bristled with hostility. They officially said their members should approach the TRC only after we pointed out to Chief Buthelezi that ordinary members of his organization would not qualify for reparations paid from the President's Fund unless they first testified to the Human Rights Violations Committee, which would then determine whether they were victims as defined in the law. If they did, they would be passed on to the Reparations and Rehabilitation Committee to recommend the precise reparations for which they were eligible. We were then confronted with an avalanche of last-minute applications to deal with in a very short space of time. Some victims could be referred to the Reparations and Rehabilitation Committee directly by the Amnesty Committee, but the vast majority came normally through the Human Rights Violations Committee.

There were also weaknesses in the reparation and rehabilitation process. First there was our distress at the fact that successful amnesty applicants walked free immediately, while victims had still not received final reparations nearly a year after the report was presented—a concern to which I have already referred. I have also said how many victims regarded appearing before the commission as a turning point, something that enabled them to achieve a measure of closure. But there were critics, among them members of our own staff, who were upset that we were unable to provide long-term counseling and support. We of course had our briefers, who provided far more support and sympathetic assistance than is usually available to, for instance, victims who testify in the criminal courts. But it is possible that there were people who, because they reopened their wounds before us and did not receive sufficient professional help to deal with the anguish, went away more traumatized than before. The difficulty we had was that our legal mandate was to research and make recommendations to the government on rehabilitation and reparations measures, not to implement them. As a result, we were unable to secure State funding to provide those who came to the commission with more extensive psychological and other forms of counseling and support than the briefers could provide. We are deeply indebted to NGOs and faith communities, who have tried to step into this yawning breach. But it would have been so much better had this important service been an integral part of the therapeutic process of the commission. And of course those who appeared at public hearings constituted no more than a representative cross-section of victims who came to the commission—about one in ten testified. In the final analysis, it will be up to government and civil society to respond to our recommendations with rehabilitation and reparations programs that take care of the interests of all victims.
Although the commission and the Amnesty Committee usually worked together well, there were sometimes difficulties. When our governing act was drafted, the National Party feared that the commission would be biased against the old dispensation. So it ensured that the Amnesty Committee would be headed by a judge and that its decisions on amnesty could not be reviewed by the rest of the commission. Thus this committee had very considerable autonomy. Its decisions could be reviewed and set aside only by a court of law. In the middle of the hearing on the Mandela United Football Club and Mrs. Winnie Madikizela-Mandela we received word that thirty-seven ANC leaders had been given amnesty. They had a very commendable motive for having applied—they wanted to demonstrate that they took collective responsibility for the actions of their cadres. Unfortunately, there was no provision in the law for this kind of corporate amnesty where no specific crimes had been itemized. Even those of us who were not lawyers raised our eyebrows at the committee's decision. But our hands were tied. All we were able to do was to challenge the decision by taking our own committee to court. We tried to negotiate an agreed settlement with the ANC to avoid protracted litigation. The Nationalists knew we were engaged in this process, but they were eager to score political points and went to court before our matter could be heard. Eventually both our and the National Party's applications were heard on the same day and the committee's decision was set aside. I was disgusted with the unprincipled action of this party, which went on to trumpet its success as what had goaded us into action, knowing full well that the truth was otherwise. We never heard the end of what was claimed to be yet another demonstration of the commission's bias toward the ANC. I am relieved that I am not smart enough to be a politician. Some people would not recognize integrity even if it was staring them in the face.

One of the successes of the commission was that many members of the old regime's police force came forward to apply for amnesty and reveal what they had done. Much of the truth that we were able to uncover came from the mouths of the perpetrators. They provided a massive rebuttal to the criticism that most of what was being publicized was the untested allegations and accusations of those who testified in our victim-oriented hearings. What those who testified in the victim hearings said was nowhere near as startling as the shocking details that the amnesty hearings revealed about the kind of atrocities that were perpetrated routinely. A mother might say that her son was changed physically after detention, that he became confined to a wheelchair, that his hair had fallen out, and that he had later disappeared without a trace. She might speculate that perhaps the security forces were somehow involved. The police, who knew the truth all the while, might win a court interdict stopping her from naming them in her testimony. But in the end it was not she who revealed what had actually befallen her child. It was the culprits themselves when they applied for amnesty, the very same people who had deliberately lied in court to obtain their interdict. No one ever admitted to the poisoning of her son in detention. But those responsible for killing him confessed and disclosed the sickening details—that they had abducted her son, Siphiwe Mtikulu, they had drugged his coffee and had then shot him in the head and burned his body. It took six hours for his body to burn, in order that the flesh at the top of the thighs might be rendered to ashes, and they took it in turns to stoke the fire to keep it going. They then collected the cremated remains and scattered them on the nearby Fish River. They told the commission this. Up to that point they had maintained their conspiracy of silence at inquiries into the disappearance of Mtikulu. And they had done this under oath. Senior police had subverted the very rule of law they were meant to uphold by blatantly perjuring themselves. In the commission the perpetrator had to make a full disclosure to qualify for amnesty, whereas in court he tried to defend his innocence by lying.

We were fortunate that many police came seeking amnesty but very sadly a weakness of the TRC was the fact that the military, the old South African Defense Force (SADF), hardly cooperated with
the commission at all. It left a considerable lacuna that we did not have many more from the military to testify. The major figures who did apply for amnesty were forced into it by applications from policemen who were involved with them in joint operations. There is much truth that the nation would still want to know if our healing and reconciliation are to be lasting and effective.

The Total Strategy

The SADF was part of the "total strategy" that Mr. P. W. Botha devised to respond to what he and the military establishment designated the revolutionary "total onslaught" of Communism, when South Africa was effectively ruled by the State Security Council. This was a body that was in law subordinate to the Cabinet but in actual fact the country was ruled really by what we called in South Africa the "securocrats," who dominated government thinking in those days. Our country was placed almost on a war footing as we moved into the 1980s. Already not celebrated for our respect for the rule of law and human rights, we experienced a further erosion in our rights. From then on it would be unpatriotic to call in question the decisions of the government, which were really the decisions of the State Security Council. Everything was subordinated to the security of the state as determined by those in power. It made white South Africans feel that there was a bad world out there, eager to get them, to destroy their "South African way of life." This hostile world wanted to overthrow a Christian government and replace it with an ungodly, atheistic, undemocratic, Communist dictatorship. The apartheid government as propaganda machine was adept at pointing out the disasters that had befallen countries to the north of us in Africa that had adopted socialism—basically they had come to a sticky end because these unreliable, feckless blacks had taken over.

This was a time when the superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, waged the Cold War. They did this in all kinds of ways but especially through surrogate client states in different war zones, where they sought to flex their muscles and establish their hegemony. This was the era when the United States enthusiastically supported any government however shabby its human rights record as long as it declared itself to be anti-Communist. Thus the apartheid government benefited hugely from President Ronald Reagan's notorious "constructive engagement" policy. The United States paid lip service to anti-apartheid sentiments, saying that maintaining relations with such wayward governments as the apartheid regime provided a better chance of influencing them to change for the better than isolating and ostracizing them.

I tried without any success to persuade President Reagan and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher of Britain to change and adopt a peaceful strategy to bring about change in South Africa through imposing economic sanctions. I met with President Reagan and his Cabinet at the White House soon after being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984 but to no avail. He was a bit shocked when I showed him my travel document, because I was not allowed a regular South African passport. What shocked him was how they described my nationality in that document: "Undeterminable at present." I had tea with Prime Minister Thatcher. We spent nearly an hour together at 10 Downing Street and she oozed oodles of charm. I was really quite impressed with just how charming she was in contrast to her image as the Iron Lady who had zero tolerance for the weak. But I failed to get her to see the importance of sanctions. As was to be said of her about other things, "The lady was not for turning." Mercifully the people in both countries eventually heeded our pleas, some sanctions were imposed, especially by the United States, and they contributed very substantially to the demise of apartheid.

The Reagan administration funded the Contras in Nicaragua to subvert the Sandinista liberation movement. They supported President Ferdinand Marcos and his repressive regime in the Philippines
I was thus somewhat apprehensive about going there again in January 1999, when I was to preach at an Anglican church on the West Bank, speak to a group in Jerusalem, and attend a meeting in Tel Aviv of the Peres Peace Center, on whose board of directors I serve. But I need not have worried. Our hosts at the meeting in Jerusalem had to turn people away. It was clear everywhere we went that what had occurred in South Africa fascinated people greatly. Shimon Peres, the former Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, and Nobel Peace laureate, hailed our reconciliation process as something unique in history.

In the Jerusalem meeting, which was packed, there really was a deep interest among Israelis in the process of the commission and in the concept of forgiveness and reconciliation. I was able to point out that we had learned in South Africa that true security would never be won through the barrel of a gun. True security would come when all the inhabitants of the Middle East, that region so revered by so many, believed that their human rights and dignity were respected and upheld, when true justice prevailed. I had not changed my own points of view: I still felt there was a need for forgiveness and... for the state of Israel and justice and equity for the Palestinians. But somehow in Israel I was seen in a new light.

It was clear in all of these countries—Rwanda, Ireland, Israel, and Palestine—that the process in which South Africa had been engaged lent a credibility to whatever I might say. People could listen to perhaps difficult things without accusing me of being pre-sumptuous and insensitive. More than anything else, it did seem as if many who listened to me were people who derived hope from what we had attempted to do in South Africa. We happened to have been blessed with leaders who were ready to take risks—when you embark on the business of asking for and granting forgiveness, you are taking a risk.

In relations between individuals, if you ask another person for forgiveness you may be spurned; the one you have injured may refuse to forgive you. The risk is even greater if you are the injured party, wanting to offer forgiveness. The culprit may be arrogant, obdurate, or blind; not ready or willing to apologize or to ask for forgiveness. He or she thus cannot appropriate the forgiveness that is offered. Such rejection can jeopardize the whole enterprise. Our leaders were ready in South Africa to say they were willing to walk the path of confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation with all the hazards that lay along the way. And it seems their gamble might be paying off, since our land has not been overwhelmed by the catastrophe that had seemed so inevitable.

It is crucial, when a relationship has been damaged or when a potential relationship has been made impossible, that the perpetrator should acknowledge the truth and be ready and willing to apologize. It helps the process of forgiveness and reconciliation immensely. It is never easy. We all know just how difficult it is for most of us to admit that we have been wrong. It is perhaps the most difficult thing in the world—in almost every language the most difficult words are, "I am sorry." Thus it is not at all surprising that those accused of horrendous deeds and the communities they come from, for whom they believed they were committing these atrocities, almost always try to find ways out of even admitting that they were indeed capable of such deeds. They adopt the denial mode, asserting that such-and-such has not happened. When the evidence is incontrovertible they take refuge in feigned ignorance. The Germans claimed they had not known what the Nazis were up to. White South Africans have also tried to find refuge in claims of ignorance. The former apartheid cabinet member Leon Wessels was closer to the mark when he said that they had not wanted to know, for there were those who tried to alert them. For those with eyes to see there were accounts of people dying mysteriously in detention. For those with ears to hear there...
was much that was disquieting and even chilling. But, like the three monkeys, they chose neither to hear, nor see, nor speak of evil. When some did own up, they passed the blame to others, "We were carrying out orders," refusing to acknowledge that as morally responsible individuals each person has to take responsibility for carrying out unconscionable orders.

We do not usually rush to expose our vulnerability and our sinfulness. But if the process of forgiveness and healing is to succeed, ultimately acknowledgment by the culprit is indispensable—not completely so but nearly so. Acknowledgment of the truth and of having wronged someone is important in getting to the root of the breach. If a husband and wife have quarreled without the wrongdoer acknowledging his or her fault by confessing, so exposing the cause of the rift; if a husband in this situation comes home with a bunch of flowers and the couple pretend all is in order, then they will be in for a rude shock. They have not dealt with their immediate past adequately. They have glossed over their differences, for they have failed to stare truth in the face for fear of a possible bruising confrontation. They will have done what the prophet calls healing the hurt lightly by crying, "Peace, peace where there is no peace." They will have only papered over the cracks and not worked out why they fell out in the first place. All that will happen is that, despite the beautiful flowers, the hurt will fester. One day there will be an awful eruption and they will realize that they had tried to obtain reconciliation on the cheap. True reconciliation is not cheap. It cost God the death of His only begotten Son.

Forgiving and being reconciled are not about pretending that things are other than they are. It is not patting one another on the back and turning a blind eye to the wrong. True reconciliation exposes the awfulness, the abuse, the pain, the degradation, the truth. It could even sometimes make things worse. It is a risky undertaking but in the end it is worthwhile, because in the end dealing with the real situation helps to bring real healing. Spurious reconciliation can bring only spurious healing.

If the wrongdoer has come to the point of realizing his wrong, then one hopes there will be remorse, or at least some contrition or sorrow. This should lead him to confess the wrong he has done and ask for forgiveness. It obviously requires a fair measure of humility, especially when the victim is someone in a group that one's community had despised, as was often the case in South Africa when the perpetrators were government agents.

The victim, we hope, would be moved to respond to an apology by forgiving the culprit. As I have already tried to show, we were constantly amazed in the commission at the extraordinary magnanimity that so many of the victims exhibited. Of course there were those who said they would not forgive. That demonstrated for me the important point that forgiveness could not be taken for granted; it was neither cheap nor easy. As it happens, these were the exceptions. Far more frequently what we encountered was deeply moving and humbling.

In forgiving, people are not being asked to forget. On the contrary, it is important to remember, so that we should not let such atrocities happen again. Forgiveness does not mean condoning what has been done. It means taking what happened seriously and not minimizing it; drawing out the sting in the memory that threatens to poison our entire existence. It involves trying to understand the perpetrators and so have empathy, to try to stand in their shoes and appreciate the sort of pressures and influences that might have conditioned them.

Forgiveness is not being sentimental. The study of forgiveness has become a growth industry. Whereas previously it was something often dismissed pejoratively as spiritual and religious, now because of developments such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa it is gaining attention as an academic discipline studied by psychologists, philosophers, physicians, and theologians. In the United States there is an International Forgiveness Institute attached

\[ \text{Jeremiah 6:14 and 8:11} \]
to the University of Wisconsin, and the John Templeton Foundation, with others, has started a multimillion-dollar Campaign for Forgiveness Research. Forgiving has even been found to be good for your health.

Forgiving means abandoning your right to pay back the perpetrator in his own coin, but it is a loss that liberates the victim. In the commission we heard people speak of a sense of relief after forgiving. A recent issue of the journal Spirituality and Health had on its front cover a picture of three U.S. ex-servicemen standing in front of the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C. One asks, "Have you for-given those who held you prisoner of war?" "I will never forgive them," replies the other. His mate says: "Then it seems they still have you in prison, don't they?"

Does the victim depend on the culprit's contrition and confession as the precondition for being able to forgive? There is no question that, of course, such a confession is a very great help to the one who wants to forgive, but it is not absolutely indispensable. Jesus did not wait until those who were nailing him to the cross had asked for forgiveness. He was ready, as they drove in the nails, to pray to his Father to forgive them and he even provided an excuse for what they were doing. If the victim could forgive only when the culprit confessed, then the victim would be locked into the culprit's whim, locked into victimhood, whatever her own attitude or intention. That would be palpably unjust.

I have used the following analogy to try to explain the need for a perpetrator to confess. Imagine you are sitting in a dank, stuffy, dark room. This is because the curtains are drawn and the windows have been shut. Outside the light is shining and a fresh breeze is blowing. If you want the light to stream into that room and the fresh air to flow in, you will have to open the window and draw the curtains apart; then that light which has always been available will come in and air will enter the room to freshen it up. So it is with forgiveness.

The victim may be ready to forgive and make the gift of her forgiveness available, but it is up to the wrongdoer to appropriate the gift—to open the window and draw the curtains aside. He does this by acknowledging the wrong he has done, so letting the light and fresh air of forgiveness enter his being.

In the act of forgiveness we are declaring our faith in the future of a relationship and in the capacity of the wrongdoer to make a new beginning on a course that will be different from the one that caused us the wrong. We are saying here is a chance to make a new beginning. It is an act of faith that the wrongdoer can change. According to Jesus, we should be ready to do this not just once, not just seven times, but seventy times seven, without limit—provided, it seems Jesus says, your brother or sister who has wronged you is ready to come and confess the wrong they have committed yet again.

That is difficult, but because we are not infallible, because we will hurt especially the ones we love by some wrong, we will always need a process of forgiveness and reconciliation to deal with those unfortunate yet all too human breaches in relationships. They are an inescapable characteristic of the human condition.

Once the wrongdoer has confessed and the victim has forgiven, it does not mean that is the end of the process. Most frequently, the wrong has affected the victim in tangible, material ways. Apartheid provided the whites with enormous benefits and privileges, leaving its victims deprived and exploited. If someone steals my pen and then asks me to forgive him, unless he returns my pen the sincerity of his contrition and confession will be considered to be nil. Confession, forgiveness, and reparation, wherever feasible, form part of a continuum.

In South Africa the whole process of reconciliation has been placed in very considerable jeopardy by the enormous disparities between the rich, mainly the whites, and the poor, mainly the blacks. The huge gap between the haves and the have-nots, which was

Matthew 18:22.
largely created and maintained by racism and apartheid, poses the greatest threat to reconciliation and stability in our country. The rich provided the class from which the perpetrators and the beneficiaries of apartheid came and the poor produced the bulk of the victims. That is why I have exhort ed whites to support transformation taking place in the lot of blacks.

For unless houses replace the hovels and shacks in which most blacks live, unless blacks gain access to clean water, electricity, affordable health care, decent education, good jobs, and a safe environment—things which the vast majority of whites have taken for granted for so long—we can just as well kiss reconciliation goodbye.

Reconciliation is liable to be a long-drawn-out process with ups and downs, not something accomplished overnight and certainly not by a commission, however effective. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has only been able to make a contribution. Reconciliation is going to have to be the concern of every South African. It has to be a national project to which all earnestly strive to make their particular contribution—by learning the language and culture of others; by being willing to make amends; by refusing to deal in stereo-types by making racial or other jokes that ridicule a particular group; by contributing to a culture of respect for human rights, and seeking to enhance tolerance—with zero tolerance for intolerance; by working for ... feel they belong—that they are insiders and not aliens and strangers on the outside, relegated to the edges of society.

To work for reconciliation is to want to realize God's dream for humanity—when we will know that we are indeed members of one family, bound together in a delicate network of interdependence.

Simon Wiesenthal in the anthology, *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness*, tells the story of how he was unable to forgive a Nazi soldier who asked to be forgiven. The soldier had been part of a group that rounded up a number of Jews, locked them up in a building, and proceeded to set it alight, burning those inside to death. The soldier was now on his deathbed. His troubled con-

science sought the relief that might come through unburdening him-self, confessing his complicity and getting absolution from a Jew. Simon listened to his terrible story in silence. When the soldier had ended his narration, Simon left without uttering a word, certainly not one of forgiveness. He asks at the end of his account, "What would you have done?"

*The Sunflower* is a collection of the responses of various people to Simon Wiesenthal's question. An updated version' contains a contribution from me. The dilemma Wiesenthal faced was very real. His own view, which seems to be that of many Jews, is that the living have no right to forgive on behalf of those who were killed, those who suffered in the past and are no longer alive to make the decision for themselves. One can understand their reluctance, since if they were to forgive it might appear they were trivializing the awful experience of the victims; it also might seem the height of presumption to speak on behalf of people who suffered so grievously, especially perhaps if one had not oneself suffered to the same extent. I understand the nature of their dilemma and would not want to seem to minimize it, but I hold a slightly different view.

At the end of 1990 the various South African churches gathered in Rustenburg to the west of Pretoria in one of the most fully ecumenical and representative church meetings to have taken place in our country. This meeting was called the Rustenburg Conference. Present were those churches that had been very vocal in opposing apartheid through their membership in the South African Council of Churches, as well as the major white Dutch Reformed Church (Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk, or DRC), which had supported apartheid by providing its theological rationale (but which had al-ready retreated significantly from that posture). Then there were the many so-called charismatic or pentecostal churches that had tried to be apolitical, though they must have been aware that their imagined neutrality in reality supported the unjust status quo.