THE JAMES BACKHOUSE LECTURE

2001

# RECONCILING OPPOSITES: REFLECTIONS ON PEACEMAKING IN SOUTH AFRICA

**Hendrik W van der Merwe**

## The James Backhouse Lectures

The lectures were instituted by Australia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) on the its establishment of that Yearly Meeting in 1964.

James Backhouse and his companion, George Washington Walker were English Friends who visited Australia from 1832 to 1838. They travelled widely, but spent most of their time in Tasmania. It was through their visit that Quaker Meetings were first established in Australia.

Coming to Australia under a concern for the conditions of convicts, the two men had access to people with authority in the young colonies, and with influence in Britain, both in Parliament and in the social reform movement. In meticulous reports and personal letters, they made practical suggestions and urged legislative action on penal reform, on the rum trade, and on land rights and the treatment of Aborigines.

James Backhouse was a general naturalist and a botanist. He made careful observations and published full accounts of what he saw, in addition to encouraging Friends in the colonies and following the deep concern that had brought him to Australia.

Australian Friends hope that this series of Lectures will bring fresh insights into the Truth, and speak to the needs and aspirations of Australian Quakerism. This particular lecture was delivered in Melbourne on 8 January 2001, during the annual meeting of the Society.

Colin Wendell-Smith
Presiding Clerk
Australia Yearly Meeting



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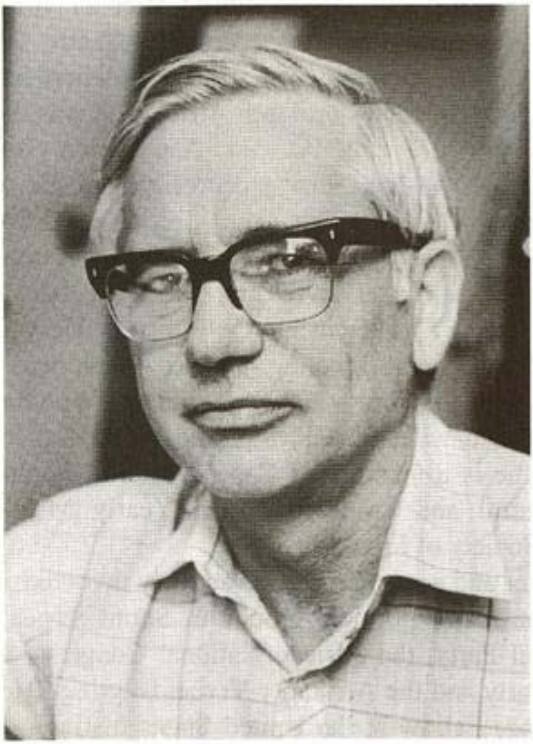
**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**



Hendrik W van der Merwe

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Emeritus Honorary Professor, University of Cape Town
Senior Fellow, Centre for Conflict Resolution

Hendrik W van deer Merwe retired after 27 years with the Centre for Intergroup Studies (currently Centre for Conflict Resolution) at the University of Cape Town, where he pioneered conflict and peace studies in South Africa, and was the founding president of the South African Association for Conflict Intervention. He was secretary and president of the Association for Sociology for Southern Africa and represented South Africa on the Council of the International Sociological Association.

He grew up in a conservative rural Calvinistic background and became an active Quaker in his early forties. He was Clerk of South Africa General Meeting for six years, was Friend in Residence with his first wife, Marietjie, in Woodbrooke, and with his present wife, Elsbeth Siglinde Woody, at Pendle Hill. At present he is a member of Cape Western Monthly Meeting within Central and Southern Africa Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends.

As Quaker and academic he was actively involved as mediator between the major political groups in South Africa, including the National Party, the African National Congress, the Inkatha Freedom Party and the Afrikaner Vryheidstigting. He spent one year as Peace Fellow at the United States Institute of Peace in Washington, DC, and in 1999 received the Common Ground Award for An Extraordinary Lifetime as Peacemaker from Search for Common Ground in Washington, DC.

He has published many articles and several books, the latest being *Pursuing Justice and Peace in South Africa* (Routledge, London, 1989), and *Peacemaking in South Africa: Life in Conflict Resolution* (Tafelberg, Cape Town, 2000) with a Foreword by Nelson Mandela.

His first wife, Marietjie died in 1992. In 1994 he married Elsbeth Siglinde Woody - head of the Department of Art at Baruch College of City University of New Yark, and well-known sculptor.

## About this lecture

Hendrik W van der Merwe became an active Quaker in his early forties, having grown up in a conservative rural Calvinistic background. His escape from a laager racially prejudiced mentality occurred the night his brother referred to a coloured woman as a *vrou* (woman) instead of the normal derogatory *meid*. That one of his own family used a form of respect for a black woman, opened up a whole new vision for him. She became a woman, not a black woman. "This," he says, "was for me the moment of truth: this new insight made me an African first, and Afrikaner second".

As Quaker and academic van der Merwe was actively involved as mediator between the major political groups in South Africa, including the National Party and the African National Congress. He writes: "A recurrent theme of my work has been the need for constant vigilance to reconcile apparent opposites, and to balance the pursuit of peace and justice. . . my role . . . gradually shifted from activism to secure justice, towards the mediating role of bridge-builder and peacemaker. "

Professor Carel Boshoff, Professor H W van der Merwe
with Nelson Mandela

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## 1. BOERS, AUSSIES AND QUAKERS

I want to share with you my reflections on peacemaking in South Africa over five decades. Much of what I have done was as a Quaker, in association with Quakers, or on behalf of Quakers. The most important lessons I learned from the Quakers are to balance the goals of justice and peace, and the means of coercion and negotiation. The challenge to reconcile these apparent opposites is the theme of this talk. In a personal sense it refers to my journey from conservative Afrikaner to cosmopolitan African and the reconciliation of these two apparently hostile forces. In my career it refers to the reconciliation of science and religion. In my peacemaking efforts it refers to the collaboration between the academic and the Quaker. However, I shall also dwell on some of the contradictions - philosophical, political, social and practical - that continue to constitute major challenges to South African society, and more particularly to the Quakers, in your country as well as in South Africa.

I am talking to you as a South African Quaker. Having been a fairly active 'international' Quaker for three decades, I feel very much at home among Australian Quakers, especially since we are also offshoots of the British Quakers in the tradition of silent worship. While South Africa and Australia are both offshoots of the mighty British Empire, there are huge differences between these two countries. Even with a total population of less than 20 million, your infrastructure, Gross Domestic Product, personal income and many other indices dwarf that of South Africa. In my youth, we thought of South Africa's population as the small group of five million white people who constituted the government. Today, in the New South Africa, under a black government, we are well aware of our total population of 40 million and the 'third world' condition under which the majority live. Our infrastructure is dwarfed by the modern Australian economy with a gross domestic product three times that of South Africa. Even in land surface we cannot compete: while Australia is almost the size of the continental USA, South Africa is not even twice the size of Texas!

What is more relevant to this lecture on relations between race and ethnic groups, is the big contrast in our population groups. While people of European descent constitute 95% of your population, they constitute only 14% in South Africa. While the First Australians constitute only 2% of your current population,

black Africans alone constitute 75% of our population. An additional 8% (over three million) are known as 'coloured people' of mixed descent including whites, the indigenous Khoesan - 'Hottentots' and Bushmen - and African and Asian slaves. Many of the Khoesan suffered the same fate as Australia's Aborigines in terms of dispossession and extermination. However, assimilation happened to a marked degree with the result that today's coloured people speak European languages (more Afrikaans than English) and their culture is European, not indigenous. Under apartheid, which had its origins in colonial policies, all non-whites (regardless of cultural orientation) were deprived of the vote, and the country was run by the small white minority, which, in my youth, constituted about one fifth of the population.

The sharp contrasts between the population distributions of our two countries must be explained in terms of historical movements, settlements and conquests. My wife, Elsbeth S Woody and I have retired on a farm about 100km from Cape Agulhas the most southern point of the African continent. A few years ago three skeletons (3000 years old) were discovered in a cave in the hills behind our house. They were of the Stone Age hunter-gatherers, called San or Bushmen, who roamed the hills and coastline of southern and western South Africa during thousands of years. At a later stage Khoekhoe herders ('Hottentots') moved into these regions and black agro-pastoralists (Bantu peoples) spread from Central Africa into the northern and eastern coastal parts of South Africa. In 1652 the Dutch established a small commercial supply station in Table Bay which gradually expanded into a self-governing colony. My ancestor, Willem Schalk, joined this settlement in 1660. I am of the ninth generation on African soil. This small white Dutch settlement was given a most significant boost when a small group of French Huguenots who escaped persecution by the Roman Catholic Inquisition in France settled in the vicinity of Cape Town. This group of devoted French Calvinists was absorbed into the local Dutch culture and formed the backbone of the proud Calvinist heritage of the Afrikaner ethnic group.

The Dutch settlement was conquered by the English during the Napoleonic wars, first in 1795 and again in 1806 after a brief reversion to the Dutch. The process of Anglicisation was reinforced by the settlement of around 5000 Britons in the Eastern Cape in 1820. The British government tried, on at least one occasion, to land a shipload of ticket-of-leave prisoners in the Cape Colony. Fierce protests by local residents convinced the authorities that these subjects would better fit into Australian society, which had been settled with more people of the same background.

In the mid-eighteenth century the white settlers had come into contact with Africans whose migration halted at the point where summer rainfall, which was necessary for their crops, tails into the winter rainfall regions of the south-western Cape. These people were far more numerous with a more cohesive form of social organisation than the Khoesan. There followed a series of wars between the Xhosa chiefdoms and the white colonists in the Eastern Cape and, subsequently, between the 'Emigrant Boers' - those of Dutch extraction who left the Cape - and other black tribes in the north.

Tension between the Dutch settlers and their English conquerors led, in the 1830s, to the 'Great Trek' when Boer families, especially from the Eastern Cape, left the colony in ox wagons. Once beyond the border, the trekkers dispersed to the east and north. Some formed the two republics, the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. Many of those who settled in Natal packed up and left when England annexed that territory. The Boer republics remained independent until the discovery of gold and diamonds sparked a chain of events culminating in their defeat in the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902.

My branch of the Van der Merwes lived in the Western Cape, and none of my close relatives took part in the Great Trek. But the spirit of adventure took my father in his early twenties on horseback to the Transvaal, 1,000 miles to the north. When at the end of 1895 the infamous Dr Jameson tried with a small commando to annex the capital city of Pretoria for the British government, my father responded to the call for defence: he presented himself with horse, rifle, and food supplies for one week. Before the outbreak of the Boer War my father returned to the farm where I was born and brought up.

If there were anything in our history that would emphasise the difference between my own people and the Australians it would be the Anglo-Boer War, especially insofar as the Australians take pride in their assistance to the British. There were never more than 35,000 Boers on horseback in the field to defend the two republics against a well-trained and well-equipped British Army which, in the end, grew to involve 440,000 soldiers. Within months the Boers lost their cities and resorted to guerrilla war. When the huge British army failed to capture these Boers, the ruthless and brutal British commander, Lord Horatio Kitchener, ordered that all farmhouses be burnt, livestock killed and crops destroyed. In addition, women and children were herded into concentration camps where 26,000 died (in contrast to the 4,000 Boers killed in combat). Kitchener was subsequently honoured in the U.K. and promoted to Field Marshal.

I have singled out the Boer War because it says a lot about my own background and because of the role of the Quakers in it - of which more later. I got to know the Quakers during the height of apartheid. I left the Dutch Reformed Church for the Quakers in 1974. My total commitment to the Quakers, their spiritual fellowship, and their firm stand against apartheid, estranged me from my own people, the Afrikaners or Boers, the perpetrators of apartheid. The Quakers gave me a spiritual base and support group.

## 2. QUAKERS AND THEIR WORK IN SOUTH AFRICA

There is evidence of Dutch Quakers in Cape Town in 1728. The first meetings for worship were held by Nantucket whalers who used Cape Town as a base for their expeditions to the South Pole. Though meetings were held regularly in Cape Town during the nineteenth century, it only became a Monthly Meeting under London Yearly Meeting in 1906. In the tradition of silent worship, South African Quakers do not proselytise, and their numbers grew slowly. There are today less than 30 members in Cape Town and more than 100 in South Africa.

Like Quakers elsewhere, they have had far more influence than their numbers would suggest. In a special issue of the liberal religious magazine *South African Outlook* in May 1986, the editor wrote:

> South African Quakers are engaged in a variety of work which extends to all sectors of the community. Those who know this small group ... frequently express bafflement at their energy and ability to take on so much work.

This work entails a wide range of activities concerned with the fundamental goals of justice and peace, including conciliation and peacemaking, development, education, training, and political activism.

A delegation of the Section of the Americas of the Friends World Committee for Consultation visited South Africa in 1979 and reported that Southern Africa Friends

> ... put USA Friends to shame. An extremely high proportion of the 100 - 200 Friends are directly involved in employment or volunteer efforts, or both, in some way to confront and abolish the apartheid system. This is not to say that they agree among themselves or with USA Friends about the Republic of South Africa, but there is a deep concern to seek truth and to speak truth in a difficult situation. Because of their small numbers and geographic dispersion there is a preponderance of individual

action and involvement with kindred non-Quaker groups rather than corporate Quaker action.

This will be evident from this lecture on peacemaking in South Africa.

**Richard Gush and James Backhouse**

Among these small numbers of devoted Quakers there were several who led exemplary lives. South African and Australian Quakers have singled out two persons to be honoured by annual memorial lectures. South African Friends honour Richard Gush in this way. Richard Gush was a British settler who lived according to Quaker principles during a time of violent conflict between white settlers and Xhosa inhabitants on the eastern frontier. He demonstrated that peaceful relations were possible between whites and blacks. He saved his community of Salem from certain annihilation by a Xhosa impi when he confronted them unarmed and learned that they were hungry. With the help of his family he fed them and thereby averted a bloody battle. Australian Quakers, similarly, since 1964, honour a prominent British Quaker minister and missionary, nurseryman and botanist, writer, scientist and reformer, James Backhouse, with this annual memorial lecture. Backhouse was no stranger to South Africa. After his six year long visit to Australia where he did much to establish Quakerism, he spent two and a half years, from 1838 to the end of 1840, with George Washington Walker in South Africa. They travelled six thousand miles in the interior of the country by ox wagon and on horseback, visiting mission stations and taking a profound interest in indigenous vegetation.

In Cape Town they established a school for the poor which operated from 1840 to 1879. The school was mainly supported by Quakers in England, but some of the white and coloured children who attended, contributed one penny a week for tuition. On the death of James Backhouse in 1869 the school was in good shape and was placed under the care of James Backhouse Jr and his friend Daniel Steadman of Cape Town. It was closed in 1879. In 1885 the property was transferred from Backhouse to Meeting for Sufferings (the executive body of British Quakers). In 1892, the sum of 400 pounds, realised from the sale of the property, was offered on loan to Friends' School in Hobart, Tasmania.

Backhouse published several booklets addressed to missionaries. He wrote separate messages to white and coloured people, urging them to work for

better inter-racial relations. Backhouse recorded in his journals how relations between whites and their former slaves gradually improved after slavery was abolished. One old farmer who was reproached by his sister for attending a church service at which one of his emancipated slaves had engaged in prayer, responded: "If you truly felt yourself a sinner before God, you would receive the gospel with gladness, were it from a Caffer or a Bushman."

After his return to England Backhouse sent books to Africa and raised money for the Tswana translation of the Bible. He published two volumes of his travels in South Africa and Australia besides numerous other publications on visits to many other countries. Backhouse' s concern about relations among South African population groups was shared by several subsequent British Quaker visitors. In 1878, British Quakers under the leadership of Isaac Sharp visited South Africa and established warm relations with Afrikaans ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church. Back in England they took a firm stand against British imperialism. These contacts set the stage for Quaker involvement during the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902. It was above all in the role of reconciliation and helping the needy that Quakers came into contact with Afrikaners.

**The Anglo-Boer War**

Individual Quakers have often taken courageous initiatives. When the Anglo-Boer War was looming Guy Enoch, a South African Quaker who was an engineer in Johannesburg, met with President Paul Kruger, State Attorney Jan Smuts, and State Secretary F W Reitz, seeking ways to avert war. Leading British Quakers such as George Cadbury and Joshua Rowntree were active in the South African Conciliation Committee and the Friends of South Africa Relief Fund. Rowntree visited South Africa with Emily Hobhouse, an Anglican, who became famous for exposing the atrocities of the British concentration camps. Quaker volunteers came to South Africa to assist her as nurses, or helpers to distribute food and clothes in the camps. When George Cadbury, a wealthy industrialist, found that there was no press support in Britain for the Quaker campaign against British imperialism and for the cause of the Boers, he bought the London *Daily News* in order to ensure a public stand against the war. A British Quaker, Francis Fox, took it upon himself to visit the Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Abraham Kuyper, urging him to use his good offices to help bring the war to an end. It is believed that this was one of the first steps that led to the Peace of Vereeniging.

During the war, Joshua Rowntree befriended Samuel Cronwright-Schreiner, leading politician of the Cape Colony and husband of the famous writer, Olive Schreiner, who went to England to protest against the war. When Cronwright-Schreiner was not allowed to state his case, Rowntree hosted him to the chagrin of hostile crowds. The police and army had to be called in to rescue the two men. Quaker groups provided platforms for Emily Hobhouse when her own Anglican church, being a state church, refused to let her criticise the war effort.

After the war the work of Emily Hobhouse was continued by two British Quaker volunteers, Lawrence Richardson and William Alexander, in consultation with a local Quaker, James Butler of Cradock, Dr J J Marquard of the Dutch Reformed Church and Dr Abraham Kriel of the Langlaagte Orphanage of the Dutch Reformed Church. They and others promoted home industries among Afrikaner women who, in utter destitution, tried to settle on the scorched earth (which used to be their farms) left behind by the British troops. Quakers provided bursaries for Afrikaans children, helped to build up the libraries of Dutch Reformed ministers and brought back from England a number of Bibles that had been looted by the Tommies (British soldiers)

**Apartheid**

The next period of active Quaker involvement came during the 1950s when Quakers participated in various anti-apartheid organisations. They supported the 1952 Defiance Campaign, a program of passive resistance undertaken when the National Party government rejected pleas to lift various oppressive laws. Their role had changed dramatically. Fifty years before they had championed the Boers, the underdogs at the time. Now they took up the cause of blacks against oppression by the Boers. This remains a feature of Quaker involvement - their tendency to side with the underdog. During the apartheid era, from 1948 until the early 1990s, it was inevitable that Friends would propagate the cause of the black people in South Africa.

This brings us to the current situation in the new South Africa where we have had another reversal of power. We were blessed with a most positive, constructive and peaceful transition from white domination to a democratic system. But this does not mean the end of our troubles. We are plagued with the same evils as other societies. The tendency for political power to corrupt is true for South Africa as it is for all other countries. South African Quakers are now

facing new challenges continuing to speak truth to power and to support those in need.

**My personal involvement**

By the time I got to know South African Quakers in the early 1970s my personal inclinations, beliefs and actions, academic work and social-political activities had become finely tuned quite independently - to Quakerism. For decades South African Quakers, either individually or in corporate action, had taken firm stands against various manifestations of race discrimination, economic inequality and political injustice. During the apartheid era they opposed forced removals, influx control, the enforcement of group areas, the demolition of squatter housing, extreme poverty and hunger, police violence and torture, conscription, and the military destabilisation of neighbouring black states.

I participated in research and activism regarding virtually all of these issues. I was included in delegations to apartheid government officials, politicians, and cabinet ministers where we brought to their attention cases of discrimination, injustice and failure to provide welfare benefits and other services. Some of these initiatives originated in the Society of Friends. Others came from me or from the organisations to which I belonged. The ties I developed with Steve Biko during the workshop of the Abe Bailey Institute of Inter-Racial Studies of which I was Director, in January 1971, resulted in financial support from Quaker Service Fund for his Black Communities Programmes Ltd. My friendship with Winnie Mandela, which started in 1982, led to Quaker support for her home industries among black women - ironically in the same town where Quakers eight decades previously had supported home industries among Afrikaner women. The African National Congress referred to me as 'an honest Quaker broker'. There was, as can be seen, a mutually supportive overlap between my Quaker activities and my work as director of the Centre for Intergroup Studies and my personal life.

A recurrent theme of my work has been the need for constant vigilance to reconcile apparent opposites, and to balance the pursuit of peace and justice. During three decades, my role as an academic and as a Quaker gradually shifted from activism to secure justice, towards the mediating role of bridge-builder and peacemaker.

## 3. RECONCILING OPPOSITES

### The Constructive Intervention Model

While the Quakers provided me with the stimulus and commitment to pursue the goals of justice and peace, my work as an academic provided a useful conceptual framework that guided me through complicated social situations. I became aware of the need to distinguish between two types of intervention: partisan and impartial. Partisan intervention is in support of one party in a conflict, while impartial intervention is as mediator or peacemaker. This distinction made it possible for me to reconcile the tensions between the goals of justice and peace, and between the means of coercion and negotiation. I developed the following constructive intervention model for the accommodation of conflict:

**The Problem:**
1. Racial, economic and political inequality, injustice and violence
2. Racial, political and ideological discrimination, fragmentation, polarisation and violence

**The Means used to resolve them:**
1. Development, empowerment and coercion
2. Reconciliation, negotiation and mediation

**The Goals:**
1. Social justice, equality and human rights
2. Peace and reconciliation

I distinguished between two major problems of injustice and discrimination, the means of coercion to obtain the goals of justice, and the means of negotiation to achieve the goals of peace and reconciliation.

**Lessons from experience**

I was fortunate to be in an academic position that was compatible with my religious convictions. As Director of the Centre for Intergroup Studies (now called Centre for Conflict Resolution) at the University of Cape Town from 1968 to 1992 I was able to intervene in a large number of conflict situations and was able to choose whether I wanted to play a partisan or an impartial role. By being part of the South African community I was familiar with the needs of various political and social groups and was able to respond to these needs according to my own insights. Operating in an oppressive apartheid system, I was subject to pressures like all other citizens, but as director of an autonomous research institute I was free of the normal occupational restrictions of the University Councilor government authorities. During our first meeting in 1984 in Lusaka, Thabo Mbeki, our current president asked me to explain myself. I said I was wearing two hats: I was motivated by Quaker principles and operated within an academic conceptual structure. Conflict resolution is both an art and a science. The art refers to the natural instincts and personality type that come rather spontaneously. The science refers to those skills and techniques that one acquires by taking courses, learns from books or workshops. (Unsuitable personalities do not always benefit much from scientific training.)

I had the disadvantage of pioneering conflict resolution in South Africa without any specific training besides my degree in sociology. This forced me to carefully analyse my experiences in intervention, both as advocate of deprived black groups, and as neutral mediator between blacks and whites. By doing that, I was able to document the lessons we have learned, and in that way contribute to the science of conflict resolution.

Over the years I became involved with the major political groups and their leaders. The National Party was in power from 1948 under the leadership of Dr D F Malan whose sons were great friends of mine at university. In 1990 President F W De Klerk announced the unbanning of the major opposition (mainly black) parties, including the African National Congress (ANC) whose leaders were in prison (Nelson Mandela) or in exile (Thabo Mbeki). In 1982 my wife and I befriended Winnie Mandela who had been banished to a small town in the Orange Free State, and through that friendship my wife and I met Mandela in prison. Over a period of 25 years I regularly visited ANC leaders in exile in other countries and tried to bring messages of goodwill to South African politicians and

bureaucrats, such as the Commissioner of the Security Police. In 1984 Mbeki asked me to help them meet with the government.

Seven million Zulus constitute the largest ethnic group in South Africa. Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi is the leader of their biggest political party, the Inkatha Freedom Party. He is currently the Minister of Home Affairs in a Government of National Unity with the ANC which is largely Xhosa oriented. I got to know Buthelezi almost thirty years ago through my wife, Marietjie, who worked at Rorkes Drift, a famous Zulu Art and Craft Centre. In 1986 I mediated between Inkatha and the United Democratic Front which was established to fill the gap while the ANC was banned. Later in the paper I will say more about two other ethnic groups: the coloured people and the Afrikaners.

The essence of my experience was summarised with the help of colleagues in an article *Principles of Communication among Adversaries in South Africa*. (This article was included in 'Conflict: Readings in Management and Resolution', edited by John Burton and Frank Dukes, published by Macmillan, 1990). I refer briefly here to those lessons that had to do with the reconciliation of apparent opposites, the theme of this lecture.

**Justice and peace**

Interveners in conflict situations are constantly faced with options which, unfortunately, often appear to be mutually exclusive or irreconcilable. A major lesson I have learned is that, in many situations, apparent opposites are often complementary.

In reconciling justice and peace three observations must be made about these goals. The first is that they are ideals and are, in fact, unattainable in absolute terms. The second is that they are complementary - we cannot have one without the other. The third is that they stand in a relation of tension to each other. This tension is especially evident between the means of coercion to obtain justice and the means of negotiation to obtain peace. But coercion and negotiation are not mutually exclusive; coercion, in fact, often constitutes an integral part of the political negotiation (or rather bargaining) process.

**Impartiality**

Impartiality of the intervener is a controversial issue. Intervention forms part of a wider continuum of behaviour patterns in which the intervener adopts a variety of roles. Intervention can be either impartial or partisan.

The purpose of impartial intervention is usually to mediate a negotiated settlement. Partisan intervention may be motivated by a need to assist or advocate the cause of one party to the conflict, to protect the status quo, or to empower the weaker party. Concern about the power imbalance between parties is expressed in the principle: *Where there is gross asymmetry of power between adversaries, a process of empowerment of the weaker party is essential*.

One has to distinguish between the intervention of a change-agent or activist, for the purpose of changing or eradicating apartheid or some other government policy, and the intervention of a mediator or facilitator for the purpose of bringing together the government and its opponents. The intervention of the former is partisan. It is in favour of the deprived, the underdog, the banned, and the inevitable result is to estrange the change-agent from the perceived oppressor. The intervention of the mediator is more impartial. As peacemaker one must try to be on fairly good terms with both sides.

There is, however, the danger that the mediator's impartiality and detachment may be perceived as lack of feeling, care and concern by suffering, deprived or oppressed parties. An acceptable mediator must empathise with all parties in conflict, but expressions of concern must not be confused with support for that party. Adam Curle, experienced international Quaker mediator, argues that it is through 'concerned impartiality' that mediators are able to remain on good terms with both sides.

My concern that the middle ground in South Africa was being eroded motivated me, in the 1970s and 1980s to move away from activism towards conciliation and mediation. There is a clear tension between the roles of activist and mediator, and the problem of being a mediator in one's own country where one has been (and to some extent continues to be) an activist is obvious. I went out of my way to keep my channels of communication open with the government, especially the police. This was not always easy, or possible. I was also careful not to embarrass any party. Another important principle was: *To be respectful towards all parties, especially towards the perceived perpetrator of violence or oppression.*

Another very important related principle is that *the mediator must help the guilty party to save face in order to reach a mutually acceptable solution.*

Those qualities of facilitator and mediator, as opposed to an anti-apartheid activist, probably account for the fact that I could continue talking to the government during the 1980s when I was also openly talking to the ANC and advocating a negotiated settlement in articles, public talks, and even on television.

**Pace of change**

Disagreement about the pace of change is often the most important source of conflict between adversaries, and may split groups, which share the same goals. This may be due to a false or unnecessary mindset, which rejects the distinction between short- and long-term strategies. Incremental steps can be accommodated within a radical fundamental change program. *Incremental steps can be reconciled with radical goals.*

**Private convictions vs. public statements**

Another obstacle to reaching agreement between conflicting parties is the contrast between the private and public views of leaders on both sides. The sensitive mediator will sympathise with party representatives who are willing to make concessions and express this in private talks, but who nevertheless claim the opposite in public because their constituencies are not yet ready to make concessions. Leaders I dealt with often quoted the public utterances of their opponents to prove that they were intransigent. In almost every case I was able to point out that they were equally guilty of inconsistency between public and private statements. This realisation often broke down their resistance to formal talks. The principle underlying this is: *The mediator must respect the popular base of elected leaders and acknowledge the tension between privately held views and public stands.*

On the basis of personal contacts at a high level, I came to believe that there was an underlying wish among leaders of all parties in South Africa that talks would somehow come about. A sad consequence of this top level secrecy was that junior leaders were not aware of progressive tendencies in their ranks, or were not authorised to express such views - or perhaps were not yet themselves

converted. I was often encouraged privately by political leaders to say what they themselves did not dare to say publicly.

**Facilitation**

*Where formal mediation is not acceptable, informal mediation or facilitation of communication may be successful*. In keeping with this principle I have found that in situations of extreme polarisation, where any form of mediation or peacemaking is rejected, informal facilitation of communication between adversaries can contribute toward better understanding and so pave the way for subsequent mediation.

I make a clear distinction between mediation and facilitation. The latter is restricted to one aspect of mediation: the facilitation of communication between conflicting parties. Facilitation can take the form of shuttle diplomacy where the contending parties do not meet face to face. Mediation usually involves parties meeting physically in the presence of the mediator. The facilitator does not suggest solutions and is primarily concerned with technical rather than moral issues, that is, with the process of improvement of communication rather than the goal of reaching a solution. The mediator is motivated to reach that solution. He or she can claim neutrality regarding the stands taken by conflicting parties, but not regarding the outcome of the exercise. For the mediator, facilitation of communication is a means to an end. For the facilitator, facilitation of communication is an end in itself. The facilitator is not obsessed with peace and is unlikely to be accused of wanting peace at all costs - an accusation sometimes made of mediators.

In my experience with the South African establishment and the ANC in exile, I assisted both parties to have meaningful communication and gain reliable information. It was up to them to decide how they would use these insights. I believe it was this approach that largely accounted for the positive response I had from both sides. The facilitator is less likely than the mediator to be seen as a meddler or a busybody, a preacher or a moralist. He or she does not offer or attempt to bring the parties together but, obviously, should they be ready to take that step, the facilitator may be an appropriate person to assist.

The facilitator should not have high expectations but patience in abundance. It was in 1984, 21 years after I first walked into the ANC office in London, that the ANC asked me to help them talk to the government. It took five

visits over a period of ten months before the United Democratic Front asked me to arrange a meeting with Inkatha. It took several years of silence before Eleanor Lombard of the Conservative Party, who had hesitantly attended seminars at the Centre, asked me to arrange meetings with the ANC. It took more than a year of meetings of regional leaders before both sides asked me to arrange a meeting of their leaders, Professor Carel Boshoff and Nelson Mandela, in Johannesburg. It was as a process-oriented facilitator and not as a goal-oriented mediator that I was accepted by the parties, especially during the initial stages. It is however in the merging of the two, or in the ability to switch from one to the other when necessary that one can influence the outcome.

# 4. ETHNICITY

## Ethnicity in politics

Looking at the population distribution of South Africa, it is no wonder that the reconciliation of ethnicity with nationhood is a major problem. I will deal with different aspects of ethnicity, starting with my own escape from Afrikaner ethnic politics and what major impact it had on my life. Next I record some of my experiences with the coloured people, people of my own flesh, blood, culture and ethnicity who, classified as non-white by the apartheid government were deprived of political rights. I discuss in more detail my attempts to reconcile reactionary ethnic Afrikaner leaders with the ANC, and then I discuss how ethnicity presented problems among the small number of Quakers in South Africa.

Ethnicity has been a thorny political and academic problem world-wide, but especially in South Africa where the apartheid government emphasised ethnic differences among black tribes/nations (Zulus, Xhosas, Sothos, etc.) as part of their policies to divide and rule. The government established five sovereign independent homelands, including Transkei and Ciskei with Xhosa peoples. Thanks to the uncompromising resistance of the powerful Zulu leader Buthelezi, the government was unable to force or lure the Zulus as an ethnic group to accept separate nationhood and thereby lose their South African citizenship. In propagating different sovereign states with their own government and institutions, such as universities, the apartheid government pointed to age-old race and ethnic conflicts in the rest of Africa as proof that race and ethnic groups could not live together peacefully. The unfortunate result was that in anti-apartheid and even in liberal academic circles it became politically incorrect to acknowledge the existence of ethnic differences and the power of ethnic forces. The end of the cold war unleashed, usually to our horror, the political power of these forces among East European nations, where ethnic differences had been denied and suppressed under Communist rule.

During apartheid the ethnic controversy centred around the separation of Africans, but during the transition from white minority rule to democracy, the issue of Afrikaner ethnicity, as in many cases in Eastern Europe, came to the fore. If ethnic groups like the Croats, the Serbs, the Albanians, the people of East

Timor, among many others, find sympathetic international platforms for their pleas for autonomy, for independence and for full sovereignty, why not the ethnic Afrikaners of South Africa?

**My own escape from ethnic politics**

I grew up with a strong motivation to protect my Afrikaner identity. That entailed not only my white skin, language and culture, but also the apartheid political system without which my ethnic identity would be threatened. While Afrikaans-speaking people constituted 60% of the white population, we grew up in a *laager* (siege) mentality, feeling threatened by overwhelming outside forces: the *swart gevaar* (black danger), due to the preponderance of less developed African masses, the *Engelse gevaar* (the danger from the English who conquered and oppressed us wherever we fled), and the *Katolieke gevaar* (referring to the Catholics who had persecuted our forefathers during the Inquisition and preached 'a heresy of the Bible').

I want to sketch briefly my escape from this *laager* mentality. After finishing high school I was first a farmer, and then from age 19 to 21 a farmer and superintendent of African schools in the Dutch Reformed Church Mission in Mashonaland, Southern Rhodesia. I returned home at the end of 1950 with all my racial prejudices intact. However, I had a strange experience one night when my elder brother referred to a coloured woman as a *vrou* (woman) instead of the normal derogatory *meid* (similar to *abo* in Australia) which we invariably used. The fact that one of my own family used a form of respect for a black woman, opened up a whole new vision for me. She became a woman, not a black woman. This was for me the moment of truth: this new insight made me an African first, and Afrikaner second. And as an African myself, the concept of *swart gevaar* became transformed.

Just like the word American, Afrikaner is a misnomer. American is used exclusively for people from the USA, and normally does not include people from other American countries such as Canada, or Mexico. Literally, Afrikaner means African - a person from Africa. In actual fact, Afrikaner (or Boer) means a white Afrikaans-speaking person of Dutch descent, quite distinct from a black African. Apartheid was meant to maintain that distinction.

With my father and other family members at home (before I came to this new insight) we continued to fight the Anglo-Boer War over and over again until

the National Party of Dr Malan in 1948 beat the liberal 'pro-English' United Party of General Smuts and started implementing the policies of apartheid. I was 17 at the time of the election and rejoiced in the nationalist victory, believing that the 'foreign' English 'capitalists and imperialists' would now be controlled, and the 'kaffirs' would be kept in place. Fortunately, my 'moment of truth' at the age of 22 pretty soon undermined these Afrikaner nationalist values and during the next ten years I drifted away from my Afrikaner roots in the processes of Anglicisation - or as we jokingly call it, detribalisation. And then, of course, there was the switch from rigid intolerant Calvinism to the tolerant spirit of Quakerism at the age of 40. It was now that the anger I experienced about what they did to my poor Protestant ancestors in France four centuries ago, as well as my holy concern about the heresies they preached to the poor heathens in Mashonaland, disappeared into thin air.

I remained proud of my Afrikaner heritage, my language and my culture. Nevertheless I drifted away from Afrikaner politics, from my Church and the many Afrikaans institutions that symbolised Afrikaner political exclusivity (distinct from related or similar English-medium institutions). That included universities. I came to value ethnic features as cultural diversity, but firmly believed that they should not constitute bases for political identification and activity, for the same reason that race should not.

The reason we reject race as a basis for discriminating against people is because it is inborn. One has no control over it. Because it had been exploited over so many ages, the current tendency to deny racial differences is understandable. The current tendency to acknowledge and encourage ethnicity enriches our lives to the extent that it promotes understanding and human interaction. To the extent that it is used to discriminate, exploit and even exterminate, it should be opposed.

**The Coloured People of South Africa: ethnic group or integrated part of the nation?**

As part of the apartheid government's policy, provision was made for the separate development of the coloured people. Their mixed origin (which I explained earlier) means that in appearance they range from European to Asian to African. Their language and culture are basically Afrikaans. In essence they are of

my own flesh and blood, but classified as non-white, they were victims of the apartheid system. In the light of their official status, the coloured people produced various parties and organisations as well as some individuals, who stood out as strong anti-apartheid forces over the years.

After the unbanning of the liberation groups in 1990 and the beginning of multi-party negotiations for a new South Africa, the Coloured Labour Party, which had fought the government within the system, reconsidered its role and on one occasion I was asked to address their regional congress. My message was clear: race or ethnicity, to the extent that it is an inborn characteristic should never form the basis of a democratic party. Democracy only works if there is free choice of party affiliation. To have a coloured party is contrary to democratic principles. It does not leave us a choice of parties. However, as one could have made a case for black power in times of white oppression, one could have made a case for a coloured party during apartheid, but not in a free democracy.

This party was subsequently dissolved and its leaders and members were absorbed in a range of multi-ethnic parties. The African-dominated ANC, and the largely white Democratic Party, attracted some. However, most of them joined the predominantly Afrikaans National Party which had been responsible for apartheid! They joined the party of their flesh and blood! Thanks to the vote of coloured people, the New National Party is in power in the Western Cape Province with a coloured man as premier.

Let me hasten to add that this does not mean the end of the problems of the coloured people as a distinct group (even though today we dare not call them either a racial or ethnic group). One reason they joined forces with white South Africans is because they have found themselves deprived in other ways in the new South Africa under black rule, in contrast to the former white rule. A major problem is the new policy of affirmative action with which we are well acquainted world-wide. One aspect of affirmative action is to ensure that senior positions be filled by people who were previously disadvantaged. The same principle applies to measures concerning general employment and the serious problems of unemployment. The implementation of affirmative action under black rule in the new South Africa has led to bitter accusations by coloured people who complain:

> Under white rule, we were not white enough to qualify for the privileges of white society. Now we are not black enough to qualify for the privileges of affirmative action!

No wonder some coloured people still feel the need to have a party dedicated to the needs of the 'coloured people'.

**Ethnic Afrikaners**

With the removal of apartheid came new perceptions of ethnicity. In the first place, the former Nationalist claim that the coloured people form a distinct ethnic group and therefore deserve separate governments and educational institutions, does not carry weight any more. On the other hand, black leaders, including anti-apartheid activists who tended to deny the existence and meaningfulness of ethnicity as vehemently as they denied the phenomenon of race, now are advocates of multi-ethnic and multi-cultural diversity. This new approach has been driven to its almost absurd logical conclusion in that we now have nine official languages instead of the previous two: English and Afrikaans.

By the time that President F W De Klerk, leader of the National Party in the last all-white parliament, revoked the banning of the liberation groups, the largest white opposition party was the Conservative Party to whom about half of all Afrikaner voters belonged. The Conservatives under the leadership of Dr Andries Treurnicht, regarded De Klerk's turnabout as a sell-out to the blacks and refused to join in the multiparty negotiations. They saw the new integrationist policies of the National Party under De Klerk's leadership as a major betrayal.

Conservative Party members were confused and divided about their position and their role in the new South Africa. Their party's refusal to participate in negotiations meant that, among other things, the wish of some members for a white homeland would not be presented. Within the Conservative Party a group calling itself the *Afrikaner Vryheidstigting* (Avstig - the Afrikaner Freedom Foundation) under the leadership of Prof. Carel Boshoff, (son-in-law of the late Dr Verwoerd, the 'grand architect' of apartheid), had formulated a consistent and sensible proposal for a white homeland.

Avstig claimed that different ethnic and religious communities could not co-exist in peace, and therefore advocated a separate independent homeland for white people. They were encouraged by Western approaches to the problems in other parts of the world, especially the Vance-Owen agreement that favoured the breakup of Yugoslavia into separate ethno-religious political units which by the way, made ethnic cleansing a self-fulfilling prophecy of xenophobic nationalists.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of ethnic nationalism in Eastern Europe boosted their morale. They argued cogently in favour of political independence and autonomy for 'ethnic Afrikaners'. They believed that only a white Afrikaner homeland (*volkstaat*) would ensure their survival as a distinct group, preserving their language, culture and religion.

Avstig's proposal focused on a semi-desert area in the Northern Cape (one of nine new provinces defined in the course of the constitutional negotiations) where a nucleus of Afrikaners had already established themselves by means of land purchase. I have visited these lands, on the banks of the Orange (*Gariep*) River, several times. Orania, as their settlement is called is an isolated but vibrant community populated by people with different motivations. The handful of original inhabitants went there to escape growing racial integration of South Africa during and in spite of the enforcement of apartheid!

Avstig grew out of a cultural movement calling itself the *Afrikaner-Volkswag*. Avstig, like the Conservative Party, believed there was little room for compromise. To begin, Avstig insisted on complete political independence as a pre-condition for negotiations, and refused to participate in the Convention for a Democratic South Africa where the new dispensation was being negotiated. In mid-1991, however, its leaders realised that they were becoming isolated and would have no impact on the formation of the new South Africa. By then, because of their 'racist' reputation, no prominent black politicians were willing to have formal and open talks with them.

**Mediation between Avstig and the ANC**

I have over the years persisted in my efforts to involve people from all political groups, including the Afrikaner right wing, in the Centre for Intergroup Studies programs. At one time I invited Eleanor Lombard, a Conservative Party parliamentary candidate. She reluctantly attended two seminars during the 1980s but, having felt uncomfortable, thereafter stayed away. More than a year after the unbanning of the ANC Eleanor, who had joined Avstig, phoned me and asked if I would help to bring the two parties together. The first ANC leader to whom I talked was Johnny IsseI. His enthusiastic answer to my question was:

> I have come out from underground where I tried to sabotage this government because they would not talk to us. We will soon be in

government and I donot want these people to sabotage us because we refused to talk to them! Let us talk.

The early meetings took place in my office. Beforehand I told Avstig delegates that there was no way the ANC would respond favourably to a request for a white homeland - a racist concept and I emphasised that I could not support an attempt to get it. I urged them to ask for an Afrikaner homeland, a cultural or ethnic concept. Eleanor brought Pieter Grobbelaar, a farmer who was chairman of the Western Cape branch of Avstig. Johnnie brought Reginald September, a returned exile and devoted Communist. While I had been bringing such people together for over two decades the experience was still novel in South Africa. At one stage, when Eleanor appeared shocked, Reginald declared: "Yes, I am a Communist. Have you ever talked to one?" Later he asked: "Am I talking to someone who will take up arms against us?"

"Yes", replied Eleanor with a spark in her eye, "if you do not grant us our homeland!" To begin, the Avstig members were extremely nervous that news of their overtures to the ANC might leak out. They feared that, like De Klerk, they would be seen as traitors. But as our discussions progressed they became committed and gradually moved away from their Conservative Party colleagues. We soon added a social dimension and met in homes, such as Pieter Grobbelaar's at Stellenbosch, where these leaders established contact and relationships of trust.

By then, Avstig had announced several major policy shifts. It had decided to participate in the negotiation process without rigid preconditions. Instead of the racist concept of a white homeland the party adopted an ethnic/cultural concept: a homeland for Afrikaans speakers regardless of race or colour. During their discussions the ANC leaders had emphasised that ethnicity could be accepted only if it were guaranteed that *baasskap* (race dominance) would be eliminated. Avstig agreed that there would be no forced removals and no race discrimination in the proposed homeland of Orania in the Northern Cape. In contrast to the other homeland proposals which involved ownership of cities or industries or mines, Avstig asked for a semi-desert area (where a nucleus of residents had already established themselves by means of land purchase). This impressed the ANC and made their proposal much more acceptable.

At the end of 1992 members of both sides asked me to arrange a meeting between Nelson Mandela and Professor Boshoff. Two delegations, of eight people from each side, met in Mandela's office in Johannesburg on 12 March. In Johannesburg as well as Cape Town, the ANC delegations included members of

the major racial groups: Africans, coloured people, Asians and whites. Following the meeting, Mandela made a public statement in which he expressed his sympathy with the wish of the Afrikaners to retain their language and culture. He invited them to participate in the multi-party negotiations and submit their case. The leaders of Avstig became actively involved in the negotiation process. Avstig paved the way for the establishment of the Freedom Front that broke away from the Conservative Party, participated in the national elections and were elected to Parliament under the national leadership of General Constand Viljoen, former head of the South African Defence Force during the apartheid regime.

**Volkstaat Council**

The interim constitution adopted in 1994 contained a clause in terms of which a *Volkstaat* Council was established. Its task was to advise the government about the practical implementation of an Afrikaner homeland. Although the Council had produced no meaningful results by 1996, it was included in the final constitution, which was adopted in May that year. The ANC agreed to the establishment of a Volkstaat Council, not because it believed it was a practical possibility but because it was a way to keep the dialogue open. It was also a magnanimous gesture of respect for a small, despised group of Afrikaners who had been shunned and ridiculed even by their fellow Afrikaners, especially in the ruling National Party.

When nominations were invited for the Volkstaat Council, the only party to show interest was the Freedom Front. General Viljoen thus appointed all its members. Viljoen, unfortunately, leaned over backwards to accommodate homeland proponents of the far right. Some of them made absurd claims on major cities in Gauteng, such as Pretoria. One conservative group of white Afrikaners, *Suiderland Aksie*, claimed most of the country and declared that "Non-Afrikaners would not be forced to leave this republic, but they would not be given work, education or medical care under the envisaged Boer government". The strong ideological commitment of some members on the Council prevented consensus on the nature and location of a white or Afrikaner homeland.

Towards the end of the first democratic Parliament in 1999, the Volkstaat Council was dissolved. The volkstaat dream had faded, as reflected in the national election when the Freedom Front returned fewer members than it had in 1994. Thanks to the respect shown by Mandela and his colleagues to the people of this dream - especially General Viljoen and Professor Boshoff, the major patron of

Orania - the ANC and the Freedom Front were able to work together in the new South Africa.

When I introduced my new German-American wife Elsbeth Woody, to members of parliament of the Freedom Front and of the ANC in 1995, they were overjoyed to tell us how well the two former' enemies' got on.

It is interesting to note that most of the participants in our meetings - among them Eleanor, Pieter, Reginald and Johnnie became members of the provincial and national legislatures in the wake of the 1994 general election. Some of the participants achieved high office: Kader Asmal and Dullah Omar became cabinet ministers and Albie Sachs was appointed as a judge on the Constitutional Court.

**European Quakers in an African society**

My last example of the problems of reconciling ethnic and racial groups in South Africa refers to tensions that related partly to failed attempts to Africanise Quakerism in South Africa.

Quakerism in South Africa is basically an extension of the British tradition of silent worship. It lacks outward trappings such as decorations, Sunday clothes, music and singing, or a sermon. To a large extent it is a spiritual experience which appeals to those who derive satisfaction from being quiet for at least one hour a week. I met the Quakers through English-speaking liberal people involved in human rights organisations. Throughout most of our membership, my late wife, Marietjie and I were the only Afrikaners or Afrikaans-speaking members of the Society in South Africa, and for that matter in the world. I cannot think of anything about Quakerism in South Africa that would attract conservative Afrikaners to the Society.

On the other hand it has been a concern among South African Friends, and also among those visiting us from abroad, that South African Quakerism should have an African character and shed its colonial image. This became more urgent as we approached independence in the 1990s. We tried to address this issue in study groups and seminars.

I myself treasure the 'varieties of religious experience' that we encounter world-wide. I am proud of the Quaker tradition of tolerance toward other religions. I believe the great variety of religious expressions is due to cultural,

socio-economic, political and personality differences as well as to different, and often contradictory, religious insights and interpretations of the Bible and other holy books and traditions. The fact that I switched from the Dutch Reformed Church to Quakerism had as much to do with my personality (the wish for simplicity) and my politics (opposition to apartheid) as with my religious beliefs (liberal, ecumenical). Little as the South African version of Quakerism would attract conservative Afrikaners, I accepted that it would attract few traditional Africans. Should westernised Africans be attracted to Quakerism in the same way as liberalised or 'detribalised' Afrikaners (like me), they will become members of our silent meeting for worship and all the associated processes and practices which constitute for me the essence of our religion and of our treasured spiritual fellowship. To greatly modify these in order to meet the cultural needs of other groups would alter Quakerism as we practise it.

Because of decades of apartheid injustices and oppression, Quakers in South Africa have reached out to the large black population. We have become deeply involved with them and sympathised with their aspirations. Our service work has become almost exclusively concerned with their political struggle and social and economic development. To the extent that we remain an 'alien' organisation with foreign forms of worship and virtually no black members, there is a fear of our being white paternalists. That is the last thing Quakers want to be! Among many Quakers there remains a deep need to explore ways in which Quakerism might become responsive to the needs of the people with whom we work, with whom we identify, and with whom we would like to worship. We have responded by recruiting black members to the Society. This, however, is difficult in view of the fact that in South Africa, Quakers do not proselytise as do other churches. In Cape Town, numbers of black people are involved in the work of the Quaker Peace Centre but do not join the Quakers or come to meeting for worship.

For many years we have had one very devoted African member in Cape Town, Susan Conjwa, who now and then gently enters our silence with a beautiful African hymn. Johannesburg had notably Miriam Madebe and Dudu Mtshazo. More recently two black women joined in Cape Town, Georgina Mbambo from Zimbabwe and Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge from Durban, a member of parliament and Deputy Minister of Defence.

In Soweto a few black people became attracted to the Quakers. By 1984 they had established a Preparative (Monthly) Meeting and met regularly for worship. White members of the Transvaal Monthly Meeting, who regularly met in

their own Quaker House in Johannesburg, were enthusiastic and proud of this development and frequently joined the Preparative Meeting. One thing that struck me from the beginning in Soweto was the tendency to sing and to have some form of prepared ministry. I was happy to see that these members felt free to occasionally adapt the form of worship as many Quakers have done in the United States, Kenya and other countries, with what are called Programmed Meetings.

**Soweto Quaker Centre**

An attempt to address the needs of deprived blacks and at the same time 'Africanise' Quakerism, was initiated by members of a delegation of the Southern Africa Program of the American Friends Service Committee when it visited South Africa in 1980. It had two black members, Jim Fletcher, who was an active member of the Society, and Jerry Herman of the American Friends Service

Three Quaker clerks: Hendrik van der Merwe (Clerk, South Africa General Meeting), Rosemary Elliot (Clerk, South Africa Yearly Meeting), Allison Madenyika (Clerk Central Africa General Meeting) 1983.

Committee staff who was not a Quaker. They reached out to their brethren in Soweto with whom they had extensive visits and meetings.

These contacts resulted in two initiatives. One was an invitation to Eddie Mvundlela, a member of Soweto meeting, and his wife Sibongile to visit Pendle Hill, the Quaker retreat centre near Philadelphia. The other was the idea of establishing a Soweto Quaker Centre. Both of these initiatives were fraught with problems.

First, the 'red carpet' treatment given to the Mvundelas in the USA was too much for Eddie to handle who, because of this visit, became the spokesman for Soweto Quakers and the major recipient of large funds. Back in South Africa the Soweto Quaker Centre Trust was established under the auspices of South Africa General Meeting to handle these large donations from the United States. In 1984, while I was Clerk of South Africa General Meeting, I was asked to address Friends World Committee for Consultation in the Americas, the major sponsor of this project. I was well acquainted with the Meeting in Soweto and knew the few members personally. I warned that there was no hope that a stable Quaker support group would develop in Soweto and that a Quaker Centre could not succeed. I suggested the establishment of an ecumenical community centre. Although there was general support for my proposal, it was opposed by people who had developed vested interests in the project.

Very soon there was clear evidence of violations of Quaker practice and of maladministration. Eddie appointed himself as Clerk of the Meeting and exercised autocratic rule over the Centre. He intimidated other black members of the Meeting and went so far as excommunicating the Clerk of South Africa General Meeting, the widely respected Dudu Mtshazo.

Unfortunately, it became a racial issue in the States as well as in South Africa. White Quakers who criticised Eddie were silenced by accusations of racism. This 'racist card' was a major reason why Central and Southern Africa Yearly Meeting took several years before they took firm action against Eddie who had by the early 1990s hijacked both the Meeting and the Centre. The Meeting was dissolved, the Centre closed and the building donated to the local authorities.

This is a sad story of a failed attempt of Quakers with good intentions to meet the needs of members of another culture. It will require careful reflection to understand what lessons could be learned form this experience.

**Ethnicity in Australia**

I am aware that the ethnic issues of Australian Aborigines are quite different from those of the South African groups that I have discussed - the coloured people and ethnic Afrikaners. I chose them because of my close relationship with these two groups, but also because both groups make us aware of the problems of nation-building. What are ethnic groups and how do they fit into political units? The question that came up when I read some of your Quaker literature, was: What does Absolute Sovereignty for the Aborigines mean? It seems clear that ethnicity when it is equated with culture can become part of a whole (or nation) in which the whole is different than the sum of its parts but where each part retains its ethnic/cultural identity just like the rainbow with its distinctly different colours.

# 5. CHALLENGES IN THE NEW SOUTH AFRICA

## Retribution or forgiveness

In 1990 South African political parties entered a process of political negotiations that resulted in the first national democratic elections and a government of national unity in 1994. The replacement of traditional confrontational politics by a new political style of negotiation encouraged a new civic culture and the emergence of negotiating and mediating bodies in all walks of life. In other words, the political miracle was not limited to national politics; it became a grassroots democratic movement involving representatives of all population groups and political persuasions. The signing of the National Peace Accord in 1991, and the establishment of a National Peace Secretariat as well as local Dispute Resolution Committees, was supported and followed up by numerous Non-Government Organisations who helped to build a solid base for a new democratic society. Support for negotiation and mediation was no longer limited to moderate and liberal English-speaking whites and a few black people who had the courage to take a moderate stand. A fundamental change in civic culture among both white conservatives and black revolutionaries followed the direction given by political leaders.

Human rights activists were, however, divided between those who more readily credited the government with progress and criticised the ANC for violations of human rights and those more cautious to accept that change was irreversible. The boycott mentality among sections of the international anti-apartheid movement, particularly abroad, was so strong that it took them many years to accept compromises that had already been accepted by black leaders within the country.

Following my resignation in 1992 as executive director of the Centre for Intergroup Studies I turned my attention to the wrongs of the past, and the problems of how to deal with this concern.

My friendship with the Mandela family - first with Winnie, during her long and lonely banishment in the Free State town of Brandfort, and then with Nelson when he was still in prison had made me conscious of two very different and contrasting philosophies and approaches to dealing with the past. On one end of the spectrum there is a need in society for punishment and retribution; on the other there is a need for forgiveness. Nelson Mandela has taken the lead in showing no bitterness, but a willingness to forgive. Winnie, on the other hand, has become a world-wide symbol of those less ready to forgive. She represents many blacks, but also whites, who believe that justice must be seen to be done: the perpetrators of the atrocities of apartheid cannot be let off the hook without proper punishment. As the widow of another black leader, Steve Biko, has said: "We want our pound of flesh".

**Restitution instead of retribution**

I myself could not accept the popular slogan, 'forgive and forget'. There is in every society and in each of us a need for some form of punishment, retribution or revenge for wrongs that have been done. But I also know that without forgiveness South Africa has no future. It is a fundamental requirement for healing our society because there is no way in which whites can truly compensate blacks for the harm they have done them, in both material and psychological terms.

These contrasting perspectives formed only part of the reasons why the Mandelas divorced. They also reflect the feelings of important segments of our society. There is an ongoing tension between the need for peace and reconciliation on the one hand and the demand for retribution and justice on the other. While retribution is commonly seen as negative and forgiveness as positive, I argue that they are not mutually exclusive or irreconcilable opposites, but form part of the continuum of responses to prior injustices. The logical conclusion of my belief in the principle of complementarity, and my practical experience of reconciling apparent opposites in South African politics convinced me that restitution is the synthesis of retribution and forgiveness.

I define restitution as a comprehensive process whereby society can heal itself and be able to face the future: it is an accounting and exposure of the injustices of the past, a unified process of repentance and forgiveness, and a plan to compensate for past evils as well as create a blueprint for the future. Its aim is the restoration of broken relationships.

I had come to the conclusion that within the process of restitution to restore relationships one should distinguish three categories, which include the full continuum of responses:

a) Punishment of the offender, which includes personal revenge and retaliation as forms of retributive justice, as well as responsible social vengeance and social censure and embarrassment through public exposure as a lenient form of restorative justice;

b) Compensation and reparation by the offender in both material and psychological ways (confessions and apologies); and,

c) Forgiveness by the victim, including amnesty.

During 1993/4 the government set in motion the process to establish the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). It consisted of three Committees: on Violations of Human Rights, Reparation, and Amnesty. While the first two Committees had completed their tasks and had handed their reports to the government, the Amnesty Committee continued its hearings of thousands of applicants.

On my return to South Africa in December 1994 from the United States Institute of Peace in Washington I led a Quaker discussion group who issued a statement promoting the concept of restitution as a balanced approach to deal with the wrongs of the past. The Quakers shared the concern of the South African Council of Churches with the well-being of both victim and perpetrator. We encouraged wide grass-roots participation in the activities of the TRC, and also long-term programs to follow up the short-term task of the Commission.

**Punishment in perspective**

While I regard the work of the Commission as a major contribution to conciliation in South Africa, I also feel that it has failed to meet the needs of millions of South Africans who wish to see that justice is done. What I objected to

at the time of its establishment was the insistence by its proponents, including Justice Minister Omar that the purpose was not to punish. Apart from my feeling that this claim was not quite honest it also, in my view, contributed to the rejection of the Commission by many black people who would have supported it had the deep-seated need for some form of punishment in all of us been publicly acknowledged.

Although retribution is popularly seen as primitive emotionalism, a form of pointless revenge, it actually constitutes a firm principle in most legal systems as well as in certain strands of theological thought. It is a basic principle of justice that a wrong should be righted - that the offender deserves punishment. Punishment as retribution is the paying of a debt to one's fellow citizens. It is true that there was an element of punishment in the sessions of the Human Rights Violations Committee where perpetrators were exposed and publicly humiliated. For some this amounted to severe punishment because acts that they committed during the apartheid regime which brought them honour and promotion were revealed as atrocities and violations of human rights, now punishable by law.

By denying the role of punishment as a form of redress in the healing process, the Commission failed to achieve reconciliation in the larger society. It is my conviction that South African blacks (and whites) need to hear from whites and the new government that punishment is a legitimate and ethical element of restitution. Such a public stance should have come from the Truth Commission. It did not.

Perhaps the biggest disappointment of the TRC was the failure of its Reparation Committee to implement the findings and recommendations to the Commission. This was largely due to incompetence of leading people in the Commission, and lack of support from the government.

Certainly the wish for conciliation has been paramount in devising the new constitution. South African political leaders firmly decided against any Nuremberg trials. Conciliation underlay the miracle of the peaceful transition to a democratic society and was the spirit behind the establishment of the Truth Commission. The building of a new South Africa was more important than establishing blame for past behaviour. But a delicate balance between retribution and compassion is required to achieve a just and viable social order. If there is no subsequent legal action against those perpetrators who refused to acknowledge the role and authority of the Truth Commission and refused to appear before it, the scale of justice will be out of balance.

The great challenge before us is to conceive and develop mechanisms, both formal and informal, governmental and non-governmental, to deal with these needs. That challenge still has to be met. There are many top black and white leaders in South Africa who had no doubt violated human rights during apartheid years who had not applied for amnesty. When the Amnesty hearings are concluded the authorities have a choice of charging and sentencing these people, or declaring a general amnesty. There are persistent rumours that the government would not charge people like Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi (leader of the lnkatha Freedom Party and minister of Home Affairs, who had arrogantly refused to cooperate with the TRC) and would rather declare a blanket amnesty, thereby making a mockery of the painful, costly, national process of the TRC and amounting to a slap in the face of Archbishop Desmond Tutu who chaired the Commission. So far, the response of the government to the report of the TRC has been very disappointing.

**Restorative Justice**

I have mentioned the concept of restorative rather than retributive justice. As I have explained, the Truth Commission emphasised healing and forgiveness, rather than justice. Quite rightly they wanted to avoid accusations of 'a witch hunt' or retributive justice. On occasions, Tutu seemed to want peace at all cost (Most notably in the case of Winnie Mandela). However the notion of restorative, rather than retributive justice would have helped to bring a reconciliation and improvement of victim/offender relations. Restorative justice avoids the traditional urge for revenge and retaliation that prevailed, and still exists in our social and legal system. Restorative justice focuses on conflict transformation and peace building, changing situations from destructive to constructive outcomes. In the case of the Truth Commission, the victims got a raw deal in spite of many good intentions.

**Rainbow Nation but not utopia**

The lessons we have learned on our path to a negotiated settlement, and the democratic and well considered way in which we dealt with the wrongs of the past in our constitution, our Government of National Unity and the work of the Truth Commission have proved to be of great international significance.

When lecturing during the 1990s in Africa, Eastern Europe and Russia, I often heard: "If this was possible in South Africa, there must be hope for us." Does this mean South Africans are entering a Utopia? It now sounds ridiculous but it is true that many people, white liberals as well as blacks, had become so obsessed with the evils of apartheid that there was an unconscious anticipation that a black majority government would be free of political evils.

I was not comfortable with this idealistic attitude. I have always argued that whites are not inherently better or more moral than blacks. Similarly I warned that blacks are not inherently better or more moral than whites. A fundamental tenet of my life has been the belief that there is something good in every person. Yet I am not blind to the presence of evil in every person. The fact that power corrupts speaks loudly from every corner of the world.

The emphasis on free speech as a fundamental human right and an essential component of democracy is a good example of a product of Western culture, which is not fully shared by people of African and Asian cultures. Tension inevitably exists between this perspective and that of autocratic rule where individual free speech is subordinate to the greater value of 'free speech in the interest of the nation', which means the party in power. This explains the phenomenon of 'politically correct' speech and the silencing of opposition. Botswana has been the rare exception on the African continent where democratic political opposition was tolerated.

The legitimacy of democratic government rests on the free election of representatives by popular choice. This distinguishes politicians from bureaucrats who are appointed on merit. Legitimate political leaders may be popular but are often incompetent and disastrous. A legitimate political system may seriously diminish efficiency. Most will agree that this outcome has struck South Africa. Lack of efficiency in a developing country means lack of economic development.

This lack of efficiency and the destructive power of corruption is most glaring when we look at the issue of land reform.

**Morality vs efficiency in land allocation:**
**A Quaker response**

Land is one of the most emotional issues in South Africa, as in many others, notably Zimbabwe and Australia. The land issue has become one of the

most divisive political issues partly because of divergent cultural and spiritual perceptions between indigenous inhabitants and white settlers. To the Aborigines of Australia and the Khoesan in South Africa, and to a lesser extent the black African tribes, the European idea of private ownership of land was inconceivable. The first inhabitants felt they were owned and controlled by the land rather than themselves controlling the land. While there are huge differences in the historical process of conquest and expropriation of land in South Africa and Australia, and especially in the way solutions are currently sought, it remains a major source of intense division and a threat to peace, security and development in both countries.

With the colonisation of Africa, white settlers have taken the land from indigenous people, often by legal means and commercial transactions, but always in terms determined by the conqueror and to the disadvantage of the conquered. With the liberation of African countries during the past few decades, 'land reform' was a major platform. In many cases land reform implied a policy of the new black government repossessing large white-owned or white-controlled productive farms which had been making major contributions not only to the country's overall national product but also to feed the people on those lands. The settlement of these large modern mechanised farms by small-scale self-subsistent farmers using primitive tools and often outdated methods, has resulted in huge decreases in production, in many cases great food shortages, poverty and hunger.

An oversimplification of this issue would be to interpret this problem as that of reconciling the moral right of indigenous people to get their land back, with the need for efficiency in producing food and wealth. The politicisation of land has made it a much more complicated issue. The original problems resulting from different cultural perceptions of land have long been replaced by political rivalry and opportunism.

In South Africa the state owns about 25% of the total land. However, there is no coherent policy on state land disposal that would unlock economic opportunities. In addition many commercial farms are for sale, so there is no need for expropriation of productive white-owned farms.

The new ANC government of South Africa had lost no time in taking up the land issue. The Restitution of Land Rights Act of 1994 provided for restoration of land, and a Land Claims Commission was established. The shortcomings of this Commission are reflected in the fact that by May 2000 only two land claims out of 5,500 lodged in the Northern province alone had been settled (*Mail and Guardian*, May 5-11, 2000). Countrywide fewer than 5% of

land claims have been settled since 1994. No wonder that the *Mail and Guardian* of July 14 to 20, 2000 reported that thousands of squatters have invaded hundreds of white farms in KwaZulu-Natal Province, "all but halting commercial agriculture in the area by taking over prime commercial land." These invasions in South Africa contained all the elements of intimidation and violence that are present in Zimbabwe.

The governments of Zimbabwe under Robert Mugabe over the past two decades and of South Africa under Mandela and Mbeki, for the past six years have made big claims about land reform, but have failed miserably in instituting any major reforms. In Zimbabwe available land that could have been distributed more fairly, was given to cabinet ministers, senior government officials and wealthy businessmen. After neglecting legal land reform for 20 years, Mugabe is now blaming white farmers for his own failures and has allowed the unlawful forceful invasion and occupation of 1600 white farms, bringing production literally to an end, and ruining the lives, not only of thousands of whites, but also of many more thousands of black farm workers.

The politicisation of the land issue in Zimbabwe and South Africa has polarised white and black where reasonable compromises were in sight. In both countries there used to exist enough good will for practical compromises between white farmers and black peasants. In one famous case in South Africa the court decided that a group of farmers had to sell their land in order that it be returned to the descendants of the original owners. There was no way that the large number of subsistence peasants could operate these modern and mechanised farms and dairies. A compromise was reached when the large group of new black owners decided to form a company that hired the former white owners as managers. The current political polarisation and animosity, especially in Zimbabwe, makes any such compromise more and more unlikely if not impossible.

Following Mugabe, several top ANC leaders in South Africa have diverted attention from their own failure by blaming farmers for lack of land reform. Max du Preez writes in the *Cape Argus* of July 2000 about the "threatening noises" of ANC leaders: "It is cheap and easy, land is one of the most emotional issues in a country such as ours, and Boerehaat is the easiest emotion to whip up." These politicians perpetuate that myth that "owning land automatically brings wealth." Giving farms back to the descendants of the original owners, may sound morally right, but it makes no sense in a modern economy. These historically legitimate claims have to be reconciled with appropriate and efficient farming procedures. At present politicians are using this issue to increase racial

tensions and conflict, and are damaging the economy. It was most disturbing when our Minister of Agriculture recently announced that she relied on Zimbabwe as a model for land reform in South Africa.

These conflicts have escalated during the past few years since I have retired from active Quaker life. I was aware that the small group of Quakers in Zimbabwe, both black and white, might not have the influence or the courage to take a firm stand in such a dictatorial country. South African politicians, including President Mbeki, became heavily involved in the Zimbabwean political debate. When President Mbeki, to everybody's disappointment came out in public support of Mugabe's violation of law and order, I reassured my Quaker friends. I recalled how I, as a mediator, sometimes took the side of the offender to help him get out of a fix by helping him save face. I was sure Mbeki was privately putting great pressure on Mugabe to end the lawlessness. However, as time passed other black, ANC leaders, as well as Mbeki, not only continued to give public support to Mugabe, but started to play the same political game in South Africa. I was therefore grateful when I saw that Cape Town Quakers published an open letter to President Mbeki in the *Sunday Times* of June 2000 in which they expressed their grave concern about the fact that the South African government, and specifically President Mbeki, have given the impression that they condone the breakdown of law and order in Zimbabwe. The Quakers pleaded with President Mbeki to start now mobilizing an international effort in anticipation of a forthcoming national disaster as a result of the expected food shortage in Zimbabwe.

**A flawed democratic system: A poor compromise**

Our new democratic constitution replaced an electoral system whereby members of parliament are elected by voters in geographically defined areas with a system of proportional representation. Under the former system, representatives were accountable to constituencies who could vote them out of office if they failed to live up to community expectations. Under the new provisions the leadership of each party determines its list of candidates for election and the rank order. Party members make a periodic and indirect input in the selection process but the leaders have the final say.

The effect of this system is that members of parliament feel accountable not to their constituencies, which are somewhat theoretically and arbitrarily designated, but to the party leadership. The proportional representation system thus fails to promote accountability to the wider population and consolidates power at the centre, which inevitably encourages autocratic rule. Not only open

challenges to the leadership but independent thought and loyal dissent, which are crucial for true democracy, are seriously diminished. If members of parliament find that their honest convictions are in accord with the policies of another party they cannot cross the floor. If they disagree they may be dismissed, and probably deprived of their livelihood. This system of accountability to party leadership undermines democracy. The danger is reinforced if decisions are taken outside parliament (the *Mail and Guardian* has warned against the present 'back-room presidency' of Thabo Mbeki).

Western-type democracy is a cultural concept that requires adaptation to a South African culture. To find the balance between the weaknesses of this system and the urgent need for efficiency and development is not easy. Our greatest threat lies in ideological polarisation where practical compromises are indeed possible.

For decades we have lived under the ideology of apartheid in alliance with capitalism. President De Klerk was able to reject apartheid once he felt the threat of communism and socialism had been reduced. Under the strong leadership of Mandela the ANC moved from the ideology of a command economy, to a practical policy of a market economy in alliance with big business in South Africa. Whether the ANC will continue to withstand pressures from within its own structure, especially from the ideological fanaticism of the Communist Party of South Africa and the trade unions, remains to be seen. The fact that current compromises are so biased in favour of the wealthy surely undermines the power base and stability of the government. The resurgence of ideological conflict along capitalist-socialist lines is seething among the poor and the ideologues.

To emphasise how important and how delicate compromises are, I quote the historian Norman F Cantor and the great politician who speaks with such moral authority, Nelson Mandela: In his book *Medieval History: The life and death of a civilization*, Norman F Cantor, came to the following conclusion:

> "The study of medieval history therefore teaches us that civilization is the result of a complex interpenetration of spirit and power, of moral and material resources; that this delicate compromise is not easy to maintain, that its preservation requires mature intelligence, sophisticated moderation, and constant vigilance; and that the enemies of civilization, apart from the uncomprehending primitives, are the socially irresponsible zealots and the neurotic simplifiers". (New York: Macmillan, 1969:547)

Commenting on the recent conflicts in central Africa, Nelson Mandela argued that there was hope because many of the leaders from different countries searching for solutions were university graduates with insights into social situations and problems. It was reported that Mandela said:

> "that the most difficult thing is to **change yourself** in the light of the conditions that face you, and reconcile emotions and feelings with reality. **But the worst failure would be that innocent men, women and children should shed their blood because of a lack of political compromise**". (Emphasis supplied)

I am often asked how I feel about the changes that I have helped to bring about in political leadership. My response is that I have no doubt that I have acted morally correctly. Apartheid was morally wrong and had to be replaced. I had consistently warned against the short-sighted policy of merely fighting apartheid instead of promoting a long-term policy of building a better society. The search for a just system continues.

As an intellectual I continue to remain critical of the establishment and I abhor and expose abuse of power. As a Quaker I continue to side with the weak, the poor, and the minority. As a peacemaker I continue to search for common ground between adversaries and apparently irreconcilable forces.

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by Hendrik W van der Merwe

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