Comment

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TALK TODAY

PETER FABRICIUS

Reality complicates morality play

It was ironic that a day after publicly berating the developed countries for their contempt of multilateralism, President Thabo Mbeki was privately browbeating Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir for refusing to accept a multilateral United Nations (UN) peacekeeping force in Darfur.

This was a reminder that the world is a more complex organism than had been suggested by Mbeki's speech to the General Assembly on Tuesday. That was a speech straight out of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) copybook, essentially a full-blown rant against the North, or First World, for depriving the South, or Third World, of its right to development.

In his speech the week before at the NAM summit in Havana, Mbeki had put his case even more crisply, blaming the rich nations for failing to "transfer resources" to the poor world. The picture thus evoked was of Uncle Sam and Co sitting round a table with a big fat chequebook in front of them, and asking the poor nations: "How much, or should we just make it a blank cheque?"

The world does not work this way. Yes, of course the rich world could do better, not least by scrapping its agricultural subsidies in the Doha round of trade talks. But these rich countries are asking in return for more market access for services and it is by no means clear that such a deal would be bad for countries of the South – particularly South Africa, which has strong and competitive companies.

Nor should we forget that the G8 – presumably the embodiment of the rich world Mbeki was berating – has forgiven much poor world debt and is increasing its development finance to the poor nations, especially Africa. True, the G8 members and others are not yet on track to keep the big promises of Gleneagles, but they are moving. It is largely the European Union's peace fund which is financing the African Union's Amis peace force in Darfur, for example.

These things Mbeki did not mention in his bitter speech. Why so? When South Africa hosted the NAM summit nine years ago, its aim was to alter the organisation's ethos, from the usual soapbox anti-West rhetoric towards an engagement with the rich countries in a more constructive dialogue.

That helped create the developing world and especially's Africa's formal engagement with the G8 at its annual summits, which Mbeki has attended seven times which led, inter alia, to the G8's Africa Action Plan for supporting African development through Nepad.

Perhaps the bitterness of Mbeki's General Assembly address reflected his sense that this dialogue with the rich world had not produced anything like the results he hoped for and that the powerful nations have also failed to democratise the UN and other international organisations.

The powerful nations – particularly the five permanent members of the UN Security Council – are reluctant to surrender their powers. But here again reality raises its head to complicate Mbeki's neat morality play. Africa itself greatly hampered the international efforts to democratise the UN Security Council because it was not prepared to make compromises with other countries seeking permanent seats.

Mbeki knows this and knows that Sudan is currently at least as big an enemy of multilateralism as the US.

Which makes you wonder about the tone of his General Assembly address. Was this a campaign speech to win General Assembly votes for South Africa's bid for a permanent seat on the Security Council? More cynically, was this Mbeki talking left on the comparatively harmless world stage to impress the growing band of left-wing critics back home who don't like his neoliberal domestic economic policies? Was this, in order words, counter-Zuma politics?

One might have thought that this would be an occasion to indicate how South Africa will perform when it almost inevitably takes a temporary seat on the council from January.

But if that is going to be South Africa's uncompromising tone, it's going to be a turbulent two years there.

One man's vision for reconciliation

To undo the damage caused by apartheid, Archbishop Desmond Tutu believed South Africans had to face up to its consequences, writes **John Allen**

In 1987, in a series of presentations to an Anglican Church consultation, Desmond Tutu spelled out his vision for reconciliation in South Africa.

He likened the country under apartheid to the depiction of the world in the book of Genesis after the fall of Adam and Eve: a place in which harmony had been shattered by the effects of sin – alienation, disharmony, and separation.

Quoting from the Bible, he said the church's calling was to work for the fulfilment of God's vision of "a new heaven and a new earth", in which "the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid".

But this would not be achieved without offending the powerful. "Often there have been those who have wanted to provide a spurious kind of reconciliation, a crying of 'peace, peace, where there is no peace', a daubing of the wall with whitewash, a papering over of the cracks instead of dealing with the situation as it demands, seriously facing up to the unpleasantness of it all.

"In South Africa, we have often heard people speaking disapprovingly of what they have called 'confrontation', which they then opposed to 'reconciliation'. In this way glorious Gospel words have fallen into disrepute and have been horribly devalued so that many have come to think that 'reconciliation' meant making peace with evil, immorality, injustice, oppression and viciousness of which they are the victims and, quite rightly, they have rejected such a travesty of the genuine article. How could anyone really think that true reconciliation could avoid a proper confrontation?"

Although Tutu developed this statement as a theological rationale for the struggle against apartheid, it also neatly summarised the thinking which underpinned his main pre-occupation for the better part of the next two decades.

As apartheid was dismantled, he insisted – initially in the churches, then to FW de Klerk, and eventually through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission – that if South Africans were to overcome the damage it had caused, they had to face up to and work through its consequences.

He advocated an explicitly Christian model of achieving reconciliation, involving three separate, successive transactions. Two of them required action from the perpetrators or beneficiaries of apartheid; the third involved a generous response from its victims.

His best-known elucidation of the model was delivered at a national conference of South African church leaders near Rustenburg, nine months after Nelson Mandela's release.

In an opening sermon, Tutu made the point that church leaders could not credibly preach reconciliation if they were not reconciled among themselves. For this reconciliation to happen, he said, those responsible for apartheid first had to confess their sin.

In the second transaction, the victims were under a "Gospel imperative" to forgive. In the third, those who had committed wrongs had to make restitution.

His sermon was followed by a moving apology for apartheid from another speaker, Willie Jonker, a theologian from Stellenbosch University, once the intellectual heart of Afrikaner nationalism.

The apology, endorsed the next day by the main white Dutch Reformed Church, sent ripples through the Reformed Church and the Afrikaner community.

From one side, black and coloured Dutch Reformed churches questioned the sincerity of the white church and Tutu's right to accept the confession; from the other side, a furious PW Botha telephoned the church's moderator to protest.

Tutu denied that he had spoken for the conference, but said he refused to impose limits on God's grace.

> "God has brought us to this moment.... I speak only for myself. I cannot, when someone says, 'Forgive me,' say 'I do not'"

He said that the Dutch Reformed confession marked a "quite shattering" moment in the life of the country: "God has brought us to this moment ... I speak only for myself. I cannot, when someone says, 'Forgive me,' say 'I do not'."

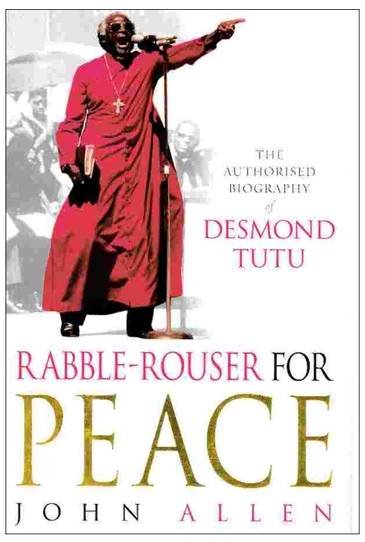
The conference approved a long declaration, including an eloquent collective confession of the churches' complicity in apartheid.

Some months later, Tutu asked De Klerk for a private meeting at which he urged the president to make a formal apology for the suffering which apartheid had caused.

De Klerk replied that his father, a member of one of the first apartheid-era cabinets, had helped to implement apartheid and that his father had not been a vicious man.

Tutu responded that he was saying the policy was vicious, not its perpetrators; but he failed to persuade De Klerk.

Two years later, De Klerk did apologise. "It was not our intention to deprive people of their rights and to cause misery," he said, "but eventually apartheid led to just that. Insofar as that occurred we deeply regret it ... Yes, we say we are sorry."



Tutu thought the apology was qualified and that De Klerk was not yet prepared to admit apartheid was intrinsically evil, but he urged that it be accepted.

The issue would return to haunt their relationship during the proceedings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

As the evidence of atrocities mounted, the commission turned its attention to the leaders under whom they had occurred.

Tutu was instrumental in calling to account three leaders in particular: PW Botha, FW de Klerk and Winnie Madikizela-Mandela. He did so not as a dispassionate adjudicator of the law, rather a committed advocate, willing to bend over backwards to persuade them to make the confessions by which they could appropriate the forgiveness they were being offered.

De Klerk made his first presentation to the TRC before the amnesty hearings of the Vlakplaas commanders Jac Cronje and Dirk Coetzee and their men. He acknowledged that security forces, frustrated by their incapacity to deal with revolutionary strategies, had developed "unconventional counter-strategies" which were planned on a "need-to-know" basis. But "within my knowledge and experience, they never included the authorisation of assassination, murder, torture, rape, assault or the like". Neither did he or his colleagues "directly or indirectly ever suggest, order or authorise any such action".

When he gave evidence a second time, the confessions of the Security Branch's commanders and underlings had changed the landscape. In an oral submission, he reiterated his apology for apartheid of 1993, but added: "Many things happened which were not authorised, not intended and of which we were not aware. The recent information of atrocities I find as shocking and as abhorrent as anybody else."

At that point, De Klerk dug in. Under extensive cross-examination, he rejected "with every fibre of energy which I have" the contention that his government had presided over systematic, state-sanctioned violence. Replying to a statement by Tutu that the abuses hardly constituted aberrations when they continued for so long and involved such senior figures, he questioned the veracity of applicants for amnesty who said their actions had been authorised from above.

The next day, Tutu's face crumpled up in distress when a journalist asked him about the hearing at a news conference. Composing himself, he said he had hoped for statesmanship. He could not comprehend how De Klerk could insist he had been unaware of atrocities.

The commission's frustration at failing either to pin responsibility for violations of human rights on De Klerk, or to engage him in Tutu's effort to find a white leader to accept accountability for atrocities, was displayed in the embarrassing weakness of its finding against him.

De Klerk acknowledged in his autobiography that the TRC badly damaged his image. After its main report was published, a newspaper headlined his presence at a meeting of the State Security Council in 1984 at which an education minister wanted two teachers in the Eastern Cape town of Cradock "removed". Fifteen months later, the teachers were among four people murdered by the police. De Klerk told the newspaper the intention had been that the teachers should be transferred to another town.

The writer, exploring the damage that the clash between Tutu and De Klerk did to their relationship, asked De Klerk what had gone through his mind when he heard of the deaths of the teachers. Did he ever think: 'there's something wrong here'? De Klerk's answer might have enhanced the commission's potential to promote reconciliation had it come eight years earlier.

"I never knew about this and I was never part of any policies authorising it. But where maybe I failed was not asking more questions ... not following up on a slight uncomfortableness you feel here and there ... In my case, I'm not saying I didn't want to know. But I do think, with the advantage of hindsight, that I was at times maybe not strong enough on following up on my instincts."

John Allen, managing editor of the African news website, AllAfrica.com, has reported on and worked with Tutu for 30 years. *Rabble-rouser for Peace*'s international launching will take place in Cape Town on September 28. The recommended selling price is R245

Tomorrow, read in the Pretoria News Weekend how Tutu tried to make PW Botha remember his own mother's internment in a British concentration camp to get Botha to stop the forced removals of black South Africans from the urban areas.

PRETORIA NEWS

Let's improve our public transport first

Motorists and taxi commuter will welcome efforts by the Gauteng transport department to ease congestion on our roads.

But there are concerns about the proposal to reserve one lane for multi-passenger vehicles only on the N1, especially during the busy pre-festive month of October.

The plan to turn the left lane into a high-occupancy-vehicle lane, allowing only multi-passenger vehicles, taxis and buses on it, does not address the issue of why we have so many private cars on our roads in the first place.

By the department's own admission, the number of cars using the N1 is increasing by 7% or by 21 000 passenger trips per day each year.

The increase in the number of cars on our roads is a vote of no confidence in the public transport system, which is at best unreliable and at worst dangerous.

Yet after all these years of talking about the problem nothing has changed on the public transport front. Our Metrorail system is still unreliable and no additional buses are being introduced on busy routes. Commuters have to rely heavily on minibus taxis, which are dangerous. Just as dangerous as the hundreds of trucks flooding the highways.

Yes, someday we will have a Gautrain.

But something needs to be done before then to alleviate the chaos on the N1, and that something is not forcing motorists to share a lane with slow moving trucks, especially during a busy period.

An idea would be to launch this project during a quieter month like January for instance, when schools are closed.

If the transport department wants to discourage motorists from using their cars, it must offer a viable alternative.

Let's improve our roads, offer safe, reliable road transport and improve Metrorail and Spoornet services. Then let's see if we have fewer cars on our roads during peak hour.

YESTERDAYS

1828 Shaka, king of the Zulus, is assassinated by his half-brothers Dingane and Mhlangana, who stab him to death. Dingane assumes the throne.

1899 The British government decides to mobilise an army corps for service in South Africa.

1914 South African leader General Louis Botha takes command of the nation's armed forces.

1934 The Status of the Union Act is gazetted and becomes operative.

1987 The first US businessman to be convicted under the Anti-Apartheid Act is sentenced to four months' imprisonment for trying to sell military aircraft manuals to the South African Defence Force. **– Sapa-AP**

TODAY

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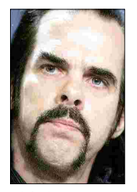

Nick Cave