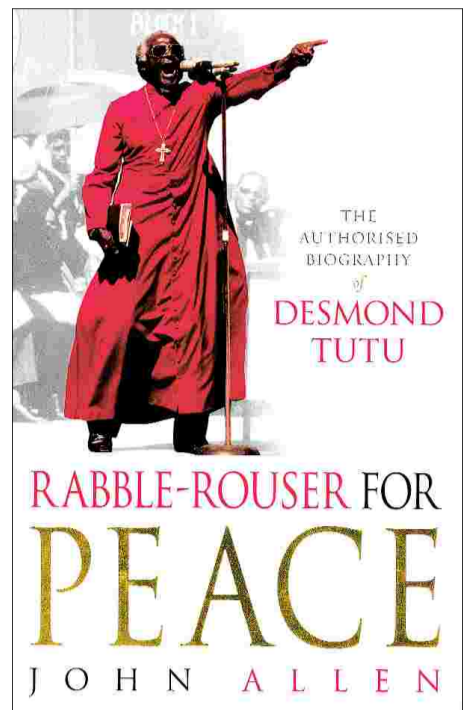


Truth and reconciliation for peace

Desmond Tutu shared his vision and proved a leading example of how the healing power of forgiveness can help us move on



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 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.

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 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?

This underpinned Tutu's main preoccupation 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 (TRC) - that if South Africans were to overcome the damage, 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 SA church leaders near the town of Rustenburg, north-west of Johannesburg, nine months after Mandela's release.

The conference brought together an unprecedented range of SA churches. Tutu made the point that church leaders could not credibly preach reconciliation to the country 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 Willie Jonker, a theologian from Stellenbosch University, 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 family 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.

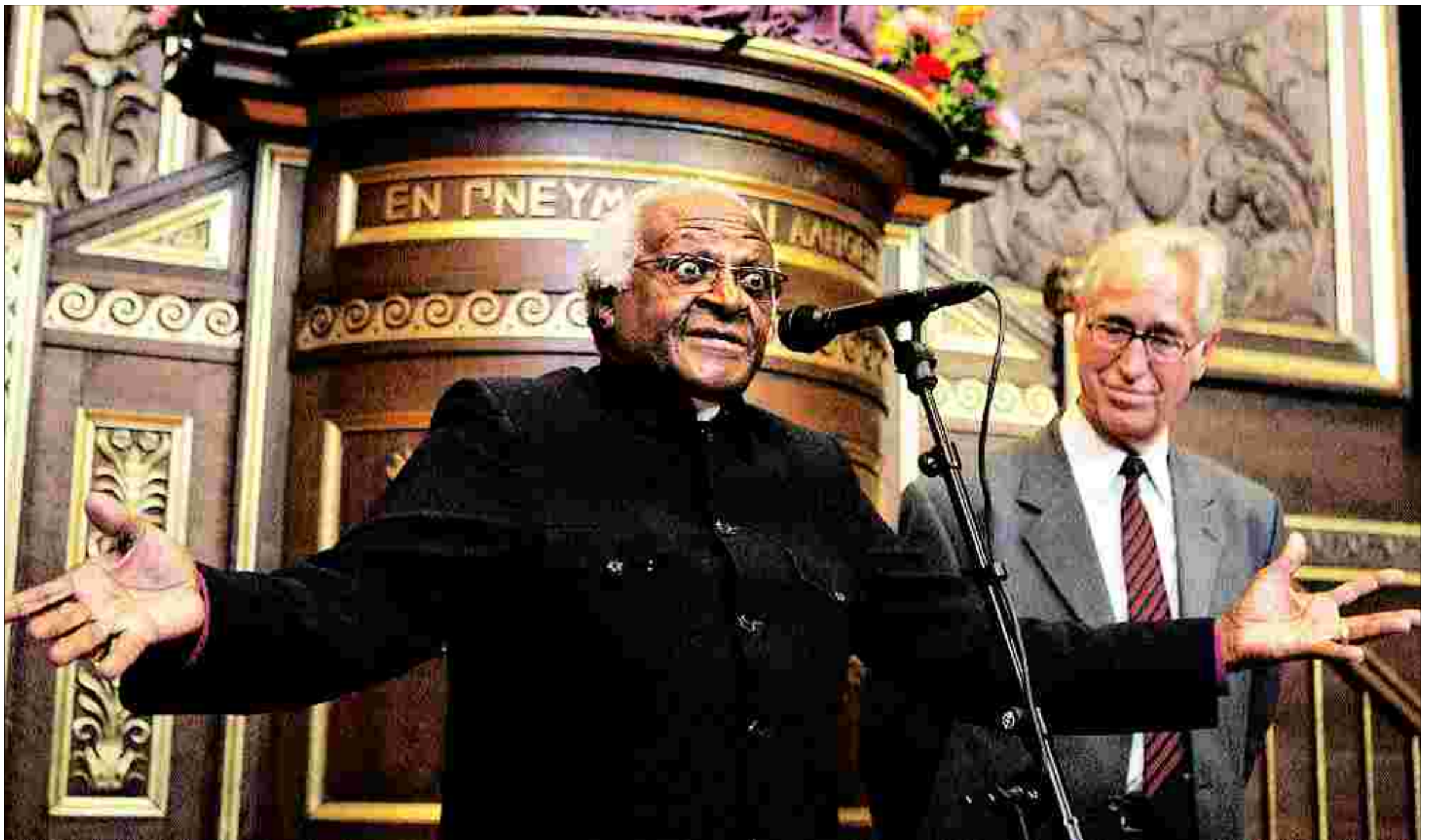
He supported his position by quoting an associate of Steve Biko, Malusi Mpumwana, who had once told him that while being tortured by police he had looked up at his torturers and thought to himself, "By the way, these are God's children too, and... they need you to help them recover the humanity they are losing."

Tutu said that the Dutch Reformed confession marked a "quite shattering" moment in the life of the country.

The conference approved a long declaration, including an eloquent collective confession of the churches' complicity in apartheid. Some months later Tutu asked FW de Klerk to make a formal apology for the suffering which apartheid had caused, but he failed to persuade him.

Two years later, De Klerk did apologise: "It was not our intention to deprive people of their rights and to cause misery," he said. 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 TRC.

As the evidence of atrocities mounted, the commission turned its attention to the



MOVING FORWARD: Archbishop Tutu delivers a lecture at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark recently. The speech was made in front of a 600-strong audience, and was the first of a series of events marking the tenth anniversary of South Africa's change from apartheid rule. **PICTURE: MAGNUS MOELLER / AP**

leaders under whom they had occurred. Desmond Tutu was instrumental in calling to account three leaders in particular: PW Botha, FW de Klerk and Winnie Madikizela-Mandela.

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, etc."

Neither did he or his colleagues "directly or indirectly ever suggest, order or authorise any such action".

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.

"There was an avalanche of information. To say I did not know ... I find that hard to understand. I have to get to say that I sat there and I was close to tears. I feel sorry for him. I am devastated. (For him) to make an impassioned apology... and then to negate it. All that is required is to say that 'we believed in this policy but it is a policy that brought about all of this suffering. It is a policy that killed people. Not by accident, deliberately. It was planned'."

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.

FW de Klerk acknowledged in his autobiography that the TRC badly damaged his image. After

conciliation had it come eight years earlier. De Klerk: "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 going on a crusade about things ... 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. But that doesn't take away from the fact that at no time was any decision taken of which I was part, where I felt: 'This is actually authorising assassination or cold-blooded murder.'"

"And I remember distinctly one incident, which I didn't write about (in the autobiography) and therefore will not identify, where it took place."

"At a function, I got extremely upset, because I heard something that meant

there had been what in my (judgement) would mean unacceptable behaviour. And I exploded in front of three of the top security people in South Africa."

John Allen: "Is this in the eighties?" De Klerk: "Yes. And they took me aside and on their words of honour they assured me that my suspicions on that particular occasion were unfounded."

Allen: "Do you recall generally what the nature of the issue was? That people had been killed?"

De Klerk: "Ja (Yes), there were deaths involved. And on their word of honour (they) assured me ... and it was people I had respect for."

John Allen, managing editor of the African news website, *AllAfrica.com*, has reported on and worked with Tutu for 30 years. He met Tutu shortly after the Soweto uprising of 1976, when he was appointed religion correspondent of *The Star*, Johannesburg.

After Tutu was appointed archbishop of Cape Town, Allen was appointed his press secretary, and later served as director of media liaison at the TRC and as Tutu's research assistant at Emory University, Atlanta, in the US. From 2000 to 2004, Allen was director of communications at Trinity Church, Wall Street, in New York, where he was on the streets below the World Trade Center during the attacks of September 11 2001. He returned to South Africa in 2004 to write the biography.

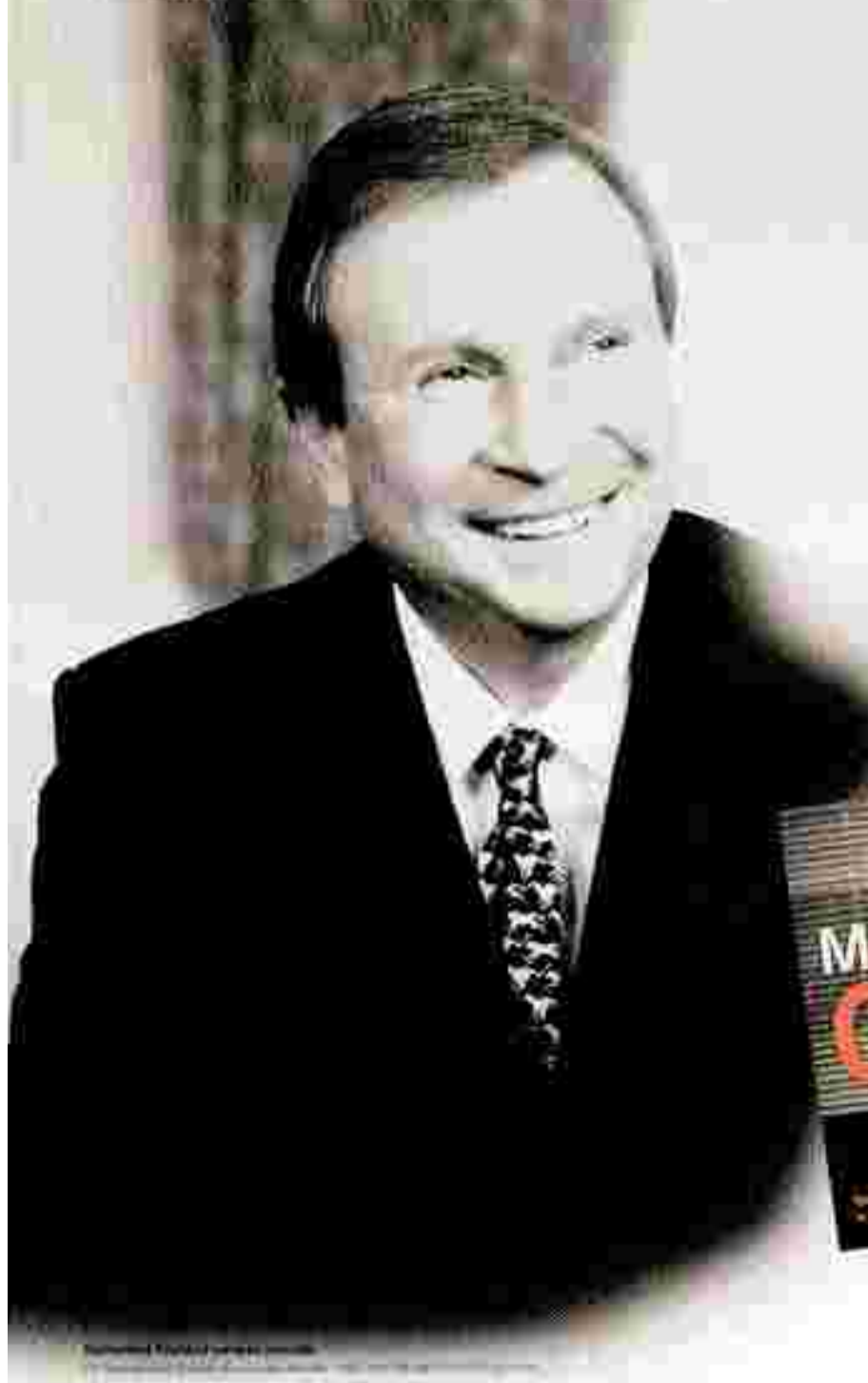
The international launch of *Rabble-Rouser for Peace* will take place in Cape Town on Thursday September 28. The recommended selling price is R245.

This is an extract from the book. Tomorrow, read in the Saturday Star 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.

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