

**Reconciliation, Justice, Spirituality:
In Conversation with John W. de Gruchy**

by

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DECLARATION

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the authorship owner thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated) and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

Date: March 2014

ABSTRACT

The primary concern of this study is to gain a better understanding of the interplay between the notions of reconciliation, justice, and Christian spirituality in the work of John W. de Gruchy in order to strengthen the profile of Christian spirituality. Through close readings of de Gruchy's works on reconciliation and justice, as well as his own reflections on Christian spirituality, this study seeks to observe the nature and content of Christian spirituality as it pertains to justice and reconciliation. This study furthers the understanding of the contribution of Christian spirituality to the practice of reconciliation and as witness of public theology. It reveals the relational character of Christian spirituality, showing its value for engagement in practices of reconciliation and justice. These core concepts are found to be inherent in the covenantal relationship between God and humankind. Consequently, reconciliation is depicted as restoration; the contours of justice and right relationship in the transcendental, Platonist choice for truth, beauty and goodness serve to encapsulate these observations in de Gruchy's work. Spirituality, reconciliation and justice are found to interrelate particularly in the sense that all are a means to an end, and ends in themselves.

OPSOMMING

Hierdie studie fokus op die wisselwerking tussen die opvattinge van versoening, geregtigheid en Christelike spiritualiteit in die werk van John W. de Gruchy met die oog op 'n versterking van die profiel van Christelike spiritualiteit. Deur 'n noukeurige lees van de Gruchy se werke oor versoening en geregtigheid en sy eie refleksies van Christelike spiritualiteit, poog hierdie studie om die aard en inhoud van Christelike spiritualiteit te bestudeer in sover as wat dit betrekking het op geregtigheid en versoening. Hierdie studie bevorder die begrip van Christelike spiritualiteit se bydrae tot die beoefening van versoening en dus die getuigenis daarvan as publieke teologie. Die verhouding-gedrewe karakter van Christelike spiritualiteit word beklemtoon deurdat die waarde daarvan vir betrokkenheid in praktyke van versoening en geregtigheid duidelik word. Hierdie konsepte staan sentraal tot die verbondsverhouding tussen God en die mensdom. Gevolglik word versoening as herstel uitgebeeld; die kontoere van geregtigheid en regte verhoudinge in die transendentale, Platonistiese keuse vir die waarheid, skoonheid en goedheid omsluit hierdie waarnemings in de Gruchy se werk. Spiritualiteit, versoening en geregtigheid het veral 'n onderlinge verband aangesien elkeen nie bloot 'n middel tot 'n doel is nie, maar ook self 'n einddoel is.

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Chapter 1: Contours in Context

1.1. Introduction

The interplay between the notions of reconciliation, justice and Christian spirituality offers key perspectives in understanding both the contours and the impact of the Christian life. Though the landscape of terms such as reconciliation and justice has many significant reliefs in the South African context and clear formulations of what designates Christian spirituality are constructed at best, a study of this interplay could help to define these contours. These observations will be made through a study of the life and work of the South African theologian, John W de Gruchy. In the forward to a book of meditations, reflections and prayers by de Gruchy, Desmond Tutu, arguably South Africa's most public religious figure and representative of reconciliation, chooses to acknowledge this interplay: "In the struggle for justice, peace and reconciliation the Christian resources are ultimately spiritual" (1986a:13). These resources have contours and contexts that warrant continued consideration.

1.2. Background and Objectives

The notions of reconciliation and justice have a long and convoluted history in South Africa and have been at the centre of public discourse even before the democratic transition of the country. They have played, and continue to play, a central role in the history of South Africa. The different time periods in our history have given rise to various ways of engaging with these concepts and countless South African narratives bear witness to the complexity and also the importance of dealing with these notions. In the introduction to *Reconciliation Restoring Justice* de Gruchy writes in reference to reconciliation, "If there was ever a theological theme that had to be developed in relation to the world in all its agony and hope, this is that theme" (2002:1).

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has perhaps been the most prominent formal platform for engaging with the concepts of reconciliation in recent South African history, including the closely related concept of justice. Many lessons can be learnt from this Commission

and the broad theme of reconciliation, which finds expressions in various spheres within our society. It was “in every respect a beginning – and only a beginning”, especially for the role that faith communities play in civil society (Cochrane et al 1999:6). Despite its prominence, the success of the TRC has been disputed. Even though it achieved its outcomes in terms of being both an agent of healing and a catalyst for promoting a more just society, de Gruchy still acknowledges that “many critics contended that justice was sacrificed on the altar of forgiveness and reconciliation”¹ (2002:147).

The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) was launched after the TRC in the year 2000. It aims to continue to implement the lessons learnt from South Africa’s transition to democracy. It has become a platform for the much needed continuing work of reconciliation in South Africa². Charles Villa-Vicencio, a distinguished theologian and national research director for the TRC was a co-founder of IJR. Villa-Vicencio is also a long-time friend and previous colleague of de Gruchy. The Institute helps to build fair, democratic and inclusive societies in Africa through carefully selected engagements and interventions. One of these is the yearly Reconciliation Barometer Project that conducts national public opinion poll surveys in order to track progress in

¹ See publications such as Villa-Vicencio, C., Du Toit, F. 2006. *Truth & reconciliation in South Africa: 10 years on*. Claremont: David Philip. ; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa: report. Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1998); Graybill, L.S. 2002. *Truth and reconciliation in South Africa: miracle or model?* Boulder, Colo: Lynne Rienner Publishers; Villa-Vicencio, C., Verwoerd, W. 2000. *Looking back, reaching forward: reflections on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press; Van der Merwe, H., Chapman, A.R. 2008. *Truth and reconciliation in South Africa: did the TRC deliver?* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania.; James Cochrane; John W De Gruchy; Stephen Martin.1999. *Facing the truth: South African faith communities and the Truth & Reconciliation Commission*. Cape Town: Philip.

² According to their website, IJR’s vision is “Building fair, democratic and inclusive societies in Africa” and their mission is “Shaping national approaches to transitional justice and reconciliation in Africa by drawing on community intelligence as well as macro-trend research and comparative analysis.” This is implemented through four programmes: The Building an Inclusive Society Programme (BIS);The Justice and Reconciliation in Africa Programme (JRA);The Policy and Analysis Programme (PA); and The Communication and Strategy Programme (C&S).

reconciliation³. In 2012, the Reconciliation Barometer survey again found that most South Africans are willing to ‘forget about apartheid’ and move forward together as a country (66.7%), and that is time to forgive those people who hurt others in the past (66.9%) (Lefko-Everett 2012:39). The report also highlighted that issues of material justice seem to stand in the way, “low levels of economic inclusion and slow transformation remain important concerns: 43.1% believe that reconciliation and improved social relationships between South Africans are impossible while those who were disadvantaged under apartheid are still poor” (2012:40). This is just one finding of the report that is worth mentioning in order to show the complexity of the task of reconciliation, which will always require an interdisciplinary approach.

If one accepts that the notion of reconciliation has continued to play a vital role in South African public discourse and in civil society⁴, then it is vital that the church chooses to engage and that it does so specifically from the discipline of theology. The reciprocal influence between the political, public discourse and the theological understanding of reconciliation warrants investigation. The definition of reconciliation – particularly as defined theologically - might not be as obvious or self-explanatory as one might think, especially due to its frequent use in broader society. De Gruchy makes a valid point about the distinct character of the Christian doctrine when

³ This includes a range of multi-dimensional indicators such as political culture and relations, human security, dialogue, historical confrontation and social relations. In South Africa it is currently the only dedicated social survey on reconciliation. Since 2003, the results have provided unique insight into post-apartheid social change.

⁴ The importance of reconciliation is further demonstrated in the fact that a public holiday (16 December) specifically commemorates and celebrates South African history and serves as a reminder of the continuing work of reconciliation. This day was chosen as it was previously known as Dingaan's Day (1910–1951), Day of the Covenant (1952–1979), Day of the Vow (1979–1994). It was previously a day marked off in the South African calendar to commemorate the Voortrekkers' covenant made between them and God on the eve of their battle against a Zulu army. It is telling that the day chosen to celebrate the Afrikaners' independence now serves the purpose of reconciliation, celebrating national unity. Heritage Day (24 September, previously Shaka Day) serves a similar purpose of celebrating cultures and has been informally adopted as 'National Braai Day'.

he states, “How pointless it would be if we were simply to provide religious terms in which the discussion about political reconciliation could be clothed in order to make it more palatable to religious people” (De Gruchy 2002:46). What is more, the need for reconciliation stretches much further than contexts of endemic violence, conflict or unjust political structures. De Gruchy writes, “...the need for reconciliation is something that is pertinent in every human community where alienated and estranged people cry out for healing and a reason for hope” (2002:12).

Many theologians have contributed to the discourse on reconciliation and justice within the South African context in recent history. One theologian in particular, John W. de Gruchy, has made a unique contribution to this subject. His 2002 publication, *Reconciliation Restoring Justice*, offers an ecumenical, interdisciplinary perspective planted in the Christian tradition. It also illustrates the relationship between reconciliation and justice. It uses the TRC as case study and has been commended by Desmond Tutu, who resided as Chairman over the TRC hearings, calling it a “passionate yet carefully reasoned account of the connection between God’s gift of reconciliation in Christ and political struggles for justice and peace”. De Gruchy contributed significantly to the church struggle against apartheid, as will be shown in chapter two. By studying de Gruchy’s contributions and research interests and briefly looking at how the institutional church has responded to reconciliation, the hypothesis is that it can add to distinguishing the unique role of Christian spirituality.

1.3. Research Problem - Academic and Strategic Aims

The primary concern of this study is to gain a better understanding of the interplay between the notions of reconciliation, justice, and Christian spirituality in the work of John W. de Gruchy in order to strengthen the profile of Christian spirituality. Through close readings of de Gruchy’s works on reconciliation and justice, as well as his own reflections on Christian spirituality, this study will seek to observe the nature and content of Christian spirituality as it pertains to justice and reconciliation. This study aims to further the understanding of the contribution of Christian spirituality to the practice of reconciliation and as witness of public theology.

The study wishes to show how and why reconciliation and justice are viewed uniquely by Christians. Considering how disposable and/or destructive Christian spirituality can be in Christians' understanding of the theory and practice of reconciliation and justice could highlight the contours of Christian spirituality. This richer understanding could contribute to constructive public discourse on reconciliation in South Africa. This study is further motivated by an interest in how Christian spirituality can function as identity formation for Christians practising faith in public life.

1.4. Research Questions

The central research question posed in this study is: *What is the interplay between the notions of reconciliation, justice, and Christian spirituality in the work of John W de Gruchy?* In answering this research question, this study will furthermore ask:

- How are the notions of reconciliation and justice connected in de Gruchy's work?
- How do the notions of reconciliation and justice relate to Christian spirituality?
- How can the interrelatedness of these notions strengthen a richer understanding of Christian spirituality?

1.5. Limitation of study

Both the field of Christian spirituality and reconciliation are vast and any study within these fields will need to qualify a very specific approach. The field of Christian Spirituality has emerged as a distinct academic discipline in the English-speaking world in the late 20th and early 21st century. This discipline can be studied from various perspectives, including its biblical foundations, historical developments, theological perspectives, its interdisciplinary dialogue partners, or contemporary topics within Christian Spirituality. Christian Spirituality manifests in a range of different historical and cultural contexts. This study will therefore reflect very specifically on the relationship between reconciliation, justice and Christian spirituality which is broadly understood as the lived experience of Christian faith and discipleship – 'the Christian life' as de Gruchy

prefers to call it (1986a:24). In light of this, the contours of de Gruchy's understanding of spirituality, including focus areas such as Christian Humanism in his recent work, will also contribute to the understanding of spirituality as offering perspective on being human and living reconciled.

This brief study can in no way offer an in depth analysis or even comprehensive overview of John de Gruchy's contributions to theology; his work has been far too comprehensive to attempt that here⁵. Neither can this study make reference to all the historical developments which forms the context for both de Gruchy's theology and the contours of reconciliation and justice. The objective is to uncover sufficient elements of his contextual work in order to frame the focus of the interplay between reconciliation, justice, and Christian spirituality.

The understanding of reconciliation, justice, and Christian spirituality could (and should) be equally enriched by bringing in perspectives from others sciences, whether it be philosophy, sociology, psychology, politics, economics, or law - not to mention other religious traditions. This study will therefore be limited in that regard. What is more, various disciplines within Christian theology could also contribute to a richer understanding, whether it is the biblical sciences or practical missiological perspectives. Even the systematic and historic focus of this study could have given more attention to a focus such as apologetics.

1.6. Theoretical Framework and Research Design

The theoretical framework for this study is formed by the work of John W. de Gruchy, including articles, sermons, books, and blog-posts. The research method that will be applied will be a close reading of texts, while a synthesis of concepts will be attempted. This study will engage with both his contribution to the understanding of reconciliation and his expression of Christian spirituality.

⁵ Other dissertation studies on de Gruchy's work include: *Die Teologie van J.W. de Gruchy: Konteksueel-Gereformeerde?* Jan M. de Beer, M.Th., University of the OFS, 1997; and *Seeking the Dawn: A Critical Reflection upon and response to the Theology of John de Gruchy*, Rebecca Baer Porteus, Ph.D, Duke University, NC.1998

The choice for de Gruchy will be evident in the description of his work covered in chapter two to four in this study. As a Reformed South African theologian de Gruchy has made invaluable contributions to public theology and has contributed significantly to contextualising Christian theology in South Africa⁶.

This study opts for the use of the term *contour* in order to describe how the theoretical components are viewed. It wishes to refer merely to the outline and the broad defining traits of the notions reconciliation, justice and Christian spirituality. A contour also designates a synthesis of variables to some degree.

1.6.1. Reconciliation and Justice

Participation and engagement with the discussion on reconciliation and justice requires some degree of definition. However, it must also be noted that the Christian tradition does not have an uncontested definition and understanding, as De Gruchy writes: "...some of the problems of understanding encountered in the TRC process derived from differences of interpretation within the Christian community, and from a lack of understanding of the history of Christian doctrine by Christians and others alike" (De Gruchy 2002:57). The underlying reference to what it refers to has also been disputed in the South African context. One example of this is that the term was heavily racialized when first employed in the 1980's. Others, such as the authors of the Kairos document, have felt that systemic economic inequality was its core (Cochrane et al 1999:59). We will need to come to terms with the theological contours in understanding or defining reconciliation and justice, especially as it was used in the past in order to reflect on de Gruchy's work in context. This will be covered in chapter two and three.

We need to take note of an important distinction between the theory and the praxis of reconciliation at the outset of this study in order to navigate its contours. De Gruchy draws on the

⁶ De Gruchy is responsible for publications contextualising Bonhoeffer for South Africa, such as De Gruchy, J.W. 1984. *Bonhoeffer and South Africa: theology in dialogue*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

language of Dietrich Ritschl in distinguishing between ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ expressions of reconciliation (2002:18, 19). This distinction is between theory and praxis. On a primary level reconciliation is expressed in doctrine, confessed in liturgy, witnessed in scripture and well formulated and explicated in the systematic works of great theologians such as Barth. The secondary expression, however, is within reach of empirical verifiability. These are acts, expressed in concrete social and political realities. The challenge identified by de Gruchy that he attempts to address in *Reconciliation Restoring Justice* is how one makes the connection between the primary and secondary expressions of reconciliation – both in theological endeavours and in practical contributions to public life. This distinction between theory and practice is one to which we will return – not only for the notion of reconciliation, but also for Christian spirituality.

1.6.2. Spirituality

The term ‘spirituality’ can be ambiguous and confusing, as de Gruchy admits in the introduction to his 1986 publication *Cry Justice*, titled *Christian Spirituality and Social Transformation*. De Gruchy writes, “The term ‘spirituality’ nevertheless remains useful. At one level it refers to the character or ethos of the Christian tradition as it has taken root and flourished within particular Christian communities in different cultural and historical contexts. At another level, spirituality is about those disciplines that enable the flourishing of Christian life, community and witness” (1986a: 24). De Gruchy chooses, in agreement with Barth, to use the term ‘the Christian life’, which begins with “God’s gracious acceptance of us in Jesus Christ”, is always communal, is a gift of grace, and has to do with the constant renewal of the church itself in the power of the Spirit. It is from these perspectives that we will ask what the role of spirituality is in the task of enacting and enabling reconciliation and ensuring justice. More clarity will also be gained concerning the distinction of the use of related terms such as religion and spirituality⁷.

⁷ For a comprehensive study on the forms, foundations and methods of Spirituality see Waaijman, K. 2001. *Spirituality*. Leuven: Peeters.

1.7. Divisions of chapters

Chapter two will lead us into the context and work of de Gruchy. A biographical overview will be given to illustrate the context he has worked in and to show the various influences on his theology. Chapter three will then discuss his specific understanding of reconciliation and justice, centred on his book, *Reconciliation Restoring Justice*. Chapter four will then provide us with a clearer description of how de Gruchy has given expression on a primary and secondary level to Christian spirituality. Chapter five will show how the observations from chapters two, three and four relate to one another in order to strengthen the profile of Christian spirituality, also concluding with an evaluation of the initial hypothesis and posing questions and possibilities for future study.

1.8. Conclusion

Writing on the value of living with historical consciousness that acknowledges hope, David Bosch constructs the following metaphor which is apt for the task at hand:

Let me say it by means of a metaphor – that of a bird in a violent storm. If the wings of that bird are set wrongly, it will be smashed against the cliff. But if the wings are set correctly, the storm itself will lift that bird above the danger of the cliff and it will soar towards the sun. We do not need new wings, then. It is the setting of our wings that matters. That has to be made new. God takes us as we are, together with our histories and “sets” our histories in a new way. Indeed, our histories could have smashed us against the cliffs. But they can also, under God, help us to soar into true freedom. The storm is necessary to carry the bird over the cliff. If there had been no wind, no storm, the bird would never have been carried into the blue.

Bosch 1988:102

Let us then see how the storm of alienation that still exists in the predominantly Christian country of South Africa can help to set wings in such a way that it is possible to “soar” into a world that is reconciled, and just.

Chapter 2: John W. de Gruchy in Dialogue and in Context

2.1 Introduction

John W. de Gruchy is a Reformed theologian. As a world-renowned Bonhoeffer scholar⁸ his study of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Confessing Church movement in Germany contributed to the leading role he played in reflecting on South African ecclesiology. This is seen in *The Church Struggle in South Africa* (1979, 1986, 2005), one of the many publications that have played an important role in helping South African's understand the racial and political context in which Christianity has been shaped in South Africa.

De Gruchy has been described by his colleagues as a blend of intellect and creativity, a productive and whole person, and open to change. He has also been called a free spirit, open to exploring boundaries and taking risks, while remaining firmly grounded in his faith (Holness, Wustenberg 2002:xiii).

De Gruchy has made a major contribution to public theology; theology that has acted as a bridge between theory and practice. Smit acknowledges that de Gruchy has always been interested in the relationship between “event” and “institution” – “somehow the event of the church – worship, preaching, and piety – had to impact on the structures of the church and eventually on the structures of society” (Smit 2002:284). Let us take a brief look at the major phases and influences in the life and work of de Gruchy.

2.2 Professional and Academic Career

De Gruchy's professional career began when he was ordained as a minister in the United Congregational Church of South Africa in 1961, serving first in a congregation in Durban and then in Johannesburg, until he shifted his attention to the work of the South African Council of

⁸ John de Gruchy is a member of the Bonhoeffer Society and has contributed as organiser and participant in several International Bonhoeffer Congresses.

Churches (SACC). He served on the board of the SACC as Director of Studies and Communications, and also as Secretary of the Church Unity Commission in that time. It was during this time that he launched the *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* (JTSA).

He then took up the “irresistible opportunity”, as he describes it, to teach Indian Religious tradition at the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Cape Town (UCT); a very rewarding experience according to his description. Here he gained respect for the religious traditions of others, and the way that people of other faiths perceive Christianity (2006:55).

De Gruchy remained in research and teaching, one of his first passions, for the remainder of his career. Later he was appointed to the Robert Selby Taylor Chair of Christian Studies at UCT on its establishment in August 1994. His Professorship has also been acknowledged at Stellenbosch University as Extraordinary Professor in 2006, Adjunct Professor in Applied Ethics at the University of Fort Hare, and since 2009 he has conducted research as a Fellow at Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Studies (STIAS).

During his professional career de Gruchy has served on numerous university administration committees, many times as chair or director. His leadership is also demonstrated by the various academic societies to which he has belonged and the numerous honorary positions he has held. He has served on different editorial boards and conducted many workshops, locally and internationally, related to his research.

As author and editor, de Gruchy has had over 40 books published and contributed to chapters in many more publications, in addition to journal articles covering a broad spectrum of topics in religious studies. Some of his books have been used as textbooks, playing a significant role in the formation of a new generation of theologians. He has been a National Research Foundation (NRF) A-rated researcher for three consecutive periods and has been internationally recognised for his work, receiving the Karl Barth Prize in 2000.

John de Gruchy continues to work with students and colleagues as part of the Volmoed community of faith which has a ministry of hospitality and reconciliation.

2.3 Theologian in Context

De Gruchy's publications such as *Theology and Ministry in Context and Crisis* (1986), *Doing Theology in Context* (1994), and *Doing Ethics in Context* (1994), amongst others, attests to his continued effort to appropriate his work and his theology in context. His focus on 'doing' theology has always been a way of engaging Christian faith within the life of the church within a given social and cultural context. He understands this as what happens week by week in the ministry of preaching, social justice work, pastoral caring, liturgical leadership and the development of spirituality. De Gruchy has throughout his work engaged with Bonhoeffer's perennial question 'Who is Jesus Christ for us, today?'

The following quotation from de Gruchy's work highlights the contextual nature of ministry, and also leads us into another observation of his work – the value of interdisciplinary engagement:

In proclaiming the gospel of the reign of God in Jesus Christ, and therefore of God's demand for justice, reconciliation and peace, it is of the utmost importance that the church has some understanding of what this means concretely in the life of each situation. Otherwise proclamation and witness would be a very vague set of propositions rather than a clear statement of what the Word of God means in the most concrete terms possible.

(de Gruchy 1994:11)

2.4 Interdisciplinary Work

De Gruchy's work attests to the reality that engaging with the social sciences – sociology, philosophy, social psychology, political science and economics – assists in making sense of a situation; they provide tools and resources for the necessary analysis. De Gruchy describes his

own experience of studying humanities as a journey not away from faith but more deeply into faith (2006:57). He also believes that theology has a great deal to learn from the more general study of religion, just as it has from the social sciences as a whole (2006:58). De Gruchy is regarded as a theologian who believes that it is a theological imperative in our contemporary world to interact with other disciplines (Holness, L., Wustenberg, R.K 2002:xiv). We see this in the *estschrift*, aptly titled *Theology in Dialogue*, in which the collection of essays in his honour mesh science, culture, politics, and ethics, as well as theology. It focuses on the impact of the arts, humanities, and science on contemporary religious thought⁹.

His time as Director of the Graduate School in Humanities at UCT inevitably shifted him into the broader field of Humanities and reflected his growing interest in multi-disciplinary studies. Besides the social sciences, de Gruchy also recognises that doing theology in context requires a wider frame of reference. This is expressed in his book *Christianity, Art and Transformation* which is an attempt to show the importance of aesthetics and art for doing theology in context. Some of his latest projects and publications, such as *Led into Mystery* and *The Humanist Imperative in South Africa* also engage with the field of neuroscience. De Gruchy writes: “It is often the non-Christian critic, whether poet, dramatist, painter or author, who most powerfully perceives reality, refusing us to run away and hide, confronting us with raw experiences of pain, doubt, and anger, and calling us back to reality and to our responsibility as Christians in the world” (de Gruchy 1986a:18,19)

⁹ In his description of the role of tradition and how doing theology in context is a process of engaging in transformation – of both tradition and of contexts – de Gruchy writes, “Engagement with people of other religious traditions, along with secularists and those engaged in disciplines and practices other than doing theology, are equally important if Christian theology is to discern the transforming trajectories within its tradition, and to participate in the public debate around issues that affect our common humanity and the common good” (2011b:12).

2.5 Ecumenical Focus

Just as de Gruchy has always valued a broader study of theology in conversation with other academic fields, he has also always maintained an ecumenical approach to his work and ministry. This is demonstrated in the many commitments he made to serve the ecumenical church on bodies such as the South African Council of Churches¹⁰. Besides his connection with the United Congregational Church and the Reformed tradition, he acknowledges how he has been enriched by other traditions such as Eastern Orthodoxy. “While each tradition has its own distinct character, at their best they all converge in enabling true worship and discipleship” (1986a:17). The letter awarding de Gruchy the Karl Barth Prize stated the following:

Through his Reformed Theology John W. de Gruchy has contributed with prophetic impulses to the overcoming of apartheid mentality as well as to the democratisation of South African society and the renewal of his church, thus playing an outstanding role for a culture of international and intercontinental theological exchanges.

(Holness, Wustenberg 2002:xii)

2.6 Reformed Tradition

De Gruchy displays an understanding of Reformed theology as a liberating expression of Christian faith and witness, as is seen in his book, *Liberating Reformed Theology* (1991). The title is deliberately ambiguous – herein de Gruchy means to reclaim the Reformed tradition, also for other believing communities¹¹. His work and witness also attests to the plurality in the Reformed

¹⁰ De Gruchy writes, “While I was evangelical by commitment I became more and more aware of the need to be catholic in outlook” (2001:31).

¹¹ In an article titled ‘What does it mean to live in South Africa and to be Reformed?’ DJ Smit reminds us of the ambiguity concerning liberation that stems from influences such as Barth and others. He writes: “It is not without very good reason that John de Gruchy wrote deliberately ambiguously about *Liberating Reformed Theology* – arguing both that Reformed theology is a theology with liberating potential as well as that Reformed theology in South Africa needs to be liberated from alien influences ... In other words, living in South Africa and being Reformed means, for De Gruchy, as for so many other South African Reformed believers, to be faced with these internal controversies, between the powerful potential to

tradition. It was especially in his evaluation of the theology used to enforce the political structures of apartheid that de Gruchy affirmed the Reformed understanding of the centrality of the Word of God, especially as found in Calvinism (1986c:41).

It is the Reformed tradition, particularly through the lenses of Barth and Bonhoeffer, which have had a major impact on de Gruchy. He was greatly influenced by the theological impetus of both Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Karl Barth, which is reflected in his work concerning the ecclesiastical and social contexts in South Africa. Both these theologians have also contributed to de Gruchy's understanding of Christian spirituality as a force for reconciliation and justice in South Africa, as de Gruchy observes: "Few twentieth-century theologians have been as influential as Bonhoeffer in enabling us to see connections between faith and politics, spirituality and justice, and the renewal of the church within the life of the world" (de Gruchy 2001:7).

De Gruchy's doctoral thesis was a comparative study of the ecclesiology of Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Since those early days, he has contributed significantly to the interpretation of their work through numerous articles, book chapters and publications. His close friendship with Eberhard Bethge and his wife, Renate, played a major role in his choice to enter deeper into dialogue with Bonhoeffer, the Confessing Church and the Barmen Declaration (Huber 2002:xix).

In the chapter titled *Compassion and Action for Justice: Bonhoeffer's Christocentric Spirituality* the writer highlights how Bonhoeffer's spirituality "pivoted on courageous deeds in imitation of Christ as well as on the trustful prayers that emanated from his personal piety. For Bonhoeffer, truly mature spirituality manifests itself above all in love of one's neighbour and working for

liberate (in almost every Reformed conviction) and the urgent need to be liberated (from so many contemporary temptations and powers). It is also not without reason that these internal differences and tensions have sometimes been attributed to the diverse influences on South African Reformed churches from the history of reception of well-known twentieth century Reformed figures and their followers, in particular Abraham Kuyper and Karl Barth, respectively" (Smit 2008:265).

peace and justice in one's spheres of influence in a society that often fails to provide for the common good of all its citizens"(Kelly, Nelson 2003: 40,41). We see in this both the primary and the secondary expression of spirituality – expressions that will be clear in de Gruchy's work and witness, too. Bonhoeffer himself stated in a baptismal sermon, "Our being Christians today will be limited to two things: prayer and action for justice on behalf of people." These have been called the two most distinctive characteristics of Bonhoeffer's spirituality (Kelly, Nelson 2003:41).

2.7 The Church Struggle in South Africa

Much more deserves to be said than what can be included here concerning the historical developments during which de Gruchy has practised theology. However, it is valuable to observe some developments from the 1980's up until after the TRC.

The following quote of Denise Ackermann in the prelude to *The Cost of Reconciliation in South Africa*, the first reader published by the National Initiative for Reconciliation (NIR) in 1988 is telling. It communicates the urgency of the task that was at hand to practice theology in context. She writes,

"The time for whites theologising about justice and reconciliation on behalf of others is over. For our thoughts on justice and reconciliation to have any substance or relevance we shall need to BE where the suffering is, to LISTEN to what the oppressed are saying, often being SILENT because it is the only honest response, and then to STRUGGLE with what we hear and experience in the light of the Gospel" (1988:v).

There were various formal actions undertaken and documents drafted by the churches in the 1980s to address the growing oppression and alienation of South Africans under the Apartheid regime, not to mention *The Message to The People of South Africa* (1968), which de Gruchy helped draft as part of the SACC. These include the NIR, the Kairos Document, the Evangelical Witness, the Koinonia Statement, Christians for Peace, Church and Society, the Belhar Confession, and others. The term reconciliation is described by a 1988 reader of the NIR to be ambiguous, listing six

different understandings that are motivated by the different drives of the parties who were to be reconciled; motives derived from group interests and vulnerabilities that confirm the reality that “ideological arguments become hopelessly entangled with religious convictions and bedevil relationships between believers” (Nurnberger & Tooke 1988:5). A 1986 article by D. J. Smit describes how reconciliation had become a very problematic religious symbol within the South African conflict situation – a reality that could be said to still exist today¹².

Some of the formulations and references to the understanding of Christian spirituality in this time are worth noting. The publication by the NIR mentions what was a “fairly widespread opinion, particularly among devote White Christians” that a form of ‘turning to Christ’ was all that was necessary to resolve the social-political problems. They maintained a sort of unsuspecting piety that change only had to take place at the heart (1988:3). David Bosch calls this sort of reconciliation cheap (in reference to Bonhoeffer’s warning of cheap grace); “Cheap reconciliation means tearing faith and justice asunder, driving a wedge between the vertical and the horizontal. It suggests that we can have peace with God without having justice in our mutual relationships” (1988:100).

The Belhar Confession arose from a consciousness concerning the political and ecclesial situation of South Africa that threatened the heart of the gospel. Three issues needed to be confessed concerning the historical circumstances’ influence on the gospel – these circumstances concerned the unity of the church, the reconciliation in Christ and the justice of God. These three themes would therefore form the structure of the Confession (Smit 2012:187). The Belhar Confession continues to stimulate conversation around reconciliation, justice, and unity. This call to share in the freedom of reconciliation and justice, as drawn from the Bible, has sadly not been embraced by many in the Dutch Reformed Church family to whom it is extended.

¹² See Smit, D.J. 1986. The symbol of reconciliation and ideological conflict in South Africa. In, Voster, W.S. (ed). *Reconciliation and Construction*. Pretoria: Unisa. 19-112.

2.8 Conclusion

Various focuses have dominated de Gruchy's work – from Bonhoeffer, to contextual, public and Reformed theology and the church in South Africa, social history, theological aesthetics and art as a transforming engagement with reality, and Christian humanism. In chapter four we will look at the different accents of spirituality in John de Gruchy's work, but let us first turn to the notions of reconciliation and justice.

Chapter 3: Reconciliation...and Justice?

3.1. Introduction

Protestant theology in particular has paid close attention to the doctrine of reconciliation. The massive twentieth-century contribution by Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, placed this doctrine at its centre. Reflecting on reconciliation Barth writes, “We enter that sphere of Christian knowledge in which we have to do with the heart of the message received by and laid upon the Christian community, and therefore with the heart of the Church’s dogmatics”.

De Gruchy’s 2002 publication titled *Reconciliation Restoring Justice* is a comprehensive study that consolidates many theological, political and historical perspectives on the notion of reconciliation. The major concern of the book is to explore the relationship between the politics of reconciliation and the Christian doctrine of reconciliation in order to address the many issues that society faces concerning reconciliation. This publication, as de Gruchy’s most comprehensive work on reconciliation and justice, will form the framework for understanding these notions¹³. Both the necessity and the possibilities of reconciliation are expressed in this very contextual contribution that is made accessible to public discourse. It draws on the Christian Tradition¹⁴ and therefore functions as a valuable form of public theology.

This work is divided into three parts, each with two chapters. Part One is about the language of reconciliation and the relationship between theology and political speech. Part Two deals with the role of the Christian church in embodying reconciliation and looks at the relationship of three

¹³ Although de Gruchy’s major work on Reconciliation and Justice was published in 2002, he had already reflected on these themes in many of his previous works, and contributions thereafter. Some of these will be included in the discussion.

¹⁴ De Gruchy admits that the Christian tradition is made up of many strands, some of which are in tension with one another, though he has attempted a perspective which has ecumenical support. This is confirmed throughout the book in that he accounts for his widespread sources and makes qualified statements.

Abrahamic religions—Christianity, Judaism, and Islam—in promoting reconciliation. Part Three takes a practical approach in looking at spaces within which reconciliation can take place and ends with a proposal of the notion of covenant as a framework for the process of reconciliation with the goal of restoring justice.

Let us then turn to how de Gruchy defines the notion of reconciliation, before looking at how he connects it to justice in order that we might see its contribution to the understanding of Christian spirituality.

3.2. Reconciliation Restoring Justice

3.2.1 Waging Definitions

In the first of the three parts of the book, De Gruchy wages some definitions of reconciliation by problematizing the use of the word and placing it within the South African context (with special reference to the TRC) - a context with a continuing need for national reconciliation and an appropriate case-study to highlight universal issues about the nature and efficacy of reconciliation as restoring justice¹⁵. As we have observed in chapter one, the term reconciliation remains an ambiguous and contested term that carries not only theological and political meaning but has a historical legacy too. De Gruchy stresses the fact that the term cannot be used too thinly so as to refer to a mere ‘social contract’, but should also not remain locked in inaccessible theological constructs. In order that the stated purpose that de Gruchy puts forward (consolidated theological and political engagement) be achieved, it is necessary (as he makes clear in this first part of the book) that there be both meaningful rhetoric and meaningful practice.

In making sense of the multi-layered nature of reconciliation de Gruchy makes a distinction between four ways to speak of reconciliation; an attempt to illustrate the many levels on which reconciliation, understood at the core as overcoming alienation, can take place –theological,

¹⁵ He also makes references throughout of the German experiences of Nazism and the Holocaust (through the work of Bonhoeffer) and other conflict contexts such as Rwanda.

interpersonal, social and political (2002:26). Reconciliation can relate to each of these ways of overcoming alienation separately or together. He furthermore notes the nature of reconciliation as always taking place in a sequence or as a process – a journey requiring consciousness of past, present and future steps (2002:27,28). There is a distinction to be made between reconciliation as event, process and goal – herein lies a certain tension between what is hoped for and what is possible in the present; a tension also characteristic of the Christian faith.

Another valuable observation that de Gruchy makes is that reconciliation has to do with identity; understanding one's identity in relation to 'the other' and finding new, common identity (2002:30,31). Having established these contours of the nature and content of reconciliation, de Gruchy turns to the understanding in the Christian tradition as the second chapter of this first part.

The first chapter made it clear that in theological discourse reconciliation must retain its specific meaning as a God-given reality that the Church appropriates and proclaims in its liturgy and faith convictions, and this ultimate theological idiom should not be surrendered even in public discussions and debate. The contours of this God-given reality, which de Gruchy affirms (in accordance with Barth) lie at the heart of Christian doctrine, are seen especially in the writings of Paul. It expresses both the sum total of what Christians believe about God's saving work in Jesus Christ (also described by the terms 'salvation', 'atonement', or 'redemption' – though each has a specific emphasis and character), and is used by Paul to explicate the meaning of the doctrine (2002:44,45). It is the 'grand narrative' of redemption, as a story that helps us understand reality in a certain way that "informs faith and satisfies reason", in which the doctrine of reconciliation is embedded. De Gruchy writes, "Every Christian who seriously considers the meaning of reconciliation begins, in the words of Rowan Williams, 'from the experience of being reconciled, being accepted, being held (however precariously) in the grace of God'" (2002:50).

De Gruchy continues to explain the Pauline trajectory of reconciliation. One aspect he highlights is of particular interest – he notes that in virtually every instance in which Paul uses the word,

God is the subject or agent of reconciliation. We will return to this divine reversal of roles as traditionally understood in the perpetrator-victim relationship of reconciliation in the summary of the final chapter of de Gruchy's book.

Various theories or primary expressions of reconciliation have developed in particular contexts that have attempted to construct the doctrine of reconciliation, also reflecting the social variants in which it developed. De Gruchy also notes the public nature of the theology of reconciliation and how this has taken shape in different forms, from liberal nineteenth-century Protestantism to theologies of social transformation. Drawing from the reflections of Barth he writes, "Nothing remains outside the redemptive and reconciling purposes of God, for while the covenant made with Abraham refers to the calling of a people to witness to God's purposes, that covenant presupposes God's redemptive will for the whole created order. In Christ, the mediator between God and humanity, God has renewed his covenant in a new initiative 'to reconcile all things to himself' (2002:69).

In more than one instance de Gruchy makes it clear that reconciliation is an event, an action, a process and a celebration, before it becomes a doctrine or theory. There are many examples of how the Christian church has adopted, adopts, and can adopt this agency, as 'secondary' expressions of reconciliation. De Gruchy follows this more descriptive part one by highlighting the adoption and embodiment of reconciliation in the Christian tradition and how it finds precipitance in the Abrahamic religions, to which we now turn.

3.2.2 Transcending Definitions

This Part Two of de Gruchy's book will only have to be looked at very briefly. Herein he describes the Christian embodiment of reconciliation as expressed in and through the Christian church – which the church as social construction and human institution holds as 'treasure in clay jars' (2 Cor 4:7). He also considers the place of the sacraments in the life of the Church. Besides baptism and Eucharist, he includes confession as it is analogous to the TRC and reconciliation processes

in general. Much more could be said to elaborate on the many authentic, rousing descriptions of the potentialities of reconciliation embodied in and through the church.

Concerning reconciliation amongst the Abrahamic religions de Gruchy makes some interesting observations about the challenges of dialogue, areas of communality and of difference as well as dealing with conviction, pluralism and covenantal obligations. Dealing with all these dimensions and perspectives prepares the reader for the final Part Three that will also demonstrate more clearly the relationship with justice.

3.2.3 Applying Definitions

The first section of Part Three covers the ‘art of reconciliation’ in which de Gruchy speaks of creating spaces for reconciliation, where truth can be spoken, and where forgiveness can be searched for. It is the final chapter in *Reconciliation Restoring Justice* to which we can turn to distil the essence of what de Gruchy proposes as the point of collaboration or consolidation of theological and political realities of reconciliation.

Central to his argument is the idea of the covenant between God and creation. De Gruchy makes a distinction between the theological understanding of covenant and a basic understanding of social contract. He states that the biblical account of covenant¹⁶ – God’s covenant with creation, made new in Jesus Christ – and more specifically the relationship between God and humanity is analogous to relationships between people, as presented in the political or public sphere.

To be analogous, the relationship would have to contain both similarities and dissimilarities (de Gruchy uses the terms [no] symmetry and ‘points of reference’). This distinction, in so far as it is made clear what the dissimilarities or dis-symmetries are and that they can be overcome or are not contingent, is not clearly stated in de Gruchy’s description. This contingency is with regards to those outside of the Abrahamic faiths. De Gruchy does briefly mention ‘power relations’ and

¹⁶ He acknowledges past associations of the covenant relationship with destructive theologies such as witnessed in apartheid, but believes the truth of this relationship can be uncovered anew.

‘responsibility for the past’ as dis-symmetries¹⁷ (2002:188). While the theological understanding of God’s covenant claims to have direct social, political and ecological consequences, de Gruchy cautions that “we cannot apply the classic substance of the theology of the covenant directly to the political realm. This would lead inevitably to the utopian and theocratic fallacy of trying to create the kingdom of God on earth” (2002:188). In light of this he proposes the analogous understanding.

According to this argument, the interpersonal, social and political relationships need to adopt or incorporate the “values, ethical concerns, and theological and anthropological insights” of the ‘covenant’ relationship, which gives it form and structure (2002:183). This relationship is what de Gruchy proposes as a framework within which reconciliation is to be understood. This covenantal relationship bears the characteristics of commitment, trust, and a respect for difference. It is driven by pure intent, seeks solidarity, is altruistic and self-sacrificial in nature, allows compromise and is a continuous, dynamic enactment of responsibility for social justice.

His argument develops the tasks or responsibilities of both the perpetrator and the victim. These tasks include truth-telling and the admittance of guilt for the perpetrator, and forgiveness for the victim.

The concept of guilt is unpacked to quite some extent to show that it is a necessary element for moral responsibility and accountability. What is more, it must be coupled with genuine lament (this is witnessed in the biblical accounts of the destruction of Jerusalem and Jesus’ Beatitudes) and is necessary, lest admittance to an act of justification. This process of exposing truth in honest acknowledgement of guilt that accepts forgiveness, together with punishment or consequences, gives birth to freedom for both perpetrator and victim; freedom from guilt and unjust privilege, and freedom from bitterness.

¹⁷ These similarities and dissimilarities will be referred to again in chapter five.

De Gruchy proposes that the doctrine of sin establishes a sort of solidarity amongst all humankind; because of the ontological nature of our sinfulness we share a degree of co-responsibility for everything unjust. Therefore the idea of a covenant relationship extends the responsibility for humankind (especially people of faith) to act as agents of reconciliation in the world.

3.2.4 ...And Justice?

A valuable point of departure in trying to make sense of the concept of justice and its relation to reconciliation is to accept de Gruchy's observation that "there is no coherent understanding of justice in the modern world" (2002:200). Possible descriptions include punitive, corrective, compensatory, redemptive, distributive, communicative, remedial, poetic, practical, and lastly, restorative justice. This last mentioned form of justice is the approach taken by the TRC and the form of justice that plays witness to the formation of covenantal relationships. De Gruchy clearly illustrates that this is also the biblical witness as found in the writings of Paul – expressed in the Paul's understanding of justification by faith and the interpretation of the gospel as grace.

Restorative justice does not exclude other forms of justice. It is rather an attempt to "to recover certain neglected dimensions that make for a more complete understanding of justice" (de Gruchy 2002:202). Justice in the biblical tradition is social and relational. De Gruchy therefore also highlights the relationship between justice, love and power.

Divine power is revealed in the suffering and vicarious love of the cross that forgives perpetrators yet condemns injustice in exercising the creative and redemptive justice of God. God's justice, power and love are revealed in the fact that the just dies for the unjust, thereby justifying and embracing the ungodly in a new covenantal relationship. This restorative justice has to do with renewing God's covenant and therefore the establishing of just power relations without which reconciliation remains elusive.

(de Gruchy 2002:203,204)

According to de Gruchy's descriptions of justice, if justice were a road to be travelled, the first stop would be that of punishment or the establishing of rightness. This 'first stop' is the goal of a secular judicial system. Restorative justice, the justice of covenant relationships, travels further down this road to reach a 'final stop'. This is where healing and reconciliation takes place. This final stretch of the journey is concerned with human dignity, embrace, love, and the securing of human rights.

The question whether justice is subordinate to reconciliation or vice-versa has to do with the historical context. This is seen in the Kairos document, which de Gruchy admits made a connection between justice and reconciliation which might not be confessed today (2002:199). De Gruchy argues that reconciliation and justice are both part of the process and the goal, both means and ends. A world that is just, requires reconciliation, just as a reconciled world is only possible when justice is restored.

At the heart of the struggle for justice is also a search for an equitable distribution of the wealth of the earth. This makes it clear that the talk of reconciliation was futile for black South Africans – especially during apartheid, but still today – if it does not mean the restoration of justice.

3.3. Conclusion

This chapter has looked at how the notions of reconciliation and justice are understood in de Gruchy's work. It has made clearer what the dynamics of reconciliation are in general and the theological formulations in particular. It also covered de Gruchy's analogous understanding of the covenantal restoration of justice.

Chapter 4: The Christian Life: Christian Spirituality

4.1. Introduction

We now turn our attention to the content of Christian spirituality in de Gruchy's work. Although we can only cover a fraction of all the dimensions available to us in de Gruchy's work, some major contours will be identified. We will look at what we speak of when we speak of spirituality and how this is reflected in de Gruchy's witness.

4.2. A Choice for God

De Gruchy gives account of why he is a believer and what that means to him at the hand of two concepts: *awe* and *justice*. In doing this he navigates between his own experience and the reflections of philosophers, scientists, and theologians on these two elements. He recalls how,

from an early age, he had a sense of awe that was evoked by being aware of the beauty, mystery and infinite expanse of our universe. He also recalls his awakening of a sense of justice when he became conscious of the suffering caused by injustice; a greater sense of morality. He relates these observations to similar witnesses of awe and justice through the ages - from Plato and Kant to modern day scientists (and of course the author of Psalm 8). He does this without skirting around the difficult questions it raises (2006:108-116).

De Gruchy continues this account in *Being Human* through making use of Christian apologetics that is both insightful and informed. The following quotation exhibits something about the nature of what it means to be a believer:

To claim to know God but not to seek justice and live with compassion is surely evidence that people do not know God, whatever they might say to the contrary. And it may well be that those that say that they do not know God, or even that they cannot believe in God, but who 'do justice and love mercy' [a reference to Micah 6:8], actually do know God better than some of us who may claim that knowledge.

(de Gruchy 2006:140,141)

References to being spiritual, religious or pious can be confusing. De Gruchy helps us move past being caught up in these references. Some select perspectives can help us in discerning this landscape.

4.3. Religious, Pious, Spiritual

De Gruchy confesses that theology was understood as a form of spirituality in and through which the living Word of God was known and communicated, long before theology became a scientific discipline and a human construction based on reason and dialectic (1994:5). Though there have been significant developments in understanding theology as science, the primacy of this

understanding of faith remains of fundamental importance – this is clear in de Gruchy’s understanding of Barth and his affirmation of Anselm’s *credo ut intelligam*, ‘I believe so that I may understand’. The subtitle for his latest book, *Led into Mystery*, also reflects this: *Faith Seeking Answers in Life and Death*.

In *Being Human: Confessions of a Christian Humanist* de Gruchy subscribes to the suggestion of Wilfred Cantwell Smith that the term ‘religion’ should describe faith commitment or personal piety; therefore ‘being religious’¹⁸. Herein he questions the designation of terms such as being ‘religious’ or ‘pious’ as necessary qualifications for Christians (and in the context of Christian humanism, being human). These are labels that carry various meanings and can refer to dispositions that take away from what it means to be truly Christian, or human. True piety, de Gruchy believes, is “the mutual love shared between parents and children, and by extension between lovers ... It is love that is guided and expressed in day-to-day practice. So to love God with heart, soul and mind, and to express that love towards others in a practical way, is the essence of true piety. That is good religion” (2006:61).

In his discussion on the term ‘pious’ and ‘pietistic’ it becomes clear that many times semantics get in the way of what is actually being communicated. This is related to the diversity of religious traditions that have come to use these related terms. For instance, to call someone ‘pious’ can carry the stigma of a “self-righteous narrowness of spirit that lacks concern for the world”. This is seen in many post-modern discussions making distinctions between being ‘religious’ and being ‘spiritual’.

The last mentioned distinction brings us to another valid discernment that de Gruchy has displayed in various writings – the quality of spirituality.

¹⁸ The other three distinct ways in which ‘religion’ is used, according to Cantwell Smith, refers to either a system of belief expressing a world-view, a social and historical phenomenon embodied in institutions, or ‘religion in general’ as distinct from other fields such as politics (de Gruchy 2006:59).

4.4. True and False Piety

One article in particular employs this discernment in a clear and intriguing manner, *Prayer, Politics and False Piety* (de Gruchy 1986d). Here the distinction is made between false piety and true piety¹⁹. From de Gruchy's description there is a distinction to be made between piety that is motivated by self-interest, and piety that forsakes self-interest and is motivated by a will for the Kingdom of God. The former, false piety, expresses itself in privatization that maintains the status quo, does not engage in social responsibility, and has no prophetic vision²⁰. What is more, it chooses an ideology other than that of the Kingdom of God, often leading to patriotic appropriation of state ideologies that can be unjust (such as apartheid)²¹. The latter, true piety, expresses itself in acts of justice. It is faith (as a free response of an individual) that is practised in community and leads to discipleship in the world. In the former, God is manipulated; in the latter, God is feared.

This reflection furthermore assists us in understanding why Christian spirituality is simultaneously a means to an end and an end in itself. This is best expressed when de Gruchy writes, "True piety refuses to pray without acting; it also refuses to act without praying" (de Gruchy 1986d:103). De Gruchy has expressed these tasks of prayer and action – manifestations

¹⁹ De Gruchy does not attempt a general or normative classification of piety, but rather the quality of piety or spirituality as it relates to politics and public life.

²⁰ "In becoming deaf to the cry for justice and blind to the plight of the poor, such pseudo-piety sanctions injustice and applies brakes to just social change" (de Gruchy 1986a:23).

²¹ De Gruchy accounts for philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach's critique against piety or spirituality (the basis for Marxist and Freudian objections to religion) - roughly translated as the notion that God is created by humankind for self-affirmation - by explaining that these objections are built on 'false piety'; it is piety that became removed from social reality and engagement due to its need to assert itself after the Enlightenment - a period of securing individual rights and freedoms. However, this distinction between true and false piety made by de Gruchy in this article does not address Feuerbach's argument that divine intervention does not exist. It suffices to say at this point that de Gruchy approaches such apologetics from a *credo ut intelligam* tradition of thinking. This makes sense considering the strong influence of Barth. He also finds this thinking in Bonhoeffer in the way in which Bonhoeffer connects prayer and action in his writings.

of a choice for God that is rooted in spirituality that is true - with specific focal areas, a few of which we should take note of.

4.5. Witness to the Christian Life

4.5.1. Humanizing Spirituality

In de Gruchy's chapter in *Being Human* on what it means to be religious he tells the story of Karen Armstrong, a devout Christian who was forced to undergo a process of 'secularization' in her honest search of God, leaving the convent and having her vows annulled. She is quoted as saying, "In the past, my own experience of religion had diminished me, whereas true faith, I now believe, should make me more human than before" (De Gruchy 2006: 65). To this, de Gruchy responds by saying that to him, that is what spiritual formation, 'going on retreat', and seeking the advice of a 'spiritual director' are about; becoming more human (2006: 65). His Christian faith and identity have led him to discover his humanity that he shares in common with others, and to understand it better (2011b:7).

De Gruchy describes his own process of 'becoming religious' in an 'evangelical-fundamentalist' kind of way as threatening, at one stage, to close down rather than open up possibilities for growth as a human being. Although he admits the inadequacy of the religious grid that he had been provided, it was a way in which to begin to understand himself. De Gruchy underwent the experience of being 'born again' – a popular phrase for the conversion act, and one that he admits took a while for him to discover did not mean a ticket to heaven, but a way of becoming more fully human as a follower of Christ in this world²² (2006:67,68).

²² "Conversion, or our spiritual rebirth, means the reorientation of our lives so that we no longer live in conformity to the values and powers of the world, but part of God's transforming purpose" (de Gruchy 1986a:28).

De Gruchy notes several reasons why his association with evangelical fundamentalism came to an end²³. This included the fundamentalist lifestyle it demanded (including requirements such as a lack of involvement in social responsibility and political activities), the requirement of a closed, unquestioning mind, its use of religion as an ‘ideology of crusade’, and its opposition to humanism²⁴. One example of how his faith has developed is expressed in the escape from the narrow constraints of fundamentalist biblical infallibility and inerrancy he found in the work of Barth; particularly in his belief that God’s revelation proclaimed in the gospel and witnessed to in scripture, judges religion and awakens faith in God (2006:71,72). De Gruchy opts for the use of Christian Humanism because he has found it an expression of Christian faith that he has found “eminently useful to convey what I confess by way of contrast with other expressions of Christianity and humanism” – rather than it being the only or the most adequate description of Christian faith²⁵ (2006:200).

In his contribution at the David Nicholls Memorial Lecture at Oxford in 2004 titled *Christian Humanism - Antidote to Fundamentalism and Secularism*, de Gruchy explains his choice for the term Christian Humanism. To briefly summarize – firstly it reminds us of our primary common

²³ De Gruchy still confesses to be evangelical, however reluctantly: “Perhaps I am an evangelical of sorts, *evangelisch* if you like. Jesus is Lord. We are saved by grace because we are incapable of saving ourselves. To be a Christian requires faith and commitment. The church is a community of believers and the Bible has unique authority for us. The way in which I have understood these evangelical tenets has undoubtedly changed over the years, but I still believe that they are of the essence of Christianity even if not the whole of it” (2001:29)

²⁴ ‘Liberalism, communism, and humanism’ were labeled by the National Party and the Dutch Reformed Church as three signs of the anti-Christ during apartheid. The danger of this, de Gruchy writes, is that it creates an atmosphere which breeds anti-humanist tendencies that can and have in the past led to dehumanizing actions – Nazism, Fascism and apartheid (de Gruchy 2006:79).

²⁵ “...my own critical retrieval of Christian humanism today is not simply a regurgitation of Renaissance humanism, important as it may be, but a retrieval that takes seriously the critique of the Reformers as a necessary challenge to the humanist tradition in which they were nurtured” (de Gruchy 2011:b).

identity as humans²⁶. “Until we truly recognize our common humanity and live accordingly, and recognize that it binds us also to the earth and its well-being, there is little chance that we will achieve justice and peace, or truly understand what it means to be a Christian” (de Gruchy 2004:11). Secondly, it describes Christianity as being about the well-being and dignity of humanity. Thirdly, it is an affirmation of human potential, capacity, hope and especially rationality – basically that the world can be made a better place by humans. Lastly he mentions its capacity to affirm rational faith and to engage critically with truth, while maintaining the importance and the authority of the gospel contained in the Bible (2004:10,11). In a 2011 publication de Gruchy affirms Christian humanism by elaborating on these four points (especially on different dimensions of well-being). He states that it ties together faith and discipleship or theology and ethics (primary and secondary expressions of faith); it is concerned with the common good – therefore justice in society; and lastly it affirms aesthetic values and connects truth, morality and beauty. There are much more to these broadly stated affirmations, but one senses its relevance as a “transforming trajectory”²⁷ of Christian tradition that speaks to the basic need for human flourishing and overcoming injustice.

²⁶ De Gruchy succinctly states: “...our being Christian is not our primary identity; being human is. We are human beings before we are Christians, and we belong to the human race before we belong to the Christian Church”. He continues, “Whatever else our Christian identity is about, whether through baptism, confession or denominational allegiance, it is ultimately about our common humanity and therefore our solidarity with all of humanity both in suffering and in hope” (de Gruchy 2007).

²⁷ De Gruchy develops this phrase as a description of what transformation means, in light of living within a tradition. He states that transformation is *metanoia*, a change of mind; it is also “a change of social and economic structures that move us towards a new kind of society built, to be sure, on the legacies that make us who we are, but critically retrieving them in terms of who we must become for the sake of justice and well-being”. Therefore, transforming trajectories are those that address “the personal, social and political realities that we associate with overcoming injustice and the legacies of apartheid, and creating a society and a world in which human life and the environment can flourish” (2011:13). De Gruchy’s understanding of Christian humanism is to him a transforming tradition that draws on the trajectories of the Christian tradition. What he defines as Christian humanism is at the heart of and therefore in continuity with doing theology in South Africa.

In his contribution titled *A Christian Humanist Perspective in The Humanist Imperative*²⁸ (2011) de Gruchy succinctly describes this construct by stating:

Christian humanism speaks of the need for a spiritual formation that engenders practical wisdom and enables love and compassion to flourish. The process is not about becoming more pious and religious, but becoming more truly human and therefore more responsible in relation to the world, to others and to the transcendent

(De Gruchy 2011a:65; 2006:162)²⁹

Just as de Gruchy is able to call himself a Christian Humanist, he also continues to affirm his Reformed identity. In the introduction to an address titled *Being Reformed In Babel: Christian Humanism and Being Reformed In Today's World* to which we will now turn, he states: “there is a historical connection between Christian Humanism and Reformed Identity and both are relevant for being Christian and being the Church in today's world” (de Gruchy 2007).

4.5.2. Reforming Spirituality

In this article de Gruchy uses the biblical reference of Babel, speaking of the global societal demise and asks what this means for a Reformed Christian Humanist. Although it is in no way an attempt to recall all its characteristics, some points that have not been mentioned elsewhere are worth mentioning. The first point he makes is that one is to locate oneself in Babel – which

²⁸ This publication was an interdisciplinary project inspired by different perspectives on what it means to be human together in South Africa today and how this is to be embodied in social life. De Gruchy cites the words of Njabulo Ndebele to express the development that led to the *New Humanism* project at the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study (STIAS) that culminated in the publication, *The Humanist Imperative in South Africa*. “An historic opportunity has risen now for white South Africa to participate in humanistic revival of our country through a readiness to participate in the process of redress and reconciliation” (2011a:12).

²⁹ De Gruchy links this understanding to what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called “aesthetic existence” – a spirituality that fosters human fulfillment in community through art, friendship and play (de Gruchy 2011a:65).

reminds us of the way he has always practised his theology in context. On a personal note he states, “When I speak of my Christian or Reformed identity I need to acknowledge my privileges and find a way to deal with them. In doing so, I must not only take responsibility for my own personal failures but also for my contribution to the collapse of Babel. As Reformed Christians, our confession of faith always begins with a confession of sin³⁰” (de Gruchy 2007).

Besides the Christian heritage as a whole, the legacy and the contribution of reformers John Calvin³¹ and Ulrich Zwingli are central to the Reformed tradition, even though this has been understood differently virtually from the beginning. They have made valuable contributions that we can learn much from, but reconstruction is necessary for the world we live in today. De Gruchy believes that the Reformed Tradition is, at its best, a liberating and transforming tradition³².

The Reformed Tradition has had its restrictions – such as defending church structure and order, rather than being an inclusive Christian community serving the world. But in its confession of Jesus Christ as Lord, the Reformed Church remains a prophetic Church; “As Reformed Christians we are committed to the struggle for human dignity and rights, we are committed to working for economic policies that are just... we may live in Babel, but we try not to let Babel squeeze us into its mould” (de Gruchy 2007).

³⁰ This form of spirituality also takes serious the reality of the ‘principalities and powers of evil’ (Ef 6:10) as sin that functions beyond personal sin, but is manifested in forms of social evil.

³¹ It is interesting that de Gruchy reads Calvin, Barth and Bonhoeffer as Christian Humanists. See De Gruchy, J.W. 2006. John Calvin, Karl Barth and Christian Humanism. in *NGTT*, Deel 51, Supplementum, pp. 370-379.; De Gruchy, J.W. 2009. *John Calvin: Christian humanist & evangelical reformer*. Wellington: Lux Verbi.

³² For an insightful retrieval and liberation perspective on the Reformed tradition, see De Gruchy, J.W. 1999. *Toward a Reformed Theology of Liberation: A Retrieval of Reformed Symbols in the Struggle for Justice*, In Willis, D., Welker, M. (eds). *Toward the Future of Reformed Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; and De Gruchy, J.W. 1991. *Liberating Reformed Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

4.5.3. Aesthetic Spirituality

In his book, *Christianity, Art and Transformation: Theological Aesthetics in the Struggle for Justice*, de Gruchy argues that art in all its forms - music, drama, and the fine arts - played an important role in the struggle against apartheid, and while Christian activists had been engaged in these aesthetic forms, theologians had generally not taken them into account. Elsewhere he writes, “I not only learnt the importance of worship and spirituality early on in my Christian journey, but discovered their relevance even more so during the struggle against apartheid” (de Gruchy 2006:172). He further argues that arts, especially in Africa, play a fundamental role in helping explore the social and human condition, and in prompting their transformation. He believes aesthetics is central to both our knowledge of God and the way in which we express that in our lives.

De Gruchy clearly connects the practice of liturgy and love of God to the practice of theology in context. He writes,

The knowledge and love of God is never separate from the mission of the church in the world. The prophets constantly remind us that ‘to know God’ means ‘to do justice’, and ‘to love God’ implies loving our neighbour and our enemy. Thus the theological formation of the People of God is the enabling of a community to express such praise of God in the midst of the world. True doxology then rejects any false dualism between spirit and matter, between spirituality and involvement in political struggle, between the sacred and the secular.

(de Gruchy 1986b:162)

De Gruchy appropriates visual art not only in the context of the liturgy, but in the broader South African context. He recovers Bonhoeffer’s notion of “aesthetic existence” which is necessary to evoke the churches’ imagination and to allow social transformation to take place. He writes: “Art

as a gift of the Spirit has to do, then, with a "revolution of the imagination" which relates directly to engagement in the struggle for healing and justice in society" (de Gruchy 2000b:51).

4.5.4. Public and Political Spirituality

Publications such as *Christianity and Democracy* (1995), *The Dialectic of Reconciliation: Church and the Transition to Democracy in South Africa*³³ and *Dietrich Bonhoeffer and The Transition To Democracy In The German Democratic Republic And South Africa*³⁴ all showcase de Gruchy's belief that Christianity cannot be equated with any political order even though it may express a strong preference for democracy as the best way of structuring equality, freedom, and justice. He states that one of his motives in writing about Christianity and democracy has been "to offer a critique of the kind of democracy which was being touted by the advocates of the 'new world order' of global capitalism unrestrained by any concerns for justice and the poor" (2001:33).

In his contribution titled *A Christian Humanist Perspective in The Humanist Imperative* (2011) he explains his understanding of humanity and the Christian understanding of sociality which stands in contrast to liberal humanism and democracy (the individual is primary), and Communism (collective is primary). He believes the church is an agent which can tie together the common good and the good of each – providing "a model of reconciliation for the broader human community as well as a basis for solidarity in the struggle for a more just world"(2011a:60,61). These ideas are also developed elsewhere in de Gruchy's work.

The public nature of de Gruchy's spirituality has been demonstrated throughout this study³⁵. His work frequently attests to beliefs such as this: "Prayer is as much dependent upon reading the

³³ In Gregory Baum and Harold Wells, eds., *The Reconciliation of Peoples: Challenge to the Churches*, New York: Orbis. 1997

³⁴ In *Modern Theology* 12:3 July 1996

³⁵ Also see De Gruchy, J.W. Public Theology as Christian Witness: Exploring the Genre, In *International Journal of Public Theology*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 26-41; and De Gruchy, J.W. 2004. The Contribution of Theology

newspaper and participating in the struggles and agonies of life as it is upon its traditional resources” (de Gruchy 1986a:19). De Gruchy believes that Christianity can only exist in meaningful relation to culture – though it must not be allowed to become captive to it (1986a:19).

De Gruchy’s understanding of Christian spirituality clearly has to do with more than religious disciplines which act as primary expressions. He recalls Bonhoeffer’s description, “It is not the religious act that makes the Christian, but participation in the sufferings of God in the secular life” (1986a:27).

4.6. Conclusion

There are admittedly other elements of the Christian Life in de Gruchy’s work which we have not covered; the relationship between spirituality and the rebirth of culture; definitions of truth; the role of memory; or elements such as joy and peace. In reference to these last mentioned elements de Gruchy reminds us that discipleship will always be costly: “...the joy and feasting of Christian spirituality is always in the shadow of the cross and human suffering, and it cannot be separated from the struggle for justice and liberation” (1986a:29). What is more, dealing with spirituality in context means dealing with different experiences of God’s presence.

De Gruchy’s description of Christian humanism that we have witnessed, expresses a level of inclusivity and a maturity to deal with these many complexities. Descriptions such as the following are in fact enticing: “So the designation Christian humanist helps me to identify myself as Christian but not fundamentalist, ecumenical rather than narrowly denominational, and fully engaged with others, not least secular humanists, in making the world more humane, just and compassionate” (de Gruchy 2004:12)

to Public Life in South Africa, in *Public Theology for the 21st Century*, William F. Storrar and Andrew R. Morton (eds.). London and New York: T. and T. Clark, 2004), pp. 45-62.

What also needs to be said in conclusion is that the understanding of linking prayer to action, faith to praxis, spirituality to acts of reconciliation, is not something new – it is rooted not only in biblical tradition, but also in the history of Christianity. Such spirituality lives in hope, and can construct the future.

Chapter 5: Reconciliation, Justice, Spirituality

5.1 Introduction

Dietrich Bonhoeffer had the hope that the word ‘reconciliation’ would become embodied in a new language born out of prayer and the struggle for justice (de Gruchy 2002:130). Let us see where the study of de Gruchy has led us in understanding the interplay of the three notions and how we can begin to understand Bonhoeffer’s recovered hope. In light of how reconciliation has been depicted as restoration, this can be done at the hand of the transcendental, Platonist contours which focus on justice and right relationship: truth, beauty, and goodness.

5.2 Interplay

5.2.1 Contours of Beauty

The observations have helped us to understand why, relationally, Christian spirituality has value for our engagement in practices of reconciliation and justice. Reconciliation is an event and a process before it is a theory. Christian Spirituality makes sense of this event not in that it provides a step-by-step guide in how to forgive or how to confess guilt (necessary processes in the practice of reconciliation). Its value is that it is an invitation into a relationship in which these elements are inherent – the covenantal relationship. It is in this relationship that one is changed, forgiven, and reconciled. Such a true spirituality will make you more human and define your relationship to the world around you. Christian spirituality raises one's consciousness that all relationships cry out for justice. This relational understanding also deals with reconciliation in its different phases as an event, a process and a goal.

Spirituality is firstly and primarily the lived experience of relationship with God; but naturally also with people, and with creation, fed by a longing for justice and wholeness and a resistance to all that goes against well-being. All creation, according to de Gruchy, has the potential to express the beauty of God and presupposes an analogous relationship (2001:103). This is because beauty is part of the nature of God and the essence of God's glory.

This then is the first of three contours – a relationship with God that is known in revelation of God's beauty. De Gruchy writes: "beauty as a transcendental is not primarily that which pleases the senses as mediated through nature or art; it can only be known in and through revelation" (2001:104). De Gruchy acknowledges spirituality and a relationship with God's beauty as that which sustained pioneers of reconciliation; both Bonhoeffer and Tutu bear witness to this (De Gruchy 2002:21, 22)³⁶. He believes that the revelation of God's beauty is the medium of humanities' transformation (2001:105).

³⁶ In a moving video insert and interview with Desmond Tutu on his role in the TRC, Tutu responds to the question of how he coped while listening to people's hurt and stories of alienation by stating, "I was sustained by prayer" See: <http://www.tutufoundationusa.org/2013/11/5682/>

5.2.2 Contours of Truth

In observing the work of Hans von Balthasar, de Gruchy shows the connection and interrelatedness of the three transcendentals – truth, goodness and beauty: “They are all integral to God’s being and revelation, and therefore to our transformation” (2001:104)³⁷. The place of truth - and the power of its judgement - is therefore central.

De Gruchy helps us to see that the lines between true and false piety are not clear-cut; maintaining absolute true piety is a quite unattainable task for anyone (1986d: 99). Human history and the history of the church attest to this. Something de Gruchy briefly mentions in *Prayers, Politics, and False Piety* seems to be a key in understanding some of the contours of Christian spirituality. He observes that “true piety begins with repentance and lives out of forgiveness”. According to what we observed in *Reconciliation Restoring Justice*, these are the tasks of the perpetrator (admitting guilt and repentance) and victim (forgiveness) respectively. This is a clear demonstration of how and why reconciliation and justice are so pivotal in understanding Christian spirituality – and rightly as “true piety”. Such piety experiences God’s forgiveness. The interplay gives us context to consider the truth of what the 18th century poet, Alexander Pope observed: to err is human, to forgive, divine.

If we had to relate these observations regarding true and false piety to de Gruchy’s distinction between ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ expressions of reconciliation, we see that both these expressions can be “true” or “false”. Both expressions are equally important, as de Gruchy reminds us at the hand of scripture and Christian witnesses through the ages – secondary actions

³⁷ There are many more dimensions to this argument concerning ‘the Glory of the Lord’ set within the larger description of the redemptive power of beauty in de Gruchy’s *Christianity, Art and Transformation* (2001) which cannot all be highlighted here. In summary of the argument de Gruchy states: “Truth without goodness and beauty degenerates onto dogmatism, and lacks the power to attract and convince; goodness without truth is superficial, and without beauty – that is without graced form – it degenerates into moralism. Alternatively, we could say that truth and goodness without beauty lack power to convince and therefore to save...” (2001:107).

without primary contemplations leads to self-interest whereas primary prayer is negated without action (1986d:102).

What we have witnessed over and over in John de Gruchy's work is that to understand Christian spirituality is to embrace the beauty of what happens in the tension between theory and practice, prayer and action, awe and justice. Is it too basic to state that the fundamental truth and challenge for understanding Christian spirituality is to engage fully in both and to understand that there is no distinction?

Engaging in prayer makes it possible to understand why God desires that the whole world be reconciled to Himself and why we must act; acting for justice confronts us with the reality that reconciliation is not possible unless we are in relationship with God.

A prayer for a just world cannot be a faint hope that there might be some divine intervention that sets the world right. A true spirituality that understands what reconciliation and justice means does not regard their prayers as a summons for God³⁸; if anything, it makes them more aware of what is rational, and what is real. De Gruchy helps us to understand that having faith in God is more than filling the gaps which science cannot account for (2006:121). We approach God in humility in accordance with what we know to be his will as revealed in scripture. "To pray for an end to unjust rule," de Gruchy writes, "is not twisting God's arm to do something he had not previously thought to do; it is placing oneself at his disposal in the struggle for justice" (1986a:37).

We have observed that the process of exposing truth in honest acknowledgement of guilt that accepts forgiveness, together with punishment or consequences, gives birth to freedom for both perpetrator and victim; freedom from guilt and unjust privilege, and freedom from bitterness.

³⁸ For an interesting perspective on prayer and the nature of faith, see *What are we doing when we Pray?* by Vincent Brümmer. It was awarded the Andrew Murray-Desmond Tutu Prize for theology in South Africa, 2009.

Jesus was a proponent of this relationship between truth and freedom³⁹. To live in freedom is also to experience the goodness of society and of one's context.

5.2.3 Contours of Goodness

The challenge for the church in our day is to engage in honest spirituality that understands acts of justice beyond altruism acting as second-order selfishness. Justice cannot be pursued so that our consciences are cleared. This raises the question of the motivation for justice. If one takes seriously the message of the gospel and Jesus' challenge in his Sermon on the Mount to 'thirst for God's justice'⁴⁰ then we must move past our own selfish motives. The call for altruism also makes sense why de Gruchy has emphasized the importance of community and therefore also context.

The reality is that acting for justice and reconciliation in context helps us to see how our freedom is tied to others' freedom. To recall David Bosch's image: "Indeed, our histories could have smashed us against the cliffs. But they can also, under God, help us to soar into true freedom." These words of David Bosch seem eminently true if one looks at how the themes of reconciliation and justice are inseparable from the understanding of human freedom expressed throughout the history of the Reformed tradition⁴¹.

³⁹ "To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." -John 8:31-36

⁴⁰ See de Gruchy's blog post, *The Jesus that Thirsts* [Online] Available: http://anisa.org.za/news/columns/john_w_de_gruchy/jesus_thirsts.

⁴¹ This is seen in documents like the Heidelberg Catechism and in Calvin's work. "Calvin's notion of belonging ... calls for qualitative forms of community, community of radical bridging, visible in actual liberation, living unity, real reconciliation and compassionate justice" (Smit 2009:140).

5.3 Contours Traced, Context Continued

We have found resolve for the question of how the notions of reconciliation and justice relate to Christian spirituality by observing that reconciliation is a human and social process that requires theological explanation, and a theological concept seeking human and social embodiment. It is true that this relationship with Christian spirituality can be both disposable and destructive; but this inevitably leads to the perpetuation and growth of injustice.

Spirituality, reconciliation and justice interrelate in the sense that all are a means to an end, and ends in themselves.

Christian Spirituality is not spirituality without both justice and reconciliation which clearly stand at the heart of the gospel message. However, in acknowledging an analogous relationship between God's covenantal relationship and human interactions, we have to be honest in the dissimilarities of our capacity as humans and not impose theocratic fallacy.

Christian spirituality is a means to the end of new common identity – of traditions transformed; “true Christian spirituality is about each of us coming to maturity in terms of who we are, so that faith in God actually enables us to become more truly ourselves as God intended” (de Gruchy 2010).

5.4 Necessity of further study

You can remove every tenet of apartheid, every law which applies to it, and you will still not have dealt basically with the prejudices and attitudes which 300 years of South African history and 38 years of apartheid have built up in white people, and by association obviously among the black people. Apartheid has demoralized the white and degraded the black ... In some ways I would think the trappings of apartheid are the least of the problems. The real problem is going to be the mind-sets of men [sic].

(De Gruchy 1988:68)

These words of Gavin Relly quoted by de Gruchy are chillingly true. In 2014 we will celebrate 20 years of democracy. In terms of issues of justice and reconciliation, it wouldn't be too far from the truth to acknowledge that we have only dealt with the least of the problems⁴².

The fact that the 'freedom' that was fought for in the struggle against apartheid was seen as 'realised', 'achieved' or 'complete' when our country entered a democratic, non-racial dispensation has not contributed to a society that is genuinely free. This South African situation seems to be as a result of a society that has become too hung up on the entitlement that comes from an understanding of freedom as freedom *from* that we have not been able to take up the responsibility that is required in freedom *for*. We are too 'free' for our own good.

These words of de Gruchy remain pressing: "The liberation of the privileged is essential for the liberation of the oppressed, a dictum that applies globally as well as locally and regionally. This is not a stratagem of privatized piety, but an act of far-reaching political consequence (2002:208)

Piet Naudé reminds us in his book *Neither Calendar nor Clock* (2010) that amnesty and reparation are the two tasks that have to be addressed after the work of the TRC (2010:203). Talks of reconciliation will remain "cheap" if these are not addressed; they are indeed still necessary in order to build a moral culture. Naudé furthermore points out that article four of the Belhar Confession no doubt speaks of restorative justice. It refers to specific "restorative" scriptural passages from Luke and Amos; "it calls the church to stand against the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and discriminate against those over whom they exercise, or have exercised, control" (2010:206). Confessional documents such as these will need to continue to be utilised in the Christian witness of reconciliation.

⁴² For an interesting perspective on a timeful and embodied view of reconciliation see Vosloo, R.R. 2001. Reconciliation as the embodiment of memory and hope. In *Journal of Theology for South Africa*. 109:25-40.

Conflict areas in other parts of the world such as Israel-Palestine continue to look at South Africa as example of a country that has risen from past injustices. Conflict, and ironically Christianity too, is on the rise on the African continent. Perhaps we should again ask, as Beyers Naudé did in 1985 during South Africa's State of Emergency, "To what degree do we believe that the issue of justice is of crucial importance in determining the future of our land" – and we might add in the context of globalisation, the future of the world (Naudé 1985).

5.5 Conclusion

Indeed, is it not true that when we truly journey to the foot of the cross then we do begin to see things from below, from the perspective of all who suffer? For it is precisely at the cross that we should be moved to repentance – a change of heart and mind – and are born anew by the Spirit so that we can see things quite differently

(de Gruchy 2000:6)

These words are taken from de Gruchy's book of sermons *Seeing Things Differently*. Herein he reminds us that the gospel calls us to 'become like children' in order to see things from a totally different perspective – the perspective of God's gracious reign over the whole of reality (2000:vii).

John de Gruchy has throughout his career attempted to bring together the interpretation of life and world and Word in which Christians engage in his theology. This is a task that needs to be continued by all who choose faith in God.

Bonhoeffer's hope as interpreted through de Gruchy - the birth of something new, a language that has the ability to set free and reconcile - can only happen in the tension between experiencing God in full consciousness, and acting out true Christian humanism.

The observations in de Gruchy's work have allowed us to be frank in stating the Christian mandate for reconciliation and justice. It is so fundamental that it is fitting to cite these words of David Bosch: "The question: "Are you prepared to be reconciled to your brother and sister?" is in essence the same as the question: "Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?" (Bosch 1988:111).

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