



# The ongoing challenge of restorative justice in South Africa: How and why wealthy suburban congregations are responding to poverty and inequality

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South Africa remains one of the most unequal societies in the world and any discussion around poverty and the church's response cannot exclude this reality. This article attempts to analyse the response of wealthy, 'majority white' suburban congregations in the southern suburbs of Cape Town to issues of poverty and inequality. This is attempted through the lense of restorative justice, which is broadly explored and defined through a threefold perspective of reconciliation, reparations and restitution. The first part explores a description of the basic features of poverty and inequality in South Africa today, followed by a discussion on restorative justice. This is followed by the case study, which gives the views of clergy and lay leaders with regard to their congregations' perspectives and responses to poverty and inequality within the context of restorative justice. Findings from the case study begin to plot a tentative 'way forward' as to how our reality can more constructively be engaged from the perspective of congregational involvement in reconstruction of our society.

## Introduction

Maluluke (2007) points out:

As long as the poverty gap between rich and poor widens, even if some of the *nouveaux riches* are Black and some of the *nouveaux pauvres* are White, South Africa is not yet a reconciled nation. Indeed the local churches will have to dig deep into their own pockets if they are to attempt to address the question of reconciliation for our times. (p. 53)

More recently, in 2011, Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu called for a 'wealth tax' to be imposed on all white South Africans based on an understanding that restitution is a key element in the reduction of poverty and inequality within the context of an unjust legacy (cf. Arrisson 2012:9). The latter is set against the background of the perception that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) failed in its attempt and that more robust dialogue needs to take place with regard to issues of restitution and reparations as a means to restorative justice within both government and civil society. Indeed in 2002 De Gruchy noted that the:

restoration of justice requires a great deal more than could be achieved through the TRC... when we talk about restoring justice in the context of reconciliation in South Africa... then the focus must be on social and economic justice. (p. 205)

The church is of course part of civil society and has played an often contested role as both 'hero' and 'villain' during the apartheid era.<sup>1</sup> How then do what we term 'majority white' suburban congregations<sup>2</sup> view the place of restorative justice, particularly against the background of poverty and inequality, and what lessons can we learn from their current engagement within the context of poverty and inequality? In using a case study approach of five wealthy, suburban congregations in the southern suburbs of Cape Town, this article explores their response to the issue of poverty and inequality within a context of restorative justice.

1. See Johannes Erasmus's (2012a:241–254) chapter entitled 'Double legacy: Perceptions of churches as welfare agents in the New South Africa' for a discussion on the historically contested role of the church in South Africa with regard to the church's response to poverty and injustice.

2. The unit of analysis here is that of the local congregation as identified by Smit (1996:120–121) who, August (2003:29) argues, is key in helping to form the 'moral fabric of the local environment' by helping to conscientise their members with regard to issues of social justice. It should be noted that the congregations cited are by no means viewed as representative of the denominational configuration of church they are affiliated to (cf. Smit 1996). These congregations were studied within the context of the southern suburbs in Cape Town and were termed 'majority white'. The congregations selected fulfill the following criteria:

- The clergy (leadership) is 80% white.
- The congregation is no less than 60% white. The reason that this figure is lower than the figure for the leadership is, if the church has effectively been involved in responding to the issue of poverty then the church demographics could have changed since 1994 (i.e. the poor could now be represented in the church). This could be a positive indicator of the church's response to the poor, so we do not want to exclude them on this basis. This rationale could also apply to the leadership, but for the purposes of this study we will use this criteria, as often change in leadership is slower to come into effect than change amongst the other members.
- They are representative geographically of the southern suburbs area of Cape Town. The churches are spread through the southern suburbs, making them more representative of the church in those suburbs of Cape Town so that responses from different areas will be included.
- They represent a cross section of denominations, so that insight can be gained from leaders with different theological viewpoints.



## Brief overview of poverty and inequality in post-apartheid perspective

Poverty in South Africa remains still largely a legacy of the structural inequality of the past and any response to poverty by the wealthy within a post-apartheid South African context has to be considered within this context. This section outlines the key aspects of poverty and inequality within the South African context and the nature of income distribution as still racially skewed. It also briefly begins to explore the challenge posed by this legacy to congregations within this context.

One of the main sources of household data for the post-apartheid period are the Income and Expenditure Surveys (IES) of 1995 and 2000 and the Population Census of 1996 and 2001. Although there were shortcomings in both these sources of data, studies which reviewed them indicate that incomes during the period 1995 and 2000 fell by a significant 40% (Leibbrandt *et al.* 2010:66). Other surveys have found that an estimated 1.8 million people in South Africa were added to the number of those living on per capita household expenditure of less than \$1.00 per day (Hoogeveen & Ölzer 2010:66)<sup>3</sup>. Some surveys indicate that these are extreme figures, but research has shown that the incomes of approximately 15.4 million South Africans remained below the breadline (earning less than R250.00 per month) in 2004 (Van den Berg in Burger, Louw & Van der Watt 2010:66). It is important to note that the vast majority of the poor in South Africa are black and most lack any access to wage income (Burger *et al.* 2010:62).

Socio-economic transformation has not taken place on a broad scale and this is no more evident than when one looks at unemployment statistics in South Africa. These statistics show that inequality is a result of the policies of apartheid. So much so that Leibbrandt *et al.* (2010) states that:

in addition to high poverty levels, South Africa's inequality levels are among the highest in the world. Furthermore, levels of poverty and inequality continue to bear a persistent racial undertone. (p. 9)

In 2001, 3 445 000 black South Africans (28.4%) were unemployed, 395 000 coloured South Africans (22.6%), 70 000 Asians (15.3%) and 170 000 white South Africans (7.6%). In 2007, 3 565 000 black South Africans (27.6%) were unemployed, 407 000 (21.4%) coloured South Africans (21.4%), 52 000 Asians (10.9%) and 95 000 white South Africans (4.4%). During the same time frame, the number of domestic workers and people employed in elementary occupations also increased (Statistics South Africa 2008:20–26).

We can clearly see from these figures that apartheid was certainly successful in securing a greater measure of livelihood security for most white people in South Africa. It is interesting to note that the number of black Africans and coloured people that was unemployed increased

3. It needs to be noted, though, that access to basic goods and services increased, thereby actually improving the living conditions of the poor in some ways (Hoogeveen & Ölzer 2010:66).

from 2001 to 2007 (even although they had extremely high levels of unemployment originally) and the white group of unemployed dramatically reduced in number (Statistics South Africa 2008:20–26). Although apartheid has ended, the educational, institutional and systemic advantages to white people during apartheid continue to ensure their employment, and, therefore, escape from poverty for the majority of this group<sup>4</sup>.

It is, therefore, implied that one cannot speak of poverty and inequality without speaking of justice in a post-apartheid context. Burger and Van der Watt (2010) argue that:

due to the country's history of racial discrimination and forced segregation, poverty has a strong association with race and place, which creates additional distance between the poor and the rich. (p. 395)

Apartheid fragmented society along geographic, socio-economic and racial lines so that 'viable communal reparations, which focus on economic growth and the restoration of human dignity, are not easy to realize' (Villa-Vicencio 2004:77). Villa-Vicencio further argues that in light of the fact that inequality continues to grow, there must, in the interest of restoring human and civil dignity, be a national commitment to bridging the gap between the rich and poor from the perspective of restorative justice (Villa-Vicencio 2004:77). Several authors have argued over the past few years for the potential of the church within a South African context to bridge this gap due to factors such as public trust in religious institutions, the church's historical role in social welfare and the significant amount contributed by the church to poverty alleviation (cf. Bowers Du Toit 2012:206–208; Burger & Van Der Watt 2010:396; Erasmus 2012b:60). Not many of these arguments have, however, taken into consideration the importance of the local congregation in bridging socio-economic divides or the conceptualisation of the church's engagement with poverty as a restorative justice endeavour.

Bowers Du Toit (2012:210) points out the potential of the local congregation in meeting the reconciliation and restitution agenda in recounting the Paarl case study<sup>5</sup>, but even this case study reveals that although congregational leaders from various denominations mentioned the importance of economic 'sharing', no partnerships appeared to be happening on congregational level across racial and socio-economic divides. This is interesting in light of the much highlighted argument that many congregations and faith-based organisations (FBOs) continue to engage in a charity mode, which rather often raises issues of power and

4. Although these figures do not specify, there is a possibility that the white figures could be lower due to emigration, which is an option available only to the well-resourced. However, despite the fact that 18 years of post-apartheid transition has not been sufficient time to see high aggregate inequality fall, intra-race inequality is also beginning to grow (Leibbrandt *et al.* 2010:21).

5. Cf. Bowers Du Toit's article (2009) entitled 'Theology and praxis: Friends, foes or mere acquaintances? A case study from Paarl' where the role of various 'theologies of poverty' and their role in the church's response are highlighted. She makes the point that many churches still operate in a charity mode based on the level of their theological discourse. Lotter (2008:192–193) makes the point that 'although a biblical ethics of poverty and wealth does not prescribe any detailed specification of preferred distributive patterns, sharp inequalities in distribution are vehemently rejected'.



paternalism – particularly when such charity is across social divides (cf. Swart & Venter 2001). Poverty and inequality can no longer merely be viewed as objects of the church's charity, but must also be seen against the background of a post-apartheid discourse (socio-political and theological) around social justice. A post-apartheid discourse surrounding reconciliation, restitution and reparations provides a context within which congregational praxis occurs – and hopefully responds – to issues of poverty and inequality.

## The restorative justice debates within a lingering context of inequality

The church (particularly in its congregational form) should play a role in facilitating reconciliation, healing and wholeness in local communities. What is not so clear, as briefly outlined in the preceding argument, is what form this should take and what will constitute healing and rebuilding within a context of poverty and inequality. It is important to note that De Gruchy (2002:130) emphasises, however, that within faith discourse 'religious notions of reconciliation expect from perpetrators an ethical commitment to making redress, restitution and reparation'. Many denominations made submissions to the TRC, acknowledging their role in apartheid but the issue of redress within local contexts such as congregations remains problematic to enact. It is with this in mind that this section provides a brief discussion of what we term a 'threefold' perspective of reconciliation, reparations and restitution as part of a generously interpreted notion of restorative justice<sup>6</sup> within a post-apartheid discourse, both in broader civil society and the church in order to lay foundations for the case study analysis.

### Reconciliation

At the end of the apartheid era, reconciliation emerged as a priority in the country for the new government. South Africa's Interim Constitution recognised the importance of reconciliation to South Africa's future<sup>7</sup>. The TRC was then established and tasked with balancing truth-finding with reconciliation. The TRC was to go beyond truth-finding and 'to promote national unity and reconciliation in a spirit of understanding which transcends the conflict and divisions of the past' (Chapman & Spong 2003:2). There were also a number of major conferences and documents that focused on reconciliation and the need for repentance and reparations (De Gruchy 2002:3).

One definition of reconciliation that has been offered is: 'A process of developing mutual accommodation between

6. It is important to note that the term 'restorative justice' is differently interpreted and much disputed. We have opted to take on De Gruchy's understanding, who states that its emphasis is on rehabilitation, compensation, the recovery of dignity and the healing of social wounds. In this way reconciliation, reparations and restitution could all be interpretively viewed as part of restorative justice.

7. The post-amble to that document stated that 'the pursuit of national unity, the well-being of all South African citizens and peace require reconciliation between the people of South Africa and the reconstruction of society' (Chapman & Spong 2003:1). It went on to add: 'There is a need for understanding but not vengeance, a need for reparation but not for retaliation, a need for Ubuntu but not victimization' (Chapman & Spong 2003:2).

antagonistic or formerly antagonistic groups or people so as to establish a new relationship predicated on a common shared future' (Chapman & Spong 2003:13). This definition recognises that reconciliation involves parties with a shared history who, however difficult, can move into a more hopeful shared future together. Njabulo Ndebele imbues reconciliation with hope when he suggests that 'reconciliation has not so much to do with the present realities as with "who we can become"' (Villa-Vicencio 2004:81).

Past and present realities remain, however, important and the full implications of past inhumanity need to be faced with uncompromising honesty. This implies that whilst we need to deal realistically with our horrific past in order to recognise and benefit its victims, we also need to envisage the 'possibility of the new' (Villa-Vicencio 2004:81). It is important when considering reconciliation in South Africa that there is a balance between dealing effectively with the past for those who were damaged by apartheid (who, it could be argued, is all people in South Africa, in different ways, although for the reasons outlined previously, most explicitly black, coloured and Indian people) whilst encouraging a movement towards a unified future.

If reconciliation has been established as a priority of the government, surely it should even more so be a focus of the church. The need for FBOs to play an important role in the process of nation building and reconciliation was stated by President Mandela in an important keynote address in Potchefstroom in December 1992 (De Gruchy 2002:3). Reconciliation should be at the heart of the purpose of the church – to reconcile humankind to God and humankind to each other. This reconciliation is, of course, cosmic in scope and touches on all relationships – social, economic, spiritual et cetera. The mandate of the church is to model this reconciliation to both God and their fellow human beings (Thesnaar 2010:99). Despite the fact that certain FBOs played contested roles within the conflicts of the past, it is also clearly evident that 'their influence constitutes an important role in the area of reconciliation' (De Gruchy 2002:3)<sup>8</sup>. This is, however, somewhat problematised by the historic Kairos Document<sup>9</sup> which argues that authentic reconciliation could only follow white repentance and a clear commitment to fundamental change (Doxtader & Villa-Vicencio 2004:xiv). Whilst many denominations certainly confessed their complicity with the apartheid regime and denounced it as an evil system which distorted and broke God given relationships, Doxtader and Villa-Vicencio (2004) argue that this is insufficient means for what they term 'genuine and deep reconciliation':

In order for there to be genuine and deep reconciliation, is an apology enough or do there need to be actions that support the apology? If so, what form would these actions have to take? The gross discrepancy between rich and poor constitutes a fundamental threat to both citizens and the nation of South

8. The Kairos Document of 1985 contains voices from within the church calling on the church to confess their guilt for apartheid on behalf of the nation and to work for reconciliation on the basis of justice (De Gruchy 2002:3).

9. The Kairos Document was produced by the Institute for Contextual Theology in 1985 by black theologians as a critique to the churches' response to apartheid.



Africa. The urgent need to bridge this gap is the fundamental problem of how to undertake repair and muster the capacity for reconstruction.<sup>10</sup> (p. xvi)

The latter brings us to the issues of reparations and restitution.

## Reparations

There is a long standing legal principle 'that responsibility for a wrongful act entails a duty to make up for the damages caused by such an act' (Tomuschat in Vandeginste 2004:88). This is known as 'reparation':

Public International Law states that reparation must, as far as possible, wipe out all the consequences of the illegal act and re-establish the situation which would, in all probability, have existed if that act had not been committed. (Tomuschat in Vandeginste 2004:88)

On the other hand, the term 'reparations' acknowledges that a monetary or material compensation cannot make up for losses such as a death of a family member or the trauma of torture, but suggests it is rather a symbolic gesture and an acknowledgement of wrongdoing, which is proposed as the starting point of reconciliation. Much more than a policy that culminates in a one-time payout or fleeting acknowledgement, the power of the reparative may reside in an attitude, a willingness to see historical deprivation and inequality as a common problem that demands a struggle for a future in which things are made otherwise (Doxtader & Villa-Vicencio 2004:xiii). The term 'reparations' signifies the commitment to, and desire for, restored relationships, acknowledges the harm suffered and demonstrates a commitment to accord the other party 'equal respect, dignity and concern in the future' (Llewellyn 2004:173). De Gruchy (2002:7) makes the point that reparations has to be part of reconciliation. Neither confession nor forgiveness 'as linguistic acts', nor juridical or pseudo-juridical processes can come into their own without reparations.

Included in the recommendations of the TRC were proposals on reparations (Tutu 2004:vi). It is suggested that many different types of action can have reparative effects and there are many reasons to undertake reparations initiatives (Doxtader & Villa-Vicencio 2004:xvii). It is perhaps helpful to make the distinction between individual, communal and national dimensions of reparations. It is also important to note that there is a significant amount of debate about reparations, which is not always thought of as the most effective way of facilitating reconciliation. In his response in parliament to the TRC's recommendations on reparations, President Thabo Mbeki announced that the government will pay individuals reparations but will do so with 'some apprehension' about their value in building a 'better life for

10.The following have been suggested as the requirements for reconciliation: 'Discernment about the truth of the extent, causes and perpetrators of violence and abuses in the past; a shared and open acknowledgement of moral responsibility by those who inflicted the harm and others who were complicit by their silence and failure to oppose wrongdoings; a willingness to let go of the past and not seek vengeance; achieving justice, specifically a measure of redress; lastly, a commitment on the part of both parties to repair and reestablish their relationships' (Chapman & Spong 2003:13).

all' (Doxtader & Villa-Vicencio 2004:xvi). Desmond Tutu suggested that each family who could afford it could give R100.00 or R200.00 to an indigent family (Tutu 2004:viii). As stated Tutu has recently renewed calls for a 'wealth tax' in South Africa. 'What a magnificent gesture it would be ... were relatively wealthy South Africans to contribute to a central fund aiming to contribute to the national effort to uplift the poor. This could, in particular, create a mechanism for those individuals and companies who acquired wealth during the years of apartheid, to pay one-off reparations' (IOL News 2011). The tension that many feel about reparations is highlighted by the author Antjie Krog who observes: 'If people don't get reparations they won't forgive. If people are not forgiven, they won't give reparations' (Doxtader & Villa-Vicencio 2004:117).

Whatever one thinks of Tutu's model, many would agree that at the root of his reasoning is the righting of past wrongs in a way that is informed by the inequality created by the apartheid system<sup>11</sup>. Although Villa-Vicencio (2004:77) by no means calls for reparations of this nature, he does argue that if 'communal reparations are to be viable, they need to focus on the much needed economic growth and restoration of human dignity.' The church cannot stand apart from this debate, because as inequality continues to grow the church as God's people will need to reconnect power, love and justice (De Gruchy 2002:199). Love without justice in this context is hollow and does not bring to rights the liberatory and restorative message of the gospel.

## Restitution

According to the Restitution Foundation (n.d.):

Restitution is one of the most significant tools available to us in addressing the residual ills of Apartheid and discrimination as well as other causes of inequity in our communities.

Restitution involves seeking to right the generational ills of inequality by engaging those who have benefited from the system, directly or indirectly, in transferring wealth and social capital to and reinvesting in communities that still suffer from the grim legacy of the past. In such a model, a one-to-one sort of repayment makes no sense (The Restitution Foundation n.d.).

Restitution is also seen when those who take responsibility for wrongs are involved in rebuilding. This includes rebuilding where there has been 'structural' or 'institutional' violence such as lack of access to educational resources or health care. Practically this might mean building schools in communities where schools and classrooms are overcrowded and access to education is limited as a result of this. Restitution is, therefore, not charity, but rather highly relational, potentially costly, and long term. Its aim is to restore relationships, where before there was brokenness and suspicion:

11.Du Bois and Du Bois-Pedian (2008:127) in fact makes the salient point that it may even be necessary to see the 'generations of children and yet to be born who will suffer the consequences of poverty, of malnutrition, of homelessness, of illiteracy and disempowerment generated and sustained by the institutions of Apartheid and its manifest effects on life and living for so many'.



In this relationship, we progress past the point in which there is a clear benefactor and beneficiary, roles that still leave power on one side and that can be unintentionally dehumanizing. (The Restitution Foundation n.d.)

De Gruchy (2002:205) notes that 'reparation is not simply being kind or going the extra mile; reparation is not simply engaging in welfare'.

Those within church circles who support restitution cite the Christian practice of the Eucharist, with its explicit reference to Matthew 5:23–24 (where it states that if you are at the altar and remember that your brother has something against you, you must go and be reconciled to your brother before you can offer your gift) as saying that one should not share the bread and wine until one has made restitution to those whom one has harmed (De Gruchy 2002:8). This is an incredibly challenging statement within the context of our country, where for many Christians even the reality of sharing the Eucharist with brothers and sisters across racial boundaries cannot be conceived. Naude (in Thesnaar 2010:101) remains hopeful and states that when 'God's love is in people, people will take the knowledge of suffering seriously and this will lead to sacrificial acts in very concrete material terms.'

## The 5-congregation case study<sup>12</sup>

The following case study reports on the perceptions of ministers and congregational social ministry leaders of what we have termed 'majority white' wealthy suburban congregations, with regard to their understanding of reconciliation, restitution and reparations in relationship to the situation of poverty and inequality within a post-apartheid context. The study utilised qualitative methodology and therefore unstructured scheduled interviews were undertaken with four clergy and one leader of a social ministry in churches in the Cape Peninsula. The churches and leaders were chosen as they represent a purposive sample population of leaders of churches that could be classified as wealthy at the time of the official dismantling of apartheid in 1994. Each leader was interviewed to gain insight into their response, and the response of their congregation, to issues of reparations and restitution within a context of poverty and inequality. The churches that were represented were the following: Baptist church, Anglican church, Dutch Reformed church, Charismatic church (that is part of a network of churches) and an Independent Evangelical church. All respondents were assured of anonymity<sup>13</sup>.

12. The type of case study identified here is that of the Collective Case Study. In this instance the researcher intends to further his or her knowledge regarding a social issue or population being studied, in this case Christian congregations and their response to issues of poverty and injustice with regard to restorative justice. In a Collective Case Study 'cases are chosen so that comparisons can be made between cases and concepts and so that theories can be extended or validated' (Fouche 2005:272). In this particular study attention was paid to a range of suitable denominations (both ecumenical and evangelical-charismatic) within a set geographic boundary of the southern suburbs of Cape Town. In order to understand and interpret the case study at hand a brief introduction to the context of poverty and inequality as well as the definitions of reconciliation, reparations and restitution have been provided, which assists in contextualising the contexts in which the unit is embedded' (Babbie & Mouton 1998:282).

13. All interviews were recorded and transcribed and respondents were assured of anonymity. The empirical research was originally disseminated as part of a mini thesis at Cornerstone Institute.

## In their own words: Leaders' views on issues of reparations and restitution

According to the Dutch Reformed minister, the Dutch Reformed church has not been involved in any reparations, but has done restitution in the form of building schools and giving back land. Restitution is an issue that they have been discussing with the Uniting Reformed church for a few years. The minister also commented that in the area where the church is situated (an affluent suburban area) this is not so much an issue: 'We don't want to give handouts, they are a bit sensitive about it. We don't want to be paternalistic' (Dutch Reformed church interview 2011). *This view highlights the fact that whilst denominations often have the ability to launch such initiatives, congregations recognise that restitution needs to begin within the restoration of relationships, which is often a complex issue. As aforementioned, restitution is not the kind of charity so well practiced by many congregations, but as mentioned 'highly relational, potentially costly and long term'.*

The response of the Anglican respondent further highlights the complexity of such actions and argues that the 'one-to-one' payment model is of no help. With regard to reparations and restitution the Anglican minister responded that they are constantly asking the question: How do we live in a way that shows that we are repentant. We are constantly asking the church community to think of ways that you can give back and make a difference. A lot of families and individuals spend their resources on others or on creating jobs. Examples cited were individuals who were working in under-privileged schools to build the education sector and an individual who works tirelessly in a clinic in Nyanga to train others. He noted that there is a discomfort when leaders of the various churches come together to discover how the socio-economic inequality can be addressed: 'White churches still have an attitude that I have done my part, the mixed race churches still say that there is hurt' (Anglican church interview 2011). *Long term relationship building which acknowledges the hurts and recognises that addressing poverty is a response to God's justice is, therefore, essential. This is sacrificial, in that it will cost both the poor and the non-poor and will require the re-building of broken relationships.*

It is interesting to note that most of the respondents were not particularly interested in Tutu's model of a once-off individual reparations. When asked about the role of reparations, the Baptist minister responded in the following manner:

'I don't think that every Baptist in every church should give a Black person R1000.00. That won't achieve anything. They need to invest their time. We need to commit for the long haul to development and to fulfill a biblical mandate. Another handout will be a dismal failure.' (Baptist church interview 2011)

He did add, though, that if a resource-rich church was wondering what to do with their resources and they could build, for example, 50 houses then they should do that. He cautioned that a reparations model will only run whilst there is a visionary leader leading the cause. This minister did,



however, see a need for reparations, but only of it is framed within a biblical understanding of poverty and justice:

‘I do think there is a role, but I don’t see it as repairing the effects of apartheid. It is because the church is called to reach the poor. If it is a reparation/restitution model it will fail because that is based on giving and taking. I think we responded unbiblically during apartheid and are now seeking to react biblically.’ (Baptist church interview 2011)

This minister stressed that it is a biblical mandate for the non-poor to respond to the poor, and gave an example of one of the Baptist churches in Soweto that would be classified as wealthy. The interviewee highlighted that this congregation, although they are black South Africans, also has a responsibility to respond to the poor. The Baptist minister agreed that there is a biblical principle of restitution where we see the Jubilee principle in the Old Testament allowing the debt to be cancelled. He did highlight, however, that restitution should be church-led and development orientated. He added:

‘A biblical model will last. There is an increased model of focus on the two. In a hundred years, if there are no more effects of apartheid, I would still like to see the church reaching out to the poor.’ (Baptist church interview 2011)

*This theological understanding of poverty reinforces the notion that restitution has its roots in a biblical understanding of structural inequality as injustice.*

This approach is modeled by the Charismatic church, which clearly highlights restitution as a biblical injunction, flowing from a theological understanding of justice. This minister went on to add: ‘Restitution is a justice issue. We think that restitution is a Godly response to a situation of injustice’ (Charismatic church interview 2011). He outlines their initiatives with poverty and inequality in the following manner:

‘As we sought to grapple with a post-apartheid South Africa, we thought restitution was missing (this minister refers to reparation and restitution under the label of restitution). If genuine repentance takes place we want to address the issues. In our local church we have three tangible expressions of restitution. One was to build a church building for a church in Khayelitsha before we had our own building. We knew that there was an uneven distribution of wealth, so we wanted to pay for that church building before our own. We also have a restitution education fund. We wanted to give tangibly. I was particularly moved by this radical injustice in education as I benefitted from an excellent education. So far we have raised approximately R500 000 that we have given to previously disadvantaged towards their education needs. The third area of restitution that we are involved in seeks to help people purchase their own homes. The primary motive for these is restitution.’ (Charismatic church interview 2011)

He then went further to clarify his thinking about restitution:

‘There are two issues. The poor, which is true of any society, and restitution, which is an issue of justice. Until the justice issue becomes resolved we can’t have reconciliation. As a White person if you become hostile at the thought of restitution you haven’t really been affected by the injustice. If you steal from

someone, you need to make amends.’ (Charismatic church interview 2011)

It should be noted, however, that this minister stated that it is now a challenge where the church is at least 50% black because they are not a white community, which means that when he is preaching he is not addressing a white person or congregation. Addressing the issue of restitution becomes complex because it applies to only part of the community.

*The response from the Independent Evangelical church’s congregation was most interesting as it highlighted the role of congregational leaders in shaping the way the church responds to poverty as a justice issue:*

‘Personally I don’t think that we have done enough. The eldership<sup>14</sup> would say that we are doing enough through our foundation. The preaching of the church is “build relationships”. The church will never support restitution. The thinking is: “how far back do we go? Do we go back to colonialism?” I think something has to be done, but I have never seen a working model for that.’ (Independent church interview 2011)

She added that:

‘we have spent some time and sent some people to a foundation working in the area of restitution. We don’t think that their strategy is clear, but they are doing something. We feel it needs to be a grace thing, not a law.’ (Independent Evangelical church interview 2011)

Although this congregation is active in the arena of poverty alleviation, justice issues are not addressed directly by the church leadership or promoted directly through the social ministry within the church. This is rather the initiative of church members in their own capacity. ‘Someone in our church is involved in literacy project that is making a significant difference’ (Independent Evangelical church interview 2011). Another example was the formation of a group in the church that is involved in and supports the adoption of children who have been affected by injustice. This was not initiated by the church, but is a result of people in the church who are motivated to do something (Independent Evangelical church interview 2011). Whilst this response is valuable and legitimate, it reflects an often ad hoc approach to issues of poverty and inequality and ignores the structural nature of these issues, which are best addressed in a manner which takes this into account.

## Findings from the case study

All of the church leaders interviewed felt that it was the role of the church to reach the poor and marginalised and bring justice where there has been injustice. How each church was involved in the lives of the poor or attempting to be involved varied greatly. Although there is work being done to bring reconciliation and healing, there was an acknowledgement from most of the leaders that much more could be done. The two churches that are most integrated and are involved the most in the lives of the poor are satisfied that they are

14. This Independent Evangelical congregation refers to their ministers as ‘elders’.



on the right track, whilst those that still have largely white congregations acknowledged that they lacked some strategy or resources. The following section reflects (from the findings of the case study), what may be required for local congregations to engage more constructively with issues of restorative justice at congregational level<sup>15</sup>.

### **A clear theology of the poor and social justice and its relationship to issues of reconciliation, reparation and restitution<sup>16</sup>**

All of the churches in the sample were convinced of the importance of reconciliation and being involved in the lives of the poor. All believed that it was the role of the church to bring hope to the poor and demonstrate God's love to them. The churches that were most assimilated and had the most church-led initiatives had a very clearly articulated theology of the poor. This also applied to their doctrines of reparations and restitution. Each of the church leaders interviewed felt that there was a place for reparations and restitution. The leader of the social ministry from the Independent Evangelical church however acknowledged that although she did, her church did not really believe in it. Most of the churches did not differentiate between reparations and restitution, but regarded them as one thing. Again, the clearer the thinking was with regard to these issues, the clearer the implementation of a strategy by the church. The churches with the clearest thinking had clearly divided a line between issues of the poor ('who will always be amongst us') and issues of justice, where they placed reparations and restitution. Although some of the churches had clear thinking on these issues, the amount of emphasis placed on work with the poor in the name of restitution and reparations, and work with the poor because of a biblical mandate varied amongst the churches. Those churches that believed strongly that the poor are to be part of the church were most racially assimilated. It was, therefore, evident in varying degrees that a clear doctrine had led to clear teaching and strong implementation by the leadership and the congregation.

### **Involvement by church leadership or church laity**

Four of the churches reported that they regularly encourage all members of the congregation that it is their role to be involved with the poor. However, the churches that were most integrated racially and were most involved in the lives of the poor definitely had a 'hands on' involvement by the top levels of leadership of the churches in the lives of the poor, or at least an involvement in decision making concerning the poor, for example taking the initiative regarding restitution initiatives. The leaders in these churches were modelling the importance of involvement with the poor and it was having an effect on the congregation who was also largely reaching out to the poor. Along with the 'hands on' involvement, the church leadership was consistently teaching and motivating the congregation towards a biblical response to the poor, who was responding well. The churches that only had

<sup>15</sup>It should be noted that all findings could not be reflected in the previous section and that some of the findings noted in this section stemmed directly from the interviews, rather than the previously cited interpretive narrative.

<sup>16</sup>Cf. Bowers Du Toit (2009) and Lotter (2008) for discussions on the role of theology in the church's engagement with poverty.

a primary focus on every believer being a minister who is to reach out wherever they are, did not have as much integration, although they did have some examples of people in the church who were making a difference in the lives of the poor. They believed that the continued encouragement of the congregation to make a difference in their lifestyles was increasingly bearing fruit.

### **Long term relationship building**

In terms of sustainability and ownership on the side of the poor, the two churches that were most racially assimilated had been building relationships and working on reconciliation with people from poor communities over a long period of time, including during apartheid. Genuine relationships had been formed that had come at a cost, such as entering forbidden areas to spend time together. This long term investment of time into relationships demonstrated a consistency that, along with visible, practical and sacrificial involvement, earned the trust of those from poor communities, who were now responding with increased engagement in the church community. This is a very important aspect of the development of the more integrated churches – their very strong belief that the poor are not 'out there' beyond the walls of the church, but that they very much need to be part of the church community. This was based on the underlying belief that true reconciliation is reflected in authentic and integrated community building.

This relationship building has allowed for a more developmental approach (as opposed to a charity model) as the churches engaged with the poor, learnt what their needs were and worked together to find solutions. This long term relationship building in these churches also allowed reconciliation, restitution and reparations to occur in a relationally based context. The churches did not have to go and 'find people' to reconcile with and pay reparations or restitution to, but it was done with people who were in their midst.

### **Sacrificial and practical involvement**

It is interesting that the two congregations that have assimilated communities are the two communities that have a lot more practical church led engagement with the poor. These churches have been involved in reparations and restitution in ways of sacrificial giving of finances, time, people resources, and mobilising resources on behalf of communities. This has made them credible to the poor communities that they have engaged with and has empowered the communities. Again, some actions were taken specifically in the name of reparations and restitution and some in the name of involvement with the poor.

The churches that are most racially assimilated are arguably located somewhat more accessible for different races, although they are located in white areas. It is, however, definitely not only their location that has helped them to become multicultural, but a very intentional engagement with communities by the leadership and the congregation.



With regard to the location and segregation of areas, the church that has the greatest integration in terms of church congregation actually assists people in township areas with transport (through paying for a taxi service) and in student areas (through arranging for transport with the university transport system). This is notable, as two of the churches that have less than 10% non-white membership attributed the lack of integration to people not living in the area.

## Conclusion

The journey to 'repair the past' is challenging when one considers the nature of our fragmented past and the role the church has played, and should continue to play, in reconstruction and redress within an unequal society. The charity and 'ad hoc' approaches employed by congregations in addressing poverty within South Africa, whilst well-meaning, do not acknowledge the structural nature of the system of poverty and inequality engendered by apartheid. To repair the past demands far more than this, as the case study tentatively plots. Those 'majority white' congregations, who not only acknowledged the injustice of apartheid, but have sacrificially reached out in intentional ways to build relationships across the divide as part of their attempt to restore the socio-economic injustices of the past, have made the most progress. The success of these efforts was undergirded by involved clergy, who understood that the congregation's response must be shaped by a theological understanding of poverty and injustice or its efforts will not be sustainable. So, whilst there were definitely some indications of progress and attempts at restorative justice within the case study, and certain aspects of examples that can be followed, there is still a long way to go before we can say we have seen true reconciliation and transformation in this country. Donald Shriver (2007:214) notes (with reference to restorative justice within the context of North America) that 'the pragmatic truth may be that we can never know how much, or how little, we can improve social measures for recovery from an immoral social past until we try'. If we believe that the church has a key role to play in terms of modelling Christ's example and possesses the moral, financial and social resources to do so, then we are compelled to do just that – try.

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### Authors' contributions

N.F.B.d.T. (University of Stellenbosch) was responsible to the conceptual framing, part of the literature review, analysis and editing. G.N. (University of the Western Cape) was responsible for the data collection, part of the literature review and analysis.

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