Healing the aftermath of terror and tyranny – A survivor speaks –

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Thank you, dear Patrick, for those very warm words of introduction. When there is a build-up to a speaker like that, I always have a feeling in the pit of my stomach that it is going to be downhill afterwards. So I hope I don't disappoint you too much.

I want to recognise and honour Cécile Thill, the president of ACAT here in Luxembourg. I wasn't sure about our gender balances as we sat here tonight, so I'm happy that the president of ACAT is here, and I want to honour the different organisations that have helped to put this event together. And thank you to Patrick for taking the risk of inviting me to be here tonight.

I must begin by asking forgiveness that I am not speaking the heavenly language of the people in Luxembourg. And I therefore wish to honour Roland, Sophia, Phil and Armelle, our translators, without whom many of you would not be hearing what I have to say in your heavenly languages.

So perhaps, right at the beginning, we could give a round of applause to the translators.

(Applause)

You know, when you have no hands, you have to get other people to clap for you. So thank you for your willingness to do that.

For me it was very moving that the music that we heard at the beginning was from Miriam Makeba, affectionately known in South Africa and many parts of the world as 'Mama Africa'. And I think that the world lost a very beautiful, wonderful voice when that great heart stopped beating a few days ago; and, through her music, such a powerful voice for the struggles of the people of South Africa; someone who, through her own life, paid a great cost because of the decades that she had to live outside the motherland until freedom came to South Africa.

On this occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights, I want to begin by honouring all those who through such a long period of human history have fought for human rights, and those who in the last 60 years have sought to make that piece of paper a reality.

In particular, I would like to honour all those who fought for the total end and abolition of torture. I think it is right that tonight we pause and remember all those who have been victims of torture and all those who still suffer torture: whether they suffer it through the actions of state officials or whether they suffer from the torture that so often happens in private space; whether they are popular victims who have people who can fight for them, or whether they are unpopular victims for whom nobody speaks. And I'd like to invite you to stand and have a moment of silence for all those who suffer torture. So, I would ask you to stand.

(Silence)

Thank you very much.

I think the question of torture is of particular significance for anyone who calls himself a Christian, because we are the ones who follow the tortured one. So it is an issue that is central to our own faith.

Tonight, I speak to you as one who has been a victim of state terrorism, of the terrorism of a state against an individual. And what I would like to do is share a little bit of my own journey, my own story and how that is intertwined with the story of the journey of the people of South Africa, and then also to talk about healing of memories.

I want to begin with what happened to me 18 years ago in the dying days of apartheid. In April 1990 I received a letter bomb, a letter bomb hidden inside the pages of two religious magazines. And I suppose that, in a way, it was the ultimate act of cynicism of a regime that said 'we are Christian' that they chose two religious magazines to seek to kill a priest. Now what is always important for me to say is that, when that bomb went off, I had a sense that God was with me. God had not stepped in and said 'It's a bomb, don't open it'; but rather a God who travels with us, who accompanies us on our journey. Originally I come from New Zealand. I trained as a priest in Australia and I came to South Africa first to study in 1973 and was a student and also a university chaplain. I often say that, when I arrived in South Africa, I stopped being a human being and became a white man. And, for me, joining the liberation struggle was joining the struggle to recover my own humanity.

I was expelled from South Africa after the Soweto uprising in 1976 and went to live in Lesotho, that small African country completely surrounded by South Africa. And then, after a massacre in Lesotho in 1982, I was forced to leave Lesotho and went to live in Zimbabwe. The government of Zimbabwe informed me that I was on a South African government hit list or death list, and so I lived with armed police guards for several years. Whilst living in southern Africa, I travelled the world in the cause and the struggle against apartheid. And my message, in some ways, was a very simply one. What I was saying was that apartheid was a choice or an option for death, carried out in the name of the gospel of life, and therefore it was an issue of faith to opposers.

When the bomb went off and the word began to spread around the world, it was as if everybody I had ever met for those previous 14 years began to send me messages of prayer, love and support. People of faith, people of hope, people of goodwill. I often say that when I die I won't need a funeral, because people said all the nice things then. I'm not sure why it is that people wait until we are dead before they start saying nice things about us.

After the bomb went off - there I was with no hands, one eye, ear drums shattered, not sure whether I would ever be able to read again, ever be able to hear properly again - a little bit of that time, I thought perhaps it would be better to be dead. But then I thought of the prayers, love and support that were continuing to flood in, and I began to see that, if I was filled with hatred, bitterness, self-pity and desire for revenge, I would be a victim forever. They would have failed to kill the body, but they would have killed the soul. So my own story was acknowledged, reverenced, recognized and given a moral content.

I want to emphasise the giant step from knowledge to acknowledgement. And what I want to say applies equally to individuals, families, communities and nations. For example, there can be abuse happening in a family. Everybody in the family knows that the abuse is happening; so indeed there is knowledge, but there is no acknowledgement. Some people would say that that great country, the United States of America, will not truly heal until they move from knowledge to acknowledgement concerning what happened to native Americans, what happened under slavery. A little sign of hope was that, when Senator McCain spoke on the night of the election, when Senator Obama, the President-elect, spoke, and when President Bush spoke the next day, they all referred to slavery. I began to feel that perhaps, perhaps, perhaps, the day of acknowledgement was dawning in the United States.

One can think of many other contexts where the journey from knowledge to acknowledgement is important. One of the most important examples happened early this year in Australia, where the Australian Prime Minister stood before the Parliament of Australia and said to the nation, and specifically to the indigenous people, 'We are sorry'. 'We are sorry about what we did, we are sorry about the stolen generation. We are sorry about the oppression'. Of course, in the example of Australia, up until 1967 their constitution actually used the words '*terra nullis*' to say that it was an empty country when white people went there, even though there had been a continuous human civilisation for more than 40 000 years. But suddenly, in a moment, there was a movement from knowledge to acknowledgement.

Before I came to Luxembourg, I was with the Sami people in the northern part of Sweden, the reindeer people. And they said that in their case there has in fact been acknowledgment, specifically by the faith community, who have said, 'We are sorry for what we did'. However, they said, there is no knowledge. So there has been public apology, but people do not actually know the content of the journey of oppression and dispossession. And it was the Sami who taught me that we need both that knowledge and that acknowledgement, a fundamental step on the journey of healing.

So back to my story. My story was acknowledged. It was reverenced, it was given a respect. It was also listened to, it was given a moral content. We think of situations of domestic abuse. When a man abuses a woman and says to her, ‘I am abusing you because of the wrong you have done. You are a bad person and therefore I am abusing you’. When the torturer tortures, the torturer says, ‘You are being tortured because you are a bad person’. And so the moral order is inverted. And, only when it is said that the abuse is what is wrong - you are not wrong, the abuse that happens to you is wrong, the torture itself is wrong – only then does the moral order begin to be restored.

One way that I would describe my own journey is the journey from being a victim - I was a victim, something horrible was done to me, a survivor, I am a survivor, I am physically alive, but God through the love and prayers of support of people around the world enabled me to take another step - to becoming a victor. A victor, not in a militaristic sense of victor, but rather in the sense that, when something is done to us we become objects of history, and when we become victors, we become subjects of history once more. We are able to begin to participate again and help to shape and create the world. So it is about moving from being an object of history to becoming a subject of history once more.

One of our great leaders in South Africa, Chief Albert Lutuli, once said that those who think of themselves as victims eventually become the victimisers of others. And people give themselves permission to do terrible things to others because of what was done to them. And often, in conflict situations, both sides say ‘But we are the real victims. You are not the victims’. And indeed there can be a competition for victimhood.

So what I am suggesting is that, if terrible things happen to us, there is likely to be one of two journeys. It will be either the journey of victims who become victimisers, who become victims, who become victimizers, a cycle that can go on intergenerationally, or the journey of victims who become survivors, who become the victors. What’s the key to which journey we are likely to take? I would suggest to you that often the key to the life-giving journey involves acknowledgement, when what has happened to people is truly acknowledged.

I can say the same thing in another way. Life is like a river. The river flows. Something horrible happens to us and our life becomes a world where we live life in terms of that incident. Life stops, even for many decades, and the acknowledgement can be the beginning of the river of life beginning to flow.

Let me say the same thing in a third way. If horrible things happen to us, we can be filled with poisonous memories. Filled with memories that have poison connected to them, like hatred, bitterness, desire for revenge. My favourite definition of revenge, which I came across somewhere in the United States, is: when you drink poison and hope that someone else will die.

So conflicts that go on for generations are often characterised by destructive memory, memory that has poison connected to it. Imagine for a moment, in the context of South Africa,

if Nelson Mandela had walked from prison and said, ‘It’s time to get the bastards’. We would have died in our millions. But instead Nelson Mandela walks from prison and says, ‘Never, never and never again should a people do to one another what was done to us’. So there was a journey away from destructive memory to life-giving memory.

I spent a month in hospital in Harare, in Zimbabwe, after I was bombed, and then I spent another seven months in two Australian hospitals, and then I returned to Zimbabwe. One little story in brackets if I may: before I went into hospital from Zimbabwe to Australia, my bishop came to pray for me. So he prayed for me and off I went to hospital. And seven months later, I came back and said, ‘Well, Bishop, here I am’. The bishop looked very surprised, and I thought ‘Well, he’s a bishop. Maybe he is not used to God answering his prayers’. And then he said to me, ‘But you are disabled now; what can you do?’ I said, ‘Well, Bishop, I can drive a car’, at which point he looked completely terrified. I think he thought that maybe he would be on the same road as I was. I said to him ‘I think I can be more of a priest with no hands than I was with two hands’. And indeed that was 18 years ago and I’ve found that my physical dramatic brokenness often gives people permission to share the brokenness we all share which is often invisible, but no less part of our humanness.

I must also say that there was another bishop, slightly more well-known, Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Archbishop Tutu said to me, ‘Come and work in my diocese in Cape Town’. He said, ‘You know, I have got one priest who is blind, I have another priest who is deaf and now one with no hands: Wow!’ So for one bishop I was a liability, for the other I was an asset.

I returned to South Africa in 1992. I had been away by then for 16 years. I had been living in countries in southern Africa, but not in South Africa. And I came back to South Africa, and I found a people damaged in our humanity. Damaged by what we had done, damaged by what had been done to us, damaged by what we had failed to do. And, as I said, my story had been acknowledged, reverenced, recognised, given a moral content. People said, ‘What happened to you was wrong’. I found millions of my fellow South Africans whose stories had not been acknowledged, reverenced, recognised. No one had said, ‘What happened to you was wrong’. Often, all they had was their victimhood.

I became chaplain to a Trauma Centre for victims of violence and torture, and this was by now 1993. You remember democracy came to South Africa in 1994. Nelson Mandela was elected the President. It is extraordinary to think that, when we voted in 1994, it was the first time that we had done anything together for 350 years. We had never before acted together as South Africans. So Nelson Mandela becomes the President, and it seemed to me that as a country there were two giant questions that faced us, or two pillars, if you like, on which the country would proceed into the future.

One question - or one pillar if you like – was: how would we meet the basic needs of the people of South Africa for water, education, healthcare, electricity, telephone, shelter – all of those political, social and economic things? A question that we will continue to be seized with

for generations to come. But there was another giant question that also faced us: how would we deal with the past? How would we deal with what we had done to each other?

You know when we think about a nation, we think about politics, sociology economics. We think about the individuals psychologically, emotionally, spiritually. We don't often ask the question, 'But how has the history of our nation affected us individually, psychologically, emotionally, spiritually'. We don't often ask the question, 'How has what happened to our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents affected us? What do I have inside of me not just because of my journey, but from the journey of generations before?'

As you know, one of the ways that we as South Africans decided how we would deal with our past was to have a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a Commission headed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu. We are now going to look at a very small piece of film for just a few minutes, about the beginning of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

(6-minute video on victims appearing before the Truth & Reconciliation Commission))

It is a very painful piece to watch, I think. Very emotional. When I see those scenes, which I have watched a number of times before, and particularly the wife of the farmer who was murdered, Susan van der Merwe, I also think of another particular woman who confronted the nation by what she said, a woman called Beth Savage. She's a white woman. She had been very badly injured in the attack by the Pan African Congress towards the end of apartheid. And, when she spoke to the Commission, she still had shrapnel in her body. And she said to the Commission and to the nation, 'I am grateful for what I have experienced. I would like to meet those who were responsible for my injuries because I want to ask them to forgive me for what I did in my life that led them to feel the way they did, to take the actions which they took'. It was one of those moments when, as a nation, we felt challenged and confronted by what she said and how she said it.

Even before this Commission began, some of us were asking the question, 'How many people will come to this Commission? Nobody. Nobody.' Well, 23 000 people came and told stories of gross human rights violations, murder, attempted murder, torture, severe maltreatment. There were more than 2 000 specific accounts of torture that were recorded. 7 700 people asked for amnesty, of whom only 10% qualified to get amnesty.

However, I had personally been saying, 'But we are all a damaged nation. All of us have stories to tell'. And, in my years as chaplain to this Trauma Centre for victims of violence and torture, I had come to some conclusions and one was that we were over-pathologising people. What do I mean by that? If something terrible happened, for example if something terrible happened in this hall now, everyone in this hall would be affected, but there might only be half a dozen of us that needed expert, long-term clinical intervention. The rest of us would have a story to tell. The rest of us would have deep feelings inside of us, but we would continue to lead functioning lives. So we wouldn't need an expert intervention, but we would need the space to deal with what had happened and how we had been affected by it.

The other conclusion I came to - but I'm not sure, I don't want to cause problems with my sisters and brothers, the translators – was that we had over-expertised (if there is such a word) the response to human pain. So what I am suggesting is - my point is not to devalue the role of the expert, that's not my point, there can be times in the lives of all of us when we need expert intervention - but we have under-valued the wisdom of the ages, we have under-valued what cultures and great faith traditions know about healing.

It seemed to me as well that there were a great number of stories that weren't going to have a listener in the truth and reconciliation process. Let me give you one example. Under apartheid, three-and-a-half million people were forcibly removed from their homes. Those stories did not qualify to come to the Commission because they didn't fulfil the definition of murder, torture, severe maltreatment. And I am not making any criticism of the Commission, but simply saying that we were dealing with the top – or should I say the bottom - of the iceberg of the most serious violations. It seemed to me that we wouldn't create a very nice society if we did not create safe and sacred spaces where people could begin to explore how the journey of the nation had affected them, if we didn't create the opportunity where people could speak not so much about what they *thought* about what had happened, but about what they *felt* about what had happened; where people could, even if they didn't ever receive acknowledgement from a perpetrator, receive acknowledgement from those who were willing to listen; where they could begin, if you like, to detoxify; where they could begin to have the opportunity to vomit out the poison they had inside them as a consequence of the journey they had travelled.

I spoke earlier of these two pillars or two fundamental questions. They are interconnected. If in South Africa we cannot deliver the water or electricity, education or healthcare, people will become angry, bitter and frustrated. And we have seen some signs of that in the last period where we haven't delivered sufficiently at municipal level, and communities are getting frustrated. But, even if we do deliver, and people are bitter and angry and full of hatred, that still won't create a nice society.

And, referring for a moment to my two sets of figures: 23 000 people told their stories to the Human Rights Violations Committee. 7 700 asked for amnesty. Even if you take those figures quite crudely, it's clear that, for thousands and thousands of people, nobody has come forward, no one has said 'I did it'. So there is not necessarily reconciliation. But, always and always and always, there is a possibility of healing of memories. Always and always and always, there is a possibility of me dealing with myself. And so what some of us did was develop an experiential kind of workshop. We developed a process that basically happens over a period of three days where 25 people at a time could begin to tell each other their stories, begin to deal with what they had inside them. And we say to people who come to our workshops, 'We promise you one step on the road to healing'.

Of course sometimes that one step might simply be the recognition that I'm in need of further help, but if somebody has kept a story inside them for 5, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50 years, the telling of the story to a reverent listener, who believes, acknowledges and says, 'I am sorry about what

happened', can be the turning point, can be that point where the whirlpool becomes the river flowing once more.

We do this work in the context of national reconciliation, but in the South Africa of today, we also do it in prisons, recognising that those who do terrible things to other human beings have often - not always - had terrible things done to them, and are often part of cycles of victims who become victimisers, who become victims. We do this work in the context of refugees. I am sure - I say with guilt and shame - that some of you saw the horrors of the xenophobic attacks that happened in South Africa earlier this year, which appeared on televisions around the world. And we ourselves have long been working with refugees and asylum seekers. But we too realised we had made a mistake. We had workshops for South Africans all alone and workshops with refugees all alone. And we said, 'No, we have made a mistake'. We need to create opportunities where South Africans and citizens of other lands hear one another's stories and become people to each other.

And some of you will know that we are a country with five million people who are HIV positive. And so, we too have to say, as healing of memories, what is our contribution to dealing with this pandemic? We realised that, for us, it had to be about the story, it had to be about allowing people who suffer stigma and rejection to tell their stories. We have begun to realise that many 'communities of pain' suffer pain not simply from one cause, but that often there is multiple woundedness; and that we need to create the opportunity for people to speak about their levels and layers of woundedness. And so we do this work in South Africa, seeking to contribute to breaking the chain that turns victims into victimisers. We have been asked to do a little bit of this work in Rwanda, where the central question, I believe, is 'how do we act today to prevent the genocide of tomorrow?' Again, how do we break that cycle? We do this work in the United States, working with women who have been abused, who are also disabled. We are beginning to work also in the area of war veterans. And I have been struck as I travel around the world that, if it's a popular war, people come back and they march down the street wearing medals and they are heroes. If it is an unpopular war, they are just told to disappear and go away. But, you see, in neither case do people want to hear the stories of what actually happened to solders and what they actually have inside them.

I have just come from the United States. I was there since the end of September. And one of the shocking things people told us was that, among former war veterans, there is a very high level of suicide. And so, a war for an individual comes to an end. The permission for violence, be it legitimate or illegitimate, comes to an end. But it doesn't end in intimate space. It doesn't end in what we do to ourselves or what we do to those whom we love. So, often the cycle is from political violence to domestic, family, sexual violence.

But I want to suggest to you tonight that healing of memories is something whose time has come in the human family. One of the characteristics of our age is the past coming back to bug us, the past that we sought to bury and forget that doesn't go away. And so we are a generation who are seized with this question: can we be the generation where all conflicts are laid to rest because they get fully acknowledged? So that grandparents will no longer tell their

grandchildren stories that have poison connected to them. And I hope that, in some ways, what I am saying resonates for you here in Europe, where some of the old conflicts continue to poison.

I want to say a few words in conclusion. Something seismic happened in the last ten days or so. And I am referring, of course, to the election of Barack Obama as the President of the United States. And I think that everyone who was an activist of any kind should rejoice that a country that replaced South Africa as the polecat of the world could seize hold of the moment. If you had said to me, three years ago, that the United States of America could elect an African American as their President, I would have said to you, 'dream on, dream on'.

But people organised and organised and organised like never before, and organised young people, and gave young people a vision of hope for the future. And sometimes, when we feel cast down as human rights activists and say 'it is all too difficult, all too big', we need to remember something that I guess we learned as many of us campaigned for peace in Vietnam, that one and one and one make a million. And that is the spirit in which we need to fight against torture.

I know that President Obama will not deliver all of our dreams, but I am sure that some of them will be delivered. I have no doubt that Guantánamo Bay will be closed. And a place that is committed to torture, to human rights violations, will come to an end. And the world will be a better place.

But also, as activists we have got to do something that comes very close to home. We have got to say that rendition is unacceptable. It is unacceptable. And some people have said to me, and I don't know whether it is true or false, but some people have said to me that rendition happened on the soil of Luxembourg. I hope, I pray that it is not true.

So this issue of a commitment to human rights is something that concerns all of us. But I hope that we will talk to our children and our grandchildren about why torture is never acceptable. Our Truth and Reconciliation Commission made history by giving us the opportunity, as a country, to face our past to a degree that no country in history had ever done before. Unfortunately, I must say that our democratic state failed us in relation to victims because they provided reparations neither timously nor generously. But one thing it did was to say that apartheid was a crime against humanity, that it was evil, and that those who fought against it were fighting a just cause; but also that torture is torture is torture, and is never acceptable, because the liberation movement too sometimes tortured. And it said that torture remained totally unacceptable, whether it was done by those who were carrying out the crime against humanity or by those who were fighting for freedom. And so we, in our own humble way, helped to recreate a moral order.

I hope that, in some ways, when you look at somebody like me, with no hands, one eye, eardrums shattered, I am a sign to you of what racism does, what hatred does, what state terrorism does, what torture does to seek to break human beings. But, a thousand times more

importantly, I hope in a small but significant way that I can be a sign to you that stronger than evil, torture, hatred and death are the forces of life, of gentleness, of kindness, of compassion, of life, of God.

Thank you very much.

(*Applause)*

For a few minutes, we are going to have the opportunity for questions or for comments from you. But I thought we would perhaps just pause for a moment before questions. And I would like to invite you to speak to the person next to you. Just for a moment, share what you felt about what you heard tonight and what struck you in particular, and then in a minute or so we'll open it to the house. In Luxembourg are you allowed to speak to each other? Is it OK?

Thank you

(Short break)

<u>*Question 1*</u>*: What did you mean by the English term 'rendition'?*

Thank you very much. I should apologise to the translators for coming with surprises towards the end of the speech. But 'rendition' is what happened specifically when people were captured by the CIA because they were considered to be terrorist suspects and then were flown across many different countries illegally, but with the cooperation of countries, and I believe they ended up in Guantánamo Bay and in other places. And they were often taken to places where they could be tortured and held in impunity. Many governments, sad to say, cooperated with this activity, which is contrary to international treaties, contrary to international law, and itself was a human rights violation, where people were not subject to review, were not subject to the courts of any land. In an article by Archbishop Desmond Tutu which was published in the Washington Post last week, in the wake of the Obama victory, this was one of the very specific issues that were raised as extremely serious.

<u>*Question 2*</u>*: Dear Michael, I am very happy about your presence today among us and, with your permission, I am happy too about your accompanying shadow, Victor, who is hiding there behind the screen. Your message ties in very well with the other message we have had in the past week from Maggy Barankitse, our guest speaker from Burundi. And I will only mention this last idea from her, similar to your own ideas and messages: that hate does not have the last word in this world, but love. And this ties in with the meditational reflection we had today for the next Lenten campaign, when we read St Paul's Letter to the Corinthians about love, and we were wondering how we can define this love and what it means in today's world. And you delivered a similar invitation: the path from knowledge to acknowledgement is a part of love. And I feel that we Christians have had very unfortunate periods in our past, with empoisoned memories vis-à-vis our Jewish brothers and sisters, vis-à-vis other Christian Churches. And I was thinking that perhaps we could also learn from this experience of the*

people of South Africa in our ecumenical discussions, in order to have healing of memories in this sense also for ourselves. Thank you very much.

Thank you for that. I also wanted to emphasise that, when it comes to torture, there are popular and unpopular victims. For example, often, when criminals are tortured, there is no one to speak for them. In some societies where women are abused, there is nobody to speak for them because of the scale of the patriarchy. In societies that are homophobic, it is acceptable for gay, lesbian and transgenic people to be tortured. And in South Africa, when we wrote our constitution, we wrote into it provisions to make it illegal to discriminate, not just on the grounds of race, but we also spoke about gender, we spoke about disability. We were the first country in the world to put into our constitution provisions outlawing discrimination on the basis of orientation. But, in the end, it is all about saying something very simple. We are one human family and we are all first-class citizens. I have learnt in my short life that we are all against all forms of oppression, except the ones that we are in favour of.

<u>Question 3</u>*: What is your understanding of our Lord's cry from the cross about 'Forgive them for they know not what they do'?*
<u>Question4</u>*: When you arrived, as a student, in South Africa from New Zealand, you were a convinced pacifist. Through your experience of apartheid, your attitude changed and you became involved in active resistance. Given the parallels which currently exist in Tibet and Myanmar, in what circumstances do you believe that this switch from peaceful opposition to active resistance is justified?*

Thank you for both questions. I am glad that we are agreed that this meeting is going to last until dawn so that I can give you proper answers.

It is interesting that, in our workshops, the issue that people put on the table more than any other is forgiveness. And clearly, forgiveness is so central to Christianity that we often speak of it – those of us who preach – as something glib and cheap and easy, whereas for most human beings it is costly, it is painful, it is difficult.

I was fascinated when it was pointed out to me that on the cross Jesus doesn't forgive anybody. He offers a prayer. He offers a prayer to his father. And I think that is often our own experience, that forgiveness is so big that we need what we as Christians call grace, we need that power that comes from God, to be able to forgive; I mean, one of the questions, when we take these texts, is what happens if they did know what they were doing, in some situations? What does forgiveness mean then?

I spent some years of my life studying Greek and the New Testament, and I confess that I have forgotten 99.9%, but one of the tiny bits I remember is that the Greek word in the New Testament for forgiveness 'aphiem' is the same word as untying a knot. So forgiveness is about liberation. And often, when I decide that I will forgive, it is for my own sake that I need to forgive, in order that I may be free. But sometimes in the faith community we are too quick

to tell hurting people that they should forgive. In fact we increase their burden. Where people are saying, 'Please can you hear that I am hurting? Please can you hear my pain? Please can you acknowledge what's happened to me?' And then perhaps they might be able to begin to travel the journey of forgiveness.

Now, when I speak, people often say, 'I'm full of hatred. I'm bitter. I want revenge.' And they say, 'You are such a wonderful example of forgiveness'. I say, 'I beg your pardon. I didn't actually mention the word "forgiveness".' You are the first one who mentioned it tonight. You see, as we sit here tonight, I don't know who sent me the letter bomb. I don't know who made it. I don't know who gave the orders. I don't know who wrote my name on the envelope, so I haven't yet forgiven anybody because I don't know what it means to forgive an instruction. If you know, that's fine. I don't. But maybe, when I get back to Cape Town next week, someone will knock on the door and say, 'I'm the one who sent you that letter bomb. Will you forgive me?' Now forgiveness is on the table. And I guess I've got three choices: 'Yes', 'No', 'Not yet'. I might begin by saying to the person at the door, 'Excuse me, Sir, do you still make letter bombs?' He says, 'Well, actually, no. I work at the local hospital. Will you forgive me?' 'Yes, Sir, I will forgive you. And I would prefer that you spend the next fifty years working in that hospital rather than being locked up in prison', because I believe a thousand times more in the justice of restoration than the justice of punishment.' Often when we say justice, we mean punishment, if not revenge.

And then perhaps we would have tea together and I'd say, 'Sir I have forgiven you, but I still have no hands. I still only have one eye and my eardrums are still shattered. I will always need a shadow (to use your quote, referring to my brother, Victor Cervati). I will always need someone to assist me for the rest of my life. Of course you'll help pay for that person'. Not as a condition of forgiveness, but as part of reparation and restitution in the ways that are possible. Sometimes we reduce forgiveness to saying sorry, and yet, when it happens, as we know in the heart of the Gospel message, it can be mutually liberating.

Now, my Sister has been reading my history a bit and it's true I was a convinced pacifist when I went to South Africa, which Father Chris will agree is unusual for an Anglican. We have a long history of blessing wars. If you doubt me, check for war memorials you can see in so many of our churches. So I was an unconventional Anglican. I thought that maybe my father was wrong to have been a soldier in the Second World War. I had read my Mahatma Ghandi, I'd read my Martin Luther King, I'd read my Jesus of Nazareth, and I was convinced that we could get justice from any and every situation by non-violent means, until I witnessed the killings of the children by people who read the Bible every day and went to church on Sunday, and killed kids. But somehow racism had sold into their soul. They didn't see a child like their child.

So reluctantly I became a conventional Anglican once more and accepted that, in our context, an armed struggle had become morally legitimate, necessary and justifiable. But I didn't find it easy to be a pacifist. I didn't find it easy to take the route that I took, and in no sense would I ever want to romanticise war. We as a nation still pay a moral cost for the choice that we

took. There is an interview with the late Oliver Tambo, who was president of the ANC. He was asked about South Africa's option for armed struggle, and many of you will know that the ANC struggled non-violently for 50 years in the face of increasing violence by the State before eventually taking up arms, and even then in a very selective way. And so Oliver Tambo was asked this question about the arms struggle, and his voice reduced to a whisper as he said, 'They forced us into it'.

Now, it is not for me to say what the people of Myanmar or the people of Tibet should do. But I think of the words of Bishop Helder Câmara, who said, 'I would prefer a thousand times to be killed than to kill'. But he added, 'However, I blame the real authors of violence, those who are responsible for creating and upholding the structures that cause people eventually to respond'.

My last comment is that in our faith tradition as Christians we have, as many of you will know extremely well, the just war tradition. From St Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, and later from some writers on just revolution. But people misunderstand all of that theory in the sense that they think it's about giving permission to bless war, but actually it's the opposite. It's trying to limit, limit, limit, the occasions in which it would ever be justified. And of course one of them is that of last resort, proportional means, just goals, just means. I don't know if there has been a just war in history. But, if there was one, that which was waged by the people of South Africa was one.

Question 5: You have just said that you were an unconventional Anglican. I'd like to know how your superiors reacted when you joined the ANC's struggle.
Question 6: My name is Léon Ntabala. I sincerely wish to congratulate you because I see in you a rich man. Not everyone is capable of taking on the culture of forgiveness. Many people, including some who are priests, are incapable of forgiving. Forgiving is a good thing, but does not mean forgetting. I come from a country where, now as we speak, evil is being done to so many innocent people and I wonder how the remedy you have just been talking about – forgiveness – can bring about effective change in the world.

Thank you very much for both the questions. I am a member of an Anglican religious order as well as being an Anglican priest, and when I became involved in the liberation movement, the members of my order in South Africa wanted to expel me from the order on the grounds that I was a terrorist. My brothers in my community in Australia and in the United Kingdom said, 'No way'. And subsequently we closed that community in southern Africa. Not because they said that, but because we had lost our way. There was one subject that we couldn't talk about, and that was apartheid. We couldn't speak about 'the elephant in the room'. And I used to travel the world saying that apartheid didn't just mess up black people, but it messed up white people big time, including my brothers in my community. So we closed that community in southern Africa and, five years ago, we created a new congregation, 98% of whom are black, and I was elected the first head of the new community. So history was quite kind to me. But my Church has a very proud record in terms of opposing apartheid. In some respects, if the

Kingdom of God could be built by church resolutions, we created the Kingdom of Heaven quite early.

However, if I can use a distinction from the Latin Americans, our orthodoxy was more impressive than our orthopraxis. And we had our heroes, we had our Archbishop Desmond Tutus, our Trevor Huddlestons, our Bishop Reeves, but our Church was also deeply racist as well. I have my own memories of being asked to leave a church, an Anglican church, because I was with a black person. So we had our own compromise and complicity. As we travelled the world, people would say 'What is the position of the Church on apartheid?' Many of us used to reply, 'The Church is a site of struggle or, if you like, a context of struggle.' And, in some ways, the fight in South Africa was never simply a human rights struggle, never simply a political struggle, never simply a justice struggle. It was always, in some respects, a theological struggle, because long before apartheid existed in 1948, going back to the last century, there were white Christians who would not sit at the table of the Lord with black Christians.

So there are these two strands among us, or two major theological strands. One is those who used the Bible to defend apartheid (– those who practised in the middle –) and those who saw that the Gospel was a Gospel of justice and liberation. It's not accidental that the first three presidents of the African National Congress, beginning in 1912, were ministers of religion: ministers of religion who had heard a Gospel that says we are all God's children made in God's image and likeness, but then experienced oppression and so realised they needed to act politically.

Maybe the last thing to say is that, when I left South Africa, when I was expelled in 1976, I had a faith problem. And my faith problem was very simply this: that the Bible says you must love God with your heart, mind, soul and strength and you must love your neighbour as yourself. And I couldn't be a neighbour to a black person; I was locked into this oppressed/oppressor relationship. But my faith problem took the form of a political system, which itself claimed divine guidance, itself claimed divine sanction, and I realised that I needed to act politically to be able to help end this system, so that I could begin to live in a society in which we would be brothers and sisters.

My Brother also asked another question. I suppose, the Book of Ecclesiastes can be relevant. There's a time for war, there's a time for peace. There's a time for building up and a time for tearing down. I would say, on the one hand, that Healing of Memories is something whose time has come for the human family, but there are contexts in which the time for Healing of Memories has come in a particular way. You know, if you had said in 1985 to the people of South Africa, 'The time has come for human reconciliation', it would not have been true. It was not true. There was a monster that needed to be slain. We needed to get to the point that we could all have a common citizenship, and there were some who said, 'No, no, let's just pray and it'll be fine, and leave the fundamental structures intact.'

So, in response to what my Brother was saying, I am sure that Healing of Memories has relevance in every context, and even when its time has not quite come, there still need to be people who are dealing with this stuff. And particularly leaders, because leaders who have poisonous memories can help perpetuate and continue the conflict. We were running a little workshop in a very small village in South Africa, and we were sitting on benches with a mud floor, and this woman stood up and she said, 'Are you working with our leaders?' And I said, 'Well, we have made our choice to work in the poorest communities in the country.' She said, 'You should work with our leaders. You think we're messed up, but they are much more messed up.'