KENOSIS AS A GIFT TO HUMANITY OF GOD’S GRACE TO BE LIVED RELATIONALLY

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Abstract

In this thesis the concept of kenosis is considered as a divine gift of grace which can find expression and provide possibilities for restoration and right relationship in tangible communal contexts where competing rights perpetuate an impasse.

Humanity is inevitably compromised but contains the possibility of being resourced through grace toward recognising our obligation to humanity beyond ourselves and our claim to power and rights.

Kenotic theology is considered in light of fresh trajectories emerging from an understanding of Trinitarian sociality. The sovereign freedom in love of God is located within the Trinitarian perichoresis. This is depicted through God in Christ entering fully into the suffering of humanity. The suffering of God is understood as an excess of being, in freedom to love and be love.

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Consideration of possibilities for a kenotic theology and the possibility for kenotic engagement in tangible communal contexts.
Chapter 1 - Introduction

My thesis is that the concept of kenosis, although expounded by many, theologically and philosophically, particularly as an individual and discrete expression, remains elusive in terms of tangible communal expression. This is considered especially in the context of modern conditions which emphasise the rights of the autonomous individual. Simone Weil’s political thought was an attempt to develop a kenotic approach to tangible human contexts, as was similarly Karl Barth’s. The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission experiences can be used to illustrate a radical kenotic engagement in a communal context. A kenotic approach is contingent upon a sound theological basis for understanding the inseparable movements between trinity, incarnation and kenosis within the Trinitarian perichoresis.

Within this thesis I will commence by engaging the following issues: first, human compromise in the face of goodness as articulated by Augustine, Simone Weil and Pope Benedict XVI; second, the inevitability of self-preservation in the face of human limits through the writings of Simone Weil, and the political thought of Reinhold Niebuhr and Karl Barth; third, the possibility for a divine irruption of grace within human economies of preservation and compromise; fourth, the specific character of grace as kenotic after Phil 2.7 (ekenōsen he emptied himself) and similar sources; fifth, kenosis, incarnation and trinity as inseparable movements articulated within Christian theology and given specific attention by von Balthasar and Kasper amongst others.

I intend to conduct a close examination of Weil’s philosophical thought on grace as expressed in aphoristic brevity in Gravity and Grace and developed more extensively in other works. The practical outworking of this approach will be explored as envisioned within community, specifically in a twentieth century French political environment. This is articulated by Weil initially in The Need for Roots in which the development and implications of an excessive emphasis on rights, rather than obligations, is considered.

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2 Pope Benedict XVI, God is Love - Deus Caritas Est (Strathfield, NSW: St Pauls Publications, 2006).
This is subsequently developed in *Oppression and Liberty*\(^8\) where the tendency for power to overreach and undercut itself necessitates an alternative to competing powers and rights that is liberating.

I will explore the role and capacity of individual morality to function effectively within communal contexts through the writings of Reinhold Niebuhr in *Moral Man and Immoral Society*.\(^9\) Niebuhr will contest the adequacy of morality beyond individual relations to achieve equality. The essential and ineluctable role of politics in community is observed and suggestions for the role of Christian people or groups will be articulated by Karl Barth.

In this thesis I will be considering a more recent approach to kenosis which does not meet with the problems inherent in a two-nature discussion on kenosis—early Christian thought was caught up in concepts of God that were influenced by the Greco-Roman view of a static, abstract God which struggled to conceive of the possibility of Jesus Christ being both fully human and fully divine. Further, the immutability of God who is potentially changed by the eventfulness of the incarnated Christ was inconsistent with their conception of the divine changelessness. Rather the positive possibility of kenosis being conceived from the triune sociality of God is considered and explored predominantly through the more recent Trinitarian work of von Balthasar, Kasper, Lossky,\(^{10}\) Jenson\(^{11}\) and Jüngel\(^{12}\) representing a range of different Christian traditions. This will include a historical survey of some of the key issues, challenges and advances in the development of a Trinitarian theology. I will consider self communication as the starting point for the trinity and the basis in tradition for taking love as the point of departure and the inevitability, therefore, of the suffering of God. Within this exploration both the divinity and humanity of Christ are upheld, as is the suffering of God in freedom and love without divinisation or abandonment. The suffering of God depicts the absorbing of evil rather than the deflection or rebounding of that evil.

Further, the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission experiences will be considered to question whether they can be seen to illustrate a radical kenotic

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\(^{10}\) Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology* (New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1978).
engagement in a communal context. In doing so, I will explore some of the experiences of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as recounted in the Truth and Reconciliation Report\(^{13}\) and transcripts\(^{14}\) and framed by the *Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act*.\(^{15}\) The development, processes and experiences of the Commission are further articulated by Archbishop Desmond Tutu,\(^{16}\) chairperson of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Alex Boraine,\(^{17}\) Deputy Chairperson of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Through these resources and others I will consider the practical application of a kenotic approach in a communal context. This will necessitate consideration of the pursuit of truth as a pathway to reconciliation as a form of transitional justice beyond a punitive, judiciary approach and a reconfiguration of ideas and expectations around justice. Some of the challenges inherent with this approach will also include impunity and amnesty.

In doing so it will also be necessary to consider the relationship between forgiveness and reconciliation from a theological and philosophical perspective, but essentially as it informs reflection upon the practical illustrations of forgiveness and/or reconciliation as depicted in post-Apartheid South Africa during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission processes. The practical illustrations are drawn largely from the insights of Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela\(^{18}\) and Alex Boraine and critiqued by Jacques Derrida.\(^{19}\) The role, influence and place of religion and spirituality in the process will be considered with forgiveness, reconciliation and reparation usually being present as part of the language of religion not political or juridical discourse.

In terms of method, my approach will be historical, philosophical and theological, each utilised with a high degree of narrative specificity. A theological engagement of kenosis will be undertaken from a historical-theological perspective with both von Balthasar and Kasper. Weil’s contribution will be engaged as a historical narrative with theological

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suggestions. Finally, engagement with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission will be conducted as a theological narrative on the practical application of a kenotic approach.

In this thesis I aim to demonstrate that the principle of kenosis can be conceived theologically and applied practically to social contexts, which have a propensity for deadlock over issues of equality, with kenosis providing a way beyond the perennial impasse over competing rights. I will question whether a communal kenotic approach is either feasible or sustainable without the resources of Christian faith—as these are nurtured within a particular view of reality which is eschatologically informed in which kenosis, as losing one’s life for the sake of the gospel, is reiterated and reaffirmed, through doctrine and ritual, as a reality with tangible outcomes. In practical terms, the work of Weil anticipated this social possibility in her political manifesto. Von Balthasar gives the kenotic social possibility in the context of triune grace as the essence of human possibility.
Chapter 2 - Grace and politics

Human existence is compromised within its own freedom, which gravitates away from God in pursuit of its own security within mortality. Hope is found, however, in the grace of God and expressed through love. In human economies of preservation, the propensity for an excessive emphasis on rights occurs, rather than obligations. However, an eternal obligation to neighbour is recognised in their humanity. The struggle from oppression to liberty continues with the tendency for power to overreach and undercut itself, ultimately necessitating an alternative to competing powers and rights that is liberating: the possibility for grace through kenosis.

The theological deployment of the phenomenon of gravity and its antithesis grace will be explored through the philosophical and theological thought of Augustine, Simone Weil and more recent theological reflections on love by Pope Benedict XVI. Simone Weil explores social and political possibilities through philosophical reflections upon the nature of human economies of preservation and compromise in both individuals and collectives, oppression and liberty and through historical narrative which is informed by twentieth century post-war France. Politics as an inevitable product of community is explored through some of the writings of Reinhold Niebuhr and Karl Barth. Kenosis as an alternative to competing powers and rights is offered as an approach which will be considered within a communal context.

a. Gravity and love

The possibility of goodness is compromised in our flawed human existence. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, in the fourth century, considers this through the analogy of gravity. This same analogy is subsequently developed further in the twentieth century by Simone Weil, writing philosophically in a French context during World War II (WWII). This phenomenon of gravity is seen to permeate our existence in the downward or diminishing forces of atrophy, destruction and even death. Gravity is a phenomenon but its theological deployment exceeds phenomena, as gravity, and its antithesis, grace, assumes pervasive and inexorable discursions of human existence and possibility. Beyond phenomena, gravity and grace signify the central theological tension in social existence. Augustine observed that as gravity tends to move a body towards a new place or carry a
stone downward, so the love of the world can carry the soul down and in the process lose God, self and neighbour.\textsuperscript{20}

Weil describes gravity as that movement from God that continues as a result of having been issued from God in creation.\textsuperscript{21} It continues as from necessity. Gravity has a sense of referring to humanity’s experience of being separated from God and is expressed variously, including through a propensity for self-preservation that permeates human freedom. This instinct of self-preservation echoes Pascal’s observation that “my place under the sun is the beginning of the usurpation of the entire earth”.\textsuperscript{22} Immanuel Kant suggests that the notion of ‘radical evil’ in human moral life is an obstacle to right willing and right conduct that must be overcome through moral conversion. In contrast to an understanding of the Christian concept of inherited original sin, Kant postulates that ‘radical evil’ is self-incurred by each human being when we submit to our propensity to choose actions that favour ourselves rather than the rightness of an action.\textsuperscript{23}

Human existence, however, is not without hope. Augustine considers that in grace God’s love can fill the soul with caritas; a different love, a love of grace, that allows the soul to lift again, finding itself, God and neighbour, thereby becoming what it desires to be.\textsuperscript{24} Whilst this experience of gravity continues within human freedom, yet as though from necessity, it can be alleviated only by grace.

Weil considers that in the incarnation God consented through love to cease to be everything so that we might be something; we must consent through love to cease to be anything so that God may become everything again.\textsuperscript{25} This decreation consists in our willingness to be faithful to the moment, to the present, without compensation or imagination. We must accept emptiness, an unequal balance. We must never seek compensations and, above all, we must continually suspend the work of our imagination, which perpetually tends to stop up the cracks through which grace flows.\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{20} Augustine, \textit{Confessions}, Bk XIII.9, 282.
\textsuperscript{21} Weil, \textit{Gravity and Grace}, 4.
\textsuperscript{24} Augustin, \textit{Confessions}, 282.
\textsuperscript{25} Weil, \textit{Gravity and Grace}, 12.
\textsuperscript{26} Weil, \textit{Gravity and Grace}, 16-18.
Weil recognises that this is the way of the wounded and suffering and warns that we should love something other than God if we wish to protect the soul from suffering. This work of *decreation* is not a process of will but of grace, of which, Weil suggests, we can only attend to rather than will for ourselves: we must give up everything which is not grace and not even desire grace.\(^{27}\)

This understanding is encapsulated within a kenotic Christology in which the mystery of suffering, this process of *decreation*, is centred upon the mystery of the Incarnation. In the Incarnation He emptied himself: “these words enfold the meaning both of the Creation and of the Incarnation with the Passion … to teach us that we are nothing (*non-être*) God made himself nothing.”\(^{28}\) Jesus Christ, in assuming human condition with all its suffering, woundedness and abandonment, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”,\(^{29}\) mediates and redeems through grace the creature afflicted by gravity.

While Augustine recognises the force of gravity in humanity to pull towards a love of self, or love of the world, he acknowledges the life giving potential of God’s grace to fill the soul with a love of God, a different love, being *caritas*. This can be understood as a positive affirmation of humanity in God’s grace. Whereas Weil, also recognising that humanity is inscribed in the affliction of gravity, contends that a harsher, and perhaps negating perspective of humanity is necessary; to learn that we are nothing.

Christian theology has always expressed the possibility of a radically different kind of love. Pope Benedict XVI in the first encyclical of his pontificate entitled *Deus Caritas Est* describes love in and of God as the heart of Christianity. Love grounded in and shaped by faith expresses a real discovery of another, the loved one, which moves beyond selfishness and self seeking. Rather, the good of the beloved is sought and in so doing becomes renunciation which is ready and perhaps willing for sacrifice of self. This is a different kind of love from that of the world that draws humanity downward and away from God. This love is like an outward journey, an exodus from the inward looking self towards its full discovery and liberation through the giving of self. This discovery includes self but can indeed include the discovery of God.\(^{30}\) This echoes the biblical

\(^{29}\) Mt 27:46 KJV.
\(^{30}\) Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 4.
imperative that “Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it”.  

Von Balthasar suggests that Christ is signified to us only when we read His human love and self-gift unto death as an expression of absolute love. This is found decisively in the humility and powerlessness expressed by Christ in obedience to the Father. The inconceivability of God’s love, absolute love, is the sole object of faith and the basis on which von Balthasar can claim that love alone is credible. 

God has demonstrated love for us first through the self relinquishment of God in Christ and continues to do so in the community of Christ, the community of love. As such, our love for God and for others is not merely our response to a command, but in a fuller sense, it is our response to the gift of love, the gift with which God draws near to us. Through God’s love for us we have been equipped and become capable of loving our neighbour, even those that we do not know or even like. This is to universalise the concept of neighbour without negating its tangible immediate reality and a corresponding practical response.

In relation to this response, which encompasses and seeks both justice and charity for our neighbour, the Church is warned away from taking on the role of the State, but to encourage activity, dialogue and prayer and is to endeavour to reawaken the spiritual energy necessary so that justice, which usually demands sacrifice, can prevail. However, even if the State could provide everything, it could not ultimately provide that which every person needs, that is, loving personal concern. Love will always be needed even in the most just ordering of a nation State. The need for a service of love cannot be eliminated. The state is, therefore, ambiguous in Christian theology; it is a primary instrument for social order and harmony, yet it lacks the crucial capacity to translate legislation and structure into the personal and volitional before rights in relation to the state’s legislative powers. This is what theology addresses.

The possibility for a movement in love from gravity to grace, from a love weighed down by the partisan criteria of human factions in self preservation to caritas buoyed up by

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31 Lk 17.33 NKJV.  
33 Pope Benedict XVI, Deus Caritas Est, 1.  
34 Pope Benedict XVI, Deus Caritas Est, 28.
grace, is resourced from the kenotic gesture of God’s love in, and for, humanity. Thus “being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.” 35

b. Human economies of preservation and compromise in individuals and collectives

The popular notion, within Western contexts, of excessively seeking the upholding of our rights prior to recognition of or emphasis on our responsibilities is the inversion of Weil’s starting point. Weil contends that the notion of obligations or responsibilities comes before that of rights. 36 This view may be seen echoed in some contexts where reference is heard first to responsibilities rather than rights. 37 While we live in societies that are based on rights, this often presents itself as a ‘society based on legal rights’ or even a 'litigious society' in which rights are a legal issue, 38 whereas love – caritas – is volitional and therefore exercised in freedom.

From a theological perspective, our obligation exists to each other through our humanity and continues as an eternal obligation, without end. This obligation is unconditional and is not merited nor claimed, but merely exists. The eternal nature of the unconditional obligation cannot be its reason or motive as the obligation is not, and cannot be, contingent upon any conditions or benefits, otherwise it would lose its unconditional nature and be merited or earned. This eternal obligation does not necessarily extend in the same form to human collectives or social groups. Weil contends that only humanity, as individuals, can have an eternal destiny. Human collectives or social groups do not have one, nor obligations of, an eternal nature. While human collectives may engage in activities or responses directed towards preservation and conservation they do not command an eternal obligation, or duty, as a collective in themselves; rather any duty exists in relation to the persons that constitute that collective. 39

35 Pope Benedict XVI, Deus Caritas Est, 1.
36 Weil, The Need for Roots, 3.
37 Oscar Aris Sanchez is a former President of Costa Rica, and member of the InterAction Council, an organisation committed to the adoption of a Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities. He suggests in his speech “Some contributions to a Universal Declaration of Human Obligations” that many societies in the East have traditionally conceived of human relations in terms of obligations, responsibility and community rather than rights, freedom and individuality as has been the case traditionally in the West. He suggests that even the fact that a Universal Declaration of Human Rights was developed rather than a Universal Declaration of Human Duties reflects the philosophical and cultural background of the authors who represented the Western powers, the victors of WWII.
39 Weil, The Need for Roots, 4-6.
Our respect is an obligation in response to the eternal destiny of human beings, which can be expressed or recognised in the genuine meeting of the needs of others. Christians seek to hear Christ Himself say to them, “for I was hungry and you gave me food”. Paradoxically, whole national destinies are caught up in such very individual and tangible expressions of human compassion. Weil recognises that in relation to human beings and human collectives the needs of the soul must be recognised, understood and met. The obligation to go to the help of a human being, or sometimes a human collective, may make a total sacrifice necessary without implying the superiority or unhealthy value placed on the part of the individual or collective that was aided.

\[c. \text{Oppression and liberty}\]

In relation to our experience of the contingencies of human existence, Simone Weil observes that oppression has always been present in all forms of social organisation, with perhaps the only exception being where very low levels of production occur, prior to division of labour, where production meets only a family’s immediate requirements. In that case, the necessities imposed by nature are the primary oppressor with each person free in relation to the other, but captive to the dominion of nature. The struggle for existence in the face of the elements takes priority over any inter-communal tensions.

As humanity distances itself further from a sense of nature’s dominion, actions are subtly directed from a battle with nature to storing up reserves and such activities that relate to future anticipated but not yet felt needs, beyond immediate needs. These activities necessitate a shift to the importance of coordinating these measures in both time and space. Social organisation becomes unavoidably more complex, with a monopoly on leadership emerging. Obedience becomes necessary to execute the efforts of the social organisation as determined by leadership. Humanity moves from feeling as though it is a servant to nature, to having dominion over nature, when in reality it has exchanged a servitude to nature with a servitude to other people. The force that is exercised appears to have shifted from nature to humanity, yet the source of this force is always located in nature, in the necessity of existence.

\[40\text{Mt 25:35 NRSV.}\]
\[41\text{Weil, The Need for Roots, 5-6.}\]
\[42\text{Weil, Oppression and Liberty, 59-62.}\]
The obligation to lead brings with it the struggle for power—over those that are led and over those who are potential rivals to the holding of this power. The holding of power is always a race for power without end or relief, of which the struggle for subsistence becomes one of many factors, albeit an indispensable one. This race for power knows no natural limits other than reaching a point ultimately where the reason for power overstretches its resources. Power continues to both fertilise and engulf itself by its very nature.

Revolution is not genuinely possible as one oppressor will inevitably replace another. Slow transition from one holder of power to another is possible where a secondary power base is developed alongside until it becomes indispensable and power can be transferred to it. Simone Weil suggests that the notion of ‘revolution’ as we understand it—the sudden reversal of the forces of power—is unknown and impossible “for it would be a victory of weakness over force, the equivalent of a balance whose lighter scale were to go down”. While perfect liberty is not attainable, as the crushing weight of necessity, gravity, is unavoidable, humanity cannot but keep from feeling as though it is born for liberty, not servitude. This sense of liberty is not limited to the possibility of obtaining without effort what is pleasurable, rather liberty can be found in the freedom to think and act. As such liberty can be experienced to some degree when people have the opportunity to think while acting, exercising some control over collective life as a whole, and in so doing experiencing their own independence.

Power will always be its own undoing in the ineluctable struggle for power. Oppression will always be present, initially through nature, then through social organisation that becomes progressively more complex until it exceeds the capacity of individual persons to handle the complexity. Ultimately the race for power will exceed its material resource base to operate from and with.

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43 Weil, Oppression and Liberty, 67-72.
44 Weil, Oppression and Liberty, 74.
45 Weil, Oppression and Liberty, 79.
46 Weil, Oppression and Liberty, 97.
This being the case, in Weil’s words, is it possible to “conceive of an organisation of production which, though powerless to remove the necessities imposed by nature and the social constraint arising therefrom, would enable these at any rate to be exercised without grinding down souls and bodies under oppression”?\(^\text{47}\) Is it possible to demonstrate grace?

**d. Communal Contexts**

As individual human beings we are already compromised and challenged by our own competing responsibilities and rights. This gains added complexity when considering we are human beings in relationship with others. Where these relationships are personal and intimate they can more easily operate on a moral basis with a personal, loving concern. However, the personal and intimate nature of these relationships cannot continue to extend to the vast number of persons to which we relate within a variety of communal contexts.

Voluntarily or involuntarily, we participate in these collectives, organisations, communities, state or nation groups which inevitably function with less moral influence than our individual personal relations. Reinhold Niebuhr suggests that we may function morally as individuals, however, collectively we generally function instinctively as ‘immoral society’.\(^\text{48}\) This is not necessarily a value judgement upon individual persons but rather an observation of the changing basis for motivation, decision making and morality within a communal or social grouping. Niebuhr contends that people acting individually can make selfless choices, thereby acting morally, but social groups lack the capacity and motivation to do so collectively.\(^\text{49}\) Ethically a social group will struggle to be selfless as a collective, as only an individual can make such a choice.

Niebuhr observes that there is an inevitable conflict between individual and social morality concurrently within each individual who participates within a society where the needs of society do not necessarily equal the imperatives of a social conscience. This can be seen as a conflict between politics with its focus on the necessities of social life as part of a rational or political morality and ethics with its focus on the inner life of a religious

\(^{47}\) Weil, *Oppression and Liberty*, 54.
\(^{48}\) Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*.
\(^{49}\) Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, xi.
morality. In the former, the highest moral ideal is justice, whereas with the latter, the highest ideal is unselfishness. The former will strive to achieve greater justice through means of self assertion, resistance, coercion and resentment while the latter strives to realise unselfishness by losing and finding self in something greater than self. Niebuhr suggests that the two cannot be easily or adequately harmonised, rather they are both necessary and must live in tension.\(^{50}\)

There appears to be an essential difference between the morality of an individual and the morality of a collective. “An individual may sacrifice his own interests, either without hope of reward or in the hope of an ultimate compensation. But how is an individual, who is responsible for the interests of his group, to justify the sacrifice of interests other than his own?”\(^{51}\) Rather it may be considered that the value in religion’s inner restraint upon self assertion “lies in its check upon egoistic impulses, always more powerful than altruistic ones.”\(^{52}\)

It may be possible to achieve ‘just relationships’ between people within a group, however, this is practically impossible to achieve in relations between groups. Niebuhr exclaims that “our contemporary culture fails to realise the power, extent and persistence of group egoism in human relations”.\(^{53}\) Relations between groups must therefore be ‘predominantly political rather than ethical’\(^{54}\) with relations determined more by proportions of power than by moral considerations.

**e. Politics and Religion**

Politics is an inevitable product of community. The basic difference between the morality of individuals and the morality of collectives suggests that a moralistic approach alone to politics is likely to be ineffective. However, this does not simply mean that the collective should merely act selfishly.

Karl Barth, in a talk given in Berlin, and other places, in 1946 on *The Christian Community and the Civil Community*, asserts that Christians must recognise that political authority is a

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\(^{50}\) Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 257-278.


\(^{52}\) Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 262.


\(^{54}\) Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, xxiii.
divine ordinance although this does not mean that it is perfect, as it is the function of humanity and must be challenged as such. He suggests that the ‘Christian Community’ exists within the ‘Civic Community’ and is to be salt and light and enact its purpose of preaching the gospel. He speaks against this occurring through Christian political parties but rather exhorts anonymous Christian participation in politics which will provide influence in its turn and proportion. He supports the use of force in violent solutions to conflicts where they are the ultimate and only possibility available for the preservation or restoration of freedom in a lawful State.\(^55\) Barth maintains that the Church should insist on the State’s special responsibility for the weaker members of society and seek equality before the law. ‘The Church must stand for social justice in the political sphere.’\(^56\)

But how can the competing objectives of justice, equality and peace be navigated? Reinhold Niebuhr writing from his context after World War I (WWI) and before WWII critiques the appearance of peace construed from an armistice which conceals existing disproportions of power, and is not a ‘just’ peace – or as near to as achievable - and concludes that equality is a higher social goal than peace.\(^57\)

In *South Africa Without Apartheid* by Heribert Adam and Kogila Moodley, the authors examine the possibilities for power sharing, reform of apartheid and partitioning in searching for a resolution to the intolerable problem of apartheid. They conclude that these are all variations, which are limited by their tendency towards racial grouping, which is still not the achievement of equality, which in this circumstance is ultimately represented by a preference for merit-based, democratic majority rule.\(^58\)

Barth says that this preference for what coincides with the intention and desire of a ‘democratic’ concept does not in itself justify the politics of a democratic state or community but recognises that while all human polity will fall short of the goodness of God, the ‘Christian view shows a stronger trend in this direction than in any other’\(^59\) and suggests that there is an affinity between Christian community and the civil community of people within a democratic society.

\(^{55}\) Barth, *Against the Stream*, 13-50.
\(^{56}\) Barth, *Against the Stream*, 36.
\(^{59}\) Barth, *Against the Stream*, 44.
However, Niebuhr warns that while rationalists and social scientists underestimate the tendency for collectives to act from ego-driven, self oriented motives, and the inevitability of social conflict, the moralists – particularly religious moralists - overestimate altruism and the capacity for morality to prevail.⁶⁰ His comments are particular potent having been made in the early 1930s straddling the European conflicts of WW I and II.

Niebuhr concludes that endeavours to enhance the moral responsibility of people and of curbing selfish instincts in the relations of individuals can serve a useful function within a society that has an established social system. He warns, however, against a delusion that this can be a substitute for the need to balance force against force or power against power to control and check the selfish instincts and functioning of collective groups.⁶¹ These tensions inevitably raise the question as to whether a kenotic vision is too altruistic for human society.

In the final analysis, if kenosis is possible only as a Christological vision, is then the Christian community called to be unique and different within a world that will struggle to rise above the tensions depicted between Weil and Niebuhr? What implications will this have for politics; is there social engagement that transcends politics? If so, what would it look like?

f. An alternative to competing powers and rights

Beyond an emphasis on rights over responsibilities and the perpetual capacity of power, especially in collectives or social groups, to undercut itself and perpetuate competing struggles for power and rights that are indissoluble is the grace-laden possibility of kenosis. This may necessitate a relinquishment of perceived and existing rights and power which would be otherwise ultimately irreconcilable. It is the sacrifice of these that creates the potential for a new creation in the present and the future.

An alternative approach beyond the rights an individual may hold is consideration of wider obligations within a communal context. This may include recognition of the invariably wounded nature of human relations, and the opportunity for reconciliation,

social cohesion, dignity and wholeness. This was an essential consideration for Simone Weil, writing from France and England during WWII. Barth similarly applied the possibility of kenosis to commentary on post-war social possibilities and activities in both *Against the Stream: Shorter Post-War Writings 1946–52* and *Community, State, and Church*. This same question was pivotal in the emergence of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa as it attempted to make the transition into post-Apartheid nationhood.

Humanity is compromised in the face of goodness, as depicted in the inevitability of self-preservation in the face of human limits. Human economies of preservation and compromise are observed through the excessive emphasis upon rights in the struggle between oppression and liberty. This inevitable movement, like gravity, away from God can yet be disturbed by an irruption of the grace of God, a kenotic expression of love, expressed as an eternal obligation to our neighbour in recognition of our shared humanity.
Chapter 3 - Theology of kenosis

Kenotic theology expresses a theological understanding of the self emptying action of God, in Christ, in the Incarnation. At times, kenotic theology has foundered over dogmatic issues. However, new trajectories have emerged within an understanding of the sovereign freedom in love of God. This includes an understanding of God as excess of being, in freedom to love and be love, suffering in Christ and absorbing the suffering of evil.

a. Kenosis: what is kenosis?

In Christian theology, kenosis refers to the concept of self-emptying, after the Greek kenoun/kenos, meaning to ‘make empty’/‘empty’. This concept is largely derived from the use of the Greek word ekenōsen in Philippians 2:7, where Christ Jesus ‘emptied himself’.62

In Philippians chapter two, Paul exhorts the saints of Philippi to be of the same mind, the same mind that was in Christ. Paul expands upon this by drawing on an ancient ‘hymn to Christ’:

Christ Jesus … though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death.63

Paul adds, “– even death on a cross.”64

Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.65

Kenotic theology is a specific expression of Christian theology, in particular, Christology. The concept of kenosis as expressed in Philippians 2 has been interpreted within a particular speculative understanding of the Incarnation as inherently kenotic and as necessarily Trinitarian by some, including recognition during the Patristic period and more recently by von Balthasar, Kasper, Moltmann, Pannenberg, Lossky, Jenson and Jüngel. Further, kenosis, as self-emptying love, is upheld as an interpretive prism for an understanding of the life of Jesus and therefore illustrative as a model for followers of

62 Also II Cor 8:9, John 3:13, 16:28, 17:5, Rom 15:3, NRSV.
63 Phil 2: 5-8, NRSV.
64 von Balthasar, Mysterium Paschale, 23.
65 Phil 2: 9-11, NRSV.
Christ. The concept of kenosis, or the kenotic motif, is a basic tenet of Christian faith—God redeemed humanity by entering into creation accepting the limitations inherent in human existence. Assertions of the basic motif of kenosis can be found in theological formulas, sermons, liturgies and prayers which draw upon the broad kenotic motif depicted through the New Testament picture of Jesus Christ. These broad portrayals are given discrete and particular emphasis in Mark 8:35; John 12:24; and Pauline images concerning giving in II Cor 8:9.66

b. Clearing of the decks

Historically, the positive possibilities of kenotic theology have been stymied by several dogmatic issues: firstly, arguments over the true nature or natures of Jesus, and secondly, the immutability (changelessness) of God. Based upon particular interpretations and attempts to manoeuvre the difficulties perceived in these issues, kenotic theology has faltered over the two natures issue or has been dismissed as heretical.

The early Christian church struggled to adapt the dynamic, personalistic conception of God that was depicted in biblical thought to a world of Greco-Roman thought. Ecumenical creeds and doctrines emerged from the Patristic period including the Trinity and the two natures of Christ which emphasized through a static, abstract ontology the divinity of Christ over his humanity. These doctrines set the tone for all subsequent Christological discussions since then and have had a significant impact upon the kenotic motif.

During the Reformation period, both Luther and Calvin considered and re-opened the importance and reality of Christ’s human nature and, in particular, the centrality of the servant form for Christology, and thus the question of kenosis. Luther’s theologia crucis as explicated in the Heidelberg Disputation (1518)67 is an example of kenosis theology although utilising a different vocabulary at that time. Kenosis was not definitively resolved and unanswered issues were left open for orthodoxy that followed.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries an emphasis on recovering the Jesus of history and a focus on metaphysical questions gave consideration to Jesus as a historically

66 NRSV.
67 Timothy F. Lull, Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1989), 30-49.
conditioned person of the first century, utilising modern categories of thought. For the mediating theologians “the kenotic motif became a principle of intelligibility in the construction of their modern Christologies. Kenosis was an interpretive principle that allowed them to resolve the problem of Jesus’ human self consciousness and its relation to his divinity”.68 This was achieved by asserting a divine self limitation in God in which the absoluteness of God was redefined as his ability to change freely to affect his will of love. In doing so, they made the first real break from the doctrine of God theology that had dominated orthodox theology since the patristic period. Liberal theologians had already dismissed the problem of the divinity and humanity of Christ in emphasising the humanity of Jesus alone. In this regard Kierkegaard was an exception in his time and the only theologian from the nineteenth century to really think through kenosis.

Hans Urs von Balthasar, writing in the twentieth century from within the Roman Catholic tradition, acknowledges these concerns and attempts to move beyond what he sees as an overloading of the Philippians text with the dogmatic teachings on the two natures of Christ. Rather, he contends that the only way which might avoid the two opposed and incompatible extremes is an interpretation which relates the event of the kenosis of the Son of God to the eternal event of the divine processions. God then has no need to ‘change’ when he makes known his love for humanity through Christ’s incarnation and passion. This understanding considers conditions, rather than natures, in which the subject exists.69

He acknowledges, however, that this still requires the allowance of an event, being the abandonment of equality – the emptying or humiliation, into God. This encompasses an understanding of the incarnational event as the lowering or stooping down of God to humanity (Barth, Augustine, Cyril, Kierkegaard),70 not the exaltation of humanity to God (contra Hegelianism and Mysticism).71 That is, God casting down to humanity and Jesus Christ raising up humanity with Him, demonstrating that He can allow Himself to renounce His glory.72 However, the problem still remains as to whether the unchangeability of God can be affirmed within this understanding. Yet, the sovereign freedom of God is such that God, while abiding in God’s self, can leave God’s self.

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69 von Balthasar, Mysterium Paschale, 24.
71 Dawe, The Form of a Servant, 159-160.
72 von Balthasar, Mysterium Paschale, 28.
Hilary declares in relation to the birth of God from God that “it is One from One; no partition, or withdrawing, or lessening, or efflux, or extension, or suffering of change, but the birth of living nature from living nature. It is God going forth from God”. The subject remains the same, although the condition of the subject may change. To this von Balthasar adds the importance of the Trinitarian dimension, the perichōrēsis of the trinity and its actions within the incarnation event. H E W Turner defines perichoresis as “the doctrine denoting the mutual indwelling or interpretation of the three Persons of the Trinity whereby one is as invariably in the other two as they are in the one.”

Von Balthasar contends that this clearing of the decks allows for consideration of two propositions: firstly, that the Son’s glory breaks through in the revelation of love and, secondly, affirmation that in the Incarnation of the triune God, God is disclosed in what is most deeply God’s own. Von Balthasar considers that these two propositions are articulated by scripture and the patristic tradition but an understanding of these was “closed off by the taking up of anti-heretical positions”.

To reconcile the immutability of God and the nature of Christ in the kenosis of God, von Balthasar affirms Althaus’ exhortation that “Christology must take seriously the fact that, in the Son, God himself really entered into suffering, and in that very entrance is and remains entirely God”. This is not limited to the incarnation as event but as the kenosis in creation from and for all eternity that anticipates and enters into the suffering of humanity for all time, as the condition of possibility in human freedom. “In his person [Jesus] he is the definitive interpretation of the will and being of God. In him God has entered history once and for all”.

However, our ability, or inability, to comprehend or encapsulate Trinitarian concepts, and more particularly, Incarnation – God made flesh - is limited. The concept of time within eternity, or perhaps within no time, is a limit concept. Therefore our capacity to think of God as beyond time is a struggle. In particular, the pre-existent Christ, fully God, beyond time, entered into our history of time and was ‘made flesh’. As such, God

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enters into our limitation – time. Alternatively this crucial issue of time can be considered from the volitional perspective of God giving time, as such God does not absent timelessness to enter time but in love gives time as an expression of what love is.

In exploring this challenge of time in relation to the pre-existent Christ and creation Lossky, utilising a Greek cosmic sense of engagement, explains that “the ‘beginning’ has no meaning in God; it is born with the created being [the Son], it is creation which constitutes time, of which ‘before’ and ‘after’ are expressions”. In the creation accounts in Genesis, the calling forth of the world by God in the ‘beginning’ gives rise to, or signifies the creation of, time. “In this way, the relation of time and eternity is established, a problem which joins that of creation ex nihilo”. The problem of time or timelessness continues to be intertwined with that of the immutability of God. Within the framework of a theology of a personal God it is difficult to retain the doctrines of divine timelessness and immutability.

Von Balthasar concludes that attempts to explicate the kenosis motif by incorporating Hegelian insights has been as unsuccessful as was applying ontological categories by the Early Fathers to make sense of the deep mystery of the kenosis of God. Whereas Kierkegaard, in a reversal of the methodological approach, has turned the question around from being a principle (and/or problem) of intelligibility to a paradox of grace with its importance derived from its centrality to the revelation of God to humanity. Following Kierkegaard, von Balthasar also surmises that “the paradox must be allowed to stand: in the undiminished humanity of Jesus, the whole power and glory of God are made present to us.” Donald Dawe suggests that while Kierkegaard’s understanding of the offense of Christianity as paradox has elevated the kenosis to a place of central importance, it has also cut off the possibility of describing it further.

**c. Kenosis and suffering**

Walter Kasper explores the nature of Jesus’ divine sonship and suggests that we approach this from His death on the cross not from merely His birth as with a Logos-
Christology. “St Athanasius says: ‘If God is born and if He dies, it is not because He is born that He dies, but it is to die that He is born’”.84 God would not have been fully human had he not entered into death completely. The starting point, therefore, of any Christological reflection is kenosis – “the giving of the Son by the Father and the self-giving of the Son to the Father (and for the many).”85 Jüngel concurs emphasising that the special and unique event, of the identification of the divine God with the historical man Jesus, “is the revelation of the eternal being of God.”86 This is articulated by Paul in his question, “If God is for us, who can be against us?”87

Kasper points to the ‘hymn to Christ’ found in Philippians 2: 6-11 as basic to our understanding from a Christological approach. Kasper is cautious to avoid an interpretation that suggests a transformation of the nature of God or a de-divinisation of God in Christ. He steps around some of the critiques of earlier kenotic thought and maintains some healthy boundaries for kenotic Christology. In particular, Augustine’s interpretation, “he emptied himself: taking the form of a slave, not by losing the form of God; the form of a slave was added, the form of God did not disappear”,88 is seen as opening up the real problem for a kenotic theology; that of God’s equal becoming the subject of the emptying without depriving any divinity.

This has been reduced to dichotomies; between an immutable God, that is seen as a mutable God in Jesus, a changeless God in history, that is seen as changed by Jesus’ history, an impassable God, that is seen as suffering in Jesus. Kasper suggests that the impassibility of God has been defended so vigorously because the Fathers were compelled to differentiate God from mythological conceptions of gods who became, suffered and changed, resulting in the significant influence of the apathia motif from Greek philosophy. The use of such static metaphors ends in the possibility of God’s actions being denied by God’s perfections.89

In contrast, some of the early Fathers; Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus, Melito and Tertullian, let the paradox stand. They recognised change and suffering in God and let it be paradoxical. A balanced view was difficult to achieve due to the Patristic view of

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84 Lossky, Orthodox Theology, 110.
85 Kasper, The God of Jesus Christ, 189.
86 Jüngel, God as the Mystery of the World, 221.
87 Rom 8:31, NRSV.
88 Augustine, Serm. 4, 5 (CCL 41, 21f.) in Kasper, The God of Jesus Christ, 189.
89 Dawse, The Form of a Servant, 188.
suffering as a ‘non-free external passive experience’ and perhaps even as a reflection of sin. Thus suffering could be ascribed to God only in so far as it was freely accepted, therefore in power not in weakness. Origen takes the next step to suggest that it is not merely from free acceptance that God may suffer but in love. This progression provides a pathway to a potential solution on the basis that within the innermost being of God is the capacity for freedom in love.\(^{90}\)

However, from this point until Luther’s reinterpretation in light of the cross, which provided the definitive answer to the Patristic issue, the metaphysical emphasis of the Scholastic era did not advance a Kenotic Christological perspective. Subsequently, Hegel’s subjectivity offered possibilities for an understanding of a philosophy of the suffering of God, which had not been possible in the metaphysically oriented theological tradition. The dialectical process, however, inherently contained the possibility of emptying the historical cross of Christ (as warned against at 1 Cor 1:17) and creating instead a speculative Good Friday, a speculated death on the cross for all time, without necessitating a historical event. In this, theology had still not completely assimilated the biblical and ecclesial confession of Jesus as the Son of God.\(^{91}\)

Theologians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, under the influence of Hegel, attempted to preserve the Christological tradition of the early church and at the same time to develop it, by effecting a new interpretation of the concept of God in light of the cross, and to give a new understanding to the biblical view of the God of history.\(^{92}\) Once again the danger loomed of slipping too far to either one side or the other along the seemingly narrow pathway, which the early Fathers had also tried to negotiate, between an overemphasis on either the divinity or the humanity of Christ.

There is a need to be wary that Kenotic theology isn’t turned into a ‘wisdom of this world, but the wisdom of God’.\(^{93}\) The point of departure must be biblical, not philosophical: a volitional movement of grace, rather than a philosophical construction of reality. Gnosticism anticipated long ago a turning of the cross of Christ into a world principle, a world law or a world formula, a symbol of a universal principle of ‘dying and

\(^{93}\) 1 Cor 1:18-31, NRSV.
living again’. In this regard, von Balthasar does not deny the possibility of a dogmatic theology, or the inevitability, perhaps necessity, of such a formulation, however, he warns against this occurring without the central tenet being the mystery of God’s love expressed in truth and love and embraced in faith.

d. The cost of suffering

Paradoxically, the kenotic action of God in Christ to empty Himself, is at one and the same time an action of filling up through absorbing the cost of evil without transmitting that evil either onwards, or by return to humanity, as a parent absorbs the costly misadventures of a child for the sake of a maturing relationship. In contrast, Weil contends that “to harm a person is to receive something from him … we have filled an emptiness in ourselves by creating one in someone else.”

God entered into humanity in the form of a slave, without exercising the immense power to transmit or rebound the evil found in humanity, but rather in the process of emptying, to absorb that which was not deserved or merited. “Not to exercise all the power at one’s disposal is to endure the void. This is contrary to all the laws of nature. Grace alone can do it.” Absorbing the cost is to suffer evil, without transmitting that evil, to take on, to absorb, the sin of the world, without exercising the capacity to perpetuate that evil, by transference or transmission. Hannah Arendt contends that forgiving “is the only reaction which does not merely re-act but acts anew and unexpectedly, unconditioned by the act which provoked it and therefore freeing from its consequences both the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven.” Further, Jean Luc Marion in Prolegomena to Charity is devastatingly clear that violence continues to be perpetuated by any other form of social amelioration of violence apart from the absorbing of it. He considers that “Christ vanquishes evil only by refusing to transmit it, enduring it to the point of running the risk … of dying; the just man is precisely he who endures evil without rendering it, suffers without claiming the right to make others suffer, suffers as if he were guilty.” Jesus’ example and teaching of forgiveness frees humanity to end the cycle of action and reaction - the reaction of vengeance.

94 Kasper, The God of Jesus Christ, 194.
95 von Balthasar, Love Alone is Credible, 100-106.
96 Weil, Gravity and Grace, 6.
97 Weil, Gravity and Grace, 10.
In a kenotic attitude there is an action of emptying that exposes one to suffering in love. This action is coupled with an action of filling up, from absorbing the suffering in evil. Located within this movement of emptying and absorbing is the mystery and example of God’s love for humanity. Moving beyond these considerations, therefore, “kenosis and suffering no longer have the last word; the last word belongs to exaltation and transfiguration”\(^\text{100}\) through and in the Spirit.

In summary, the early church Fathers’ conception of God was influenced by Greco-Roman categories of thought. The development of a kenotic theology was limited by the taking up of anti-heretical positions in relation to the divine and human natures of Christ and the immutability of God. This emphasis upon the divinity of God continued largely until the Reformation at which time Luther and Calvin brought into focus the servant form of Christ. Subsequently the nineteenth century brought the human nature of Christ further into the spotlight. Kenosis was seen as an opportunity to reconcile the human consciousness of Christ with His divinity and in the process make an important breakthrough in the potential for further development in a kenotic understanding.

In the post-idealist critique of Hegel, attempts to maintain the Christological tradition of the early church and to further develop it continued, however, this occurred based upon different premises. Kasper and von Balthasar explored this in particular with a theological faithfulness to the importance of a Trinitarian perspective, with a kenotic understanding of the incarnation, both as historical and theological event. Von Balthasar offered an interpretation which relates the event of the kenosis of the Son of God to the eternal event of the divine processions. God then has no need to ‘change’ when he makes known his love for humanity through Christ’s incarnation and passion, however, it does require the allowance of the abandonment of equality or renouncing of his glory.

Kasper saw this as opening up the real problem - that of God’s equal becoming the subject of the emptying without depriving any divinity. Some of the early Fathers recognised change and suffering in God and let it be paradoxical, while others were significantly influenced by wanting to differentiate the divinity of God from the \textit{apathia} motif of Greek thought.

\(^{100}\) Kasper, \textit{The God of Jesus Christ}, 197.
Recent developments in theological thought have opened up possibilities for a further understanding of kenotic theology that is based upon a dynamic understanding of God within the triune relationship between God the Father and Jesus Christ the son through the Holy Spirit. This necessitates a thorough exploration of trinitarian sociality and its implications and opportunities.
Chapter 4 – Trinitarian Sociality

In the past century further development of theological thought has opened up some fresh trajectories within kenotic theology which offer new windows into a kenotic Christological perspective, in particular emphasising a Trinitarian Sociality, while endeavouring to avoid the pitfalls and impasses of the past. Theologians involved in this development, ranging across a variety of Christian traditions, include Hans Urs von Balthasar, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Walter Kasper, Jurgen Moltmann, Eberhard Jüngel, Vladimir Lossky and Robert W Jenson, among others.

The development and elaboration of a theological understanding of the Trinitarian being of God has been a lengthy and difficult process which has been fraught with cultural, language, geographic and religious influences. Trinity is an essential concept to our understanding of God as Father, the incarnate Jesus Christ and the power and influence of the Holy Spirit. In particular, the innate sociality within the Trinity, understood as the Trinitarian perichoresis, testifies to the self communication of God in the sovereign freedom to love and be love, as exemplified in the incarnational event. God depicts kenotic love both within God’s own self and in God’s relationship with humanity, and in doing so further creates and illustrates the potential for human inter-relations.

a. Identity of God

Humanities’ search for meaningfulness in life points us ineluctably to considering and exploring the expressions, experiences and relations of God, or identity of God, thus the Trinity. Vladimir Lossky, writing in the first half of the twentieth century from the Eastern Orthodox tradition, suggests that we cannot read the gospels without asking the question of ‘who is Jesus?’ This is articulated in Scripture with Jesus asking Peter, ‘Who do you say that I am?’ to which Peter replies, ‘You are the son of the living God’. Robert W. Jenson, writing at the start of the twenty first century from the Lutheran...
tradition, suggests that, particularly in a religiously plural context, we ask questions that seek to identify God. Jenson observes that the overarching biblical question concerning the identity of God is answered in two distinct yet linked responses. In the Old Testament Scriptures the question ‘who is God?’ is answered by Israel as ‘whoever got us out of Egypt’. In the New Testament Scriptures the question ‘who is God?’ is answered with ‘him that raised from the dead Jesus our Lord’.

This a posteriori approach with the departing point being the incarnation - the God who acts and journeys with us ‘made flesh’ - immediately puts at the heart of theology the mystery of the trinity. The gospel testifies that the ‘Word of God’ was the incarnate one, the second person of the Trinity. Lossky declares that “Incarnation and Trinity are thus inseparable.” The prolegomena to John’s Gospel points toward and reveals in part the mystery of the Trinity. The revelation of the second person of the Trinity—Jesus Christ—the Word of God, immediately directs us to considering the identity and the diversity of God.

b. Trinitarian Theology

The Early Fathers while struggling to acquire and utilise language and thought that could adequately develop and encapsulate a Trinitarian understanding sought to navigate through potential dead-ends which were ultimately heresies. On the one side was the tendency towards Unitarianism, including the modalism of Sabellius, and on the other side the tendency towards Tritheism, in particular a weakening of the divine reciprocity which tended towards subordinating tendencies within the Trinity or ultimately a breaking down of the Trinitarian unity as seen with Arius.

By the fourth century the development of a dogmatic confession of the trinity was elaborated which enabled the church to express the mystery of the trinity as both one and three, that is, that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are a Trinity, one in being (homoousios), one nature (physis; natura) or essence (ousia; substantia) in three hypostases.

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109 Deut 26:5–9, Josh 24: 1ff, Exod 19:4–5, NRSV.  
110 Rom 4:24, NRSV.  
111 Both Kierkegaard and Barth in their polemic against ‘natural theology’ suggest an a posteriori methodological approach to theologising that can be applied usefully to kenotic theology.  
112 “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1, NRSV); “You are the Christ, the son of the living God” (Matt 16:16, NRSV).  
113 Lossky, Orthodox Theology, 36.
(hypostaseis; subsistentiae) or persons (prosopa; personae). Lossky describes this understanding of Trinity as “three, beyond all calculation, beyond all opposition, [which] establishes absolute diversity” and as a “blossoming of personal being”.114

c. Personhood

The Fathers by using either philosophical terms or words from current usage at that time were able to give meaning to the concepts of personhood and essence. In the East this was achieved by using the Greek words hypostasis and homoousios and in the process “to root personhood in being, and to personalize ontology”.115 Language differences, in particular, between the Greek speaking East and the Latin speaking West, were the cause of many misunderstandings, distinctions and difficulties. Nevertheless, it was essential to clarify the full import of these critical developments.

Lossky articulates an understanding of the hypostases of the Trinity as:

infinitely united and infinitely different: they are the divine nature, but none possesses it, none breaks it to own it exclusively. It is precisely because each one opens itself to the others, because they share nature without restriction, that the latter is not divided. And this indivisible nature gives every hypostasis its depth, confirms its uniqueness, reveals itself in this unity of the unique, in this communion in which every person, without confusion, shares integrally in all the others: the more they are one the more they are diverse, since nothing of the communal nature escapes them; and the more they are diverse the more they are one, since their unity is not impersonal uniformity, but a fertile tension of irreducible diversity, an abundance of a ‘circumincession without mixture or confusion’ (St John of Damascus).116

Although this explication is thorough and useful, it is unable ultimately to define the personal uniqueness of the hypostases, rather they are evoked through their relationship with each other. The distinctions in God are in the form of relations and depict the character of God’s love.

d. Relations

In the prologue of the Gospel of John, the writer declares that “the Word was with God”. The particular word ‘with’ is from the Greek pros which denotes movement, a dynamic closeness. This can be translated as ‘the Word was towards God’ thus

114 Lossky, Orthodox Theology, 45.
115 Lossky, Orthodox Theology, 41.
116 Lossky, Orthodox Theology, 42.
introducing the idea of a relationship; between the Father and the Son of eternal generation, and a glimpse of the life of the divine persons within the Trinity. It is in this regard that Lossky can claim that “the Father would not be a true person if He were not this: *pros*, towards, entirely turned towards other persons [in the Trinity], entirely communicated to those whom He makes persons, therefore equals, by the wholeness of His love.”

The particular address by Jesus of ‘Abba’ Father to God depicts a unique filial relationship that presupposes that the Father has already turned to the Son; that the Son relates to the Father implies the prior relation of the Father to the Son. Thus ‘Father’ is an interior name within the Trinity, by the Son to the Father, by the Father to the Son. Kasper points to this use of ‘Abba’ (Father) by Jesus of God as a clear New Testament marker towards an implicit Son-Christology within a Trinitarian structure.

Utilising modern terms, and going forth from Gregory of Nyssa who claimed that God is a predicate of the divine activity toward us, Jenson prefers to articulate an understanding of the Trinity as one event (rather than nature or substance) and three identities (rather than persona). This re-articulation allows for the first concern to be the work (of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, etc) rather than *ousia* (substance) of God. “Trinitarian identification of God compelled us to say … [God] is an event … constituted in relations and personal in structure.” Jenson cautions, though, against allowing the terms ‘relations’ and ‘persons’ to lose their “original, history-of-salvation meaning” and therefore losing all meaning ultimately.

The decline in Western Christianity creates an even greater need to know and to be able to articulate God’s identity amid religious pluralism. Interestingly this is not dissimilar to the conditions in the declining Mediterranean antiquity when Trinitarian language was first being developed. Lossky, Kasper, Rahner, Moltmann and Jüngel each decry the loss

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117 Lossky, *Orthodox Theology*, 47.
119 Jenson, *The Triune Identity*, 12-16; Lossky, *Orthodox Theology*, 44.
121 Jenson, *The Triune Identity*, 114.
123 Jenson, *The Triune Identity*, 125.
of nuanced understanding, if any at all, of the Trinitarian confession and its unconditional link to being Christian and practical relevance to Christian life.\textsuperscript{124}

e. Divinity and Humanity of Christ

After establishing the Trinitarian dogma at the Councils of Nicaea (325 CE – contra Arianism, clarify Father and Son as one in purpose or one in being) and Constantinople (381 CE – contra Arianism, Apollinarism, Sabellianism, clarify divinity of Holy Spirit) the Fathers convened again at the Council of Chalcedon (451 CE) to discuss Eutychian monophysitism and the divine and human natures of Jesus.

Following the earlier 325 and 381 declaration of the one nature of God in three persons (Father, Son, Spirit), the Council of Chalcedon declared that the one person of Christ, the second person of the Trinity, has two natures (fully divine, fully human). Christ is consubstantial with the Father by His divinity while equally Christ is consubstantial with humanity by His humanity.

The Confession of Chalcedon provided a clear statement on the human and divine nature of Christ:

\begin{quote}
Conforming to the tradition of the Fathers, we proclaim in unanimity that one must confess a single and only Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, true God and true man consubstantial with the Father by divinity and consubstantial with us by humanity, similar to us in everything, except sin, born of the Father before all ages according to divinity, born in these last times of Mary the Virgin, Mother of God, according to humanity, for us and for our salvation; a single and only Christ, Son, Lord, the Only-Begotten makes Himself known in two natures without mixture, without change, indivisibly, inseparably, in such a way that the union does not destroy the difference of the two natures, but on the contrary the properties of each only remain more firm when they are united in a single person or hypostasis which does not separate nor divide into two persons, being the same and single person of the Son, Monogenite, God and Word, Lord Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{125}
\end{quote}

The challenge to maintain both the divinity and humanity of Christ was clarified at Chalcedon with the confession of the Christological dogma, after a long battle against attempts to rationalize the Incarnation by diminishing either the humanity or divinity of Christ. Lossky suggests that “the two natures of Christ, without being mixed, nonetheless


\textsuperscript{125} Lossky, Orthodox Theology, 98.
know a certain interpenetration.” The divine energies radiate the humanity of Christ and are visible to others while His humanity is deified from the Incarnation. “This interpenetration of two natures – at once penetration of divinity into flesh and the possibility henceforth acquired by it to penetrate into divinity – is called perichoresis.”

The challenge to the divinity and humanity of Christ fell roughly along the lines of the two differing but influential schools of theological thought prevalent at the time. The school of Antioch emphasised the human aspect. Nestorianism dissected Christ into two different persons and diminished the divinity of Christ. This tendency continues to threaten Christianity in modern times in the West under the guise of humanism. In contrast, the school of Alexandria emphasised the divine aspect of Christ. Monophysitism emphasised the divinity which had the effect of diluting the humanity of Christ. This tendency emerges in the cosmic illusionism and pure interiority of the ancient East.

1f. Self communication of God

Kasper takes a new Christological starting point, rather than from the question in relation to the human and divine natures in the person of Jesus Christ, but the relationship of Jesus to His Father with the two natures grounded in this. This is approached by Kasper from the perspective of a Son-Christology wrought from the New Testament witness that presumes upon a pre-existent Christ. As noted previously, it is important to be able to hold on to the unique filial relationship, where Jesus’ earthly expression of ‘Abba’ to God assures us of God’s involvement in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, in the turning of Jesus to the Father, and from the Father to the Son – the self communication of God.

The salvation provided through Jesus – God for us – cannot be separated from His being (Dasein). This is depicted through obedience and self surrender linking Christology and Soteriology right from the start. “Jesus is the mode in which the self communicating,

126 Lossky, Orthodox Theology, 99.
127 Lossky, Orthodox Theology, 99. Lossky’s use of the term perichoresis here in relation to a certain amount of interpenetration between the two natures of Christ may be better described as coinherence in contrast to the wholly one in each person of the Trinitarian perichoresis. This distinction may indicate differences between Greek and Latin orientations of this concept.
128 Lossky, Orthodox Theology, 98.
outpouring love of God exists on the human scene”.\textsuperscript{129} Jüngel is careful to distinguish what he refers to as the self-communication of God in its most original form - as overflowing, going with himself beyond himself - from the view of Rahner, following Thomas Aquinas, that the ‘meaning of being’ is possession, or more specifically self possession.\textsuperscript{130} Both ‘being’ (ontological Christology) and ‘mission’ (functional Christology) condition each other and cannot be separated, His mission is inseparable from His being and presupposes His being.

Walter Kasper’s argument, written from within the Roman Catholic tradition, is twofold. Firstly, that on the cross, the incarnation of God reaches its true meaning and purpose. The omnipotence of God is revealed, without de-divinisation or abandonment, in the power to love, with complete surrender, to give and receive self while preserving the freedom and independence of the recipient: gift without economy. God’s self emptying, weakness and suffering are neither the expression of a lack, as in finite beings, nor a fated necessity. If God suffers, then that suffering occurs in a divine manner, as an expression of freedom, out of an excess of being, of love: not God becoming, but God as the fullness of being, pure actuality, overflow of life and love.\textsuperscript{131}

Secondly, that if God reveals God self as the one who loves in freedom and who is free in loving and if the cross is the eschatological self-revelation of God, then intrinsically, God must be freedom in love and love in freedom. Self communicating love is a starting point for an understanding of the trinity and the basis in tradition for taking love as the point of departure. It is important to note, however, that this suffering of love is a proactive, volitional act of allowing others to affect self—allowing vulnerability, rather than a passive state of being affected by others. In love, God suffers and thus reveals the fullness of divinity. Within the \textit{perichoretic} relationship the distinction between Father and Son creates the theological possibility for God’s self-emptying in the incarnation and on the cross. On this basis, it can be understood that from, and for, eternity God has signified that there is a place in God for humanity, with a God who suffers with humanity.\textsuperscript{132}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{129} Kasper, \textit{The God of Jesus Christ}, 171.
\bibitem{130} Jüngel, \textit{God as the Mystery of the World}, 222.
\bibitem{131} Kasper, \textit{The God of Jesus Christ}, 195.
\bibitem{132} Kasper, \textit{The God of Jesus Christ}, 197.
\end{thebibliography}
g. Suffering redeemed

God can self-empty in the incarnation and the cross precisely because of the distinction within the eternal trinity between the Father and the Son, through the Spirit. Our contemplation of the possibility of a God who suffers with the creation and its creatures can include a God of genuine sym-pathy, a voluntary vulnerability through freedom in love, rather than a God of a-pathy, passively affected by others.

Jüngel contends that the axioms of absoluteness, apathy and immutability are unsuitable axioms for the Christian concept of God and that these are destroyed by an understanding of God as the Crucified One. He believes this to be a significant correction to the classical doctrine of God which has been advanced through more recent theology influenced by Luther’s Christology and Hegel’s philosophy. He considers that “the God who is love must be able to suffer and does suffer beyond all limits in the giving up of what is most authentically his for the sake of mortal man”.133

Suffering no longer has the last word, but has been redeemed, rather than divinised, and is now transformed into hope. “The omnipotence of God’s love removes the weakness of suffering”.134 The voluntariness of love, specifically kenotic love, conquers the infliction and otherness of suffering from beyond and outside of a person and allows through freedom to absorb this suffering, without being conquered by it. Suffering is not abolished or diminished but it is transformed.

h. God is Love

Kasper points to an understanding of the essence of God through a modern philosophy of freedom (ontological perspective) which emphasises the personal and therefore the relational reality of God, and defines this as perfect freedom in love. Scripture testifies that ‘God is love’.135 But for whom is this love - which is God itself - directed or towards? It cannot be just for this world for thus God is in need of this world on which to outpour his love to which Lossky declares “the God-Trinity is plenitude of love; it has no need of another to pour out its love, since the other is already in It, in the

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133 Jungel, God as the Mystery of the World, 373.
134 Kasper, The God of Jesus Christ, 197.
135 1 John 4:16, NRSV.
circumincession of the hypostases”.  Nor can it be that God’s being first becomes love because love is necessary to counter nothingness. It is rather a revealing of God’s love within, in freedom, in relationship, to the Son through the Spirit. God “is communication and self-emptying within himself”.

Through the life, ministry and death of Jesus “he accomplishes on earth the Trinity’s work of love”. This is depicted through the self-giving of the Son in obedience to the Father, in love. This is a love which “gives to the other not some thing but its very self, [and] involves, in this very self-communication, a self-differentiation and self-limitation”. Jüngel suggests that the “special eschatological event of God’s identification with the Crucified One and God’s struggle with nothingness which takes place in this event moves the eternal being of God not to a self-distortion but rather to a self-definition”. The Son is affirmed and established in freedom, with a love that unites without absorbing or diminishing the other person.

i. Trinitarian Perichoresis

These trinitarian concepts which have been explored are underpinned by the basic concept of being-in-one-another and mutual penetration of the divine persons which is described as the Trinitarian perichoresis. The basis for this perichoresis is found in scripture in Jesus’ declaration that “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30) and was developed early in tradition, and subsequently followed by Hilary and Augustine. The Council of Florence (1431-1445) described the reciprocal coinherence within the Trinitarian unity as each person being wholly in the other. Kasper attributes the first occurrence of the concept of perichoresis to Gregory of Nazianzus although this was in regard to the relation between the two natures in Christ. Some of the language of Christology can also be applied to Trinitarian perichoresis clarifying its meaning as ‘without confusion and without separation’. Lossky describes the Son and the Spirit as appearing “in the eternity which unfolds, equal in dignity to the father and identical to Him in substance. They transcend

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136 Lossky, Orthodox Theology, 52-53.
137 Jüngel, God as the Mystery of the World, 222.
139 Lossky, Orthodox Theology, 101.
140 Kasper The God of Jesus Christ, 196.
141 Jüngel, God as the Mystery of the World, 221.
142 The Latin term used is circumincession and in contemporary language as social trinity.
143 Kasper, The God of Jesus Christ, 284.
the world where they act: the one and the other are indeed ‘with’ the Father”. One of the great benefits of an articulation of the Trinitarian perichoresis is that it precludes tendencies towards tritheism and modalism. It can also provide a model for unity between God and humanity to some degree.

Lossky indicates that, according to St Cyril of Alexandria, it is not God that divests the form of God but the person of the Son, or else He would no longer be God and therefore there is no Incarnation. In particular, Lossky clarifies that Christ did not decide or act to divest Himself but rather this is a manifestation of His very being. Christ is manifest in obedience to the will of the Trinity. “There is therefore a profound continuity between the personal being of the Son as renunciation and His earthly kenosis”.

Through Jesus Christ, the word and image of the Father, “God reveals his power in weakness, his omnipotence is at the same time an omnipatience or omni-suffering; his eternity is not a rigid immutability but movement, life and love that communicates itself to that which is distinct from it”.

Trinity, Incarnation and kenosis are thus inseparable movements in the definitive and eschatological revelation of God to humanity in Jesus Christ through the Spirit. The pre-existent Christ who existed in the essential form of God, emptied himself, in obedience to the will of the Father, and was ‘made flesh’. In obedience and suffering he took upon himself the limits of humanity even unto death, declaring the reign of God to be God for us through freedom in love.

The divine irruption of grace, with the specific characteristics of grace as kenotic after Philippians 2:7 (he emptied himself) is evidenced in the inseparable movements of Incarnation and Trinitarian sociality. This is articulated within Christian theology, specifically Kenotic theology, which considers the freedom of God in love to suffer and absorb the evil of humanity. This further creates the possibility for human relations to be enacted on a similar basis.

144 Lossky, Orthodox Theology, 39.
145 Lossky, Orthodox Theology, 101.
146 Kasper, The God of Jesus Christ, 178.
Chapter 5 - Illustration of tangible kenotic engagement

The experiences of the post-Apartheid Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the mid to late 1990s in South Africa gave inklings of a kenotic possibility within a communal context. The Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act framed an approach to transitional justice that sought a pathway to reconciliation through truth. This restorative approach met with many challenges and engaged with concepts and experiences of forgiveness, reconciliation and reparation. This necessitated an engagement with, and reconfiguration of, ideas of justice, forgiveness, truth and reconciliation. This occurred with a high degree of Christian religious influence in a predominantly Christian context where often both the perpetrators and victims were Christian.

Not everyone believed that a Truth and Reconciliation Process was the best way forward for the fragile nation of South Africa post-Apartheid and were resistant to the process. Some people and organisations spoke out against the Commission during the years that it was sitting and some have also continued to critique its relative success as both a Truth Commission and as a pathway forward for South Africa. The inability of the South African nation to financially support the degree and quantity of reparations recommended by the Reparations Committee of the Commission has severely hampered the achievement of economic justice – an important component in the pursuit of reconciliation. Alternatively, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has been held up by many as the leading example of attempts by a nation to pursue restorative or transitional justice which moves beyond the perennial and unresolvable rights and positions of the various parties.

The experiences of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission raises the question as to whether the remarkable gestures of forgiveness and reconciliation that were witnessed and testified to on occasion were demonstrations of a kenotic communal engagement within the intractably damaged relationships which constituted South Africa post-Apartheid.

a. Truth and Reconciliation Commission: an introduction

The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (T & RC) can be considered as to what degree, if any, it illustrated a radical kenotic engagement in a communal context.
The intention of the South African T & RC was to create a forum for the truth in relation to human rights violations committed under the apartheid system. These were to be brought out into the open, to be heard and recorded, and where appropriate, to grant amnesty from criminal punishment to perpetrators where certain guidelines were met.

This disclosure of truth was seen as a necessary step in the advancement of South Africa to full democracy after abandoning the Apartheid system. The T & RC was not established to deliver equity based justice, as with the traditional legal system, but an opportunity for disclosure, in the pursuit of healing and reconciliation. The T & RC also had a third capacity which was to seek reparations and rehabilitation for victims of violations.

While the South African T & RC process did receive some criticism, it was generally seen as being the most successful model for pursuing reconciliation after a period of human rights abuses. This was considered a better alternative to the punitive approach depicted in the ‘Nuremburg Trials’ or adopting a ‘National Amnesia’ exhorting glibly to ‘let bygones be bygones’. Numerous other countries have developed their own Truth Commissions—official bodies set up to investigate and report on a pattern of past human rights abuses—with varying degrees of success and differing circumstances. The South African T & RC has been the most high profile of these, receiving international attention especially through its public hearings of both victims and perpetrators and the enticing opportunity for individual amnesty in exchange for full disclosure of crimes.

b. The Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act

The Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, 1995 (P of NU & R) was enacted on 26 July 1995 to provide for the

investigation and the establishment of as complete a picture as possible of the nature, causes and extent of gross violations of human rights … emanating from the conflicts of the past, and the fate or whereabouts of the victims of such violations; the granting of amnesty to persons who make full disclosure of all the relevant facts relating to acts associated with a political objective committed in the course of the conflicts of the past … affording victims an opportunity to relate

147 Tutu, No Future Without Forgiveness, 27.
148 A thorough and insightful coverage of the twenty one Truth Commissions (up to 2001) is provided by Priscilla B. Hayner, Unspeakable Truths: Facing the Challenge of Truth Commissions (New York: Routledge, 2002).
the violations they suffered; the taking of measures aimed at the granting of reparation to, and the rehabilitation and the restoration of the human and civil dignity of, victims of violations of human rights; reporting to the Nation about such violations and victims; [and] the making of recommendations aimed at the prevention of the commission of gross violations of human rights.  

The Act provided for these purposes to be met through the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a Committee on Human Rights Violations, a Committee on Amnesty and a Committee on Reparation and Rehabilitation.

The Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, 1995, recognised that the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1993, provided “a historic bridge between the past of a deeply divided society … and a future founded on the recognition of human rights, democracy and peaceful co-existence for all South Africans, irrespective of colour, race, class, belief or sex”. Further the Constitution 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.” This would not be achieved without recognition that there is a need “for understanding but not for vengeance, a need for reparation but not for retaliation, a need for ubuntu but not for victimisation” and that in order to advance such reconciliation and reconstruction amnesty shall be granted. In addition, the Constitution made an important statement towards the methodology for achieving this by stating that it is “deemed necessary to establish the truth in relation to past events”.

c. Which approach to transitional justice should South Africa adopt?

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, chairperson of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, explains some of the factors involved in adopting a Truth and Reconciliation approach. The Nuremberg Trials approach to ‘justice’ was considered. Importantly, it was noted that this approach is about the victor’s justice. The South African experience was not that of a clear victor, rather it was the product of a fragile miracle that a negotiated settlement occurred allowing full participation in the first fully democratic elections from the main

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150 Archbishop Desmond Tutu in *No Future Without Forgiveness* describes ubuntu (in Nguni languages or *botš'ho* in Sotho languages) as the central feature of what constrained so many to choose to forgive rather than to demand retribution, to be so magnanimous and ready to forgive rather than to seek revenge. It recognises that each person’s humanity is inextricably bound up in one another’s humanity and suggests generosity, hospitality, care and compassion. Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, 31.


parties at the eleventh hour, amid the brinkmanship. Further that the existing military and security police, who were needed in the transition to democracy, could potentially be both protector and accused. Alex Boraine, deputy chairperson of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, notes the very real threat that security forces would not defend the peaceful process of the election and indeed make the process impossible.\textsuperscript{152} Significantly, the cost of pursuing such justice would be sacrificing essential provision of services such as education and health services for all. Tutu concludes that rejecting the Nuremberg approach was a pragmatic decision and for the best reasons of self-interest.

Another option beyond a punitive approach was what Tutu refers to as ‘National Amnesia’. This is illustrated by the experiences in Chile where General Pinochet’s departing ruling party negotiated for themselves an unqualified general amnesty. Tutu states that a general amnesty has the effect of victimising the victims once again by the denial of their experiences.

The Truth Commission in Chile was different from the South African T & RC. In particular, General Augusto Pinochet and his cohort gave themselves amnesty as a precondition to handing over power. In this case the “commission would deliberate only behind closed doors and the record of General Pinochet and his government and the security forces would not be scrutinised by the commission, certainly not for the purpose of apportioning blame‖.\textsuperscript{153} The methodology and basis for this style of Truth Commission was found to be unacceptable for South Africa. “The proceedings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, unlike the Argentinian, Chilean and Salvadorean commissions, or any others, were not held behind closed doors, but were open to the public‖.\textsuperscript{154}

In relation to the difficult question of amnesty in general and the Chilean situation particularly, Tutu stated that it would be “quite intolerable that the perpetrator should decide not only whether he should get amnesty but that no one else should have the right to question the grounds on which he had so granted himself amnesty and for what offense”.\textsuperscript{155} Rather, the requirements for amnesty would be full disclosure and transparent.

\textsuperscript{152} Boraine, \textit{A Country Unmasked}, 285.
\textsuperscript{153} Tutu, \textit{No Future Without Forgiveness}, 27.
\textsuperscript{154} Boraine, \textit{A Country Unmasked}, 270.
\textsuperscript{155} Tutu, \textit{No Future Without Forgiveness}, 28.
Although there have been more than twenty significant Truth Commissions world wide in the past three decades, the South African T & RC “is the only commission that has been given amnesty granting powers”\textsuperscript{156} and Boraine observes that as such it is “unique in nature and form. It is the only truth commission which has included amnesty as part of its proceedings. Every other commission has happened after, or has resulted, in a general amnesty”.\textsuperscript{157}

Chilean philosopher and activist Jose Zalaquett, who served on the Chilean Truth Commission, indicated at the Conference organised by Boraine to consider transition justice, held at the Lord Charles Somerset Hotel in the Strand early in 1994, that “it will sometimes be necessary to choose between truth and justice. We should choose truth”.\textsuperscript{158}

d. A Truth and Reconciliation approach is possible

Preparations were being made in the early 1990s for the possibility of a shared future between races in South Africa through anticipated, gradual reforms. Alex Boraine a white South African of English descent had been president of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa in 1970, elected to Parliament in 1974, co-founded the Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa (IDASA) in 1986, and went on to become the founder of Justice in Transition in 1994 and subsequently appointed Deputy Chairperson of the TRC in 1995. As such he was well positioned to respond to the remarkable turn of events which started with the readmission of banned parties, such as the African National Congress (ANC), in 1990 through to the release of Nelson Mandela, the lessening of some of the race restriction laws and eventually the first free democratic elections held in 1994.

Boraine initiated a Conference held in Cape Town in February 1994, hosting international experts in the field of transitional justice. He prepared a report of this Conference which was subsequently published under the title of \textit{The Healing of a Nation?}.\textsuperscript{159} Boraine was encouraged by Albie Sachs, later to become a South African


\textsuperscript{157} Boraine, \textit{A Country Unmasked}, 269.


\textsuperscript{159} Alex Boraine, Janet Levy and Ronel Scheffer (eds.) \textit{The Healing of a Nation?} (Cape Town: Justice in Transition, 1994).
Constitutional Court judge, and Kader Asmal, who had been instrumental in the ANC push towards a T & RC, to flesh out the ideas from the conference into a practical plan of action to be provided to the new President when he came into office. Boraine forwarded a draft of his report to Nelson Mandela in April 1994, just prior to his inauguration, and a covering letter outlining the positives and negatives in considering a T & RC. In this regard South Africa had the benefits of having consulted widely, having learnt from other countries and of holding a clear commitment to this process from the political party which was to ultimately form government.\footnote{Boraine, \textit{A Country Unmasked}, 44.} Alex Boraine, with others, had also travelled to Europe and other parts of the world to learn from other countries’ experiences.

On 27 May 1994 Dullah Omar, Minister of Justice, announced to Parliament the decision of the government to set up the T & RC and noted the alternatives that were being rejected. “He emphasised that reconciliation was not simply a question of indemnity through amnesty and letting bygones be bygones”.\footnote{Boraine, \textit{A Country Unmasked}, 41.} In his speech to Parliament he was thorough in his clarification of the direction, limitations and intent of the process:

\begin{quote}
If the wounds of the past are to be healed, if a multiplicity of legal actions are to be avoided, if future human rights violations are to be avoided and indeed, if we are to successfully initiate the building of a human rights culture, then disclosure of the truth and its acknowledgement are essential. We cannot forgive on behalf of victims, nor do we have the moral right to do so. It is the victims themselves who must speak. Their voices need to be heard. The fundamental issue for all South Africans is therefore to come to terms with our past on the only moral basis possible, namely that the truth be told and that the truth be acknowledged.\footnote{Boraine, \textit{A Country Unmasked}, 41 quoting Hansard, 27 May 1994, col. 187.}
\end{quote}

Strong criticism against the idea of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission when it was initially raised came from the National Party, the Freedom Front, the Inkatha Freedom Party, and the security forces. F.W. de Klerk, former State President of South Africa and one of the Deputy Presidents at the time, declared that the T & RC “could undermine the goodwill and sense of national unity that has begun to take root since Mandela’s inauguration” and that South Africa would be foolish if it “precipitately tore out the stitches from wounds that are only now beginning to heal”.\footnote{Boraine, et al, \textit{The Healing of a Nation?}, xviii.}

Professor Kader Asmal, an ANC member, and a subsequent Professor of Human Rights Law at the University of the Western Cape, suggested in his inaugural lecture that “South Africa should look not to have Nuremberg trials but a Truth and Reconciliation
This was in some part because the ANC had in a sense paved the way for such a commission because, “in order to deal with allegations about atrocities having happened in its camps outside South Africa, it had done something almost unprecedented as a liberation movement”.

The leadership of the ANC assumed responsibility for the actions of those within its movement, publicly apologised for atrocities and set up commissions of inquiry.

Also the magnanimous nature and example of people such as Nelson Mandela who, after his release and up to and including his election as President of the Republic of South Africa, demonstrated forgiveness, compassion and the pursuit of reconciliation. While still in prison, “Mandela believed that he himself had to assume the decision to negotiate the principle of a procedure of amnesty”. Accordingly the constitution of South Africa already contained a section titled National Unity and Reconciliation which outlined the importance of truth, being heard and told, in the process of reconciliation. This section became the basis upon which the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, 1995, was developed and constitutes a large part of the wording of the Preamble to this Act.

A further connection that Tutu makes, and which Boraine also acknowledges, is the concept of ubuntu that was important in Africa and had long been evident in Southern Africa and other countries. Demonstrations of compassion, dignity, the upholding of human rights and gestures of reconciliation had been depicted also in other social and political settings in Africa prior to and connected with the South African experiences.

The architects or negotiators to the Constitution recognised that South Africans would have to live together and get along after the abolishment of Apartheid. They recognised that their humanity was ‘inextricably bound up in the lives of each other’. These were perhaps pragmatic choices of some visionary thinkers and leaders. Abandoning an equity based pursuit of justice recognises the nature of power to undercut itself ultimately. Instead of a shifting of power from, say, ‘white’ to ‘black’ where the oppressor has changed only by reference group, a paradigm shift can occur that creates the possibility for hope in the upholding of right relationships. This was referred to in the Constitution and then in the P of NU & R Act (as noted above) in statements such as ‘understanding.
not vengeance’, ‘reparations not retaliation’, ‘ubuntu not victimisation’, ‘the well-being of all South African citizens’. This is about responsibilities to each other as fellow human beings, who are immersed together in what it is to be human. This still allows for consideration of rights, but they are human rights, rights for all, not my rights.

The Truth and Reconciliation way of amnesty, the third option for South Africa, was consistent with ubuntu. In this regard, Desmond Tutu states of South Africa, in general, that “harmony, friendliness, community are great goods. Social harmony is for us the *summun bonum* – the greatest good … to forgive is not just to be altruistic. It is the best form of self-interest.” This attitude recognises that in the context of relationships and human dignity, “what dehumanizes you inexorably dehumanizes me. It gives people resilience, enabling them to survive and emerge still human despite all efforts to dehumanize them”.

In an African context, ubuntu describes a recognition of and response to the entwined humanity of all people. A similar concept is also testified to in an Ancient Hebrew context as *šēdāqā*. *Sedaqa* is most commonly translated as righteousness. God’s *sedaq* is usually referring to God’s saving action, directed to the well being of the people, whereas the *sedaq* of the “community and the individual is comportment, according to God’s order in every area of life, in just and proper social order (justice to the helpless, the poor, the oppressed, the widow, the orphan, the resident alien), in legal procedure, in the ritual of worship, all effected by God’s *sedaq-sedaq*. This is subsequently in the New Testament understood as gospel imperative; love your neighbour as yourself, what you did to the least of these you did to me, those who are first will be last, and those who are last will be first. Kenosis is an act or response in the seeking of ubuntu or sedaq: a relinquishment of self for the sake of others, in seeking right relationship, a recognition of our shared humanity. This is definitively and ultimately depicted by God in Christ, an act of kenosis, for the seeking of right relationship.

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e. Challenges

Some of the difficulties and concerns raised by adopting a Truth and Reconciliation approach included impunity, amnesty and justice. Would the process encourage people to commit human rights violations with an expectation of amnesty in the future? Would the Commission provide justice to victims? Is it enough for perpetrators to make full disclosure without remorse and “since amnesty expunged the civil and criminal liability of the successful applicant was it fair to deny victims their constitutional right to claim civil damages from the perpetrator and the state?”

There were objections to adopting this approach: was it possible to expect expressions of remorse from the perpetrators? Tutu explains that reticence was ultimately fortuitous, as the integrity of the perpetrators statements would be undermined by an expectation of remorse. Further, that by requiring full disclosure for amnesty the onus for disclosure fell to the perpetrator and they were enticed to fuller disclosure. Also, full disclosure gave victims or their loved ones access to information that may otherwise have been withheld. This is illustrated by the comments of Doreen Mgoduka, the widow of one of the victims of the Motherwell bombing which was masterminded by Eugene de Kock who testified at the T & RC:

*De Kock is the only one who helped us retrace the steps of what really happened. You have no idea how much of a relief knowing the truth about my husband was. De Kock brought us the truth so that we can be with our husbands, understand what happened to them and then release them again. Now I can mourn properly because this has helped me retrace his steps in life in order to let him go in death.*

Within the Commission process, the level of proof required was reduced to a balance of probabilities as it was not a criminal court. The Act charged the T & RC to make it as easy as possible for victims to be heard (victim friendly), including respect, compassion, using their own language, location, protection and provision of reparations where appropriate.

The concern raised as to whether the T & RC gave amnesty in the pursuit of truth, but at the cost of justice being done, may be a valid question but has the potential to undermine the integrity and validity of the T & RC process. To some degree it appears to respond to a necessity to balance different evils and take a pragmatic pathway. Jacques Derrida, a twentieth century French Philosopher observes, particularly in relation to French

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national reconciliation attempts post Second World War, that “there is always a strategical or political calculation in the generous gesture of one who offers reconciliation or amnesty” but he goes on stridently to qualify that “this ‘ecological’ imperative of social and political health has nothing to do with ‘forgiveness’”.\(^{172}\)

The choice to surrender some individual rights to criminal and civil damages by granting amnesty was thought to be an unfortunate and undesirable, but necessary price to pay for the pursuit of a greater social good of reconciliation and truth. Tutu suggests that the settlement negotiations that enabled the major parties to agree to participate in the election and maintain a relatively peaceful transition would not have come into effect if this amnesty was not available. Boraine concurs suggesting that the “transition from oppression to democracy was achieved through negotiations between the state and the liberation movements. Therefore a compromise was inevitable, and one of those compromises was the provision for amnesty”\(^{173}\). While the price has been high, the benefits of a relative peace and stability have been enormous, which suggests that justice according to biblical sedaqa or gospel imperative is a wider vision than justice according to judicial rights.

In a Constitution Court judgment, Judge Mahomed notes that the decision to impinge some civil and criminal rights by the granting of amnesty to perpetrators was made by the negotiators of the Constitution and leaders of the nations who were in many cases victims of gross human rights violations themselves. Their considerations and anguish over such a decision included the limited resources available to the new nation at this time of social reconstruction.\(^{174}\)

This denial of rights is counterbalanced to some degree by the provision of reparations. The report of the T & RC stated that “without adequate reparation and rehabilitation measures, there can be no healing and reconciliation, either at an individual or a community level … reparation is essential to counterbalance amnesty”\(^{175}\). Thus, as the government removed the right for damages to be pursued by certain victims, so it should take responsibility for reparation. This is a more imaginative and wider reaching response with the resources available than is likely to be achieved under criminal or civil


\(^{174}\) Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, 59.

\(^{175}\) TRC, *Report*, vol.5, ch. 5, paras 2, 3.
prosecution where only a limited number of victims would be expected to be successful in receiving significant damages.

The other element of the concern is that justice was not being done. Tutu suggests that perhaps justice fails to be done if our concept of justice, “is retributive justice, whose chief goal is punitive”. The T & RC reflected a contention that there is at least another kind of justice, that is, restorative justice, which was a positive and relevant opportunity for justice to move beyond the impasse of entrenched and competing claims and counterclaims. Restorative justice was more characteristic of traditional African jurisprudence. Unlike an equity based judicial process that seeks retribution or punishment, restorative justice seeks “the healing of breaches, the redressing of imbalances, the restoration of broken relationships, a seeking to rehabilitate both the victim and the perpetrator” which includes creating opportunities for both to be reintegrated into the community. This will always take more than juridical justice alone can provide.

The focus of this approach to justice is working towards or creating the possibility for healing, reconciliation and forgiveness, for individuals that are immediately affected as perpetrator and victim but also for the community surrounding these individuals who are inevitably impacted. This is a more personal approach that recognises the eventfulness of an offence and its impact upon relationships within community and therefore the health and future of community. Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, a clinical psychologist who served on the Human Rights Violations Committee of the T & RC, observes in relation to both South Africa’s struggles against apartheid and Rwanda’s following the genocide of 1994, that “while there may be value in recognising and posting the limits of forgiveness, if such exist, some societies are finding it more constructive to focus on discovering and nurturing the conditions that make forgiveness first conceivable, then ultimately possible”.

Does this sufficiently or adequately satisfy the moral requirement for justice? From a moral perspective, can amnesty ever be granted, in the pursuit of truth and reconciliation, by anyone other than the victim however noble the ideals of those who have done so?

176 Tutu, No Future Without Forgiveness, 54.
177 Tutu, No Future Without Forgiveness, 55.
The pragmatic response from Tutu to some of these challenges and criticism is that “the way of amnesty and reparations is the path that our nation elected to walk, crossing from a blighted past to the promise of a better future using the ‘historic bridge’ referred to in the Constitution, one of whose pillars was to be the T & RC”. It is acknowledged that other methods and approaches could have been taken or explored, however, this was the option adopted by South Africa, in its particular time and place. It is recognised by many that in doing so “a significant contribution has been made to the promotion of national unity and reconciliation”. Boraine elaborates that perhaps “the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s greatest contribution in this regard has been its strong emphasis that reconciliation is never easy, is never cheap, and remains a constant challenge”. In seeking a wider vision of justice, which incorporates holistic expressions of justice, there will inevitably be sacrificial costs.

\textit{f. Spiritual and religious dimension and language}

It is intriguing that the President of South Africa appointed an Archbishop as chairperson of the T & RC, even though the T & RC was a quasi-judicial body. The T & RC did include seven lawyers, but it also included three or four ordained ministers of religion. Tutu considers that the “President must have believed that our work would be profoundly spiritual. After all, forgiveness, reconciliation, reparation were not the normal currency in political discourse”. Nor are they the usual language of political or judicial processes, rather that of the religious domain. At a panel appointed by the President to produce a shortlist of possible Commissioners, Tutu was asked what kind of people he would like to see on the Commission. He replied “people who were once victims. The most forgiving people I have every come across are people who have suffered – it is as if suffering has ripped them open into empathy. I am talking about wounded healers. A Commission should be buttressed by spiritual life”.  

The influence of spiritual practice included prayers to start and end meetings, pauses for recollection and silence, and prayer. The Human Rights Violations Commission

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182 Tutu, \textit{No Future Without Forgiveness}, 80.  
184 Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela recalls that Archbishop Tutu would call for silence ‘because we are on holy ground’ whenever an offering of forgiveness by a victim was made at a public hearing of the TRC. Gobodo-Madikizela, \textit{A Human Being Died That Night}, 95.
solemnised the victim oriented hearings with prayers, hymns and ritual candle lighting to commemorate those who had died in the struggle. Tutu was encouraged to preside over the opening proceedings of the commission in the purple Archbishop’s cassock, as part of his public persona, and he suggests with very few people objecting to the “heavy spiritual and indeed Christian religious emphasis of the commission”. By contrast Derrida notes that Tutu was reproached for introducing a vocabulary of repentance and forgiveness, among other things, by a non-Christian segment of the black community.

Arendt suggests that the role of forgiveness in the realm of human affairs was revealed by Jesus of Nazareth. “The fact that he made this discovery in a religious context and articulated it in religious language is no reason to take it any less seriously in a strictly secular sense”. Boraine suggests that Yasmin Sooka, a Hindu on the Commission, didn’t appear to enjoy “the strong religious and largely Christian emphasis in the Commission”.

As the commission had invited commissioners that would bring a range of experiences, skills and perspectives, this included, Tutu contends, “religious insights and perspectives that would inform much of what we did and how we did it”. This was also the case with other skilled professionals who brought expertise and perspective in fields of law, medicine and psychology. Boraine recounts that the retreat that the Commissioners held together, immediately after their appointment and prior to getting started in organising the processes, was quite a spiritual experience. Father Francis Cull, Tutu’s personal spiritual advisor, led the retreat and quoted an old rabbi who is reported to have said “An angel walks before every human being saying ‘make way for the image of God’. For me this summed up the goal of the Commission. During the apartheid years the basic humanity of millions of people had been denied. Our task was to restore the human dignity which had been trampled upon”.

The T & RC approach to restoring the civil and human dignity of all South Africans stemmed primarily from the theological premise that all humanity are children of God.

185 Tutu, No Future Without Forgiveness, 82.
186 Derrida, On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness, 42.
187 Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition, 238.
188 Boraine, A Country Unmasked, 79.
189 Tutu, No Future Without Forgiveness, 82.
190 Boraine, A Country Unmasked, 82.
191 In a more clinical analysis Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela attributes this, in relation to the capacity of some victims to forgive heinous crimes, to internal psychological dynamics that recognise the power of human connectedness and identification which is a learned response embedded deep in our genetic and evolutionary past. Gobodo-Madikizela, A Human Being Died That Night, 127.
Humanity is created in the image of God and all individuals are ultimately responsible and accountable for their own acts. This occurs while yet demonstrating compassion and respect for each human’s, including the perpetrators’, individual circumstances. This allows those involved in the process to say with humility, ‘there but for the grace of God go I’. Tutu claims that “theology helped us in the TRC to recognize that we inhabit a moral universe, that good and evil are real and that they matter”.  

In *South Africa Without Apartheid* the authors examine the role of religion and resistance. Interestingly they note that religious participation is spread across the racial groupings – with race and culture overlapping greatly and a peaceful co-existence between the major Christian denominations. Remarkably, the conflict of apartheid is fought from within a shared Christian faith, although the source or basis for the justification of an apartheid ideology may differ, but this occurs nevertheless within a broader Christian ideal that is shared. Adam and Moodley suggest that this may have impacted upon the nature of resistance or revolt against apartheid as “popular spokespersons for the oppressed affirm the common Christianity of the oppressors” recognising the sincerity of their Christianity and their brotherhood. This is depicted with Tutu musing that “when God says, ‘Love P.W. Botha,’ I say to him, ‘You can’t be serious God.’ He then says, ‘I am. The consequences of being a member of the body of Jesus Christ is that P.W. is your brother’. You have to work out what that theological position means. It means that I have to long for the very best for him”.  

Can we conclude then from the spiritual and religious influences inherent in the T & RC that the Christian perspectives that informed it are crucial to its achievements? Niebuhr is critical of ‘liberal Christianity’ perceiving what he refers to as an “illusion that all social relations are being brought under the ‘the law of Christ’”. Derrida hypothesises that the concept of ‘crime against humanity’ and the seeking of ‘forgiveness’ that has become part of the geopolitical scene in recent decades, which he refers to as a ‘globalisation’ of forgiveness, could resemble a “process of Christianisation which has no more need for the Christian Church”. The context of the South African T & RC and the apartheid experiences which preceded it occurred within an assumption of a shared Christian

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192 Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, 86.
193 Adam and Moodley, *South Africa Without Apartheid*, 197.
194 Adam and Moodley, *South Africa Without Apartheid*, 198.
ideology\textsuperscript{198} which held the opponents within certain humanitarian bounds.\textsuperscript{199} This is evident in the remarkable restraint and the magnanimity shown at times, however, this is also contradicted by the cruelty, injustice and discrimination that so many people experienced.

Immanuel Kant’s concept of universal peace and the categorical imperative can be adopted and utilised as a ‘Judeo-Christian ethic’ but stripped of the alterity of faith and based in reason alone. This was seen in nineteenth century liberalism and further developed recently by Derrida. It raises the question as to whether kenosis is merely being used to bolster a quasi-Kantian ethic of human dignity or is kenosis a specific Christian resource necessary to any such universal approach to human dignity. Can this be achieved without lapsing into compromise or partisan conflict? Is kenosis only applicable to a specifically Christian approach to issues such as the TR & C?

\textbf{g. On forgiveness and reconciliation}

Reconciliation should not be confused with forgiveness. In the T & RC, the mandate was for truth as a pathway to reconciliation. Forgiveness has been defined by James Charlesworth as the “wiping out of an offense from memory; it can be affected only by the one affronted. Once eradicated, the offense no longer conditions the relationship between the offender and the one affronted, and harmony is restored between the two”\textsuperscript{200} However, forgiveness should not be assumed within reconciliation nor should forgiveness be confused or amount to “amnesty or to amnesia, to acquittal or prescription, to the work of mourning, or some political therapy of reconciliation”.\textsuperscript{201} While forgiveness and reconciliation may not be the same thing they are so closely entwined that it can be difficult to speak of one and not the other, particular within Christian theology. Gobodo-Madikizela recognised that while it is possible for social groups to transcend cycles of violence, and to some degree forgive, this should not be assumed to be reconciliation.\textsuperscript{202}

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\textsuperscript{198} Statistics from the 1980 census based upon church according to race indicates a 76.6\% membership of Christian churches, 4.5\% of other faiths and 18.7\% unknown/none. Source: HSRC Investigation into Intergroup Relations, Main Committee Report, \textit{The South African Society: Reality and Future Prospects} (Pretoria: HSRC, 1985) 36 in \textit{South Africa Without Apartheid}, Adam & Moodley, 199.
\textsuperscript{199} Adam and Moodley, \textit{South Africa Without Apartheid}, 198.
\textsuperscript{201} Derrida, \textit{On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness}, 41, 45.
\textsuperscript{202} Gobodo-Madikizela, \textit{A Human Being Died That Night}, 133.
Derrida perceives that there is an unresolvable tension between unconditional forgiveness (pure forgiveness) and conditional forgiveness. Conditional forgiveness is not actually forgiveness, rather an equation or calculation; contingent on perhaps repentance, punishment, anticipated improved health or restoration of peace. Conditional forgiveness is a pragmatic choice made within the normal capacity of humanity to weigh up the benefits of a situation or event.

In a polarising contrast, unconditional forgiveness is impossible, and it is this itself that gives it the genuine nature of forgiveness. However, when Derrida contends that pure forgiveness is impossible, is he merely playing with semantics and not real human situations, unless the impossible can be introduced? Hannah Arendt contends that ‘radically evil’ acts “transcend the real of human affairs” and are therefore neither punishable nor forgivable. But this doesn’t necessarily account for the complexity and significance of the social context. The fact that some people have or do forgive the unforgivable (a contradiction of terms in itself), perhaps in the seeking of a way forward, is the very thing which transforms the deed into something forgivable. This is not necessarily a legitimisation of the actions but an acknowledgment or reinforcing that, yes, this did happen.

To forgive then, that which is unforgivable, is both madness and beyond the capacity of humanity. “There is a desire to draw a line and say ‘Where you have been, I cannot follow you. Your actions can never be regarded as part of what it means to be human’.” And yet this closes the door to the possibility for transformation for all people involved. Albie Sachs, an amputee as the result of a bombing intended to kill him in Mozambique, emphasised how important it was “to see these men’s humanity’, and how much our hope as South Africans depended on reaching out to such glimpses of humanity in a spirit of compassion instead of revenge”. Simone Weil suggests that “everything points to the fact that, unless supernatural grace intervenes, there is no form of cruelty or depravity of which ordinary, decent people are not capable, once the corresponding psychological mechanisms have been set in motion”.

205 Gobodo-Madikizela, *A Human Being Died That Night*, 45. Albie Sachs spoke in response to a question addressed to Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela at the First International Psychoanalytic Conference in Cape Town in April 1998 regarding whether she felt she was being manipulated by Eugene de Kock, the commanding officer of state sanctioned death squads, by extensively interviewing him.
Derrida recognises that most social, political and economic reality occurs somewhere within this tension, but this in itself is not an argument for the reasonableness of enforcing conditional forgiveness by a third party upon others. Boraine is clear that it “was not the intention of the Commission to demand forgiveness, to pressurise people to forgive, but to create an opportunity where this could take place for those who were able and ready to do so”. 207

Derrida critiques the role of Desmond Tutu, Anglican Archbishop and President of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and claims that Tutu ‘Christianised’ the language of the T & RC and “with as much good will as confusion” introduced the “vocabulary of repentance and forgiveness”. 208 Gobodo-Madikizela, without having eluded to holding particular religious beliefs herself, suggests that “it is hard to resist the conclusion that there must be something divine about forgiveness expressed in the context of tragedy … there seems to be something spiritual, even sacramental, about forgiveness – a sign that moves and touches those who are witnesses to its enactment”. 209

A further level of complexity is added when considering the locale of forgiveness. Is forgiveness located in the face to face between perpetrator and victim or is there a role for a third party, such as an institution like the T & RC or a Nation-State? In this regard Boraine draws upon the recollection of Beth Savage’s testimony and her “willingness to forgive and in particular her remarkable plea for forgiveness [which] will forever stand in strong contrast to the refusal by so many white South Africans to accept any responsibility for the system they supported for so long”. 210

Boraine reflected that “reconciliation is a process which engaged the energy of the Commission but will always remain the responsibility of the entire nation”. 211 He suggests that while it is not possible to talk about national reconciliation as a mass movement, it is important to consider that “when the leaders of a nation are ready and willing to confess, to seek forgiveness, to be accountable and responsible, they do this not merely for themselves but for the nation as well”. 212 This is illustrated in a speech made by Richard von Weizsacker, President of West Germany, addressing the German Parliament on 8

207 Boraine, A Country Unmasked, 356.
208 Derrida, On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness, 42.
210 Boraine, A Country Unmasked, 105.
211 Boraine, A Country Unmasked, 8.
212 Boraine, A Country Unmasked, 367.
May 1985, on the fortieth anniversary of Germany’s defeat in the war. Similarly when Chancellor Kohl underscored what the President had said he could have acknowledged regret for the crimes while pointing out that he wasn’t aware of them at the time, and that the present generation should not be blamed for past offences. But instead he assumed responsibility and accountability, as Chancellor of his country and in so doing invited and enabled others to do so also.213

This was also illustrated by Pope John Paul II in March 2000 when he issued a solemn apology for the errors of the Roman Catholic Church over the past 2,000 years. Whilst this apology also received criticism for what it didn’t include, Boraine considered that it ‘was a courageous act, and his successors can build on it and open the way for even greater reconciliation”.214

Others, such as John Howard, Prime Minister of Australia, who refused to apologise for what is referred to as the ‘stolen generation’ of Aboriginal children, have failed to seize the opportunity to encourage national reconciliation. Prime Minister Howard addressed the Australian Reconciliation Convention in Melbourne in 1997 at which he expressed his regret at past injustices to Aboriginal children, but refused to identify with the actions of the state in the past, to apologise, or to offer reparation. Boraine was also a speaker at this conference and commented that “there are times when a nation’s leaders can assist the process of reconciliation by offering an apology.”215 Kevin Rudd, as newly appointed Prime Minister of Australia, issued an apology to the Stolen Generation in February 2008 in pursuit of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians but has struggled to achieve tangible indicators of change in terms of life expectancy, health and employment.

In a similar vein to Howard’s position, Polish philosopher Adam Mischnik quoted Jurgen Habermas in suggesting that “collective guilt does not exist”. Rather that “whoever is guilty will have to answer individually”. However, he goes on to clarify that “at the same time there is such a thing as collective responsibility for a mental and cultural context which makes crimes against humanity possible”.216

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213 Boraine, A Country Unmasked, 368.
216 Krog, Country of My Skull, 24.
Professor Mahmood Mamdani of Uganda at a panel discussion on reconciliation held at the University of Cape Town raised the difficult and unusual question as to whether reconciliation should “take place between victims and perpetrators; or between victims and beneficiaries?”217 This question raises an issue which is particular to South Africa, as it attempts to emerge from a lengthy and all pervasive period of Apartheid, in which there were a lot of beneficiaries but perhaps not as many perpetrators.

Alex Boraine reflecting over the role and value of the T & RC after it had concluded its processes indicates that he does “believe the TRC contributed to a national process of acknowledgment, accountability, and responsibility which has unlocked the greater possibility of a measure of reconciliation, not only for individuals but also for the nation”.218 However, like many people, he is critical of the continuing impact that this attempt to restore the moral order will have if this is not matched with economic justice. Boraine emphasised, while speaking at a graduation ceremony at the University of Cape Town in 1995 before the Commission had even commenced, the link between restoration of the moral order and economic justice. “For the words of reconciliation to be heard, it must be accompanied by economic justice. Those who have been oppressed for so long must believe that there can be a change in their own lifetimes if there is to be a commitment to genuine peace and stability”.219

Antjie Krog, who was a radio reporter assigned to the T & RC and South African poet, suggests that Tutu and Thabo Mbeki have two differing views of reconciliation. She contends that for Tutu reconciliation is the “beginning of a transformative process (one must be able to transcend one’s selfish inclinations before one can transform oneself and one’s society)” whereas for Mbeki “reconciliation is a step that can follow only after total transformation has taken place.”220 She suggests that most dialogue about and consideration of reconciliation happens somewhere between these two extremes. She concludes by positioning herself in a middle ground suggesting that “given the history of our country, true reconciliation can only take place if we succeed in our objective of social transformation. Reconciliation and transformation should be viewed as an interdependent part of one unique process of building a new society”.221

217 Krog, Country of My Skull, 112.
218 Boraine, A Country Unmasked, 389.
219 Boraine, A Country Unmasked, 351.
220 Krog, Country of My Skull, 110.
221 Krog, Country of My Skull, 111.
In the situation where a third party becomes involved, it is possible to consider amnesty, reconciliation and reparations; however, it is not possible to speak of pure forgiveness. A black woman whose husband was assassinated by torturers, who were police officers, was translated by Tutu as testifying before the Commission that “a commission or a government cannot forgive. Only I, eventually could do it (and I am not ready to forgive)”. This can be taken further in suggesting that the woman in this case can only consider whether to forgive her own pain and suffering, as a secondary victim, and not ultimately that of her husband as the primary or absolute victim.

A purity of forgiveness “would be a forgiveness without power: unconditional but without sovereignty”. However, this appears to be immensely difficult, as in the gesture of unconditional forgiveness a sovereign power is often generated either from an institution in a top down approach, such as the T & RC, or even from the strength of character from an individual to forgive. Gobodo-Madikizela describes forgiveness as an act of power:

The decision to forgive can paradoxically elevate a victim to a position of strength as the one who holds the key to the perpetrator’s wish. For just at the moment when the perpetrator begins to show remorse, to seek some way to ask forgiveness, the victim becomes the gatekeeper to what the outcast desires—readmission to the human community. And the victim retains that privileged status as long as he or she stays the moral course, refusing to sink to the level of evil that was done to her or him. In this sense, then, forgiveness is a kind of revenge, but revenge enacted at a rarified level.

The pursuit of a pure forgiveness without conditions or powers requires a transformation from power to powerlessness that is inherently kenotic in nature; self-emptying of conditions or power, alongside the claim to loss, pain and suffering that is forgone in forgiveness. However, people who have been marginalised and oppressed through the denial of rights and privileges may already be disempowered and helpless, without a sense of power to forgo, particularly in the presence of those who embody or have embodied power to them.

Christianity has been criticised for fostering values of passivity and resignation in victims. Niebuhr refers to this as encouraging a disinterestedness that allows and accepts undue self assertion by others. He contends that “the dangers of religion’s inner restraint upon self-assertion, and of its effort to achieve complete disinterestedness, are

222 Derrida, On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness, 43.
223 Derrida, On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness, 59.
that such a policy easily becomes morbid, and that it may make for injustice by encouraging and permitting undue self assertion in others”. 226 Jeffrie Murphy and Jean Hampton in the introduction to their book *Forgiveness and Mercy* contend that “Christianity had encouraged the development of meek and forgiving dispositions that will tolerate oppression, and that will call that toleration virtue”. 227 Whereas Gobodo-Madikizela suggests that “ironically, some of the feelings associated with powerlessness, such as humility, are more likely to foster an attitude of forgiveness than are attitudes that equate forgiveness with a loss of power”. 228 Kasper suggests that there “is thus a change of reigns, but a change accomplished not by violence but through the obedience and weakness of the cross”. 229

### h. Reflections on forgiveness, justice and kenotic values

In considering whether the T & RC illustrates an attempt at radical kenotic engagement in a communal context, it is noteworthy that the Commission process itself appears to create an opportunity for listening and for the accounts of victims and perpetrators to be heard including those that might otherwise be silenced or excluded. This experience of being heard has provided dignity to those involved and a demonstrable sign of change post-Apartheid. However, this is not necessarily understood as justice, at least not in the Greek-Roman style of equity. The T & RC methodology introduces into a quasi-judicial style a goal of truth and reconciliation that reconfigures justice. This approach opens up possibilities beyond a rights based system that attempts to equalise but can never do more, if that at all, and introduces the potential for right relationship with civil and human dignity upheld for all humanity.

A minority of perpetrators of human rights violations were granted amnesty by the T & RC. While this may appear to depict a kenotic value on a communal level, in as much as a claim of wrong and its relevant consequences has been relinquished, the granting of amnesty was motivated by a desire for full disclosure that could lead to healing, forgiveness and community. Ultimately, the kenotic values that are implicit throughout the T & RC process are located in the ‘broad brush strokes’ where the pursuit of a

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national unity and reconciliation were adopted in which vengeance, retaliation and victimisation were relinquished for understanding, reparation and a recognition of our entwined humanity.

Within this broader communal context that seeks social reconstruction, extraordinary gestures of compassion, understanding and forgiveness have also been seen at an individual level. Some victims found a space within the Commission hearings, to offer reconciliation and/or forgiveness to the perpetrators of crimes. In many cases, this involved a family member, often a parent or spouse, of a victim of human rights abuses voicing expressions of forgiveness or a desire to be reconciled. Such a profound expression of relinquishment appears to be kenotic in nature and inexplicable within the ‘logic’ of human reason and instinct. “To forgive. We cannot do this. When we are harmed by someone reactions are set up within us. The desire for vengeance is a desire for essential equilibrium”. 230 Derrida contends that this is yet the very thing that appears to have been overcome or relinquished. In the presence of such ‘radical evil’, and “consequently in the enigma of forgiveness of the unforgivable, there is a sort of ‘madness’ which the juridico-political cannot approach, much less appropriate”. 231 The intention of the T & RC and the manner in which it was enacted and the examples that were set before the South African nation created the possibility for such magnanimous humanity.

Derrida’s concept of ‘madness’, which we may wish to speak of as ‘abandonment’ can be considered in correlation with the Reformation concept of ‘gelassen”232 meaning relinquishment, which is given testimony to as whoever loses their life for my sake,233 of which the connection with kenosis is specifically Christian. In relation to Derrida’s ‘madness’ or Christian ‘gelassen’ we may reasonably question what resources and motivations prompt some of the kenotic expressions emerging from the T & RC? Can these be considered to be motivated specifically by Christian resources or do they represent a form of post-modern abandonment to another of which Derrida speaks?

Illustrations of such ‘abandonment’ in individual circumstances within the broader communal context are visible in some of the testimonies that were heard by the T & RC,

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230 Weil, Gravity and Grace, 6.
231 Derrida, On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness, 55.
233 Matt 10: 39, NRSV.
such as that of J. Msweli, whose son Simon was tortured, mutilated and subsequently died. “I want the people who killed my son to come forward because this is a time for reconciliation. I want to forgive them, and also have a bit of my mind to tell them”. This is also demonstrated by the comments of Beth Savage, a victim of a hand grenade attack in King William’s Town by members of the Azanian People’s Liberation Army. “I would like to meet the man who killed my friends and injured me. I would like to meet that man that threw that grenade in an attitude of forgiveness and hope that he could forgive me too for whatever reason.”

A difficulty exists in considering what is being relinquished and to whom this ‘belongs’. A specifically Christian response to this is stated in the exhortation to bless those who persecute you. It would appear that in the case of a surviving relative offering reconciliation or forgiveness, this may be in relation to their own pain and suffering and claim against the perpetrators. However, it seems offensive and inappropriate that the surviving relative could forgive or reconcile with the perpetrator on behalf of the victim. Nor would this seem to be self-relinquishment. Tutu quotes Simon Wiesenthal, in his anthology *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness*, acknowledging that this dilemma is very real. Wiesenthal’s own view, which he notes appears to be shared by many Jews, is that “the living have no right to forgive on behalf of those who were killed, those who suffered in the past and are no longer alive to make the decision for themselves”. At what point, though, does a response concede or acknowledge the reality of radical evil or in Christian terms, human sinfulness? A similar view is also reflected in the framing of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as Dullah Omar stated in his speech to Parliament (as noted above) “we cannot forgive on behalf of victims, nor do we have the moral right to do so”. While this perspective is quite reasonable, the Christian call to kenotic relinquishment goes beyond this dimension. Although any expression of kenotic abandonment can ultimately only ever be representative, however closely it may appear to be more, as all modes of gelassen or relinquishment for the human good are inadequate inasmuch as they are flawed, incomplete or cannot represent another. Kenosis as a Christian resource is both pervasively present and accessible but also impossible because it is always representative.

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236 Rom 12:14, NRSV.
Tutu was called into question in relation to his own view that differs slightly from those above as illustrated by his response to a plea for forgiveness by a representative of the Dutch Reformed Church\textsuperscript{240} in 1990 at the historic gathering of South African Churches in Rustenberg. Tutu accepted the request for forgiveness and was widely criticised for doing so. Tutu recognises our contemporary humanity as irrevocably entwined with our past, with its positives and negatives, and as such our history collectively owned, embrace and therefore forgive. This critique challenges an agenda which pursue rights or retribution in recognising the character of human sinfulness. However, talk of human sinfulness in a public forum is not acceptable even yet while reconciliation and the extremities of human violence are.

Not all who testified at the T & RC hearings were in a position of embracing forgiveness and reconciliation. “Premature speech about forgiveness and reconciliation fails to acknowledge the moral force of, for instance, Joyce Mtimkulu’s anger”.\textsuperscript{241} When Joyce testified at the T & RC, she stated “I don’t want to cry. I know this is my day. If I do cry, it is not due to the pain, but to the hatred. For fourteen years we have (lived) with the pain. The Boers are liars … I will never forget the Boers”.\textsuperscript{242} As she spoke, she lifted up scraps of her son Siphiwe’s hair to show the effects of Thallium poisoning. Siphiwe disappeared from Livingstone Hospital on 14 April 1982 and was never seen again.\textsuperscript{243} Derrida contends that whether a person decides to forgive or not to forgive, we cannot be sure to understand, and we should respect that their experience remains inaccessible to us.\textsuperscript{244}

Christian theology gives testimony to abyssal pain in human experience; ameliorated kenotically, yet also partially in events of Christian love and forgiveness; kenosis has its full disclosure Christologically, which includes the resources of a unique community of Christ. Perhaps the incredible loneliness to which Derrida refers can be accessed and potentially healed within sustained kenotic community over time. Further, we can

\textsuperscript{240}The White Dutch Reformed Church had supported apartheid by providing the theological rationale (but which had already retreated significantly from this position) and enacting separation.
\textsuperscript{242}Denise M. Ackermann, \textit{After the Locusts: Letters from a Landscape of Faith} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) 68.
\textsuperscript{243}Gideon Nieuwoudt, a member of the security branch in the Eastern Cape tried to prevent Mrs Mtimkulu from telling her story in public at the commission by bringing an urgent application against the Commission. He was unsuccessful and subsequently applied for amnesty for the kidnapping and killing of Siphiwe Mtimkulu. Boraine, \textit{A Country Unmasked}, 114.
\textsuperscript{244}Derrida, \textit{On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness}, 55.
potentially learn from the T & RC that in a broader and more structural perspective an effective focus is not whether victims can forgive perpetrators but whether we, as societies, including our symbols, language, politics, laws, media and academic institutions can create environments that introduce and encourage alternatives to revenge.\textsuperscript{245}

The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission sought truth as a pathway to reconciliation. In the process, it engaged with not only truth, and to some degree reconciliation, but also forgiveness and healing through individuals and community. The commission process illustrated the capacity of love that is kenotic to achieve a restorative justice that moves beyond retributive or punitive measures, which may not ultimately satisfy, to a restoration of self and relationship.

\textsuperscript{245} Gobodo-Madikizela, \textit{A Human Being Died That Night}, 118.
Chapter 6 - Conclusion

The principle of kenosis can be conceived theologically and applied practically to social contexts where competing claims to equality are unresolvable, with kenosis providing a liberating and grace-filled possibility towards the re-establishment of right relationship.

Augustine in *Confessions* observed our propensity for human sinfulness, in the face of goodness, in the movement away from God like gravity. Weil further expressed the human need for security and consequential instinct to self preservation which permeates our relationships and communal structures and suggested that this ultimately undercut itself in the endless pursuit of power. Both Augustine and Weil concurred that this can yet be countered by the grace of God in the form of love. Benedict XVI considered this expression of love in and of God to be the heart of Christianity. The possibility of kenosis introduces a grace filled alternative to the perpetual impasse of competing claims and rights.

It would appear that kenosis, as self-relinquishment, though, cannot be enacted by a collective, as this would become an oppressive or enforced legislating away of rights rather than a self-emptying gesture of love. However, a communal context can be developed or nurtured that is more conducive to an individual choice in freedom to relinquish self for the other. Where this occurs on an individual basis, perhaps alongside others who make similar choices, this may appear to be on a communal basis. However, it is more likely that this is occurring individually but in a communal context.

The theological basis for kenosis is located in Philippians 2:7 where Paul writes ‘he emptied himself’. The form of the Greek word kenosis expresses the self emptying love of God for humanity as ultimately depicted in the incarnation, passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Kenotic theology has historically foundered upon dogmatic issues relating to the divine and human natures of Jesus and the unchangeability of God. Kasper and von Balthasar have demonstrated new trajectories that have emerged from an understanding of the sovereign freedom of God in love and to love – as abundance, an excess of being, an overflowing of life and love, not as necessity or limitation. This understanding continues to uphold both the divinity and humanity of God. The suffering of God in Christ without divinisation or abandonment is an essential contribution to this understanding. God is depicted as absorbing the suffering of evil, not rebounding or
deflecting that evil. The concept of kenosis, or the kenotic motif, is a basic tenet of Christian faith—God redeemed humanity by entering into creation accepting the limitations inherent in human existence.

A crucial step in this development is an appreciation of the inseparable movement between incarnation, trinity and kenosis. A trinitarian sociality that understands God as movement, life and love is able to embrace the kenotic gesture of the incarnational event. However, the development and articulation of a theological understanding of the Trinitarian being of God has historically been a lengthy and difficult process fraught with cultural, language, geographic and religious influences. This has been necessary, though, as trinity is an essential concept to our understanding of God as Father, the incarnate Jesus Christ and the power and influence of the Holy Spirit. In particular, the innate sociality within the Trinity, understood as the Trinitarian *perichoresis*, testifies to the self communication of God in the sovereign freedom to love and be love, as exemplified in the incarnational event. God depicts kenotic love both within God’s own self and in God’s relationship with humanity, and in doing so further creates and illustrates the potential for human inter-relations.

The accounts and stories of forgiveness recounted through the T & RC are a high tide marker for extraordinary gestures of forgiveness by ordinary people and a pathway for others to follow in the hope of ending embedded, generational violence and oppression. While Niebuhr observed that people operating as a society appear to function with less moral imperative, Gobodo-Madikizela concluded that it is possible for social groups to transcend cycles of violence, and to some degree forgive, even though this may not fully represent reconciliation. Derrida critiqued the possibility of confusing reconciliation with forgiveness and declared the impossibility of a pure forgiveness.

The T & RC demonstrated, at least in part, that a kenotic vision that is informed and nurtured Christologically is not necessarily too altruistic for human society. The T & RC reflected a high level of Christian specificity, as symbolised by Archbishop Tutu both chairing the Commission and being the public face of the Commission. Its success, however, did create some discomfort for those people who wished to recognise the ‗special quality’ of forgiveness without the Christian overlay. It is difficult to separate the Christian theology that resources this; its expression in the New Testament is inseparable from being ‘in Christ’ or ‘in the Spirit’, and therefore trinitarian. Otherwise what is seen
may be the appearance of ‘kenosis’ as a quasi-theological concept in a non-theological context motivated pragmatically and therefore ultimately an expression of quid pro quo, which negates itself as being truly kenotic. Nevertheless, Gobodo-Madikizela suggested that the pursuit of restorative justice from a broader and more structural perspective can effectively shift the focus away from whether victims can forgive perpetrators to whether we, as social groups, can create environments that introduce and foster alternatives to revenge.

It is important to acknowledge that the tangible validity of gospel imperatives, enacted within social contexts, is located in the volitional enacting of these imperatives, rather than through the legislating of legal rights to enforce these. The recognition of the inherent humanity of all people and their being in the image of God is what awakens in us and stirs a faithful response in love to the presence of God in each person. Christ through His kenosis places great value on human freedom through suffering.

As such, kenosis is indeed a divine gift of grace from God, given in grace to humanity, to be received only as gift, with the possibility of expressing this grace relationally with God and humanity both on an individual and communal level. This is made possible within a triune perspective of God. The kenotic gesture of self-giving love – depicted in the eventfulness of God in Christ – emerges from the perichoresis of the Father, Son and Spirit. Thus, kenosis as self relinquishment, freely chosen, can provide a specifically Christian contribution to reconciliation and right relationship. There can be transformation and a shift in power without violence but this is achieved through the supposed weakness and foolishness of the cross of Jesus Christ. The Christian community is called to be unique and different within a world that will perpetuate structures and relationships based upon political power and to therefore seek social engagement that transcends politics. This can occur through gestures of kenotic love, through the ameliorating expression of Christ’s incarnation and through the healing and restorative presence of the community of Christ.
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