

**CONFLICT RECONCILIATION IN SOUTH AFRICA (1990-1998)
AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR
THE MEDIATING ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN RWANDA (1990-2003)**

Samuel Cyuma

OCMS, Ph. D

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the South African processes of conflict reconciliation (1990-98), focusing on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), the role of churches and the lessons that South African experiences can offer to help resolve the ongoing crisis in Rwanda (1990-2003). The thesis takes into account that both South Africa and Rwanda experienced violent ethnic-based conflict, used as a means to control and acquire power and resources. In South Africa, however, representatives of the conflicting sides opted for a compromise to end the unrest of Apartheid and avoid an escalating war (1990). The TRC subsequently aimed to ease further the pain of the past and to support lasting peace by promoting unity and reconciliation. By contrast, the conflict and war in Rwanda, the subsequent killing and the failure of mediation led to the 1994 genocide. Consequently, ten per cent of the population died and the enmity continued. The new Rwandan leadership refused dialogue with the defeated leaders and rejected the TRC approach, but launched prosecutorial processes.

The long-running Rwandan crisis involved both international intervention and inaction and led to crimes against humanity. It swept away national religion-based attempts at mediation. Even so, given the presence of a high proportion of Christians and a popular traditional method of dispute settlement, there is a chance to find a combined and much better model in Rwanda – involving church capacity and cultural means, and possibly a third party – to respond effectively to the post-genocide situation. With this model, the Roman Catholic Church could be most effective in procedures, given its influence and following in Rwanda. Likewise, Protestant Churches could contribute more effectively through their international organisations – i.e., the Anglican Communion, the World Council of Churches (WCC) etc. – in a joint effort with regional partners.

This research entailed the use of a multidimensional methodology for gathering data, which is mostly qualitative, but also includes quantifiable ‘hard facts’, including descriptive statistics. The data collection required a pluralistic approach to identify and examine all relevant sources. The study reviewed lessons of conflict resolution worldwide and found that the South African pattern in particular fits the teaching of Jesus, which provides the basis for a universal model for conflict resolution. The study also found that unity and healing in Rwanda call for transformational theology in principle and practice.

The findings recommend the adoption of alternative justice procedures embracing truth and mercy, eventually with the involvement of a neutral third party, be they religion-based or an international presence, to ensure equity and enhance initiatives for national reconciliation. International Christian initiatives may operate within the global framework to guide political efforts and support their Rwandan partners and churches. An effective solution for Rwanda seems to require a broad-based mechanism involving the church, and judicial, traditional cultural and community-based alternatives such as *Gacaca* (courts of equity that stress reconciliation). Further research should test the application of the model, which sets out the framework of the conciliation process and involves the church in promoting truth and equity and in encouraging community participation.