

A South African Story

As a white Afrikaner, aware of the injustices of South Africa's apartheid past, reconciling with my country's black majority has always been a top priority for me. It was for this reason that I, about ten years ago, became a minister in the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern-Africa, a predominantly black church. I had the opportunity to listen to the painful Apartheid stories of my Congregation members and started to understand how evil the previous system really was. Reconciliation between black and white South-Africans became part of my life.

A few years ago I was invited to deliver a paper about reconciliation in the Old Testament. I chose as example the book of Ruth and tried to explain that mixed marriages are possibly the closest that the different racial groups in South Africa will ever come to true reconciliation. One day I shared this message with Chris Mbude a new friend I made at a conference near Vryheid in KwaZulu-Natal. When he heard this message he cried and told me his story:

Chris is a Xhosa, born in Kayalitsha, a black township near Cape Town. His father was a freedom fighter who spent many years in jail on Robben Island. After some years his father was released from prison and attended a political rally in Kayalitsha. White security police shot and killed his father at the rally. Chris, still a boy, started to hate all white people.

A white Methodist minister used to visit the poor people in Kayalitsha. His car was always packed with food, clothes and blankets that he distributed amongst the poor. Chris got to know this minister and said to himself that there is at least one good white man in the world.

During the political upheaval of the late 80's, South-African youths in Kayalitsha threw a petrol bomb at the car of the minister and he burned to death. It was a very traumatic experience for Chris. He realized that white people wrongfully killed his father and black people wrongfully killed this minister. He went to the house of the minister to sympathize with the family and a very close friendship developed between him and the daughter of the minister.

After school Chris decided to become a priest in the Roman Catholic Church and studied for many years in France. When he returned to South-Africa he started to teach Theology at one of the major Universities in South-Africa. He ended his story with tears in his eyes mentioning that he still has contact with the daughter of the minister. He started to love her and he reached a point where he has to choose between marrying her and becoming a Priest.

The story of Chris was the most touching reconciliation story I have ever heard - until I heard my own story.

Catharina van Mallebaer was an Indian lady from Java. She hit her husband with a ladder. His bladder burst and he died. Catharina was sentenced to death. The death penalty during these days was suffocation. She appealed. She told the judge that her husband maltreated her. Her sentence was relieved. She was sent as a slave to the Cape in 1657.

Hans Christoffel Snyman was a soldier in service of the Hollands Oost Indiese Kompanjie. He did his duty in the Cape Province and had an affair with Catharina van Mallebaer. She became pregnant and gave birth to Christoffel Snyman. Hans returned to Europe without marrying the mother of his child. He never made any contact with her again. Catharina married Anthony van Bengale, the first free black slave in South Africa on 20 December 1671. Anthony was the first black person who owned land in the Cape. Anthony adopted Christoffel as his own son. He provided an education for Christoffel Snyman and made Christoffel his heritor when he died in 1683. Christoffel married a very rich French Huguenot lady in 1690.

Hans Christoffel Snyman was the ancestor of the Snymans in South Africa.

This to me is the most beautiful South-African reconciliation story

DEON SNYMAN

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2001-10-22