

# Peacebuilding and the ending of apartheid:

## A Christian contribution

by **Jeremy Ive**

*Whatever the reasons, when forgiveness happens it is always a miracle of grace. The obstacles in its way are immense.* Miroslav Volf<sup>1</sup>

### Summary

The Newick Park Initiative (NPI) in South Africa was a Christian initiative which helped to build the trust and a shared national vision across the political spectrum in the years around the release of Nelson Mandela in early 1990. It also prepared the ground for the mediation of Professor Washington Okumu in 1994 which made possible the peaceful conduct of the first fully non-racial elections of that year. The relational principles governing NPI are a guide for Christian peacebuilding at a national level, applicable in other contexts as well.

### Acronyms

ANC	African National Congress
CREID	Christian Research, Education and Information for Democracy
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party
Jl	Jubilee Initiative (later renamed CREID)
NPI	Newick Park Initiative
RFI	Relationships Foundation International
SAG	South African Government

### Introduction

The twentieth anniversary of the end of apartheid in South Africa is a good opportunity to tell the story – until now largely untold – of the Newick Park Initiative (NPI). NPI took place between 1986 and 1991 and bore fruit with the end of apartheid in 1994. It can be seen, alongside other turning points in national histories, as an instance of God's providence and so is offered by way of encouragement to Christians in situations of national conflict. At the same time, it will be presented as an admittedly imperfect and limited model for Christian peacebuilding at a national level, from which both Christians and non-Christians alike might develop guidelines about how similar processes can be set up in other contexts of conflict, whether domestic, local or national.

Before telling the story of NPI it is necessary to describe the political background and the conflict it sought to address.

### Background

The policy of apartheid, that is, the entrenchment of white control by way of the legislative separation of the races in South Africa, had already led to the banning of the leading black political movement, the African National Congress (ANC), in the 1960s. Its leading figure, Nelson Mandela, was a political prisoner along with many others. By the 1980s, this policy had resulted in a groundswell of protest from the majority African community and other race groups (the mixed-race 'Coloureds', and the 'Indians' of South Asian descent). The idea that there could be any form of dialogue about the transition to a fairer order, in which those of all races could have the vote, and the system of apartheid finally ended, seemed an impossible dream. Whites who attempted

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to engage in discussions with the ANC were vilified, and indeed were liable to prosecution. Blacks faced the invidious choice on the one hand of detention or even death, or, on the other hand, of denunciation by fellow blacks through their being considered, and acted against, as collaborators. The prospect was one of continually deepening racial conflict, without any real hope of a peaceful outcome.

<sup>1</sup> *Against the Tide: Love in a Time of Petty Dreams and Persisting Enmities*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010, p.171.

## The Newick Park Initiative (NPI)

Far away in Cambridge (UK), Dr Michael Schluter, who had a Kenyan background, was deeply concerned about the deteriorating situation in South Africa and the need for a just settlement. So in the summer of 1986, he drafted a paper, reflecting on what a fair partition of the country might look like. I (Jeremy Ive) had recently completed my doctoral studies at Cambridge University, having originally come from South Africa, and knew Michael from what was then the Round Church in Cambridge. Soon we were working together on an initial document. The plan was to draw on my own South African background and contacts across the racial and political divides to make a contribution towards turning these ideas into reality.



The initial document explored a number of constitutional alternatives, ranging from the unitary, federal and confederal alternatives to partition, evaluated in the light of the concerns of different communities.<sup>2</sup> Each option was examined in the light of broader Christian principles, which all could embrace, so that discussion could take place with a detailed consideration of clearly set out but realistic alternatives. So it was that on Christmas Day 1986 I found myself on a plane for South Africa with this document in my briefcase. On the basis of the document, a number of participants from across the racial and political divide were invited to a conference at Newick Park in East Sussex, chaired by Viscount Brentford whose home it was and from which the initiative soon took its name.

These participants were first brought together in March 1987, when it was decided that this should initiate a series of conferences, to which they and further people of influence even closer to the leadership of both the then South African Government (SAG) and the ANC should be invited.

Between March 1987 and April 1991 there were a series of consultations involving both the original participants and other more senior members of the ANC and Government officials. Not all participants, nor the experts contracted

The original participants from South Africa were:

- Professor Willie Esterhuysen, from Stellenbosch University
- Professor Tjaart van der Walt, Rector of the then Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education
- Michael Cassidy, Director of African Enterprise in Pietermaritzburg and a key initiator of the National Initiative for Reconciliation
- Professor Richard Stevens, Professor of New Testament at the 'Coloured' (mixed-race) University of the Western Cape
- Revd Dr Elia Tema, a respected senior member of the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (the 'African' church within the still racially segregated Dutch Reformed Church 'family')
- Revd Caesar Molebatsi, leader of Youth Alive in Soweto

Of the above, the first two were senior and influential members of the Afrikaner establishment, and the last two had been closely involved in discussions about the South African situation from a black Christian perspective.

to provide papers, were necessarily themselves Christians; but all acknowledged the need for a principled approach to the questions being addressed in the light of Christian considerations. Through regular meetings held in England and South Africa, NPI provided a safe context in which discussion on difficult problems could be carried out amicably and informally, but also objectively, without the media pressure to make partisan statements.

NPI was an evidence-based process founded on the building of trust and the honest and open sharing of insights with the goal of a just and fully-inclusive peace. Each of the conferences was underpinned by detailed research and, as the process continued, drew on top-level expertise from leading South African and international experts. Through these meetings it was possible to identify values, goals and strategies on which there could be

a high degree of consensus, and at the same time narrow down areas of conflict and disagreement where further research and consultation was needed to bring the parties to the negotiation process closer together. Fundraising was always a problem, made more difficult by the necessity that the process remain low-profile. While some limited funding was found from companies and individuals involved in South Africa, finance for airfares, research and staff costs were a constant source of concern, only finally resolved when a generous Christian donor covered the substantial deficit after the end of the process.

NPI produced offshoots. In November 1989, the South African members of NPI launched the Jubilee Initiative

NPI combined two functions: those of catalyst and consensus-builder.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Schluter and Jeremy Ive, 'Alternative constitutional settlements in South Africa: Christian principles and practical feasibility'. March 1987, 66pp.

(JI), a dialogue process within South Africa. In mid-1990, this was renamed Christian Research for Education and Information for Democracy (CREID). CREID helped to feed into the pre-negotiation process a vision of a future South Africa informed by biblical approaches to the challenges of homelessness and of education for all.

### Parallel processes

Not long after NPI began, and unbeknownst to most of its participants, a secret initiative came into being at the suggestion of the President of the ANC in exile, Oliver Tambo. This was sponsored by Consolidated Goldfields and organised by Michael Young of that company.<sup>3</sup> It involved a number of those linked to NPI, including Professor Willie Esterhuysen, one of the original participants. This UK-based initiative complemented another secret process which was being pursued by Nelson Mandela himself in captivity, in which members of the white government and the successive State Presidents, PW Botha and FW de Klerk, were directly involved. These two secret parallel processes contributed to the announcement by President FW de Klerk of the release of Mandela, as well as the unbanning of the African National Congress and the other political movements in 1990.

Both these initiatives were highly precarious. When, in December 1988, Mandela had drafted an eleven-page document setting out the basis on which negotiation for the government could proceed, he received a negative response from members of the ANC. When news broke that PW Botha had met Mandela, the members of his party were infuriated.<sup>4</sup> News of the UK-based Consolidated Goldfields process leaked to the press in October 1989. President de Klerk felt he needed publicly to disown it, and leading members of the ANC made strong objections.<sup>5</sup>

NPI operated in tandem with these secret processes. NPI discussions helped to provide a framework for the work of Professor Esterhuysen and other key members of the Afrikaner establishment, together with their ANC interlocutors. NPI combined two functions: those of catalyst and consensus-builder. Firstly as catalyst to the process, it addressed and suggested resolutions to sticking points in the way of coming to a settlement, and secondly it built up a consensus about what the broad outlines of a future South Africa might look like along non-partisan lines. The main ideas were relayed to the SAG and the ANC at a senior level. There is evidence that it made a significant contribution to building up background trust and a common vision among these key players.

At the end of January 1991, Professor Esterhuysen (whose participation in both NPI and the secret Consolidated Goldfields process has been described above) and Gerhard Croeser (Director-General of the Department of Finance and NPI participant) made a six-and-a-half-

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hour presentation to the SA Cabinet on the basis of a six-month process of consultations with a range of different organisations looking at scenarios for South Africa over the following five to ten years. In a subsequent letter to Michael Schluter, Professor Esterhuysen commented that NPI had provided him with background and insights without which it would not have been possible for him to participate in a meaningful way.<sup>6</sup> In 1992, at a dinner in Brussels, Dr Gerrit Viljoen, the South African Minister for Constitutional Affairs, commented to Sir Fred Catherwood MEP, a Vice-President of the European Parliament and an international participant in the NPI consultations, that the constitutional discussions then taking place would not have been possible were it not for the work of NPI.<sup>7</sup>

### Two examples of political impact

In two cases, detailed consideration of issues in NPI meetings helped to lay the foundation for a shift in the policy of the ANC as the government in waiting.



The first case was that of the land, the theme of the NPI conference in October 1990. From the conference, it became clear that most agricultural production was still in the hands of white commercial farmers and that any large-scale nationalisation of the land would have serious adverse effects on agricultural production and food security, and would involve, through additional pressure on scarce foreign exchange, considerable additional costs on industrial production and employment. That conference explored alternative measures to ensure food security while embarking on a systematic policy of land ownership transfers. It was about this time that the ANC finally decided to move away from its previous policy of land nationalisation and instead recognised the need for a cautious and deliberate approach to the resolution of the land question.<sup>8</sup>

3 This has been the subject of a feature film, *Endgame* (2010), as well as two books, the latter by Professor Esterhuysen himself: Robert Harvey, *The Fall of Apartheid: The Inside Story from Smuts to Mbeki*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011; Willie Esterhuysen, *Endgame: Secret Talks and the End of Apartheid*, Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2012.

4 Harvey, *Fall of Apartheid*, p.184.

5 Esterhuysen, *Endgame*, p.242.

6 Letter to Michael Schluter of 14 February 1991.

7 Memo from Sir Fred Catherwood to Michael Schluter, 24 June 1992.

8 *Financial Times*, 15 November 1990 by Patti Waldmeier.



A similar concurrence of discussion and policy shift took place on the question of nationalisation of the banks and mines. Following the NPI consultation of January 1991 on this topic, the ANC distributed a discussion document to its members highlighting the disadvantages of nationalisation, arguing that it needed to look more carefully at the economic reality and identify a policy framework that would begin to solve the problems involved. Modification of ANC policy in this regard contributed greatly to the likelihood of reaching an agreement in any formal process. It thus helped to encourage the SAG to embark on the process which led eventually to peaceful transition to full democracy.<sup>9</sup>

### A peaceful transition

Space does not allow for a description of the role of all of the individual NPI participants in helping lay the foundations for a peaceful transition to full non-racial democracy.<sup>10</sup> However, one dramatic example was the way in which NPI prepared the way for the mediation between the ANC, National Party and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) in 1994 by Professor Washington Okumu, formerly Director of NPI. In the early months of that year, Northern Natal was a tinderbox for potential violence. The US State Department was predicting that 100,000 people were likely to die by the end of April if the election went ahead without IFP's involvement. The potential for violence from IFP supporters living in single quarters on the gold mines in the central metropolitan area (now called Gauteng) was also considerable.

Professor Okumu was able to build on the relationships previously made and his detailed understanding of the South African situation, derived not least from the NPI process, enabled him rapidly to mount a personal mediation of the pre-election crisis, persuading Chief Buthelezi and the IFP

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Professor Washington Okumu

to enter the election. His flights to South Africa were paid for by a donor with close links to NPI. The whole process was undergirded by prayer, including the 'Jesus Peace Rally' of 17 April for which 30,000 gathered in the King's Park Stadium in Durban to pray for the forthcoming elections. Professor Okumu's mediation brought the IFP into the transitional general election of 1994 and so the country avoided the inter-communal conflagration which otherwise would almost certainly have resulted.<sup>11</sup>

### The Christian motivation of NPI

Christian peacemaking is grounded in the work of Christ in whom all things are reconciled (Colossians 1:20), as indeed he is the one through whom all things were made

(Colossians 1:16). Moreover, in the Christian understanding of God as Trinity, the relational call which Jesus embodies in himself is set within the context of his call and authorisation by his Father, and within the empowering and transforming dynamic as given to him by the Holy Spirit. Jesus himself called peacemakers 'blessed' (Matthew 5:9). We are assured that when as peacemakers we sow seeds of peace, we shall harvest justice (James 3:18). More generally, we are called to pray for the peace (shalom) of the wider social order (Jeremiah 29:7), and do good to all (Galatians 6:10) – believers and non-believers alike.

Peacebuilding is a specific form of peacemaking. It is characterised by its systematic character and future-orientation. It does not so much address current grievances as encourage those involved to look beyond the present conflict to ways of living peacefully together in the future. It lays foundations which rest on the common commitment of the participants, with the help of well-evidenced contributions by experts, and then proceeds to help those involved in the process to build systematically on these foundations. It thus transforms the participants from a disparate group drawn from across the political spectrum into an informed and well-equipped network, working together for peace.

Christian peacebuilding is peacebuilding done on the basis of a common set of principles rooted in a Christian understanding of reality in general and human society in particular. These principles are 'relational' in character – Christianity is a relational religion, as discussed below. This relational character can be seen in the way that NPI operated, as well as shaping the content of its deliberations.

### The relational character of NPI

At the heart of the Christian faith is the community of love among the divine persons of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Humanity is created in God's image as persons-in-relationship (Genesis 1:27). This applies to relations between individual persons, but also to those between

<sup>9</sup> *Financial Times*, 22 Feb 1991 by Patti Waldmeier.

<sup>10</sup> See Michael Cassidy, *A Witness for Ever: The Dawning of Democracy in South Africa, Stories Behind the Story*, London/Sydney/Auckland: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995; also Caesar Molebatsi with David Virtue, *A Flame for*

*Justice*, Oxford & Batavia, IL: Lion and Sutherland, Australia: Albatross, 1991, pp.138–140.

<sup>11</sup> That is a story which has been told, at least in part, by Michael Cassidy, *A Witness for Ever*, pp.141–214.

ethnic groups and nations (e.g. Amos chapter 1). It is possible to identify five relational principles drawn from biblical insights to evaluate the Newick Park Initiative.<sup>12</sup>

### 1. Parity

The starting point for any peacebuilding process is mutual respect and appreciation of the other person's dignity, grounded in the biblical insight that all human beings are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). Every person is dependent on our Heavenly Father, whether we, or they, recognise it or not (Matthew 6:26). High levels of parity tend to foster commitment to a relationship. Low levels of parity lead to disenchantment and disengagement. Parity needs to be distinguished from equality. There may be legitimate differences of power and influence in a relationship but these should be referenced only for the parties to help one another, not to manipulate or control.

In the case of NPI, the neutral location and the fact that all the participants attended in their personal capacity meant that jockeying for power or influence was minimised.

### 2. Directness

Opportunities for direct face-to-face meetings between protagonists in a conflict are often all too scarce. Communication is more effective when face to face. Above all, there is God's supreme self-revelation in the incarnation, i.e. the becoming human, of God's Son in the person of Jesus (Matthew 1:23; John 1:14). The biblical command that we should love our neighbours as ourselves (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 19:19 and parallels) is modelled on the way Jesus related to all those with whom he dealt, giving himself to others even to the point of death.

In the case of NPI, opportunities were provided for participants to tell their stories to one another in a group session and to build up trust through face-to-face conversation in a safe environment. The confidential character of the process made directness possible.

### 3. Continuity

In a peacebuilding initiative, it is important that there are effective processes in place to maintain continuity in relationships so that the necessary change in attitudes can take place. It takes time for mutual understanding to develop. God's steadfast love (Hebrew *hesed*) takes the form of successive covenants revealed and worked out through history, continuing God's promises from one generation to another (Genesis 9:12; 17:7; Exodus 3:15; 12:14,17 etc.). Jesus promises that he will be with us always until the end of the present age (Matthew 28:20), and indeed in the age to come (Revelation 22:5). In the

light of this, Christians are exhorted to hold firm as a future-orientated community until the return of our Lord (Hebrews 10:25).

The NPI process developed over the course of four years with a continuing core group of participants building up their knowledge and trust of one another over time. It also drew others into the group, and fed their growing consensus out to third parties.

### 4. Multiplexity

Multiplexity is about breadth of knowledge both personally and organisationally in a relationship, i.e. it is about understanding not just the other person's personal background, interests, and motivation, but also their goals and aspirations, and the constraints of the organisation they represent. God made the created order good in all its diversity (Genesis 1:31) and understands every aspect of our complex lives (Psalm 139).

All the issues looked at within NPI were examined systematically in the light of all the aspects of the South African situation. The safe space and the time allowed for the unfolding of the process gave the participants the opportunity to get to know one another not just as interlocutors but within the wider context of their backgrounds and concerns.

### 5. Commonality

Close and effective relationships need to be founded on a common purpose, whether expressed through a strong single overarching identity or through joint work and agreement on specific issues. There is a common call to all of humanity to love God with all our heart, the centre of who we are, which gathers in every aspect of our different identities (Deuteronomy 6:5; Matthew 22:37 and parallels). This common call transcends the differences of identity and ideology. This does not mean absolute uniformity – indeed, difference and diversity can be seen positively as enriching a relationship.

There was a shared acceptance by all the participants of the Christian basis of the initiative, and all were committed to a peaceful and just resolution of the 'apartheid' question on that basis. This bound the participants together, regardless of political affiliation, culture or ethnicity, into working together for peace within a framework of jointly accepted principles.

### Other contexts

A similar approach was taken up in different contexts by two further NPI programmes – in Rwanda from 1994–1999 and Sudan from 1999–2004.<sup>13</sup> In each case, NPI operated in terms of an overarching framework above and beyond any party political objective, based on a common

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12 For an exposition of the relational principles see Michael Schluter and David Lee, *The R Factor*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1993.

13 For its initiative in Sudan, NPI was renamed Relationships Foundation International (RFI). RFI later became an independent charity called Concordis International.

recognition of God as the foundation of all justice and right relationships – in the South African and Rwandan cases with a specifically Christian focus, and in Sudan because there was a shared claim to believe in God as revealed to Abraham.

Other national conflicts may be amenable to the kind of approach exemplified by NPI. In such cases, the NPI experience suggests a number of lessons. There needs to be careful identification of the main parties in the conflict and their competing interests and aspirations. A group of participants identified as being close to the central protagonists, and yet not directly in the public eye, should be invited in their personal capacities and a programme undertaken to set out the issues to be considered. The focus of the discussions should be middle- to long-term questions, looking beyond the immediate conflict to a long-term basis for its resolution and the associated benefits for all parties. Even where not all those involved in the process were committed to a belief in God, by calling participants to the transcendent basis for humane action, it is possible to move them beyond the constraints of the conflict which divides them to outline a future which they, and their respective constituencies, can share.

Understood in this way, Christian peacebuilding can be applied in many other contexts, not merely national ones, but also within family, work, or community contexts. Just as at a national level, there is room for the sustained facilitation and accompaniment which initiatives such as NPI can provide, so in work or domestic issues, the same principles and experience can be applied.

## Conclusion

NPI is a recent and powerful example of Christian peacebuilding.<sup>14</sup> It is offered here as a source of encouragement both to Christians and to other people of goodwill. The Christian basis provided a meeting point and a shared foundation for discussions across the political divides. In this way it serves as a practical witness to the just and gentle rule of our Lord, the Prince of Peace, at a national level and over all areas of life.



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<sup>14</sup> A fuller report on the Newick Park Initiative in South Africa will be available on the Jubilee Centre website in due course.

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