A TIME TO HEAL

Perspectives on Reconciliation

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INTRODUCTION

Since its beginning in 1983 the Faith and Politics Group has been concerned about the meaning of reconciliation in a Northern Ireland context. It has sought to envisage what a politics of reconciliation might mean. This search has been carried out in a spirit of sober realism because the work of the political scientist Frank Wright - briefly a member of the group - has told us that by and large national communities that co-exist on the same soil develop in rivalry with and antagonism to each other. We have been aware that national conflicts do not normally end up with reconciliation of the antagonists. More commonly they are concluded by final victories or forced separations. Thus we were and are under no illusion about what might happen if a politics of reconciliation were not attempted or were to conclusively fail. Nevertheless, we dared to hope that things might be different.

Conflicts within States

Frank Wright taught us that Northern Ireland conflict was not unique. One of the things happening in our world is that conflicts **between** states are being overtaken in frequency and perhaps in importance by conflicts **within** states. The force of globalisation and homogenisation which threaten a sense of community on the one hand and the (re) assertion of identities - cultural, national, ethnic, religious, social - on the other hand, bring about situations of tension and conflict between communities. In such contested 'spaces' there are certain key areas of critical importance: the different communities' relations to the State and, in particular, to the law and justice systems; issue of symbolic expression, eg how events are publicly remembered and celebrated, flags and emblems; recognition of cultural diversity; issues of power relations and, in particular, how power is shared within a democratic order; issues of equity between communities; and how communities are to belong together. In contested spaces we are always trespassing against each other. We live with the 'other' in a mutual fear-threat relationship. We easily become caught in a cycle of conflict in which the actions and behaviours of one set of participants reinforce the actions and behaviours of the others, and the conflict keeps going. The result is a deep-rooted insecurity, antagonism and enmity and identities shaped by conflict and violence. Communities are caught in destructive patterns of relating together.

The diplomatic procedures inherited from the 19th Century which were designed to effect reconciliation - or at least political settlements - between States are ill-adapted to deal with the issues of reconciliation within and between communities. Here reconciliation becomes much less abstract and more face-to-face. People who have been deeply hurt, whose loved ones have been killed and devastated by injury, actually have to come to terms with the presence on their streets of individuals who did these things to them. It is not surprising that in this context issues like prisoner release and the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons cause significant difficulty. We need to learn about the possibilities and dynamics of reconciliation because of the increasing incidence of conflicts within States. In several of our documents we gave extensive consideration to how a Peace Process might develop (see Appendix One).

Overcoming the Past

Examination of the example of Northern Ireland suggests that reconciliation is not easy. We have a precarious political agreement. Much of the elements of that Agreement were foreshadowed in our documents - not that we can claim that our influence was significant. A political agreement is vital but it only provides a starting point for moving forward. We are all too aware of the continuing intractabilities of sectarian hatred; the undertow of hurt, pain and resentment; the competitive victimhood; many people's sense of loss; the way the conflict mutates into new forms; and the increasing segregation. This is not a society yet at ease with itself. Reconciliation remains elusive. All of this points to the need for social and spiritual transformation which will change people's views of each other and how they relate to each other.

Societies in course of transition have to struggle over how much to acknowledge, how to deal with perpetrators, victims and bystanders and how to recover. The American writer Martha Minow says

> *"A common formulation posits the two dangers of wallowing in the past and forgetting it. Too much memory or not enough; too much enshrinement of victimhood or insufficient memorializing of victims and survivors; too much past or too little acknowledgement of the past's staging of the present; these joined dangers accompany not just societies emerging from mass violence, but also individuals recovering from trauma."*

There are a whole series of potential goals for societies responding to collective violence (see Appendix Two). What is important to note is that there are tensions between them. Much of this document is taken up with discussing some of the issues involved.

It is also important to note that the transition from inter-community conflicts to sustainable peace requires a minimum of 10 to 15 years, or longer. Societies coming out of long and violent internal conflict experience problems every bit as serious as those experienced at the height of the conflict. Transitions precede transformations. Thus, people need to be
sustained by hope: hope that situations can and will be transformed and renewed, that life can and will be changed, and newness can and will come.

The Meaning of Reconciliation

'Reconciliation' has a particular resonance in situations which have undergone extensive conflict where we need to make good again, eg in South Africa with its Truth and Reconciliation Commission, while in Northern Ireland the logic of reconciliation is intrinsic to the Good Friday Agreement. It remains hard, however, to give the word meaning and practical content. Perhaps that can only be done in particular situations.

It also has to be admitted that reconciliation as a word has been shamelessly misused, to slide away from issues of injustice and rightful disturbance. It has been used to quieten people down and lead them away from the reality of their situation. There are also forms of 'reconciliation' which are about making people fit into predetermined 'solutions'. There is also a tendency in discussion about 'reconciliation' to downgrade differences. Not all differences are reconcilable. In our understanding of reconciliation we have sought to talk about "living together in difference" which both emphasises difference and living together and links them . We also understand reconciliation in terms of the inter-related dynamics of forgiveness, repentance, truth and justice. Another helpful way to understand reconciliation is to see it as a place - a space - where the different conflicting parties meet and face together

the claims and tensions between truth and mercy and justice and peace (see Appendix Three).

Living Together in Difference

Living together in difference and diversity - racial, cultural, social, religious - is an increasingly challenging issue facing today's world. It raises profound issues about community, identity, recognition and how we meet the other. Often there is dis-ease in the presence of difference and differences have been dealt with by belittling, dehumanising and demonising, overlooking, avoidance (polite or otherwise) and by making people fit in (sometimes through overt pressure). The possibility of people having real meetings where there is honest conversation, respect and mutual regard is narrowed in such situations and they become hostage to wider communal fears. For instance, there is evidence that Bosnia's earlier tradition of tolerance was based only on politeness.

All group identity is created by encountering what is different. Such encounter involves a **recognition** of the other. A recognition of the other can be positive but it can often be based on fear and mistrust and/or a sense of superiority which lead to attempts at separation and domination. The identities engendered in such situations are often negative identities, based on opposition to the other. Asserting such identities also serves to increase an awareness of difference and separateness. An identity politics of antagonised division often emerges. Positive change requires a new recognition of the other and ourselves, new ways of relating, and ways of honouring both particularity and belonging together.

Negative identity involves a need to abuse the other, often emerging out of one's own experience of abuse, fear, loss or powerlessness. If the rule of positive identity is "love your neighbour (the other) as you love yourself" (Lev 10:18) then the rule of negative identity is "do unto others what they have done unto you, or do it unto them first". One of the deepest resistances to peace and reconciliation in many situations is the stubborn commitment on all sides to the negative identities formed over and against each other. We need our enemy because of the identity they give us. We may desperately seek to continue the conflict because we cannot envision ourselves in a future which would include positive relations with the other. Periods of transition are particularly difficult for identities formed in opposition to others. For transitions to go in a good direction there needs to be a movement away from constructing identities over and against others to developing identities that through positive relationships respect others and leave room for difference. Thus re-defining identity is a fundamental step towards reconciliation and people need to have the confidence to engage in a journey which explores who they are and what they might become.

People have a fundamental need for security. In societies governed by fear-threat relationships wisdom suggests that security comes from deterrence or getting your retaliation in first or from living among your 'own'. We all know about the threat from the 'other'; much harder to acknowledge is the threat we pose **to** the 'other'. Conflict situations generate endless justifications, blame and self-righteousness. There may, however, come a time when significant sections of different communities are ready to find a way out - they can be helped by external parties to the conflict co-operating together and facilitating positive movement. These *kairos* moments have to be seized and confidence-building steps entered into. The realisation may dawn that there cannot be security for one without security for the other; that security comes from transformation and new relationships. We have to take the other into account and meet their needs as well as our own. For all of this to happen we have to 'see' the other - and ourselves - in a different way. There has to be new recognitions.

A Christian Vision of Reconciliation

'Reconciliation' is a word on many people's lips today, including politicians. This must be significant. However, Christian theology has used this word with primary reference to the atoning work of God in Christ -"God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself " (2 Cor 5: 19). How does the classical Christian understanding of reconciliation connect with the concerns of a conflictual humanity?

In our first document *Breaking Down the Enmity* we emphasised the enmity generated in conflict situations and the circle of violence and counter-violence. The New Testament shows a God who wishes to overcome breakdowns in relationships. There is a deep solidarity of God with suffering humanity. The enmity between God and human beings is overcome through Christ's loving embrace of us on the Cross - "He is our Peace who has made us both one and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility" (Eph 2:14). There is a mending of brokenness and we are brought to a new place ("there is a new creation" 2Cor 5:17) where we are able to make space for the other because Christ has made space for us. While we are made one in Christ particular identities are not abolished but they are relativised and subordinated. This new identity in Christ leaves no room for individual or collective claims of superiority or self-righteousness. Reconciliation in Christ is about being freed from anxiety about identity. We do not have to shore up our own selfhood or self-esteem. We are to trust in the goodness and grace of a faithful God.

God's loving forgiveness opens the way to repentance (for example the story of Zaccheus in Luke 19: 1-10). Issues of justice and truth are not ignored. Thus love operates within a moral order which involves truth and justice.

All of this has social implications. Christians are the visible fruits of God's reconciliation in Christ. They are called to make this reconciliation visible - visible in terms of a quality of relationships, visible in terms of openness and hospitality. This visibility should serve the same purpose as Christ's visibility, namely to reveal God and His reconciling love. This is true holiness and is the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:19). Similarly, the Church is a community of reconciliation and is called to make this visible to the world.

The innocent victim Jesus protests against a world in which violence is met by violence and the message of the Resurrection is that the destructive powers of the world will not prevail. Such a vision of reconciliation speaks of something given us, of remade humanity, of the cost of love, of suffering vulnerability. It makes us increasingly sensitive to victims. It is a world which politics cannot bring into being. However, faith in a renewed world gives us courage to be persons of persistence and creativity in the midst of politics, for we recognise that the world of politics is a place of encounter between humanity and God.

Violence demands its victims - its sacrifices. Peace and reconciliation may also demand 'sacrifice' though of a different sort: that involved in a commitment to a loving and non-violent God and by a commitment to stop the scapegoating and blaming that exists in a devious and violent world. It is a way of "living sacrifice" (Rom 12: 1), led by the memory of Jesus.

Churches and Reconciliation

As Christians we were aware that Christian faith challenges all exclusive claims of tribe, tradition and political commitment. The Gospel invites us into the space created by Christ and to find there those who were previously our enemies. It therefore seeks to break down the enmity between us: enmity caused by different traditions, and national, political and religious loyalties. The Gospel opens up for us a view of wholeness, justice and living in right relations which sees the whole world as potential brothers and sisters; a nourishing and fulfilment of the human. This is a vision of a new humanity reconciled in Christ and living together in a new community.

At the same time we knew that churches are part of communities and nations; they cannot be other. They are chaplains, reflectors, consciences, restrainers, discerners, givers of wisdom, custodians of memory and places of community belonging. Churches bring 'their' community before God. They are places where the 'specialness' and stories of communities and nations can be celebrated. Much of this is necessary and good, but there is another side. 'Specialness' can lead to exclusivity and a sense of superiority. Churches can be places where we are told - implicitly and explicitly - who does not belong to our community: by who is prayed for and who is not, by the contents of sermons, and by the symbols displayed or not displayed.

The Church is a home for the community or the nation. And at the same time it lives by a story of a Jesus who died outside the camp (Heb 13:13) and who, while completely a Jew, did not belong to his world (John 17:14) and was driven out of it by those who did not want to be disturbed by another way. All our 'homes' - personal, communal, national - are radically decentered by Jesus: "For we have not here an abiding city, but we seek after the city which is to come" (Heb 13:14). And the Church is a community where Jew and Greek, bond and free, belong (1 Cor 12:13).

The Church lives in a tension: in the world, but not of it (cf John 18:36). The danger is that in situations of communal conflict the tension collapses and as the Croation theologian Miroslav Volf says *"…Churches often find themselves accomplices in war rather than agents of peace. We find it difficult to distance ourselves from our own culture so we echo its reigning opinions and mimic its practices."*

This was our experience in Northern Ireland. Religion and politics had become so tangled up that politics had taken on some of the dimensions of a religious crusade; political positions had been absolutised and exclusive commitments had been demanded of people. Political loyalties and exclusive traditions had been put above the God who will have no other god before him. Idolatry had led to conflict and violence. Christian faith had been compromised; two communities had called upon their religious traditions to sanctify political and cultural traditions to a greater or lesser extent. Faith had been deformed in the process. Theologies of enmity, superiority and distorted recognition of others had gained pre-eminence. Northern Ireland, in our opinion, was a place under judgement and judgement begins in the household of God (I Peter 4:17). We were also all too aware that churches who were unable to achieve reconciliation among themselves were not well placed to preach reconciliation to politicians and others. We lived in a world of painful contradiction between a faith vision and reality.

In many of our documents we spoke about tasks for the churches. In particular, we have been concerned that: churches free themselves from over-identification with particular political-cultural formations; while not glossing over theological differences they meet and

co-operate with other churches in work for the common good of society, and they become agents together of peace and promoters of truth, justice and love. We have also been concerned that churches face and acknowledge their particular responsibility for the conflict.

The Metaphor of Healing

Healing is a way of understanding reconciliation and there is a rich tradition in Christian tradition of using the metaphors of sickness and healing, particularly in Eastern theology. Jesus can be seen as the "wounded healer" who uses his own wounds to heal the wounded hearts of others - suffering vulnerability becomes redemptive.

The metaphor of healing is often applied to post-violence situations. The healing paradigm casts the consequence of collective violence in terms of trauma, sickness, brokenness, hurt and pain. A society has been gravely wounded and the goal is recovery and the restoration of relationships. Further, an analogy is being drawn between the psychological and physical needs and the therapeutic responses appropriate to individuals and issues involving entire groups of people and even societies.

Some of the limitations of this metaphor need to be understood. To talk about the needs of particular victims is fully appropriate but, for instance, healing is an absurd notion for those who have died. Not all the wounds inflicted can be healed. To talk about an entire society recovering from the consequences of violence has its appropriateness but we need to appreciate that we are moving by way of analogy. And we have to ask the question: what do we mean by 'therapeutic' processes for collectivities?

The Importance and Limitations of Politics

We were always clear about the importance of politics and the limitations of politics. Political arrangements are of importance; positively because of the possibilities they give for human flourishing, for enabling people to live together and for the mediation of conflict; and, negatively, for the protection they give against violence and injustice. However, politics cannot establish the Kingdom of God and a relative peace, justice and reconciliation is all that is obtainable in a disordered world - the world of the 'penultimate' in the words of the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, where politics belongs.

The Christian tradition has always been clear about the need for the order of the State and that this order depends on violence (Romans 13, St Augustine, etc). It has also been clear about the potential for diabolic violence lying in the State (Revelation 13). The State always uses violence to drive out violence. This 'legitimate' violence is governed by the rule of law and assent to law, and seeks a monopoly for itself within the territory of the State. We cannot do without the order of the State or its 'necessary' violence - this is the darkness at the heart of order.

At the same time there is a biblical concern for justice (understood as living in right relationships) both in the New and Old Testaments. This concern refers to securing and guaranteeing the livelihood, well-being, freedom and dignity of every person in the community. Thus the upholding of social order must be challenged and constrained by a concern for justice. Rulers are answerable to God and are to be called to account. Power must be exercised within limits.

All of this suggests that it is important to understand reconciliation in an eschatological perspective; it always in its fulfilness lies beyond us. And there is the hope and dream of a world *"on the far side of revenge"* (Seamus Heaney). We live in the tension between our hope and dreams and what can realistically be expected in this fragile and fractured world.

The Faith and Politics Group

The Faith and Politics Group began when a motion was passed at the 1983 Greenhills Ecumenical Conference calling for the setting up of a Christian Centre for Political Development to analyse the relationship of churches to politics in Ireland. A steering group was set up and a number of people co-opted in an individual capacity. It quickly became clear that a Centre was not a realistic goal and the best role for the group was as an unofficial think-tank. Around 30 people have been involved for varying lengths of time since 1983. Here is what we were and what we experienced:

- all sorts of mixes: clerical/lay; male/female; North/South; Protestant/Roman Catholic. Some were parish clergy, some worked for ecumenical organisations, some were academics, some were members of communities of reconciliation, some were involved in practical peace work, some were theologians
- A mixed groupofChristiansfocussingonrealfaith/lifeissues
- there was a discipline in meeting together
- we left the tendency of always speaking from and to 'our own' side, but we had tentacles into different communities; we were not without roots.
- we told each other about our experiences and worked on their meaning
- there was no holding back - it was honest and engaged
- differences in the Group were tolerated and even valued
- agree, disagree and live with, that's what we wrestled with
- an important sounding board at a time of crisis
- we sought to discern 'the signs of the times' in events and politics
- the 'other' was present in the writing of our documents
- we were influenced by a lot of different people from both inside and outside Northern Ireland. We learnt a lot from the work of the political scientist Frank Wright and the Croatian theologian Miroslav Volf.

We were, in a small way, a laboratory of reconciliation. The Group has always contextualised its theological thinking in the particularity of the Northern Ireland conflict. This present document is not such a contextualisation but arises from a context. It uses the Group's thinking and reflection over 20 years to offer some perspectives on the meaning of reconciliation. In particular, it uses material from two documents: *Doing Unto Others* (1997) and *Remembrance and Forgetting* (1998). It is a 'thought-experiment'. an exploration, a journey, offered in the hope that others may find it of value in their situation. It is particularly offered as a contribution to the World Council of Churches' Decade to Overcome Violence.

BELONGING, MEETING AND EMBRACE : A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

Encountering the Other

God has made human beings in His own image (Gen 1: 26); all humankind share equal dignity and are owed equal respect. However, in the biblical vision there is no humanity without relatedness. The image of God in human beings is bound up with mutual inter-relationship and inter-dependence (Gen 1:27). In this picture we are not individuals on our own but persons in community who collaborate with God. This community of persons extends to social and political units. The creation stories in Genesis do not end with the creation of humanity in Chapters One and Two but with the creation of the tribes and nations in Chapter Ten. God is the author of our common humanity and of our diversity.

The first two chapters of Genesis affirm the goodness of creation. However, what follows is the story of the Fall and, leading from it, the beginnings of human conflict and violence. At the heart of this account (in Gen 3:5) there is a primal moment of human misrecognition: the false and envious perception that God is someone to be rivalled with. This rivalry means that human identity - rather than being given - establishes itself over and against God (and our fellow human beings). Such an identity always has something of violence in it.

The story of the Fall does not conclude with the story of the exclusion of Adam and Eve from the Garden; instead it concludes in Genesis Eleven with the confusion of tongues at the Tower of Babel and the scattering of the nations, as the nations too rival with God.

Fundamental in the Genesis story is how alienation from God brings a deep insecurity into human affairs. Fear of the neighbour, rather than trust in God, becomes a governing factor in human relations. We live in cultures estranged from God. In this insecurity we do two things: we create our own substitute 'gods' or idols, which belong exclusively to us and seem to offer the security we need. And we use our differences from others to give ourselves esteem and identity as individuals or a group. Our group is purer and inherently superior: we are what we are because the 'others' are not what we are - and therefore not so good as us. At the same time they excite our envy, our fascination and our fear. By their presence they question and limit us. These attitudes involve self-deception, misrecognition of others, self-hatred, hatred of others, rivalry, exclusion and victimisation. Inevitably our victims, when they can, victimise us in return.

So we live defensive lives, dominated by the 'realism' of fear. This realism says that we must always retaliate when offended, that we must always look for revenge, that we must always be ready for war, that we must dominate or be dominated. If we cannot dominate or eliminate the threat, we may accept the 'peace' of mutual deterrence, or we may separate ourselves from the other. The weight of our threat or the distance between us and the other become the measure of our security. Such 'solutions' lessen the possibility of violence. Nevertheless they are ways of life based on fear of the neighbour. Stories of what the other has done to us, or will do if we don't defend ourselves, become our controlling narratives. Stories of trust or co-operation are forgotten or not believed.

What does Christian faith have to say to this? The Gospel offers us an alternative reality to fearful frozen and defensive living. It invites us to imagine ourselves and our world differently. Reconciliation in Christ takes us to a new place - the house of Christ - where we think, speak and act in his way where fear becomes trust and hurt permits healing. Christ breaks down the middle wall of partition and invites us all into a space created by him to find people who were previously our enemies. New conversations are opened up with liberating

possibilities. The present becomes a place for risk-taking and for participation in the transformation that God is working on the earth.

All identity is created in the encounter with the other. Therefore, how we meet the other - give them recognition, respect them, give them a place, find ourselves in them - is a central challenge of all human existence. The Jewish theologian Marc Gobin suggests that the stranger - the other - is the essential metaphor of Biblical experience and the key to its ethical stance. The Hebrew Scriptures say that the vulnerable 'other' - including the resident alien and strangers - shall be protected (eg Deut 10:18-19; Lev 25). For, in a fundamental sense, "You [ie the children of Israel] are strangers and sojourners with me" (Lev 25:23). This is taken up by Jesus in the parable of the sheep and the goats when he says that how the vulnerable 'others' - the hungry and thirsty, strangers, the destitute, the sick, those in prison - are treated becomes a test of our real attitude to him (Matt 25:31-46). Thus we are 'decentered' from self and our 'normal' home to the world of others. The ethical implication of all of this is that the positive acceptance of co-existence is a necessary virtue in a world where not everyone is like us. Co-existence makes possible the sharing of a space in a way that offers everyone the possibility of having their identities and traditions acknowledged and given a place.

A Vision of Embrace

We need distance and we need belonging. Group identities offer us homes in which we can belong; a sense of pride, a space where we are among our own, a place of nourishment and security. And at the same time they can become *"fortresses into which, we retreat, surrounding ourselves by impenetrable walls dividing 'us' from 'them'. In situations of conflict they serve as encampments from which to undertake raids into enemy territory."* (Miroslav Volf). Thus group identities are profoundly ambivalent: *"havens of belonging as well as repositories of aggression, suffocating enclosures as well as bases of liberating power"* (ibid.).

Cultural and group differences cannot and should not be removed. We cannot live without differences and boundaries - even if we know that differences and boundaries can be dangerous. We can, however, open ourselves to be enriched by our differences. And, at the same time, different traditions, cultures and languages are cultivated. There is respect for boundaries. But boundaries must be porous; the other is to be welcomed in and embraced. There is respect for difference and diversity, but not sectarianism and exclusion.

Jesus, while remaining completely a Jew, cut across the boundary markers between Jews and Gentiles. He set aside food taboos. He went into Gentile houses and healed (eg the story of the healing of the daughter of the Syrophoenician woman (Mark 7:24-30); he went into the country of the Gentile Decapolis and healed the Gadarene demoniac (Luke 8:26-39)); and he engaged in a profound dialogue with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4).

Paul persecuted the early Christians because he felt the sacred boundaries, which made the Jews special, to be threatened. Paul's encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus changed his whole life. Without wishing to destroy Jewishness he turns away from an attitude that emphasises sacred boundaries to find a new identity in Christ that excludes none. He sees the dividing wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile as being broken down through the cross (Eph 2: 13-16) so that the other can be welcomed in.

Volf describes his vision of what should be through the metaphor of 'embrace':

"In an embrace I open my arms to create space in myself for the other. Open arms are a sign that I do not want to be by myself only, an invitation for the other to come in and feel at home with me. In an embrace I also close my arms around the other. Closed arms are a sign that I want the other to become a part of me, the other enriches me. In a mutual embrace none remains the same because each enriches the other, yet both remain true to their genuine selves.

Embrace, I believe, is what takes place between the three persons of the Trinity, which is a divine model of human community. The Johannine Jesus says: 'The Father is in me and I am in the Father' (John 10:38). The one divine person is not that person only, but includes the other divine persons in itself; it is what it is only through the indwelling of the other. The Son is the Son because the Father and the Spirit indwell him: without their interiority of the Father and the Spirit there would be no Son. Every divine person is the other person but he is the other person in his own particular way."

But it is a genuine embrace based on justice and respect for truth. Not everything that everybody does is to be accepted uncritically.

Such a vision respects borders and boundaries but welcomes the stranger in. It allows for difference but provides for positive and life giving relationship. The vision of embrace is an aspect of the love of the neighbour. There is a close link between the vision of embrace and an understanding of reconciliation.

A vision of embrace seeks to break out of the vicious circle of seeing the 'other' side as always to blame, and ourselves as always the righteous, the innocent and the good ones. We have to learn that the 'others' are human like ourselves, with a good and a bad side, and people to be lived with, even if we have significant disagreements with them. We need to learn about the threat we pose to and the fear we induce in the other; that our fears and insecurities help to create and maintain our enemies: "The judgement we give is the judgement we get" Matt 7:1); that the problem is ourselves (the beam is in our eye) as well as our 'enemy'. The others, although different, are human like us and worthy of respect (respect is the social analogue of love). They, too, have their fears, interests and desires and want to pursue them and, therefore, we should treat them as they would want to be treated by us (Matt 7:12). We do not want to be victims, therefore we must not victimise others. The other is our neighbour with whom we must learn to live.

Embrace is a risk. I open my arms, make a movement towards the other and I do not know whether I will be misunderstood, despised, even attacked, or whether my action will be appreciated, supported or reciprocated. But it also opens the way to surprising encounters, enriching conversation and transformation.

SOCIAL RECONCILIATION

Social reconciliation means people finding a way of living together in difference. It means the restoration of broken relationships. It means wanting the other to be with us and not wanting to destroy, dominate or separate from them. It means being able to take others into account and sharing power, responsibility and resources. It means going beyond the 'right' and 'wrong' of the conflict - the vicious circle of action and reaction - to create new, creative and just relationships *"on the far side of revenge"* (Seamus Heaney). It is the painful
forging of a shared world. Reconciliation in this world is not some finished state. It does not abolish conflict or the friction of living together. It may be and often is partial and incomplete; and it does not remove the intransigent presence of evil.

Reconciliation is not just about an accommodation of various interests and aspirations (a political settlement). It is about the social reconstruction of a society and thus it is also about the rebuilding of the moral order. It is about social transformation: it deals with the hurts, resentments and enmities that exist (the task of repair and healing) and seeks the
transformation of relationships with all that implies at the spiritual, psychological, social, economic and political levels. An understanding of reconciliation is necessarily built on the interlocking dynamics of forgiveness, repentance, truth and justice. It both deals with the past and looks to the future. Reconciliation takes people to a new place.

The German philosopher Hannah Arendt was clear that there were two primary requirements for people to live together: (1) the willingness of people to be bound together by promises and agreements, and to keep them, ie they create a moral order together; and (2) the willingness to set aside the past - its enmities and the vicious circle of action and reaction - and start anew; this is where the possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation arises.

The willingness of people to be bound together by promises and agreements, and to keep them, is necessary for order and trust in human life. But the imperfection and sinfulness of people mean that we frequently fail to keep promises and agreements. Therefore, we have to find some way of setting aside the past with its failures and enmities in order to keep human life going in a satisfactory way. Our very imperfection and sinfulness make this hard to do - particularly in our communal life.

Dealing with the Past

Important in all of this is how people remember and how they deal with past. How people remember profoundly affects how they behave in the present and significantly affects their politics; thus in Northern Ireland the politics of historic grievance and the politics of siege. Our accumulated history - *"the debris we carry with us, each, of hurt and counter hurt"* (the American poet Amy Clampitt) - is part of today's reality. It pushes people back to standing by their 'own' and against their enemies. Unhealed memories can enslave and condemn us to a seemingly endless living out of the past. In the words of the Scots poet Edwin Muir:

"... loves and hates are thrust upon me by the acrimonious dead".

Grasped by the ghosts of the past we are unable to imagine a different future.

Because the past can so possess us it is important that we find ways of letting go what has happened. The following are some of the ways this can take place.

Grieving

We may need to lament and grieve for what has been lost and done, and acknowledge anger, bitterness, pain, resentment, loss of identity and uncertainty. For this we need a language; our feelings need to be released into words. The resources available in the biblical language of lament and the ritual actions of the faith community could be of help in this.

An important biblical theme is that of moving through grief to newness. There is no conflict, especially deadly conflict, that does not involve pain, emptiness and loss. But endings can also be beginnings and we may be able to move through grief to newness. In that movement we may find ourselves reviewing the story we tell about ourselves and imagining ourselves and our world differently. However, in a conflict, our story is not the only story. . .

Telling our Stories

Stories make sense of a community's experience. They use and express values, beliefs and commitments. They give reasons for action and they build community and self-identity. In divided societies stories often conflict; the same events are understood from a radically different perspective. We need to tell our stories to each other and listen intently to what we are told - which involves reaching beyond the words - feeling the pain of the other as transmitted through the 'memory' of their community. This is 'felt' history. Thus, we begin to see from the perspective of the other. We practice what the Croatian theologian Miroslav Volf describes as "double vision", seeing both "from here" and "from there".

The German theologian Geiko Mueller-Fahrenholz describes an exchange of stories between the former German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt and the Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, during Brezhnev's visit to Bonn in March 1973:

> *"On one evening there was a meeting in the residence of Willy Brandt, who was then chancellor. The atmosphere was cordial until Brezhnev began to recall in great detail some of the atrocities committed by Nazi troops in Russia. Everyone was listening with a mixture of respect and dread, because it was obvious that the Soviet leader had to free himself of these oppressive memories. His words had to be understood as an indication of what it had cost the Russians to come to the capital of Germany - the heart of what had been their most bitter enemy.*
>
> *Brezhnev spoke for some twenty minutes. Then Schmidt, who was minister of defence at the time, responded by telling his own story, for he had been one of the German soldiers stationed in Russia. He spoke of the schizophrenic situation of German soldiers who did not adhere to the Nazi ideology but had been educated to be patriots and thus felt bound to defend their country. In recalling this encounter nearly 15 years later, Schmidt comes to a revealing conclusion; he writes that this 'exchange of bitter memories greatly contributed to the mutual respect' that existed between him and Brezhnev despite the fact that the two found themselves in opposite camps from that evening up to the end of their terms of office".*

Dealing with the past may mean walking through our history together, particular visiting together those points that continue to have a painful sting, as Schmidt and Brezhnev did. It may help us recover what we have forgotten, denied, covered up and silenced.

It may mean looking at our symbols - anthems, rituals, songs, festivals, special occasions - and the stories and memories in these symbols. What do they say about the 'other' side? What do they say about us? Is this what we want to say now?

Honest discourse about the past - particularly in the presence of the other - may provide resources for a more hopeful future. The danger is that we refuse to do this and instead we search for people and institutions to blame for what has happened. We make ourselves "whited sepulchres" (Matt 23: 11) who hide our guilt, responsibility and hypocrisy in proclaiming that we are radically different from the people we blame.

Dealing with the Wounds

People and communities must be given a way of dealing with their suffering, wounds and grief. There is a need for opportunities for the past to be addressed symbolically, ritually and liturgically, and for spaces to be *"provided for people to express to and with each other the pain and injustices experienced. Acknowledgement and mutual recognition of the legitimacy of their experience is decisive in the reconciliation dynamic"* (the US Mennonite conflict expert, John Paul Lederach). If hurt, pain, anger, guilt, and loss are not dealt with effectively they will be driven underground, sure to surface in unexpected and harmful ways.

Forgiveness and acknowledgement of wrongs (including apology) are interrelated ways of dealing with what has happened, which may be deeply transformative and necessary at key points in a reconciliation process.

Forgiveness in Situations of Conflict

Those who have been directly affected by wrong or by violence may be able to forgive. That they have been able to forgive is a sign of grace. They, however, cannot be burdened with the demand that they forgive. Nor can anyone forgive on behalf of those who have suffered. We cannot impose forgiveness on people but conditions can be created whereby forgiveness becomes at least a possibility.

Victims have their particular needs: for justice, for the seriousness of the harm to be acknowledged, for apology and repentance from those who have done them wrong, for their stories to be heard, for compensation, for practical support. They have a claim upon our respect, to be remembered and allowed to remember. The past cannot be put right, but we can seek to ensure that it is not repeated. This is one form of memorial to the victims of violence.

What is also required is that the larger community - battered, hurt and damaged by what has happened - be prepared to enter into a more general process of being able to set aside the past - with all its enmities and demands for revenge - and start anew, accepting the existence of the other. This is something in the nature of forgiveness. As the former Zambian President, Kenneth Kaunda, said, forgiveness is not so much an isolated act but *"a constant willingness to live in a new day without looking back and ransacking the memory for occasions of bitterness and resentment"*.

Such a process of communal forgiveness takes what happened seriously; thus, truth seeking and telling are important. It does not trivialise or condone violence and injustice. Guilt and responsibility remain. What such a process does do is seek to bring peace to the past for the sake of the present and the future. The goal is healing and a move forward into new relationships. It is about rebuilding what has been torn to pieces, creating trustworthy and sustainable structures and providing secure social spaces for people. Such forgiveness is made easier when there is evidence of people acting in new ways, eg decisively moving away from violence or being prepared to negotiate new and just political arrangements, or when regret or apology is expressed for what has happened.

If we fail to forgive we will hand on our bitterness to the next generation. The conflict in the former Yugoslavia is an example where bitterness was handed down; not only from memories of atrocities committed during the Nazi period, but going back generations before that, even to the wars between Christian and Turk. And, if the politics of grievance is not given up, the past keeps everyone in its grip. Either we find ways to forgive or else we separate from, or seek to destroy, each other. Thus, forgiveness is a practical necessity for continuing to live together.

Acknowledgement of Wrongs and Apology

People have to live with what they have done or been involved in. It is in this context that repentance arises: stopping what we are doing; recognition, examination and acknowledgement of wrong doing; finding another way; seeking forgiveness; and seeking to repair the harm done. Repentance involves turning and changing one's ways.

Clearly we are not responsible for, or guilty of, acts we have not done, or in which we have not been directly involved. At the same time, we belong to groups, communities and nations that have done things which were wrong, in the distant or more immediate past. Our history has often imposed suffering on others and often brought benefits to ourselves. We cannot run away from this history and its consequences, for we are caught up in it, even if we are not personally guilty. The past affects present realities and relationships. Thus, there is a solidarity in sin, which involves the living and the dead.

Acknowledgement of wrongs done and hurts caused represents a facing of the reality of what a particular group, community or nation has done. Our acknowledgement of what has happened, our willingness to review the story we tell about ourselves, our sense of regret and our disapproval of past actions by our group or community are forms of respect for past generations and present day victims. They open up the possibility of conducting our relationships in the present in a more generous and just way.

Acknowledgement of wrongs done and hurts caused may take the form of apology. Apology is the verbalised face of repentance. It opens up the possibility of reconnection with the other. For instance, the Stuttgart Confession of Guilt in 1945 recognised the Evangelical Church in Germany's share of the responsibility for the terrible things done during the Third Reich. It paved the way for an honest approach to what had happened and for that Church's re-entry into the ecumenical community.

Apology - clearly and publicly expressed - is one way of saying to people that we wish to make a break with the past. Of course, apology has to be followed by or linked to, an

attempt to undo wrongs and act differently - to establish a new justice and a new relationship. And it involves risk and vulnerability.

Public rituals of atonement are important to help individuals come to terms with the painfulness of their societies past, for their healing and for reconciliation. As the Canadian political commentator Michael Ignatieff says about one example of such symbolic politics:

> *"When President Alwyn of Chile appeared on television to apologise to the victims of Pinochet's crimes of repression, he created the public climate in which a thousand acts of private repentance and apology became possible. He also symbolically cleansed the Chilean State of its association with these crimes."*

But symbolic actions - particularly actions which express human vulnerability - may be more important than any words; for instance the West German Chancellor Willy Brandt falling to his knees at a monument to those who died in the Warsaw ghetto rising. Brandt witnessed to a world beyond power and politics, and the need for atonement.

It has been shown in many situations that it is important for a public account to be rendered of what happened and who was responsible. Wrongdoing and injustice are publicly acknowledged. Thus Truth Commissions have been established in such countries as South Africa, Chile, El Salvador and Guatemala. In Northern Ireland the Saville Inquiry has been looking into the events surrounding Bloody Sunday in Derry/Londonderry in 1972.

Rendering a public account of what has happened and who was responsible does not free us from conflicting interpretations, clashing memories, etc, about the past. Focussing on specific events may bring its own distortions and community anger. (Why this event? Why not this one? etc) 'Truths' about the past may continue to be disputed. Nor does truth-telling necessarily lead to healing and reconciliation (certainly not at once). What may be hoped for is that the range of permissible 'truths' may be narrowed and that particular lies, silences, fictions, myths and denials are effectively challenged. What all of this points to is a longer term need for work to be done on the reconciling of stories and memories, so that there is a recognition of the inter-dependence of our histories and of what we have done to each other. New realities, critical and moral reflection, spiritual transformation, changed relationships and time may open up the possibility of some shared truth being established.

Restitution

Restitution is the restorative aspect of justice. We can never undo and make good the evil that has been done; in this sense strict restorative justice is impossible. We can seek to repair the damage that has been done, where that is possible. However, restitution should be seen more as an act of compensation that fulfils certain functions in the present: firstly, as a sign of recognition of the seriousness of what has happened; secondly, as a sign of the seriousness of repentance; thirdly, it meets some need of the victim; and fourthly, it aims at facilitating a more human future. Recognition and respect are given to the victim, or their memory.

The idea of restitution has become increasingly important in national and international politics, for instance in relation to the Holocaust, the treatment of indigenous peoples in Australia, New Zealand and the United States, and the internment of Japanese Americans during the Second World War. The process of negotiating restitution agreements has involved a process of dialogue - a social conversation - between victims and perpetrators

about the meaning of events. It brings new recognitions about intertwined pasts, about inclusion, about injustices and the need to right wrongs - if only partially. Such a process opens up the possibility of reconciliation.

Punishment

Punishment is the punitive aspect of justice. We cannot do without some form of punitive institutionalised response to wrongdoing, no matter how inadequate and imperfect it may be. Punishment of the perpetrator is a statement that the injured person matters. Through the criminal justice system the perpetrator is called to account and held responsible for their misdeeds. The truth of what happened is hopefully revealed and there is the possibility of the victim's story being told. The perpetrator pays for what they have done and this is reflected in the seriousness of the sentence. Punishment is one way respect is shown to the victims (and their families). And punishment helps restore the moral order of society.

Punishment necessarily individualises guilt. In the context of community conflict (former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone) the pursuit of justice through the legal system is an ambiguous and frustrating activity - for instance, difficulties can arise from selective prosecutions and this can undermine perceptions of fairness. The courtroom focus on specific individuals and specific events can distort. Important issues such as why something happened, the chains of responsibility, the hidden cultural or social triggers can be lost within the confines of the courtroom. Trials of particular war criminals can too easily close off the past with broader issues of responsibility not faced up to.

Community conflict creates a context where there are all sorts of degrees and categories of guilt: that of the ideologues who promote hate and prepare the ground for violence; that of those who plan and direct acts of violence; that of those who plant bombs and pull triggers; that of helpers and supporters; that of condoners and bystanders; and so on. There are sins of omission and sins of commission. There are the sins of people who journeyed into the far country of violence. There are the sins of the people who stayed "at home", who remained law abiding but who have been consumed by anger, resentment, self-righteousness and the refusal of generosity. There are the misdeeds of groups, eg paramilitaries, and there are the misdeeds of the state, its agencies and agents.

An aspect of all of this is the systemic - the transindividual - reality of evil - something particularly evident in conflict situations. This reality generating its own momentum and logic. Part of the dynamic is the seductiveness of violence and its endless justifications, and the fear, dread, hatred, excitement and frenzy which carry people along, "the diabolic forces of violence" in the words of the German sociologist Max Weber.

This is not to say that we make no distinctions between actors, actions and activities - for this we **must** do. Clearly some have suffered far more than others. Some individuals, groups and institutions have killed and injured far more than others, and thus carry more guilt and responsibility. Horrendous actions are **not** automatic, or even 'understandable', responses to someone else's behaviour, or to injustice, or to history, or to the 'system'. Human beings remain moral agents. Conscious options for violence are made. What we **are** suggesting is a moral complexity - a tangled web - of which we are all part.

Part of the complexity is the issue of the punishment of perpetrators. On the one hand the perpetration of violence and injustice demand punishment and this is why the granting of amnesty in many countries in South America was greeted with outrage by many. Impunity

means that the past and what happened are not faced up to. There is no accountability and no justice.

On the other hand political necessity and prudence may argue for amnesty, amnesia, forbearance and mercy, so that a new start may be made. Managing a peaceful transition requires deals to be made and the loose ends of history to be left dangling. For instance, De Gaulle managed the transition in postwar France by pretending that all French citizens had been outstanding patriots. The sorry history of the Vichy regime and collaboration was swept under the carpet. What happens is that the issue of blame is avoided or displaced elsewhere and instead the emphasis is put on responsibility for the future. The exigencies of politics and the balance of forces may well push the issue of how the past is to be dealt with in a particular direction.

A Christian account suggests that there has to be a remembering of and a reckoning with the past. It will, however, seek a certain kind of remembering: remembering the past in order that we do not repeat the past's destructiveness, so that we become different people. It will also seek a certain kind of forgetting: forgetting not as amnesia but rather as a release from the full weight and burden of the past. It will also seek a reckoning, but a reckoning that will put an emphasis on creating a new moral order where people belong together in a context where injustice, antagonism and desire for revenge have been taken out of the situation.

Other Dimensions of Justice

Important in the restoration of a moral order is the strengthening of the law and assent to law. Thus issues of policing and reform of the legal system are central to issues of social reconstruction. In contested societies conflict often focuses on the law and order system. In a new dispensation it has to become a common authority above all groups and citizens.

Issues of distributive justice and dealing with inequalities are also of vital importance. Justice is about having a place, being included in the community, being given what is needed to make a contribution, participating, being taken into account, and being treated as human. Talk about reconciliation is hollow unless there is real change for those who are socially and economically excluded. Authentic reconciliation involves justice.

But the attempt to solve conflicts by simply establishing justice alone or by saying first justice then reconciliation will not work. One of the complexities of enduring conflicts is that the issue of justice gets blurred and deformed in the vicious circle of action and reaction. The pursuit of justice creates more injustices. Because of disagreements about the past there is no agreement about what constitutes justice and equality in the present. It also has to be recognised that groups do not simply lose their histories by the fact of structural change. Resentful histories and mistrustful relationships may simply continue unless people imagine themselves and their relationships afresh. The struggle for justice has to be placed in a context of a wish for recognition of the other, social conversation and even co-operation, ie a perspective of a desire for reconciliation.

Trust

There is a link between a stable normal society and trust. Some degree of trust is required to share a society together. This trust allows a give and take - a form of practical mutual forgiveness - within the limits of political consensus. Failure cannot always be met by blame and retribution.

Political institutions can only operate where there are relationships of trust. They can only function when trust is granted and where politicians and political institutions act in a fashion that generate trust. At the same time the structuring of society and its institutions deeply influences who you can trust.

Satisfactory government depends upon a complex series of trust relationships between political leaders, political institutions and the population. Politics can only work when politicians use power forbearingly; where they sustain the fabric of the community and allow a place for opponents; and where electorates give room to their politicians to give leadership, recognise the burdens which politicians carry and the forgiveness that they require.

It is the central task of political structures and the law and order system to give security, reliability and predictability to society. Their ritual and routine gives stability and offers the possibility of social trust. Institutions acceptable to the vast majority of citizens are of vital importance because they provide the possibility of social conversation, debate and negotiation of difference taking place in all its messy conflictual reality.

The issue of trust points to a further issue, that of belonging together. In democracies legitimate government is based on the consent of a whole people who acknowledge their common bond together. Behind this consent, however, lies a deeper and often unstated acknowledgement and acceptance that despite our differences we belong together, ie there is a solidarity in which there is an inter-dependence and a common good. Inter-dependence and a common good require a shared community where we can belong together.

Trust also requires a re-establishment of connection between people, a re-weaving of the social fabric. Political agreements and institutions, while vital, are not enough in themselves. Connections between people and social institutions need to be made; connections which involve understanding, familiarity and relationships with the other, acceptance, empathy and co-operation. In all of this there is an important role for civil society: churches, business, trade unions, schools, voluntary and community groups, backed by a series of strategies involving government and other public bodies.

Inter-dependence requires a shared community where we can belong together and co-operate on common activities and in common institutions. In a divided society it is not enough to attend to issues of equity and diversity; issues of belonging together, of a shared community, of inter-dependence, of mutuality, must also receive consideration. They are vital to social trust and a key to reconciliation.

Reconciliation and Issues of Symbolic Expression

Nationhood is about the shared story we tell of ourselves and our forebears. It is also how we are described by a place, sometimes by a language, by historic events, by parades, remembrances, ceremonies, celebrations and monuments, by a flag and an anthem. In a

'normal' state these are the things that people have in common and that bind them together. In a contested space the same things are often in dispute and pull people apart. What belongs to one community is often hated by the other. These symbolic expressions engage the affective part of ourselves - our emotions - and are profoundly important.

Reconciliation has to be expressed at the symbolic level as well as the institutional level. It will not be enough to create a neutral public or state space. A symbolic deficit will be created which will inhibit a sense of a shared community. Some 'transcendent' symbols and rituals are required to express inter-dependence and a shared community. Symbols and rituals 'work' when they represent something real, so they cannot simply be artificially created. We have to work at 'growing' common symbolic expression as well as developing real relationships of inter-dependence. We also have to recognise that communities require security at the symbolic level as well as at the institutional level.

Individual Reconciliation

Social reconciliation requires reconciled individuals, people who have undergone personal change and conversion. Behind every collective effort at reconciliation stands certain highly motivated persons whose conviction has been created through important personal experiences and who have become reconciled individuals. Faith communities can help produce and sustain such reconciled individuals, who may be able to play a key role as gobetween people in politics and civic society.

Being a Community of Reconciliation

Faith communities can also be communities of reconciliation and as such offer a 'space' in the world for those who believe that human society can , if only in anticipation
> *"overcome its violent origins, its continuing resentments and mistrust and come to realise its true calling to become the beloved community envisaged in the biblical story. The Churches exist to hold open a social space in which society's structures and practices can be seen for what they are and in which human community can be articulated in a new way"* (Lewis Mudge). .

Some of us are members of a community of reconciliation in Northern Ireland - the Corrymeela Community. Corrymeela has learnt the importance of

- belonging together in a community of diversity
- reconciliation being a practice, and a journey, not a theory or a strategy or a technique
- safe space where people can come and meet each other, where there is an atmosphere of trust and acceptance and where differences can be acknowledged, explored and accepted
- presence and accompaniment - of people who can give time and attention
- acommunityoffaithbeingabletobringhealing,ofbeinga"touchingplace"
- encounter and relationships; it is only in encounter and relationships that words like trust, reconciliation and forgiveness become real
- the importance of acknowledging and sharing our vulnerability
- people telling their stories and listening to other peoples' stories. Our identities and lives are based strongly on the stories we tell about ourselves, our families, our communities, our countries. Thus we need places where memories are explored and untangled.

- not writing people off as incorrigible baddies no matter what they have done - this is not to trivialise evil or say wrong does not matter
- the avoidance of self-righteousness and an awareness of our own hypocrisy
- surprise and the unexpected; reconciliation is something given as well as a practice
- taking small steps
- being sustained and nourished by hope and a vision of a different future
- being involved for the long haul
- The practice of forgiveness and reconciliation in the faith community may radiate out into the wider society and have its influence there.

In Conclusion

Hope, forgiveness, reconciliation, acts of repair, the reweaving of the human fabric are signs of transcendence, that the world can be different and there can be a peaceable kingdom.