

`Forgiving the Past': Paths towards a culture of reconciliation

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Introduction

How do people come to terms with a legacy of past atrocities, abuses and criminal acts? How can the wounds caused by division and conflict be healed? How can a people recover from collective trauma?

Parallels are frequently drawn between the manner in which a society might come to terms with the pain of its past and Western approaches to treating victims of post-traumatic stress disorder. You can find the same assumptions about the significance of people being able to tell their story in a secure environment so as to purge the demons and thereby create a new life on sure foundations.

I am not convinced of the appropriateness of opening up the past and talking about it as a means of dealing with the hurt. At a common-sense level it would seem obvious that most people want to forget the pains of the past and get on with their lives. Why should anyone want to relive past traumas by talking about them? Those who do are often people whose core identity is as a victim. Earlier this year one of the main stories in the British press was the failure of a libel case brought by an author called David Irving against an American professor, seeking vindication for his claim that the Holocaust never happened. Irving was branded by the judge a racist, an anti-Semite and a pro-Nazi polemicist who distorted the history of the Holocaust to fit his own ideological prejudices. Interestingly, in his commentary on the case, the journalist Jonathan Freedland called for an end to this Jewish absorption with the traumatic events of more than half a century ago, arguing that it was time to give 'the victims and survivors of the holocaust some peace'. Following themes developed by other Jewish writers and historians, Freedland was basically arguing that it was imperative for the Jewish people to find something else to put at the centre of their identity, that the collective fascination and focusing on the Shoah was deeply unhealthy.¹

Of course one should honour the memory of the historical victims of the past. Not to remember them would be to dishonour them. But the point I am trying to make is that you can have too much memory. Too

¹ Jonathan Freedland, 'Let's close the book', *The Guardian*, 12 April 2000.

great a concern with remembering the past means that the divisions and conflicts of old never die, the wounds are never healed. In such circumstances the past continues to dominate the present, and hence to some degree determines the future.

How to address the past in a constructive future-oriented manner? This is a crucial issue not just for individuals but for societies and communities emerging out of division, bloodshed and collective nightmare. There is no simple authoritative model. In the main body of this paper I want to review of the alternative modes of dealing with the pain of the past as a basis for future reconciliation. In the concluding section I will argue that if the process towards reconciliation is to be sustained, then it must be deepened and grounded in everyday life. But before proceeding it is important to examine what we understand by reconciliation as a process and a condition.

Forgiveness and reconciliation

For the bereaved and dispossessed everywhere, that which they have lost can never be restored to them. But, particularly in the case of societies emerging out of division with a bitter legacy of human rights abuses, it is vital for the sake of peace that people manage somehow to come to terms with their loss and prepare to move on. This capacity to let go of the past, to forego the quest for revenge, is at the heart of what many understand by forgiveness. Hatred and the search for vengeance can consume people, turning them into mirror images of those that they hate. Unless people manage to forsake their determination to 'get even', there can be no new beginning, no transformation of relationships. Everyone will remain imprisoned in a particular history or mythology, recycling old crimes and hatreds. As Hannah Arendt phrased it in her book *The Human Condition*, 'forgiving serves to undo the deeds of the past, whose "sins" hang like Damocles' sword over every new generation'.² As such, forgiveness is a creative act that leaves people in a position to move forward into the future together.

² H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1959, p. 213. More prosaically, President Bill Clinton, speaking at the funeral of the assassinated Israeli premier Yitzak Rabin, advised, 'Those who cannot let go of the hatred of their enemies risk sowing the seeds of hatred within their own communities.' (6 November 1995)

Forgiveness, then, is a personal process which refers to the past and does not require the involvement or even the knowledge of even those who committed the perceived wrong, although many would argue that some expression of repentance is a pre-requisite. Reconciliation, by contrast, refers to the future and requires the active participation of those that were divided by enmity. At the core of any reconciliation process is the preparedness of people to anticipate a shared future. For this to occur it requires them not to forget the past as such, but to forgive it, in the sense of freeing themselves from its determining grip.

One of the most perceptive exploration of the different dimensions of this process of reconciliation, and of the tension between them, has come from John Paul Lederach. His insight came from a reading of Psalm 85, verse 10, where the psalmist portrays a place and time where

Truth and Mercy have met together.

Justice and Peace have kissed.

For Lederach reconciliation is the process and the condition where peace, truth, mercy (or forgiveness) and justice meet. In his words:³

Truth is the longing for acknowledgement of wrong and the validation of painful loss and experience, but it is coupled with *Mercy*, which articulates the need for acceptance, letting go, and a new beginning. *Justice* represents the search for individual and group rights, for social restructuring, and for restitution, but is linked with *Peace*, which underscores the need for interdependence, well-being and security.

Following Lederach we can agree that for reconciliation to take place and wholeness and harmony to be approached, people must enjoy a degree of security and freedom from fear of a return of violence and abuse, they must believe that the old sources of division and exclusion are being transformed, and that the pain and hurt of their individual and collective past has been acknowledged. To the extent that such conditions are approached, over time, people will find themselves developing the capacity to forgive - forgiving the past in the sense of letting go of the old hatreds

³ John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997, p. 29.

and the desire to 'get even', and forgiving the 'other' as the capacity grows to detect signs of humanity in those once hated and despised. Then people are in a position to move towards a shared future rather than perpetuating the divisive and destructive ways of the past.

But, these constitutive elements or dimensions of reconciliation as a condition and a process do not rest easily together. Too active a pursuit of justice in societies emerging out of division can result in a return to repression and bloodshed. Too great a concern with avoiding a resumption of violence can mean that truth and justice are forfeited, just as the gift of mercy and forgiveness too readily offered in the form of amnesties to the perpetrators of past abuses can leave many bitter at the betrayal of those same values of truth and justice. Likewise, if one seeks the value of truth above all else, then this can come at the cost of justice - after all, why should anyone confess to their misdeeds of the past if, as a consequence, they will face punishment?

In the following review of the main modes adopted by successor regimes to deal with a legacy of human rights abuses we will see how the past can be addressed in different ways, according to the conditions in which the new regime finds itself and the value placed on the different constitutive elements of reconciliation: peace, mercy/forgiveness, truth and justice.

Amnesia and amnesty - the institutionalisation of forgiveness

In 1975 the Spanish dictator Franco died. He came to power through a military rebellion and subsequent civil war, and after his victory in 1939 his regime became infamous for its barbaric treatment of the defeated Republicans and the repression practised throughout the country. Yet after his death and the transition to democratic rule there was no purge, but rather an exercise in collective amnesia. Everything was subordinated to the peaceful transition to democratic rule - and this exercise in letting bygones be bygones would appear to have worked, the roots of democracy in Spain have deepened.

In the Spanish case this decision to ignore the past, this 'pact of oblivion', was made by elites in order to ensure political stability. There were good grounds for believing that any attempt to sully the reputation of

Franco and purge the military and security forces would lead to a coup attempt. But the desire to cover up the past can also be the wish of people at the grassroots. This is particularly so if many of them share a past which they would rather forget because of their active involvement in, or complicity with, the evil that was perpetrated in their name. For people who have been involved in mass violence such as can happen in a civil war, it can certainly seem as if the past is best left where it belongs, in the past. To introduce it into the present might lead to further bloodshed, conflict and pain.

Here the case of Cambodia comes to mind. There is no denying that in large part the emphasis on 'reconciliation' and the avoidance of 'the spirit of revenge' which has characterised the Cambodian approach to dealing with the pain of the past is a consequence of agreements between the Cambodian political elite and the surviving leadership of the Khmer Rouge. But it is also important to realise that whilst each and every Cambodian family network lost people who were killed or who died unnecessarily during the terrible years of the Khmer Rouge, in those same families there are also likely to be people who participated in the killing or were complicit in allowing people to die from malnutrition and preventable disease prior to the overthrow of the Pol Pot regime by the Vietnamese in 1979. In such circumstances is it so surprising that there has been no great demand for an uncovering of the past nor any overwhelming cry for justice against the perpetrators of the genocide? Where would it end? Who would remain untouched?

However, just because one generation might want to forget the past, it does not mean that subsequent generations will remain satisfied with leaving it covered up. Thus, in the case of Cambodia, half the population was born after the Vietnamese drove the Khmer Rouge out of Phnom Penh, and there is some evidence that they are beginning to voice their demands to know what actually happened during those years in the 1970s, a period to which the current school textbooks devote less than ten lines.⁴

Purging the past in pursuit of a kind of justice

⁴ John Gittings, 'Silence marks Cambodia's bloody anniversary', *The Guardian*, 18 April 2000.

At the opposite pole from amnesia is the active attempt to police the past and prosecute those guilty of perpetrating human rights abuses. Here the example comes to mind of the prosecution of Nazi war criminals and their collaborators that took place at Nuremberg and elsewhere in Europe after the Second World War. More recently there has been the prosecution of former East German border guards charged with the killing of fellow citizens trying to escape to the West in the years before the European political map was transformed in 1989, and the International Criminal Tribunals for Former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda.

In general one can say that the path of the purge is likely to be followed when the new regime has come to power as a result of a popular comprehensive victory over those who are the potential targets of such a purge. In such circumstances there is invariably the will to call to account those that betrayed the common good, and if the new regime feels sufficiently confident of its power and ability to pursue justice without risking political and social stability, then the perpetrators of human rights abuses are likely to be prosecuted.

There is something appealing about the idea of holding people to account for their misdeeds, and the advocates of retributive justice put forward a number of points to support their case.

1. By prosecuting and punishing those who abused the rights of others, future potential perpetrators might be deterred.
2. The indictment of those responsible for human rights abuses individualises guilt. As the German theologian Karl Jaspers said of the Nuremberg trials in 1946, 'For us Germans this trial has the advantage that it distinguished between the particular crimes of the leaders and that it does not condemn the Germans collectively.'⁵ In similar vein Serbs (and others) today might applaud the work of the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia in The Hague for showing to the rest of the world that the horrendous abuses perpetrated during the war in Bosnia were not committed by the Serbs as a people, but by individual and identifiable concentration camp guards and para-militaries who happened to be members of the Serbian community.

⁵ Quoted in Michael Ignatieff, *The Warrior's Honor*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1998, p. 178.

3. The punishment of the perpetrators through due legal process helps prevent the incidence of private acts of revenge and 'self-help justice', and demonstrates that there are other ways of coping with difference than resorting to violence.⁶

Such is the theory, but the practice invariably leaves some room for doubt. The debate over the Nuremberg trials is still ongoing. Was it due process or revenge? The accused were not prosecuted by their peers but by their conquerors, and as such many believe that it was a perverted 'victor's justice' that was served there. After all, if the German leaders were tried for war crimes, what about those responsible for the bombing of Dresden, Hiroshima and Nagasaki? Were they not also war crimes? As Ian Buruma has pointed out, the big question is: 'How to achieve justice without distorting the law, and how to stage a trial by victors over the vanquished without distorting history'?'⁷

Certainly the more recent experience of attempts to punish those responsible for the abuse of human rights under the state socialist regimes of Central and Eastern Europe, to purge them and their collaborators from positions of influence and public office, leads to the conclusion that such efforts degenerate all too easily into witch-hunts motivated by narrow political considerations rather than a concern with justice.

There is a further problem with trials - the *lampistes*, the term used to refer to those in occupied Europe who suffered summary justice in the immediate aftermath to liberation by being strung up by vengeance-seekers. The problem is that invariably it is the small fry, those at the end of a chain of command, who suffer the penalties for crimes committed whilst implementing policies devised by people behind desks with 'clean hands', far from the scenes where the blood was shed. For those paying the price for their actions, whilst seeing others escape punishment, justice can appear not so much blind as arbitrary. The danger is that there is then left a significant section of the population that feels victimised and scapegoated - and the divisions of the past are thereby reproduced into

⁶ See T. Rosenberg, 'Overcoming the legacies of dictatorship', *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 1995, v.74, n. 3, pp. 134-152.

⁷ Ian Buruma, *The Wages of Guilt: Memories of War in Germany and Japan*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1994, p. 144.

the future. So, whilst trials and purges can serve to make the victims feel happy that justice has been done, they might not assist the process of healing division.

The prosecution of those who have violated other people's human rights exercises a strong appeal for those who are convinced that there is a clear division between guilty and innocent, perpetrators and victims. But this Manichean paradigm does not reflect the complexity and the 'messiness' of life under repression. It was for this reason that President Vaclav Havel of the Czech Republic was initially reluctant to endorse any kind of purge following the Velvet Revolution of 1989. He was too aware of the manner in which the machinery of the old regime could colonise people, turning them into unwitting accomplices of the repressive apparatuses of the state. Even in the most bloody civil war situation, such as that which prevailed in Guatemala, especially during the 1970s and 1980s, one has to acknowledge that many of the soldiers guilty of horrendous abuses were themselves poor, uneducated conscripts, overwhelmed by the culture of violence that permeated the military and security forces. Moreover, they faced summary and extreme punishment if they refused to carry out orders. Clearly they were guilty of perpetrating terrible acts, but were they not also victims?

Karl Jaspers, reflecting on the holocaust, distinguished between four types of guilt: the criminal guilt of those who actually committed the crimes; the political guilt of those who helped such people get to power; the moral guilt of those who stood by doing nothing as the crimes were being committed; and finally the metaphysical guilt of those who survived whilst others were killed, thereby failing in their responsibility to do all that they might have done to preserve the standards of civilised humanity. Trials might be valid processes for determining criminal guilt, but they are not best suited to coping with all the different forms, shades and degrees of culpability.⁸

Moreover trials have their limitations when it comes to unveiling the truth about the past. They are combative encounters where defendant and

⁸ Jaspers' friend Hannah Arendt wrote to him that the scale of the Nazi crimes revealed the limits of the law, for no punishment could match the enormity of what had been done. Cited in M. Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1998, p.47.

prosecutor compete to get their version of the truth accepted as authoritative. In this process both sides are engaged in what we might term the manipulation of history, insofar as they each have an interest in concealing some aspects of the past and highlighting others. As part of this process trials can serve as morality plays, where good triumphs over evil and the guilty are made to pay the price for their misdeeds. As such they might function as symbolic history lessons, but they are not the best means for dealing with all the subtleties of the past. For that another approach seems best suited - that of the truth commission.

Uncovering the truth, but whose truth and what about justice?

Whereas trials and purges are aimed at punishing the perpetrators of crimes against their fellow citizens, the prime concern of the truth commission approach to addressing the pains of the past is with the victims. The aim is to identify them, to acknowledge the wrongs done to them, and to arrive at appropriate compensation. The intention is that through such a process they might be helped to come to terms with their anger and bitterness. The pattern was set by the 'National Commission on the Disappeared' established in Argentina in 1983. In its report the Commission tried to unveil the secrecy surrounding the torture, killing and disappearance of the thousands of victims of the military regime. Chile followed its neighbour's example in 1991 when the report of the 'Chilean National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation' was published. Chile's president, Patricio Aylwin, marked the occasion by appearing on television to apologise on behalf of the nation to the families of the victims of Pinochet's regime. More recently there has been the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission.⁹

When one considers the situation that faced the civilian regimes that succeeded the military juntas in South America, and the unstable 'law and order' situation that confronted the new post-apartheid regime in South Africa, it would seem that the truth commission is the approach adopted by regimes that lack either the will or the means to prosecute the perpetrators of political crimes, but where the policy of 'forgive and forget'

⁹ See C. Villa-Vicencio and W. Verwoerd, eds., *Looking Back, Reaching Forward: Reflections on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa*, London: Zed Books, 2000.

is not viable because of the depth of division and level of bitterness in society. Such a situation is generally associated with the following conditions.

- i) When the number of those complicit in past evils is such that their prosecution would destroy any possible basis for future reconciliation and the development of a common sense of nationality and citizenship.
- ii) Where a significant proportion of those who would be targets of any purge are from one particular ethnic group or community within the wider society, with the result that a purge might lay the basis for future social and political division in the form of ethnic or communal conflict. An important factor in such a situation would be the desire on the part of the new regime to avoid provoking any secessionist tendencies on the part of any community or ethnic group.
- iii) Where the new regime is not confident that it possesses the power or the ability to carry out a purge, because of the relative resources controlled either by those who would be chief targets of any purge or by their patrons within and outside the country.

Such conditions are likely to prevail when, rather than enjoying an outright victory over the old regime, the new regime has come to power through some negotiated process involving either the likely targets of any purge and/or their patrons.

Samuel Huntington distinguished between three types of transition with different consequences for processes of democratisation: *transformation*, when elites take the initiative to bring about change; *replacement*, when the initiative is solely from the opposition; and *transplacement*, when democratisation comes about through joint action by government and opposition.¹⁰ Like all ideal-types or models, Huntington's three-fold distinction is only useful to the extent that it throws light on the phenomena under consideration. But in thinking about

¹⁰ S. Huntington, *The Third Wave*, Oklahoma City: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993.

the kinds of factors that predispose new regimes to adopt a particular approach to the legacy of past abuses, the typology does seem to have some utility. Thus, we might depict the transition in Spain as one of transformation, an elite negotiated process that resulted in a strategy of letting bygones be bygones. The transitions in East and Central Europe during 1989, like the liberation of continental Europe in 1945, were more clearly forms of replacement, the defeat and overthrow of the established regime through pressure from below and from outside, which resulted in a greater emphasis on the pursuit of justice against those responsible for human rights abuses. Finally, the transitions in Argentina and Chile, and in South Africa, can be classified as forms of transplacement, the result of pressure from below forcing the regime to negotiate the terms of transition, and which resulted in the acceptance of the pursuit of truth over justice as the means of dealing with the legacy of abuse, bitterness and suffering.

The advocates of the truth commission approach argue that they are central to the promotion of reconciliation in divided societies, healing wounds that trials and purges can deepen. In the literature one often comes across the quote from a bereaved Uruguayan woman who confessed 'I am ready to forgive, but I need to know whom to forgive and for what.'¹¹ Certainly we know that for the family and friends of victims the process of moving on and leaving the past behind is particularly difficult when they have no definite knowledge about what happened to their loved ones. Too many, of course, never do discover the 'final destiny' of those who were 'disappeared', even after the best efforts of a truth commission. In Argentina the secret burial grounds of those tortured and killed by the security forces more than a quarter of a century ago are still being uncovered.¹²

Supporters of the truth commission approach also claim that without the kind of amnesty that the Argentinean and Chilean military and security personnel enjoyed, then the truth would have remained hidden. People

¹¹ Quoted in S. Cohen, 'State crimes of previous regimes: knowledge, accountability and the policing of the past', *Law and Social Inquiry, Journal of the American Bar Foundation*, 1995, v 20, no 1, pp 7-50, p. 41.

¹² See, for example, Michael McCaughan, 'Argentina unearths 90 torture victims', *The Guardian*, 18 April 2000.

would have refused to acknowledge their role in shameful actions if, as a consequence, they faced prosecution. But, of course, the history that is revealed by truth commissions can only be a partial truth. In fact the very process of uncovering a part of the truth and granting it the status of official, public and authoritative record can serve to cover up other aspects of the past. Thus, in the cases of the Latin American truth commissions, their remit prevented them from naming and identifying the actual individuals responsible for abuses. From the perspective of those that survived this meant that the perpetrators continued to enjoy impunity. Not only did they escape any kind of judicial trial, but they were not even required to acknowledge their shameful deeds. It is a painful paradox that truth commissions can function as means to camouflage exactly those aspects of the past they might be expected to uncover. It is for this reason that some observers have criticised the Latin American type of truth commission as a relatively cost-free way to meet popular demands for an accounting, creating the impression that the past has been dealt with, so that people will be prepared to move on and face the future together.¹³

At the heart of such criticisms is the argument that justice is forgotten in the proclaimed quest for truth, and that the alleged reconciliation is false. To put it at its crudest, the criminals provide a version of the truth in return for amnesty, and the victims are then left to do the reconciling. The survivors are expected to accept their loss and relinquish the quest for justice. But maybe this is the price that has to be paid for democracy and the restoration of human rights. The Latin American regimes that inherited power from the military juntas opted for truth commissions and eschewed trials because they believed they had to make a choice, and they settled for truth and peace rather than justice and bloodshed.

It was because of such criticisms that the South Africans introduced the element of *conditional* amnesty into their model. Any perpetrator of human rights abuses who sought an amnesty did not have to express regret or remorse, but to be free from the fear of prosecution they were

¹³ See, for example, Margaret Popkin & Naomi Roht-Arriaza, 'Truth as justice: Investigatory Commissions in Latin America', *Law and Social Inquiry*, v 20, no 1, Winter 1995, pp 79 -116, p.83.

required to confess their crimes and convince the Amnesty Committee that these had been 'political' in nature and were not committed out of personal malice or for private gain.

Even without formal punishment there is still a kind of justice involved in the public naming and shaming of those who abused their fellow-citizens. Moreover, those at the heart of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission have articulated a broader restorative concept of justice that went beyond the narrow retributive demand that the culprit should pay for their crimes. Archbishop Tutu in particular has written and spoken much about the notion of *ubuntu*, the understanding that we are all part of one community, and that by creating a space within which the perpetrators of abuses might rejoin this community, they can be helped to regain something of their lost humanity, and thereby enrich us all through the restoration of social harmony and wholeness.

Compensation and reparations

For those who have suffered loss and pain, to be denied justice and required to accept an inadequate and incomplete version of the truth is a bitter pill to swallow. It can be sweetened to some degree by offers of compensation and reparations. Thus, drawing on the Chilean experience, the South Africans provided for a Reparations and Rehabilitation Committee charged with recommending appropriate measures 'aimed at the granting of reparation to, and the rehabilitation and the restoration of the human and civil dignity of the victims of violations of human rights.' Its report went beyond setting the level of financial grants to be made to victims of abuse and advocated far-reaching changes in the provision of the means to satisfy the basic needs of the deprived and excluded sectors of South African society. In so doing the members of the committee raised profound issues regarding the relationship between reparations and justice.

New regimes can try to compensate the primary and secondary victims of gross human rights violations with cash payments, educational bursaries, access to health care, the construction of memorials and other forms of material and symbolic reparations. But how do you address the issue of reparations for the vast majority of people who were not affected

directly by the torturers and murderers but who were denied the opportunity to fulfil their potential as human beings because of the 'quiet violence' of socio-economic inequalities and the banal everyday reality of discrimination and exclusion? How do you acknowledge their suffering? How do you compensate them for the violence they endured?

It is doubtful that reconciliation in its deepest sense can be approached without addressing the structures of inequality and exclusion that constituted the framework within which the everyday violence of the old order was perpetrated. After all, how can people begin to orient towards a shared future if their everyday life reminds them of the pain of the past? For people to move together along the path of reconciliation it is crucial that a sustained effort is made to transform the structures and circumstances of everyday life that embody and perpetuate the old divisions between 'us' and 'them', between perpetrator and victim. Only when people feel that the evils of the past will not return, when they believe that 'things are moving in the right direction', will they be in a position to loosen the bonds of the past, relinquish the impulse for revenge and orient towards the future. In other words, reconciliation needs to be grounded in a sustained effort at restitution and 'putting things right'.

Towards a culture of reconciliation

An important role in laying the past to rest as a basis for 'putting things right' can be played by those occupying positions of public prominence. As Michael Ignatieff has remarked, 'Leaders give their societies permission to say the unsayable, to think the unthinkable, to rise to gestures of reconciliation that people, individually, cannot imagine.'¹⁴ But whilst opinion leaders can open up the symbolic space for people to begin to reinterpret the past and consider alternative futures, the pursuit of the values of peace, truth, justice and forgiveness must not be confined to some symbolic realm removed from the everyday lives of the people at the grass-roots.¹⁵ The commitment to a common future must be embodied and lived out in new relationships between people at all levels of society.

¹⁴ Ignatieff, p. 188.

¹⁵ Here I am reminded of the respondent to a survey in South Africa who complained that reconciliation was something she saw happening on the television screen at the hearings of

Some years ago I attended a Peace Studies conference in Austin, Texas. There I met someone who taught a course on genocide, and she explained how she would commence the course by asking her students to consider the different ways they dealt with people begging on the street, remarking on how some folk avert their gaze, ignoring the presence of the panhandler. The point she was trying to convey was that the seeds of the most horrendous crimes against humanity do not start 'out there'. They have their origins in the denial of the full humanity of the stranger, the non-recognition of the other as a human being. That lesson has stayed with me, illustrating as it does the causal relationship between our mundane everyday actions and the mass crimes that are beyond the comprehension of most of us.

So it is that the cultures of violence and vengeance, that reproduce the hatreds and grievances of yesteryear and transmit them from one generation to the next, have their roots in everyday life - in the home, the school, the workplace. And it is at this level that the seeds for a durable reconciliation process must be sown, by means of a counter-culture that embodies those values that are at the heart of reconciliation: peace, truth, justice and forgiveness.

Culture of peace/nonviolence

Conflict is endemic in each and every sphere of life. Out of conflict comes change and innovation, but it can also be ruinous and negative. In societies emerging out of violence and division it is crucial that the value of nonviolence is acknowledged and embodied in the different institutional spheres in order to avoid a collapse into the ways of the past. As Michael Ignatieff has so eloquently remarked:¹⁶

Reconciliation must reach into the shared democracy of death to teach the drastic nullity of all struggles that end in killing, the unending futility of all attempts to avenge those who are no more. For it is an elementary certainty that killing will not bring the dead back to life.

the truth and reconciliation commission, it was not something that people like her experienced in their own communities and neighbourhoods.

¹⁶ Ignatieff, p. 190

Culture of truthfulness

The different parties to a conflict each have their own history, and people do not relinquish their collective memory easily, insofar as it invariably constitutes such a key component of their collective identity. However, to ensure that rival narratives do not fuel future conflicts it is vital that people learn to acknowledge the validity of other people's 'truths'. This is a reciprocal process - it is far easier to render respect to the history of others, if they in turn respect one's own. And it is in acknowledging the reality of the other's history, even when you view the past through a different lens, that the basis for a kind of organic solidarity embodying a fundamental respect for difference can be laid. But this in turn requires people to face up to the flaws in their own past, to acknowledge the reality of the grief and remorse of the other, to begin to realise that the old manichean division between 'us' and 'them', good and evil, is fundamentally flawed. This is why public memorials and commemorations can play such an important role as safe symbolic spaces where competing versions of the past can be represented. Moreover, in the competition between the rival histories, commemorated in different locations and on different days, there is always the possibility that new constructive meanings can be attributed to old divisive memories, ones which emphasise a shared victory over the bitterness of the past.

Culture of justice

In recent years Hans Kung has written a lot about the 'golden rule' that he claims to be present in all the major religious belief systems - 'Do not do to another what you would not want to be done to you'.¹⁷ This moral imperative is of course central to notions of right behaviour. It might be an unattainable ideal - but this does not weaken its significance as a guide to those seeking to establish just relationships in and throughout society. In this regard it bears repeating once again that if people are to focus more on their hopes for the future than upon their fears from the past, then they must be able to experience significant movement to counter the inequalities and injustices that fuelled the old divisions.

¹⁷ See, for example, H. Kung & H. Schmidt, eds., *A Global Ethic and Global Responsibilities*, London: SCM Press, 1998

Culture of forgiveness

Perpetrators have no right to expect forgiveness from those they have abused in some way or another. Forgiveness, in the sense of relinquishing the quest for revenge, is the prerogative of the victim/survivor. But in exercising that power, such people can liberate themselves, escape the grasp of the past, and become more fully human.

At the core of such a difficult process is the capacity to distinguish between the perpetrator and their deeds, and this in turn requires some recognition of the humanity of the other, however difficult this might be. But it is in this acknowledgement of our common humanity that the seeds of a shared future lie.

