

### Notes from Davidson College conference: Feb 2006

(**Paul**) Reconciliation is not working in Australia – no common ground.

(**Alejandro**) The dominant population does not know us.

(**Lucy**) Resources are at stake and the dominant population is not letting go.

(**Leah**) A common ground for all actors is needed. Lack of positive dialogue. Negative dialogue generates more problems. Achieving consensus is a problem on both sides.

(**Irma**) First, work at a local level within and between families. Go from local up not government down. There are no resources (\$\$) for it so working through in-place resources is required (ex. working through the priest)—use existing local structures. Find the common ground. Diversity within the Indigenous population and society at large engenders lack of focus. Avoid toxic dialogue. Develop sense of “local ownership” of the effort through local design and implementation. Share the stories (both sides) and work to integrate them.

*The common ground is where priorities overlap*

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See <http://www.bfsf.org/workshops-seminars.html>

1. **Admission and Grieving:** The first step toward victory and healing, after a primary relationship has broken down, is admission and grieving. As pain is poured out, healing begins to pour in. "The rain of grieving will quench the fire of rage."
2. **Confrontation and Disclosure:** The victim is now ready to confront his painful past and the offender(s) who contributed to it. This process begins with a series of assignments which are set forth in letter form by the victim to his parent(s) and/or offender(s). When these written memories are disclosed, the result is truly life-changing for the participant. The final stage of confrontation and disclosure requires the victim to take accountability for his offenses of retaliation toward his own victim(s). This allows for complete restoration.
3. **Forgiveness and Reconciliation:** This third stage requires a purposeful decision on the part of the victim to let go of the bitterness and rage that previously owned him. He is not surrendering to the offender, but rather the bitterness he feels toward the offender. The choice to forgive is always difficult, but only this decision will bring genuine emotional healing to the victim and those around him.
4. **Restoration and Healing:** After the victim has progressed through each of the three previous steps to healing, he is now at peace with his past and able to regulate his emotions. He must then make a contractual commitment to release his offender(s) and move forward toward rebuilding his current relationships. This results in emotional and relational healing. Only then is he able to develop healthy and lasting relationships.

## Four Healing Steps

**We believe in Confession, Repentance, Reconciliation and Restitution.**

### 🟢 **CONFESSIO**N:

Stating the truth; acknowledgement of the unjust or hurtful actions of myself or my people group toward other persons or categories of persons. (This is often seen as our main theme but this is simply because it is the place to begin and contemporary Christians have neglected it...)

### 🟢 **REPENTANCE**:

Turning from unloving to loving actions.

### 🟡 **RECONCILIATION**:

Expressing and receiving forgiveness, and pursuing intimate fellowship with previous enemies.

### 🔴 **RESTITUTION**:

Attempting to restore that which has been damaged or destroyed, and seeking justice wherever we have power to act or to influence those in authority to act.

<http://reconcile.org/> (John Dawson)

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## USAID Program and Operations, Assessment Report No. 24 **Promoting Social Reconciliation In Postconflict Societies**

Selected Lessons From USAID's Experience

by

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January 1999

### **Social Reconciliation**

#### **Table 2. Social Reconciliation Strategies**

##### **1. Uncovering the past**

- a. Truth commissions
- b. Indigenous mechanisms  
of acknowledging the past

##### **2. Promoting dialog**

- a. Problem-solving workshops
- b. High-profile conferences

- c. Conflict management training
- d. Sustained dialog

### **3. Promoting understanding through media**

- a. Documentaries and films promoting mutual understanding
- b. Peace radio and television
- c. Professionalization of media, both print and electronic
- d. Institutional infrastructure for independent media

### **4. Developing grass-roots structures for peace**

- a. Peace committees and commissions
- b. Peace research and training organizations

### **5. Collaborative activities**

- a. Scientific and technical collaboration
  - b. Collaborative development interventions
  - c. Collaboration in sports, music, and arts
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## **TRUTH COMMISSIONS AND NATIONAL RECONCILIATION:**

### **SOME REFLECTIONS ON THEORY AND PRACTICE**

**Charles O. Lerche III**

#### **Truth Commissions and Reconciliation**

*Purpose.* Besides exposing the truth of human rights abuses, some seemed intended to show the current regime's immediate predecessors in a bad light (Ethiopia, Haiti)

*Time period investigated.* While some commissions investigated periods as brief as 3-4 years (Haiti), several examined one or more decades of their nation's history (Chile, Germany, and South Africa among others).

*Documentation.* Several commissions documented thousands -- and in a few instances tens of thousands -- of cases of abuse (Chile) while others found very few (Bolivia).

*Reporting.* Some commissions have issued no report (Bolivia, Philippines) or a report which was kept confidential (Zimbabwe). In some cases those responsible

for abuses were named (El Salvador, Honduras) and in others they were not (Uruguay).

True healing according to Montville can only come through reconciliation which involves a sequence of three steps:

1. *Acknowledgment*. When oppressors publicly acknowledge what they have done, knowledge becomes, in a sense, truth, and victims are (to some extent) assured that the past will not repeat itself. This in itself contributes to victims' healing and, thereby, facilitates dialogue. However, as Montville (1998) points out: "The act of acknowledgment to be effective must be complete and detailed. The victim cannot accept the omission of any painful episode of loss by the acknowledging side, otherwise the good faith of the acknowledgment will be suspect."

2. *Contribution*. The next step is to take responsibility for past actions, to express regret, and to directly request forgiveness. Again, sincerity, as judged by the victims, is the key to the success of this step.

3. *Forgiveness*. The first two steps by the oppressor/aggressor prepare the ground for the final psychological step, which is the victim's voluntary forgiveness of past injuries. It may take time for victims to express their forgiveness, but true acknowledgment and contrition by the other side will in themselves have a positive effect on relations between the parties (Montville, 1998).

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### ***The Journal of Humanitarian Assistance***

**Title:** The Role of Forgiveness in Reconstructing Society After Conflict

**Cite this document as:** <http://www.jha.ac/articles/a048.htm>

**Document Posted:** 3 June 2000

### **THE ROLE OF FORGIVENESS IN RECONSTRUCTING SOCIETY AFTER CONFLICT**

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Written at LSE, MSc. Development Studies 1998

In 1992, Robert Enright and his colleagues Elizabeth Gassin and Ching-Ru Wu published the results of a five year study conducted among adults in the U. S. outlining an eighteen step process of forgiveness. Called the "Psychological variables engaged in a process intervention on forgiveness", it listed the following progression.

1. Examination of psychological defences.
  2. Confrontation of anger; the point is to release, not harbour, the anger.
  3. Admittance of shame, when this is appropriate.
  4. Awareness of cathexis [hurt].
  5. Awareness of cognitive rehearsal [replaying the scene repeatedly in one's mind] of the offence
  6. Insight that the injured party may be comparing self with the injurer.
  7. Insight into a possibly altered 'just world' view. [issue of justice]
  8. A change of heart/conversion/new insights that old resolution strategies are not working.
  9. A willingness to explore forgiveness as an option.
  10. Commitment to forgive the offender.
  11. Reframing, through role taking, who the wrongdoer is by viewing him or her in context.
  12. Empathy toward the offender.
  13. Awareness of compassion, as it emerges, toward the offender.
  14. Acceptance/ absorption of the pain.
  15. Realization that self has needed others' forgiveness in the past.
  16. Realization that self has been, perhaps, permanently changed by the injury.
  17. Awareness of decreased negative affect and, perhaps, increased positive affect, if this begins to emerge, toward the injurer.
  18. Awareness of internal, emotional release. ". (6)
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**HURIDOCS**  
**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS INFORMATION,**  
**IMPUNITY AND CHALLENGES OF THE POST-CONFLICT HEALING**  
**PROCESS**  
**Gammarth (Tunisia), 22-25 March 1998**

*Impunity and the Post-Conflict Healing Process:  
Understanding the Healing Process and its Needs*

**by Inger Agger**

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**The Healing Process**

Therefore, post conflict healing processes need to address the issue of mistrust and betrayal and this could very well be through critical analysis of the ethno-discourse. Notions of ethnicity and culture are not static, natural or biological facts, but social constructions which are being used for political power purposes.

Apart from this cognitive, consciousness-raising process, the healing process would need to focus around more emotional issues such as mistrust, fear and grief through testimony-

work, organisation of dialogue groups, and individual and group work of mourning and remembrance.

### **a. testimony**

Testimony addresses the problem of truth, because testimony is a way to express truth in a personal and concrete way. The abstract discussion about truth takes on another meaning if testimony is acknowledged as the narratives of individuals about their experiences as they have felt and interpreted them. "Testimonials are produced by witnesses who have been and continue to be the subjects of exploitation and oppression by groups in a dominant social, economic, and political position" (Binford, 1996, P. p>. They are "essential]y individual accounts..." but "they embody collective experiences" (ibid., p. 10). Thus, testimony has a double connotation of something private and individual, as well as something public and political.

On the individual level, testimony can become a cathartic process, allowing the individual to express his or her feelings, but it can also be seen as a constructive way to channel the aggression. On the public level, testimony bears witness to history and can become an important accusation against the perpetrators as well as a legal document of evidence.

### **b. dialogue**

In dialogue groups, people assemble from the various ethnic groups, opening for a change of the demonic or satanic image of the enemy group towards a more realistic conception: not everyone belonging to the enemy group is bad, although some are.

Dialogue involves getting to know the feelings and thoughts of so-called "ordinary" people belonging to "the other side". Ordinary people on all sides are victims of the conflict, victims of human rights violations. They have their experiences and explanations of way and how this happened. So dialogue is a process which follows at least two paths: changing the image of "the others", getting acquainted with THEIR suffering, their feelings and thoughts, as well as remembering and finding out about the truth of what some of those others have also done.

### **c. grief**

However, not only the feelings of fear, hatred and mistrust need to be expressed in the healing process. Grief is also an important and maybe on the individual level the most important need for healing A healing process could be likened to a mourning process - grieving over what one has lost.

It can be very difficult for a victim to understand that the perpetrator also may feel deep grief about his or her acts. Did I really do that, the perpetrator may ask him or herself? So also for demobilised soldiers the grief perspective is necessary. When the war is no longer holy, the heroes become killers. An obvious example is the fate of the returning American Vietnam veterans. Instead of receiving a heroes welcome when they returned, they were condemned by general public opinion in the country which had sent them to war. The way some of these veterans have tried to heal themselves is illustrative of the needs of the healing process. Many have returned to Vietnam and asked forgiveness from

the people, and some have engaged in a survivor's mission, helping other veterans to reconcile with the truth about their government's policy.

So both victim and perpetrator need to go through a process of grief this is what they have in common, and this is what eventually may lead to forgiveness and reconciliation - if it is also combined with a sense of justice.

#### **d. forgiveness**

But it also involves knowing about those human rights violations committed by one's own group, maybe even recognising such impulses in one self. This recognition could maybe lead to "forgiveness" on a deep level - a forgiveness that could liberate from hatred and mistrust.

As expressed by a Chilean priest who was a leading member of the human rights movement: "People often say that they hate and cannot forgive. I have talked to many who have told me that to forgive is a wonderful experience, and that if for them were the real liberation: to be able to forgive, and not to hate. I think this is true. They do not get peace from revenge. To hate is still to be dependent on the persons who tortured them.

To forgive is not the same as to forget. For the healing process, forgetting the painful past is not a positive path. Because what happens if social memory is repressed, or cut off or dissociated? What happens if this unresolved past is preserved "in the icebox of history" ( )? What happens if testimony is not given and the trauma is not integrated into the collective consciousness of the people? What happens if the survivors of violence and human rights violations are silenced and they must live with these experiences as a shameful secret?

Repeatedly in Bosnia, in talks with people from all sides of the conflict, I was told about abuses which had happened during the Second World War - fifty years ago. These experiences had never been forgotten - they had been repressed - stored into the icebox of history. Certain parts of the truth about what happened during this distant war had been silenced by the government during the years that followed. When the lid was taken off the icebox of history, these memories and the accompanying feelings of hatred and fear flared up and could be used in the power struggle for territory by new leaders.

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## **WCC CONFERENCE ON WORLD MISSION AND EVANGELISM**

### ***COME, HOLY SPIRIT- HEAL AND RECONCILE***

#### ***Called in Christ to be reconciling and healing communities***

**Athens, Greece, 9-16 May 2005**

Some **burning issues** that should be addressed while reflecting on reconciliation in general:

1. Issues of **forgiveness**. Is forgiveness possible? How? How do we relate forgiveness to justice? Sometimes Christian understanding of reconciliation is seen as undermining justice procedures. How can this be addressed?
  2. Issues of **reparation**. What reparation is foreseen, or has been granted? Many times the discussion is focused on economic reparation, but talking with victims you realize that symbolic reparation is as important as economic. Church knowledge of the symbolic dimension of life can be an important contribution in dealing with these issues.
  3. Issues of **accountability and responsibility**. Shifting from individual to social level implies to understand responsibility differently. Community and society cannot be seen as innocent or neutral actors. The shift to the social also implies that victims and perpetrators are not only or mainly individuals but collective and social actors. The collective meaning of “sin” (in Adam) and “redemption” (in Christ) in St Paul’s letters could have something to say at this level. The constant need of **conversion** is addressed to Christians as individuals, but also to the church as community.
  4. Issues of **interreligious dimension** of reconciliation. Many times conflict is seen as involving religions, a factor which is highlighted in the media. However existing interreligious efforts for reconciliation should also be stressed.
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