



THE ST GEORGE'S HOUSE ANNUAL LECTURE 2009

THE MECHANICS OF RECONCILIATION TODAY

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In the course of his lecture in this series in 1980, His Royal Highness, the Prince Phillip, Duke of Edinburgh, referred to St. George's House, Windsor, as a place

"Where men and women from widely different backgrounds of conviction and experience can attempt to diagnose the failings of our society under the pressures of contemporary conditions and to grope for cures."

It is within that context that I offer reflections in this year's lecture on an issue which brings together those diverse elements of global experience - community progress and human understanding.

It seems our generation is experiencing a constant evaluation of the concept we call 'reconciliation'. This we are compelled to do in the local and the global. We are reminded of the fracture of society, the break-down of human relationship, the tensions between nations and how human kinds failure to understand the deep significance of our contribution to the fracturing of the natural world have forced into the global vocabulary the term 'reconciliation'. Indeed it will be my thesis that short of understanding the mechanics of reconciliation we have yet to define that process itself. So often the process we call 'reconciliation' has become a form of retreat when other efforts of human progress fail - a sort of comfort zone when other means of solving problems fall short. 'What is needed is reconciliation' is the cry to be followed by a hesitant recognition 'reconciliation is for others to achieve'.

Pastoral theology, international diplomacy and social science today are engaging in a new appreciation of what it means to seek the reconciled relationship. The activity we call 'reconciliation' defies simplicity of understanding because so often human endeavour to overcome division or misunderstanding is an end in itself. Generalisation is impossible because each situation demands an individual solution. When agreement is reached it is usually only a beginning to any lasting appreciation of what has been achieved and each stage in the process can produce a fresh evaluation of what we set out to accomplish.

In the Introduction to his book 'Reconciling One and All' (2008) Bishop Brian Castle claims:

"The human soul cries out for reconciliation. This God-given cry starts within and reverberated around all of creation."

For Christians there has always been a recurring call to seek reconciliation in broken relationships within and without Churches as well as in fractured personal and community connections. In a sense the Christian has no option when it comes to priorities in social involvement. Deep in the heart of faith lies the urgent necessity for the follower of Christ to be an agent for reconciliation. More and more pastoral experience in Ministry has centered on the demands and mechanics of reconciliation in the face of a widespread fractured society and divided world. There has been growing evidence that individual Christians as well as Churches are becoming actively involved in fostering reconciliation at the behest of national and public life. It is interesting to note that this evidence co-exists with a period in which reconciliation between the major world religions remains a vision rather than a reality. Nevertheless Holy Scripture abounds with themes of reconciliation, not least in the Gospel accounts of the Incarnation of Christ. It is impossible to contemplate the God-head of Good Friday and the Cross of Calvary without sensing yet again the relationship of reconciliation between God and wayward humanity.

I will not easily forget the evidence gathering we undertook before producing the Windsor Report much of it compiled here in St George's in which we examined Anglican divisions. The sincerity of argument and the strength of feeling all contributed to the obvious divisions of the Communion. So what was the nature of the reconciliation that could be offered? Indeed was reconciliation possible? What in fact emerged was a Report which contained sign-posts, laying out the possible routes to greater understanding of each others arguments. Anglicanism has moved on since Windsor. Now the talk is about a Covenant, about parallel jurisdictions. Inclusiveness is compared to diversity with sections of that world family finding strength in alliances of fellow-travellers who maintain their differences of approach to Tradition and interpretation of Scripture through new ideas of authority or 'bonds of affection' - but with little evidence of the cohesiveness of those early years of the Communion. So was Windsor an attempt not at total reconciliation of the irreconcilable but an encouragement to understand more of others' approaches and deeply held faith convictions? Does that represent something of importance about reconciliation? Has it more to do with understanding others than it has to do with producing some sort of stereotype? Is that the core purpose of a process called 'reconciliation'?

Step beyond matters solely Anglican for a moment. In my lifetime the ecumenical movement has become a reality of substance for Christendom. The great historic divisions between East and West demand a new appreciation nowadays. Contacts between the faiths are more frequent and more substantial than even a few decades ago. The historic Reformed tradition and Roman Catholicism have undergone a 'quiet revolution' in relationships. But there remains great frustration in ecumenism. The concept of the speed of the 'slowest ship' prevails. At its deepest level of eucharistic understanding so much remains to be achieved before that unity for which Christ prayed is realised. And all of this prevails as humanity cries out from its darkness and divisions for hope and light, for symbolism of unity and love and for a meaning to it all. Divided Christendom has yet to be that vision of reconciliation through which human kind can believe. Nevertheless ecumenism has come a long way. When we are downcast it is worth looking backwards to see how far we have come. That progress slow as it is may not yet have produced full reconciliation - it has encouraged us to stand where others stand and in so doing to begin the process of understanding. God's purpose for this world.

In my work within the Anglican Communion I have been left with little doubt as to the centrality of

the need for reconciliation not just between fractured Christendom but between members of the same world family of believers. What is known as 'The Windsor Report' - as I have said a recognition that we did much of our work within these walls of St Georges' - sought to produce a road map for greater understanding of the divisions within Anglicanism. Much of that division centred on and stemmed from questions of sexuality, but my experience at that time and since has left me with little doubt that behind the headlines of the main agenda there were significant questions to be asked to do with authority, power and influence. Certainly there were sharp divisions over the question of a practising gay bishop, division that represented contrasting interpretation of Scripture and the understanding of Tradition - but whatever lies ahead for Anglicanism I am convinced that reconciliation must take account of what I have termed those other agendas. What this illustrates for me is that the process of reconciliation often involves the less obvious issues.

I am reminded of the words of the late Lord Hailsham during his lecture on Morality and the Law here in 1984:

"One of the great evils of the present day is the tendency to sound off about specifics without an examination of first principles."

So, what can we say about the mechanics of reconciliation - and what has experience taught us about those first principles which one day may seem to another generation with other priorities to be self-evident.

I approach my subject with some 40 years of Christian Ministry in Northern Ireland during which society has struggled to understand the lessons, causes and consequences of division, violence and separation. In that period sectarianism as well as historic attitudes have produced much human suffering, violent death and a legacy of victim-hood which despite dramatic political progress remains to-day raw and unhealed. The legacy of victim-hood continues to surface in ways which dictates attitudes and renews division. The power of memory remains the most subtle yet easily recognisable ingredient to the continuation of ancient divisions - thankfully no longer exemplified by widespread community violence or sophisticated terrorism - but through words, evidence in Inquiries or the Courts and in the maintenance of sectarian attitudes in a new generation. It remains in the concept of what constitutes a victim - and it remains in the arguments which have to do with how society should or should not recognise the suffering of the past. Truly, Northern Ireland has witnessed unbelievable political progress. It remains questionable how far Northern Ireland has experienced true reconciliation.

There is a perception abroad that political progress towards political co-operation and dialogue equates with community reconciliation. I have heard it maintained that once such political progress is attained the problems of division and disharmony disappear. It is my experience and my thesis that such is a dangerous and erroneous assumption. The end of apartheid in South Africa was a momentous moment in history. Social change was dramatic even before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission made its contribution. But did the same brush stroke produce a

country at complete peace with itself? In the post-conflict situation in Chile much effort achieved political co-operation of a relatively high quality: but there is much evidence that more was needed. Legislation outlawing inequality and discrimination in the United States following the civil rights revolution did not bring a universal change of community attitudes. In Northern Ireland the Downing Street Declaration and later the Good Friday Agreement heralded a new dawn for the Province and the political landscape changed beyond recognition. But I suggest that reconciliation there is still at a tender stage. Ancient battles are still fought in words. Peace walls continue. Sectarianism attitudes still blight young lives. Walls of hearts and minds remain. Nothing should ever be taken from the historic political achievements we have seen. But political agreement does not mean universal community transformation.

The truth is this : we cannot legislate for reconciliation. People cannot embrace reconciliation through law alone. Legislation can put in place the bricks which can ultimately make reconciliation possible either by outlawing those actions or attitudes which mitigate against a reconciled community or by encouraging policies and attitudes which help people of different traditions to understand each other better. But there is, I suggest, inherent danger in assuming a stroke of the political pen solves all problems.

Nor does community reconciliation depend on universal acceptance of agreement. I have detected in some learned papers and academic contributions to this debate the notion that reconciliation requires surrender of traditional principles - principles often of a political nature. For that reason too often reconciliation principles have been interpreted as some sort of weakness. The growth of the ecumenical movement in Northern Ireland was accompanied by accusations of 'sell out' by fundamentalist groups who mounted protests on many inter-church occasions. Basically at the root of such attitudes is the uncertainty which all too often accompanies the unknown. Nor is such a phenomena confined to religious affairs. Politics is not immune from fear of the unknown. In many past conflict situations a lack of confidence is synonymous with the speed at which change is attempted. Often the timing of such reforms assumes a significance equal if not more important than the substance of what is attempted. Suspicion of motives can too easily become a barrier of importance to the achievement of understanding. The faces and voices of fear often present themselves when change in society appears as compromise with individual principle and the abyss of an uncertain future.

In any discussion of reconciliation there are clear themes which emerge which are not always self evident. Undoubtedly the most obvious is the allied process of understanding: the build-up of trust because we can overcome initial suspicion of another's position, the removal of false perceptions of another's motivation, the understanding of 'why' and 'how' of someones' position with which we disagree and in a real sense the process of allowing another party to understand our position in new ways. Such are the basic and somehow obvious ingredients of greater understanding as a step towards reconciliation. I say 'somewhat obvious ingredients', yet history records much evidence of a failure to allocate sufficient effort at such basics of the process.

In my own experience of the sectarian divisions of Northern Ireland I have been impressed, indeed moved, by the results which can be achieved by bringing together people who appeared bitterly antagonistic to each other. I have witnessed the slow breakdown of barriers simply because people can put a human face on 'the opposition'. In the 1970's it was not easy to arrange such encounters. But on those occasions when it was possible I would not claim I witnessed miracles, but I did see, once the initial glances and exchanges of hostility evaporated, the slow recognition

that each had something in common, that fears were in fact mutual, that social conditions were the same on both sides of the divide and that what was literally 'eating away' at family life on one side was exactly the same experience on the other. To put it simply the age-old human dynamic of personal inter-action face to face holds endless possibilities. Part of the process of addressing traditional difference between communities has been the recognition of equivalence in circumstances. Working class areas of Belfast have suffered most in the years of violence. It has been part of the process of community understanding to see that concern on unemployment, education, recreation opportunities and public health provision are common to both sides of the 'divide'.

Our global family is acutely aware to-day of the phenomena designated 'international terrorism'. We are equally aware of the inter-action of the multi-faith and multi-cultural society, full of danger yet full of possibilities for human progress. The British Government's strategy for countering international terrorism, known as CONTEST, has been in place since 2003. It is implemented under four strands: Prevent, Pursue, Protect and Prepare. In the context of this discussion it is the first of those principles which is of significance - Prevent: This involves, to quote the Home Office Report in 2008: 'to challenge the violent extremist ideology and support mainstream voices! It is also under this heading that any discussion of reconciliation touches the nature of a divided society in which terrorism could flourish. For community violence always represents the failure to embrace community reconciliation. As the Dialogue Society among others have pointed out there are two main problems for the Government in fulfilling this objective: how best to support mainstream Muslim voices so that extremist ideology can be isolated and second supporting mainstream voices while opposing extremist interpretations can be regarded as eroding its effectiveness through an appearance of reactivity. While it can be interpreted as dangerous to be reactive in the extreme sensitivities of any approach to diminishing the threat of violence my experience equally warns against the danger of over-reaction. The most useful contribution of such as the Dialogue Society is to encourage thinking on alternative means of what the government identifies as 'Prevent'. Basically that alternative approach not only emphasises sensitive dialogue but also identifies with the teachings of Islam. Such an approach, it is claimed, can weaken, undermine and negate violent extremist ideology.

There is little doubt in my mind as to the vital need to understand afresh the role and potential of dialogue in the process of reconciliation. In to-days Britain the multi-cultural and complex picture of multi-faith communities is a reality. Co-existent with the speed through which this situation has emerged is a whole new agenda for social chemistry and how such diversities can inter-relate. It is encouraging to recognise that in many instances there is a new recognition that the mechanics of strengthening good relations in local areas is in fact the mechanics of nothing more or less than reconciliation. Also I see much evidence of a commitment to reconciliation as a process rather than a definitive fact. However there still persists a basic misunderstanding of the real nature of reconciliation.

I remember visiting a sixth form in a Roman Catholic school in Armagh. After my talk came the inevitable Q and A period. One pupil asked a question which illustrated the heart of what I feel it means to speak of reconciliation.

"Archbishop can you tell me how I will identify the day I wake up and reconciliation has happened in Northern Ireland."

Of course we smile at such words. We think of the long often up-hill process of community reconciliation - for process it is and it often contains much pain and suffering.

This is particularly significant when we recognise the dangers of failure to build bridges of understanding. Radicalisation involves the frustration of individuals or communities at failure to obtain social change through such methods as peaceful protest. This inevitably leads to the conclusion that for them the social system is the real enemy. Unless opportunities to build understanding through such a dialogue are seized society is only a step away from violence - and that violence is interpreted in our generation as terrorism.

The Dialogue Society has made a powerful argument for addressing radicalisation through dialogue. It concludes:

"Policies aimed at deradicalisation and preventing violent extremism among the Muslim communities in this country have tended to be reactive. This very fact can undermine the effectiveness of those policies".

The Society also concludes:

"The values associated with dialogue and those associated with violent extremism are mutually exclusive: the stronger one grows the weaker the other becomes".

If the case for dialogue in relations with Islam can be argued in such terms then I would contend that there are general principles in the mechanics of reconciliation which if anything make an even stronger case. There are of course the lessons of history. Attempts at dialogue to prevent extremist action in advance of such action contrast with dialogue which has followed the negativity of violent confrontation. In one case I would argue moral argument strongly tends toward the preventative. Argument continues as much about the historical value of the preventative dialogue as it concentrates on what I term 'the what if': how would history have been different had there been greater emphasis on dialogue before the emergence of conflict? Was it inevitable that only conflict would drive parties to a table of negotiated agreement?

I refer again to the experiences of Northern Ireland. Was it inevitable that widespread violence and terrorism would erupt into the years of terrorism on the heels of the civil rights campaign in the late sixties? Was there no other way than the years of such suffering to herald the situation of political agreement to share power as is the case today? How far did nationalism and republican dissatisfaction and inter-community sectarianism make the Troubles inevitable? Did sectarianism in the fifties and sixties make the Troubles inevitable? With the benefit of hindsight what real attempts of dialogue were either ignored or not even contemplated in those early days?

In the entire process of dialogue so essential to defining tensions and thereby increasing contact and understanding the inevitable dilemma comes to the fore. Is it morally justified for the peacemaker to talk to terrorists? This dilemma is of varying degrees of intensity for different activists. For the government there is the question of credibility and timing. For the politician there is the issue of critical attitudes within a constituency from the victim sector. For the Churchman there is the dilemma of "being used" or inadvertently granting credibility to terrorism. I have personally had to address such questions - and they are not easy to answer. But given that a Churchman must be bound to the imperatives of a Gospel which demands every avenue must

be open to end violence and to present the moral imperative of peace there is no alternative I believe for the Christian. The risks are immense. Confidentiality and trust are both fragile elements in this world. Misunderstanding of motive, changes of interference and naivety to say nothing of deliberate mis-interpretation abound. My experience of such situations stretches back to those dark days of Northern Ireland's Troubles. My memories of those contacts and conversations remain vivid. But I have no regrets.

Professor Padraic O'Malley of Boston University with whom I have had the privilege of working in the past, has recently enunciated the view that real and lasting results in dialogue come from contacts between those who themselves are or have been engaged in violence. He argues that only such persons really understand the mechanics of dialogue in such circumstances. Clearly such an argument raises its own issues and I can understand where O'Malley is coming from. The identity of the mediator is just as vital as his or her mediation and in that the former practitioner of violence can make assumptions, use common approaches, that those from outside cannot emulate. However there are also difficulties in O'Malley's assumption - and they exist around motivation and the desires of wider society.

Some of the confusion involved in any discussion of reconciliation arises from a failure to distinguish between reconciliation of individuals involved in a breakdown of relationships and reconciliation between groups, communities and even nations. The U.S. Agency for International Development has pointed out that use of the adjective 'social' is the most helpful way of making this distinction: reconciliation between individuals, social reconciliation emphasises the collective and not the individual.

I feel this distinction is important for several reasons not least because some attempts at social reconciliation face real barriers to success because of opposition by sizeable groups of individuals. Attempts at reconciliation between communities can fail because the timing is wrong: the timing of such attempts can be too soon after conflict has ended simply because individuals in that community have yet to reach the reality of greater understanding and hence a desire to be reconciled.

Soon after the genocide in Rwanda efforts were made to establish seminars to talk about 'reconciliation'. Catholic Relief Services witnessed the failure of those efforts. Rwandans were not ready to reconcile - they found mere mention of the word 'reconciliation' so soon after the genocide to be insensitive, even deeply offensive. The Consultative Group on the Past worked with intensity to examine the legacy of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Its members came from a wide cross-section of society. Their intensive journey together could be described as a pilgrimage towards greater understanding of each other. Some 30 recommendations were contained in its Report based on an extensive public consultation in Northern Ireland, the Republic and the United Kingdom. However we were conscious of the reluctance even the opposition to some of those proposals from individuals and groups who had not yet journeyed through the same pilgrimage as members of the Group. It was concluded by some that the effort was too soon after the guns and bombs fell silent. Perhaps the mistake was to assume society had made the same journey. Perhaps the truth is that social reconciliation has a singular definition as opposed to the process of reconciliation as usually understood. Experience indicates that social reconciliation begins with adversaries acceptance of each other's right to co-exist. Social reconciliation does not pre-suppose tolerance or acceptance of each other. It attempts to promote

it. In some cases it may mark the beginnings of mutual trust.

Theories on conflict resolution emphasise that uncovering the past is essential to social reconciliation. Mutual acceptance between communities remains illusive when clouds cover details of past atrocities. Such a journey of disclosure will heighten tensions in the short-term but most experts in conflict resolution maintain it is an essential step towards community healing. Truth commissions are the most obvious current recognition of this theory. Argentina was followed by El Salvador and Haiti. The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission has been the most elaborate attempt to expose human right violations during the apartheid regime with its stated purpose of restitution not revenge. In Northern Ireland it has been proposed that a Legacy Commission should facilitate opportunities for disclosure of past involvement in the violence. But there is a voluntary element in that case and all depends on a willingness to cooperate. Nevertheless I am convinced that the suggestion remains a key proposal to social reconciliation which has yet to find 'its time has come'.

The eternal question 'what is truth?' can never be far from the process of private or social reconciliation. Beyond the physical and mental scars of conflict lies the damage done to emotions, human dignity and respect - and the nature of truth. In the aftermath of conflict perceptions, falsehood and re-interpretation of historical fact litter the path to reconciliation. Who did what, why did they do it, what is the real truth of what happened? Any society struggling to build a more just and peaceful future cannot avoid such questions. The degree of energy a society is prepared to devote to the process will vary. The degree to which any society is prepared to hear the truth about itself in the past is a sign of its maturity. The risks in discovering what may have been done in its name can be immense.

There is also the argument that the element of compromise which enables political as opposed to community progress to be made can also be a compromise to the truth. 'Let sleeping dogs lie', accept that progress is more important than disclosing the past and accept that the future is all that really matters is a strong argument.

Within the victim arena there are mixed feelings on disclosure of the past. The cry for 'justice' is their watchword. Yet the variations in definition of 'justice' in that quarter are enormous. They range from justice in the courts through prosecutions, recognition of the scars on hearts and minds that they still carry, ways of making society recognise that victimhood continues in its ranks to simply request for information. They also include the uncertainties which accompany 'not knowing who was involved because they could be someone I meet everyday! All such aspects of victimhood are dimensions of truth - they may vary in intensity but they are as valid approaches to truth as a part of reconciliation as anything else. Perhaps the Zulu saying 'All truth is bitter' embraces the reluctance of many Northern Ireland politicians to engage with the past while acknowledging in private that there are issues about the past that one day they will have to face.

Foremost among agencies in Northern Ireland addressing the legacy of the past must be the independent group "Healing Through Remembering". They have maintained enviable integrity in their independent approach to the lessons of the past. They have illustrated the importance of the holistic approach to healing but they have also reminded us all of the importance of the individual victim. Post-conflict society is sometimes over-whelmed by victims and survivors. It can feel awkward in their presence. Yet equally there are immense questions individual victims and victim-groups must ask of themselves. These are questions about what they expect of society, what do

they feel society is really denying them and how do they interpret the degrees of sympathy and recognition society appears to offer them. For society the concern must always be: the use and abuse of victims.

Psychologists tell us that memory is the most subtle yet significant of human emotions. What and how we recall the past has huge influence over our thinking in the present and how we view the future. The myriad of memories of our past whether of happiness and satisfaction or sorrow and disillusionment contributes much to the person we are. In any post-conflict situation the role of collective and individual memory determines so much of how effective efforts to achieve reconciliation can be.

In that epic film 'The Killing Fields' the sheer magnitude of human suffering in Cambodia is laid bare. The relationship between those memories which haunt in the present is vividly portrayed. There is a line which for many of us says it all: "that haunting memory is not just the past, it is the present and as far as we can see the future".

Every effort at community reconciliation demands that we face up to the significance of memory. But also that we recognise the power of memory enhanced by those who are the victims of the past. The memory of hurt, death, injury, perceived injustice, of loved ones and friends who lost their lives - all such memories contribute a highly significant ingredient to how we view reconciliation and perhaps of more significance how we view the emotive subject of victimhood.

George Santayana the American philosopher's words "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" contains a truth to which human history bears testimony. Lessons ignored or unlearned, failures repeated because humanity could not grasp an alternative or revenge and retribution because people could not find their interpretation of "justice" are testimony to the negativity of memory.

In my recent experience as Co-Chair of the Consultative Group on the Past in Northern Ireland I saw at first hand the huge spectrum of what victims call for. It ranges from demands for justice through prosecutions in the Courts, demands for recognition of their victimhood to a simple call to know what exactly happened to a loved one. I recall the mother who simply asked: 'Can you tell me if she had her dinner before she died'?

In my own work across the years I have been amazed by the capacity of those who have every human reason to revert or harbour hatred but have turned memory from the negative to the positive. They have not forgotten - no human has the right to ask them to do so - but they have found a level of misunderstanding against all the odds enabling them to turn hatred into something approaching forgiveness. Even in so doing they attract hostility. For some this will always represent reconciliation as a surrender or principle, as a sign of weakness. When Gordon Wilson's daughter was killed in the Enniskillen Remembrance Day atrocity he was able to talk amazingly about holding 'no resentment'. The young widow of a policeman murdered by terrorists in South Armagh who had every possible reason to resent who spoke of "my sorrow and my sorrow for those who did it". And on the international level Nelson Mandela in his autobiography 'The Long Walk to Freedom' wrote:

"A man who takes away another man's freedom is a prisoner of hatred, he is locked behind the bars of prejudice and narrow-mindedness. I am not truly free if I am taking away

someone else's freedom, just as surely as I am not free when my freedom is taken from me. "The oppressed and the oppressor alike are robbed of their humanity."

In the post-conflict situation in Northern Ireland to-day no one can doubt the rawness and the festering wounds of memory. That fact is found most clearly in what society has designated "the victims". Who or what is a victim? Is there a distinction between an 'innocent' victim and survivor and others? Are there degrees of victimhood depending on who or what they represented: a hierarchy of victims? Such a debate represents a sort of milestone in the road to reconciliation. It shows how deeply felt are the wounds which created victimhood. It shows how close to the surface lie rawness and hurt which can burst on to the surface in an instant. But such a debate is a reality for those who try to move society forward. It cannot be ignored. It has to be recognised in the mechanics of reconciliation.

So the key elements of the healing process we call reconciliation are

- truth
- memory
- justice
- forgiveness

Truth takes us into the morass of discovery, disclosure, admission and evidence. It concerns human willingness to be accountable, to tell a story and to clear a conscience. It is a purpose which raises a multitude of legal questions and issues. It confronts human rights legislation. It depends on the willingness of individuals or groups to step up to the mark and admit responsibility. Above all, it is about society's preparedness to learn the truth about itself.

Memory for some will never release them from the chains of the past. Toxic memories hold people captive now and for the future.

Then there is justice. Everyone has their own interpretation of what justice can do for them. It ranges from prosecution to simply knowing what happened.

But then we have the final links in the chain - that final drawing of the line in the sand - we call it forgiveness.

Forgiveness is often regarded as a specifically religious dimension of reconciling and healing. Forgiveness does not mean condoning the past or even replacing punishment. Forgiveness accepts what has happened in the past but seeks a different relationship to the wrongdoers and to the deed.

Without that sort of forgiveness we remain locked in our relationships to the past and we cannot have a different form of future to look forward to.

The implications of forgiveness are immense. In practical terms the introduction of any call for parties or individuals to show forgiveness demands much - for some the impossible. "I will never forgive them" is frequently heard in Northern Ireland: memories are still vivid, but remains raw and reconciliation is for other people.

Christianity points the faithful to the forgiveness preached by Christ. It points us to the drama of the Crucifixion. It reminds us that it is God who forgives - and that is bound up with our willingness to forgive others. I have seen the depth of resentment when victims are called upon by outsiders to "forgive". They feel demeaned all over again. The truth is - we can never forget but we can remember in different ways - in ways which allow us to have a different relationship with the past and and to the wrongdoer. That for me is what we are called to as Christians. Difficult though it is for many to accept forgiveness is an integral part of reconciliation.

I often recall the words of Chris Rice in his book 'Reconciling All Things'. Writing of his experiences in the deep south of the United States he concluded:

"But the most important lesson of those seventeen Mississippi years was this: even in a deeply divided world, even in the most deeply divided relationship, the way things are is not the way things have to be".

That remains the ultimate challenge in all human relationships - and the art of the possible is what must be the vision and aim of the reconciler.

What did the ancient Rwandan proverb say:

"To go fast, walk alone.
To go far, walk together".

