

Why transformation not resolution? Derek Poole

There are choices to be made about re-balancing the universe: the killings and conflict are a human response to re-balance. Revenge is a moral instinct – it indicates that what you said or did matters – matters enough to reciprocate with equal measure of pain.

What goes on in the mind of the killer and what is the level of threat that makes someone respond like that?

Killing is the most pathological expression of that threat.

Jesus: Do not call anyone a fool because that is of the evil one – in other words prior to taking physical life is character assassination and demonisation process.

There are four elements in conflict of any kind at any level:

- 1) Theological air cover from the pulpit
- 2) Language of history – myth making – rummaging through the attic of our history – caricaturing and stereotyping of the enemy – the use of history to justify the present.
- 3) Language of politics – absolute ideology in defence of political and geographical space – we will lose our space if we do not fight.
- 4) Language of culture: conflict is a threat to identity; identity is vital for sanity, we cannot be sane without a deep identity of self and community belonging, a sense of embeddedness, psychological problems occur when community comes to an end or is lost. Culture provides a place of identity and belonging. Fundamental to conflict is a threat to identity. Threat of what it means to be English if you are Irish, Protestant/Catholic, unionist/nationalist. When two identities clash, two differences interface which create threat – we are threatened and in defence we exacerbate – what happened in Ireland 400 years ago and is current threat to Europe.

Paradox is we need a deep sense of belonging in the world, to be tribal, to have a home/community, and this is fundamental to our well-being. I need to know what it means to be me (or Irish etc.) to have a sense of rootedness in order to be able to offer tolerance to difference. Deep sense of belonging, knowing that I am, gives security to value the other.

When everything becomes reactive, there is no sense of identity, so for Irish communities, deep sense of ethnic culture, community, home and space creates a sense of well-being. My country is an extension of my skin.

When the two sides meet and clash, it is like tectonic plates – “a terrible beauty is born (Yeates) or paradoxically an opportunity for transformation when the juxtaposition of opposites creates dialectic to allow for something new. There is the possibility of destruction or creation.

There will never be resolution between nationalist and unionist – it is for ever. All that is possible is to transform the energy through dialogue, understanding and politics to create inclusivity. So move from base primordial conflict to something more creative.

Raise concept of identity to higher plane than violence. Not to dilute conflict but to sublimate to a higher plane – to bring about a new experience that has not yet happened in history.

We believe that sectarianism is belonging gone bad. The instinct of theology, history, politics and culture has also gone bad, but it is instinct to exclude the other. We can only belong at the expense of the other. We only have identity if we rob them of theirs.

The unpicking of complexities of conflict becomes very difficult therefore we revert to a simplistic formula. The church has done this and says we are all the same – no! we are all different. People see things differently – when he looks out of himself, he sees the world

differently to me. What is devotional space for one will not be devotional space for another. All we need is one great melting pot, put in all the world's identities and each comes out coffee-coloured (Imagine – Lennon) – cosmopolitan is a non-identity.

There are too many stories of conflicts failing because they have been watered down. One cannot end conflict, but we have to find a way to lift it to something higher – evolutionary element in dialectic. Nietzsche said 'the church is a wimp because it does not face difference' - Human fullness comes through transformation.

Church claims all Christians have a transcendent identity that floats free of the actuality and particularity of experience, and that will overcome all our differences – this is an illusion and undesirable as a subversion of the Kingdom of God not fulfilment of the Kingdom. The model from Revelation is the diversity round the throne of every tribe and tongue – a rich vision of engagement with difference which lifts us through ancient instincts to a new age where diversity equals celebration, enrichment and fulfilment. It is not woolly or about power, but dynamic pluralism to find a creative redemptive place where differences find each other and genuine identity can bring about new relationships.

Frost quote – doesn't love a wall – good fences make good neighbours; interfaces e.g. Berlin wall, become destructive when we define identity negatively = what we are not; not only a weak but a fearful identity.

Challenge to the church is to celebrate and affirm identity, give permission to celebrate ethnicity of tribe and nation (Paul). We have to find a way through the walls, but the fences of neighbourhoods and belonging must remain or else we will move everything and leave another identity crisis of no space, no identity and no community.

If we can't resolve therefore we must transform the energy through political inclusion, economic equity, use of language and interfaces that enrich and don't intimidate. We can't resolve the energy of conflict but we can transform it into a creative energy. So we move from tolerance to understanding to dialectic community.

Looking for an identity free of tribal/historical shaping, some find consumerism = vague and nebulous, with its saints who are the celebrities. There is a loss of rootedness and forgetful of history, especially for middle classes who can opt out into vagueness. But for working class, identity is much more visceral located in street or workplace.

Change is coming to monolithic communities with new wave of migrant workers, who are less tolerated by Protestants who are telling themselves that the cultural war has been won by the IRA, making this place Irish and them second class citizens. Loss of pride, loyalty to Queen and country and industries – so they make someone else the bottom of the pile in order to hold any pride.

Transformation in reality – discrimination, threat and fear are taken out on Protestants where the oppressed becomes the oppressor and therefore there is mutual disempowerment and blame – that's the scenario. Transformation here would mean:

- 1) empowerment to participate in political and civic life – both communities represented, to be fair and inclusive – councils, churches, community leaders and paramilitaries;
- 2) cultural and social empowerment – sharing diverse culture on common ground e.g. sports ground shared. Requires creative and courageous engagement, allocation of funds that are just and equitable, and sensitivity to symbols, from territorial identity to cultural identity, leading to celebration.
- 3) Dealing with the hurt. Hurts of the past are palpable, dealing with the past is about redemptive remembering which requires spaces to legitimise pain, remember, and recognise mutual victimhood of each – being victim and offender at the same time.

Within this the church has healing redemptive role.

How do people with power react? About building relationships. Church has failed through bad theology of holiness, taking the pastoral to the extreme and ignoring the prophetic. Churches have not named the principalities.

The task of peace building is generational. Therefore anyone involved has to have a generational vision. It takes as long to wage the peace as to wage the war. Pauline theology of principalities has to be brought to light.

Need political stability – explored by Heinrich Berkoff, see also Christ and the Powers – Walter Wink bibliography.

Political life is a divine gift. Underneath the political canopy, people can find identity with and representation in the politics of the heart which is poignant, robust, passionate and house-to-house. Community politics empowers participation to create belonging and identity. Church has enormous role to play in local and particular.

Cannot make peace without bringing together the parties from the extremes, because the extremes are the majority.

Forgiveness is the central issue. The only way for a new beginning is to offer forgiveness – an act of stupidity which is out of synch. Social sciences collapse at this point when the dance is different to reason and logic. The offering of the gift is by the person who feels the hurt the most. The person most justified not to make a break. New beginning is only possible by an irrational illogical moment which is the gift of forgiveness.

Redemptive remembering not naïve forgetfulness

No forgiveness without public grief for what we have done (Breuggeman)