

## Reconciliation – what works? Duncan Morrow

Defending things which matter – politics, faith and history – these are not perceived as objective externals, but define the identity – not out there in history and community but internal in me – I am or we are what is being discussed or negotiated.

Therefore, the things that are at stake are not rational but emotional. It's already happening and being lived.

So we need to know what is at stake (beyond theory or text book) but this question is avoided because it is already happening.

Can't talk about key matters at stake – which are like a cloud hanging – because they are emotional so people prefer their own place where their identity is not at stake, and you believe what you hear from a trusted source or see through a trustworthy lens.

Fundamentalism is to retreat to certainty when you don't have certainty, to move from chaos to a perceived certainty which results in trauma. There is oscillation between chaos and fundamentalism which means I cannot be free because I am always hearing 'what about them?' and I have to make sure they don't end up with moral victory. But fundamentalism is perceived to be a safe place because I will be defended there – religious or political. We need to get behind propaganda.

Question is – how do we jump over the shadow of our experiences?

Northern Ireland is unique because:

- 1) The conflict has been experienced at such a high level for so long that it is tied into economy, income and education. We need resources to deal with decades of conflict – because the alternative never came to be. We live in a dual world functioning in a westernised country with local poor defined by the conflict. We have capacity and resources to put the problem off e.g. peace walls and segregation – never to be resolved – it is not the ideal but the reality. We cannot remove the wall without reconciliation. Populations will always be unbalanced, one side in the ascendancy – giving an underlying unpredictability – you don't know where or when, but you do know that it will happen again. This brings huge challenge to pieties around political realities and pieties around religion.
- 2) Established in controversy. Is choice is to be predetermined (status quo) or to be determined by the people? For the minority (nationalists) there is no power so their question is where is power held? 1) armaments 2) Special Powers Act – home security = justification for powers against terrorism (B Specials etc)

These two scenarios create the endless circle, where non-one feels they are doing anything wrong, forming a dialogue of the mutually innocent. E.g. everything is caused by something outside of themselves – the problem is 'them'. A politics of passivity where all change must be created outside of me.

Peace short of victory is injustice, or is called injustice by someone behind my back, because I have to make a deal with the baddies. If I fall short, I am judged to have been unjust to my own cause. Therefore all is trauma in the story of people's lives and history.

Making peace is making a pact with the devil, and locking the abused and abuser together – this cannot be, there is no winner, just a cycle of negative relationships, where victim or attacker are victims of self. We need management structure for resolution as people do not want to be involved.

Middle classes have felt the trauma and moved away. Those who cannot move remain involved:

- urban poor,

- people in contested rural districts
- those whose job it is to control it
- for everyone else it is nothing more than a TV programme or a traffic jam.

Can't get rid of control, because control is part of who I am with the end result that economy, behaviour patterns and communities are built around the endless circle, and the presuppositions around which society has been built = survival.

Communities are aware deep down – but that only brings a deep ambivalence.

How do we stop when the 'other' is responsible?

- 1) since 1995, reduction in velocity of endless circle
- 2) every step taken uncovers another issue
- 3) the economy is built on a cycle which cannot manage the change – structure locks you into the echo = 'they do, we do'.

Democracy waits for people to wish things, but progress not about moving from violence to peace but giving people the opportunity to move and work together, to move from a 'them' to a 'them and us' people. The future is a 'them and us' culture.

Migration makes this even more complex.

Community relations are not just about harmony but touch issues that cause disharmony – can't have a harmony-driven nation.

As we get more effective, we have to deal with harder questions and harder trade-offs. Reconciliation is coming to terms with difficult choices in the world we have been given. It is not a world of perfection but the world we have been given.

People have to find each other in weakness, and find a reality together.

Northern Ireland has historically been a great meeting place for all churches – Northern Ireland broke the rules, and the three power-based (covering spiritual and political authority) churches meet here. – Roman Catholic, Anglican and Presbyterian.

Religion is never other than political – never religion on its own.

Churches in the most mixed places find connections very hard. Pastors are the last resort and churches are the places of safety and respite in a place of uncertainty.

Churches are shaped by the endless circle, but also have the gospel, which is the only thing that sets them apart. They have to be honest to one reality – do they get caught up in chaplaincy to their 'own' reality and sucked into circle, or do churches offer an alternative reality. Danger is churches get sucked into their own reality and cannot get out. During the Troubles churches did not preach revenge, but churches have no way of reconciling the hurt for the individual or communities, and put up a theological argument to support that – the best thing they could do is to stop revenge. Churches did not find a way to reconciliation. Forgiveness as an incarnated reality was very difficult and so became part of the problem. Democracy asks what do you wish for? Answer – I wish they would lose and go away. The predicament keeps recurring, and community relations recognised the predicament that you can't go back therefore people live in an unstable equilibrium between 'no change' and 'change'.

What works?

Be careful about claiming what works.

- 1) Backing people who can move across the lines, including across classes
- 2) Find practical reasons for working together which takes people out of fear
- 3) Find examples of those who can take risks and do things differently
- 4) Politics and the way it holds things, moving from chaos to a place of 'how do we manage'

Reconciliation is ultimately not a political process but personal choice. Living out a reality that people are not what I think, therefore I need to deal with the interruption of reality when I discover that people are not what I think, this brings choice and the opportunity to change.

Reconciliation is about living with contradictions.

We need to learn how to move to be able to deal with the other civically and civilly. This is partly the role of church, as we cannot do it by intellect – it is the gift of risk and faith.

It is a work in progress