



**Institute for Conflict Analysis
and Resolution**

Occasional Paper 13

**Making Wrong Right:
Forgiveness in Politics**

**by
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INSTITUTE FOR CONFLICT ANALYSIS AND RESOLUTION
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About the Speaker

Donald W. Shriver, Jr., is a native of Norfolk, Virginia. His educational journey has taken him to Davidson College in North Carolina, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, the Yale University Divinity School, and Harvard University where he obtained a Ph.D. degree in the field of Religion and Society. Dr. Shriver is an ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and a member of the New York City Presbytery. His academic work has been chiefly in the field of Christian Social Ethics.

From 1956 to 1959 Dr. Shriver was pastor of a Presbyterian church in the textile community of Gastonia, North Carolina, which eventually became the subject of one of his twelve books, *Spindles and Spires: Religion and Social Change in Gastonia*. After completing his degree at Harvard, he spent the next ten years at North Carolina State University where he engaged in extensive inter-professional studies. He later continued his work as ethics teacher and student of urban affairs at the Candler School of Theology at Emory University.

In 1975 Dr. Shriver was elected president of Union Theological Seminary in New York, the first Southerner to hold that position. He served as president until 1991 when he returned to full-time teaching as president emeritus and William E. Dodge Professor of Applied Christianity. Dr. Shriver is past national president of the Society of Christian Ethics, was Senior Fellow at the Media Studies Center at Columbia University, and is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations. His two most recent books are *Beyond Success: Corporations and Their Critics in the Nineties* (with James W. Kuhn, Oxford, 1991) and *An Ethic for Enemies: Forgiveness in Politics* (Oxford, 1995).

About the Lectures

Friends of the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution and prominent Virginians Edwin and Helen Lynch made a substantial gift to the University in 1987 to establish a chair, first held by the late Dr. James H. Laue and now by the Institute's director Dr. Kevin P. Clements, in the name of Mr. Lynch's parents, Vernon M. and Minnie I. Lynch. Mr. and Mrs. Lynch have continued to provide invaluable support, both material and spiritual, to the Institute.

In order to bring the idea and theory of conflict analysis and resolution to the entire University community, and in gratitude to Mr. and Mrs. Lynch, the Institute established the annual Lynch Lectures. Previous lecturers have been James H. Laue (1987), John W. Burton (1989), Kenneth Boulding and Elise Boulding (1990), Richard E. Rubenstein (1991), Ambassador Samuel E. Lewis (1992), Roger Wilkins (1993), Deborah M. Kolb (1994), Rajmohan Gandhi (1995), Johan Galtung (1996), and Anatol Rapoport (1997).

The Lynch Lectures are published as Occasional Papers by the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution and, along with other publications of the Institute, are available from the George Mason University bookstore.

About the Institute

The Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia, has as its principal mission to advance the understanding and resolution of significant and persistent conflicts among individuals, communities, identity groups, and nations.

In the fulfillment of its mission, the Institute conducts a wide range of programs and outreach. Among these are its graduate programs offering the Doctoral and Master of Science in Conflict Analysis and Resolution, clinical consultancy services offered by individual members of the faculty, and public programs and education that include the annual Vernon M. and Minnie I. Lynch Lecture Series.

The Institute's major research interests include the study of conflict and its resolution, the exploration and analysis of conditions attracting parties in conflict to the negotiation table, the role of third parties in dispute resolution, and the application of conflict resolution methodologies in local, national, and international settings. The Institute's Applied Practice and Theory Program (APT) develops teams of faculty, students, and allied practitioners to analyze and address topics such as conflict in schools and other community institutions, crime and violence, and jurisdictional conflicts between local agencies of government.

Associated with the Institute are affiliate organizations including the Consortium on Peace Research, Education, and Development (COPRED), an international network of more than 300 colleges' and universities' peace studies programs; the National Conference on Peacemaking and Conflict Resolution (NCPCR), which conducts a biennial conference and maintains communication with conflict resolution professionals nationwide; and the Northern Virginia Mediation Service (NVMS), which provides conflict resolution and mediation services and training to schools, courts, and local agencies and practitioners in communities across Northern Virginia and the Washington metropolitan area.

Introduction

Dr. Donald Shriver, our Eleventh Lynch Lecturer, is the first Virginian to give this prestigious lecture; he is a native of Norfolk, Virginia, and the son of a lawyer with extensive experience in that city's government. Not only is Dr. Shriver a native Virginian, he is proud to be identified as such and he has consistently resisted any effort to turn him into a Yankee or a New Yorker, despite the fact that he has spent the last twenty-three years of his life in that city. After a stint in the U.S. Army Signal Corps in World War Two, he went on to become an ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church, USA, and later devoted himself to academic work, chiefly to the field of Christian Social Ethics.

Dr. Shriver's pastorate of a Presbyterian church in North Carolina became the subject of one of his twelve books, *Spindles and Spires: Religion and Social Change in Gastonia*. Among the conclusions that he and his co-authors reached was that while the Christian churches in the United States were not sympathetic to organized labor, they were at the forefront of the Civil Rights Movement. Before the Civil Rights Movement became a mass political movement, Donald Shriver was beginning to assume a lifelong interest in and active support of the quest for racial justice — a theme that he would return to in his most recent book, *An Ethic For Enemies: Forgiveness in Politics*.

Following his studies at Harvard and ten years as campus minister at North Carolina State University in Raleigh, North Carolina — where he engaged in extensive inter-professional studies with groups of scientists, engineers, business leaders, politicians, and ministers — he was Professor of Ethics and Society at Emory University's Candler School of Theology in Atlanta until 1975 when he was elected thirteenth president of Union Theological Seminary, the first Southerner to hold that position. Dr. Shriver served as president until 1991 when he returned to full time teaching as President Emeritus and William E. Dodge Professor of Applied Christianity. Since retiring from Union Seminary in the summer of 1996, he has continued to teach on topics as diverse as "Ethics in the Jewish and Christian Communities," co-taught at the Jewish Theological Seminary; "Leadership and Ethics in Business and in the Church," taught at Columbia University's School of Business; and "Religion and the Media," co-taught in the Columbia School of Journalism. He has also conducted seminars at Union on "Urban Ministry" and "Forgiveness and Justice in Politics."

Donald Shriver has traveled in fifty countries, holds six honorary degrees, was past national president of the Society of Christian Ethics and Senior Fellow of the Media Studies Center at Columbia University, and is a member of the

Council on Foreign Relations. His two most recent books are *Beyond Success: Corporations and Their Critics in the 1990's*, and *An Ethic for Enemies: Forgiveness in Politics*, which he discussed at his Lynch Lecture. In all of his work, he has had the support of his wife, Peggy, who is a writer, poet, and toiler in the vineyard of the National Council of Churches — together, they make a wonderful team.

Dr. Shriver has expressed two major concerns. One is on defining the legacy of the twentieth century to the looming twenty-first century: how do we deal with the barbarism and mass slaughter that has characterized our epoch? A second concern is the construction of positive myths, world-views, and conceptions of identity to replace the negative ones which all too often dominate our national and global consciousness. These particular concerns and many others having to do with the meaning of human social existence and the role of forgiveness were reflected in his talk this evening.

*Kevin P. Clements, Ph.D., Director
Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution*

Eleventh Annual Vernon M. and Minnie I. Lynch Lecture on Conflict Resolution

**Presented by
Dr. Donald W. Shriver
at the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution
George Mason University
April 15, 1998**

Making Wrong Right: Forgiveness in Politics

On March 6, 1998, a remarkable event occurred on the Washington Mall. There, in front of the Vietnam Memorial, three American veterans of that war were honored for threatening combat with their own fellow soldiers on a day in 1968 that will always be known as “My Lai.” Armed only with pistols, these three helicopter crew members stood off the further slaughter of civilians and thus saved the lives of at least a few Vietnam villagers. For their unorthodox bravery, these thirty years later the Pentagon has awarded Hugh Thompson, Lawrence Colborn, and Glenn Andreotta *post mortem*, a rare breed of heroes, an even rarer official public recognition. “We have taken too long to recognize them,” said Chaplain Donald Shea, “but we are now a richer nation as their personal heroic service is woven into the fabric of our history.”

One way we are richer is in the fact that My Lai now occupies a place in the curriculum of West Point as a case study in the violation of the rules for the conduct of war. Left over from the incident, however, is the question of whether for this, and for other like incidents, the United States government owes some apology to the victims of this and other misconduct in our wars.

In his fine book on the sociology of apology, Nicholas Tavuchis says that there is something mysterious about a mere “speech act” that attempts to transform a hostile human relationship. (1) In this sense, how does an apology, or any other contemporary act, make “right” the wrongs of the past? Human suffering, once endured, cannot be reversed, can it? The lives of four or five hundred villagers, gunned down by Lt. Calley and his company of U.S. Marines, cannot be restored, can they? Who but a sentimentalist—or maybe a theologian—can speak of righting wrong when the wrong is sequestered in a past that seems now utterly inaccessible to change?

Such questions are so serious that no one should rush to answers, but the recent explosion of attention to the crimes of human beings committed three, ten, fifty, a hundred, or even centuries ago, must have an explanation. The words “Amistad,” “the Enola Gay,” and “comfort women” resonate in today’s news with reference to events that occurred fifty—and even one hundred and fifty—years ago. The words “apology” and “forgiveness” are in the air. If there were not something still to be done in relation to the past, why would we lock ourselves in recent years into so many recurring arguments: Shall the American government apologize for slavery? Were Americans among those unwilling even to try taming the internecine Rwandan genocide? Why did the proposal of the Smithsonian Institution to look again at the bombing of Hiroshima raise so many patriotic hackles in Congress and across the land these fifty years later?

There must be something about the pains which humans have imposed on humans in the past that lingers on into the present, crying out that something be done about them. A more precise form of the question has to be, not how do we change the past, but how do we change our relationship to it? One must say, here at the beginning, that American culture does not encourage most of us to enter into the subtlety of the question. Johan Galtung’s brilliant lecture in this lecture series two years ago, amply documented that fact in regard to Americans’ obliviousness to the past. When asked by reporters in the summer of 1995 whether he meant to offer the Japanese some apology for the overkill at Hiroshima, the United States President opined that the *future* of Japanese-American relations was now the focus of his concern. He knew, I think, that we Americans prefer not to revisit the ambiguities of our wars. He knew that above all we are not very ready to revisit the Vietnam War.

What can we do to change our collective relation to such pasts? I wish to suggest that there are four things that we can do. The validity and saliency of these four ingredients of what I call forgiveness in politics have somehow, since three years ago when *An Ethic for Enemies* came into print, grown in public prominence; while not always “resolving” political conflict—one of the foci of attention of this Institute—they call our attention to the gnawing need of Americans to learn the wisdom of that shrewd Mississippian, William Faulkner, who tells us that “The past is not dead and gone; it isn’t even past.”

1.

The first thing we can do about the past, in a public context, is to *acknowledge* it. We owe to the South Africans a new clarity about the distinction between mere knowledge and full-throated acknowledgement; in their sense of the word, acknowledgment means the public confession of past wrong by its

perpetrators and a public accounting of the suffering endured by its victims. We are only too familiar with the hope of perpetrators to cover the tracks of their atrocities, but we probably have underestimated the psychic resistance of victims to the revisiting of their traumas. Vietnam veterans tell us that when they returned home no one wanted to listen to their stories. Japanese-American parents, unjustly put behind barbed wire during World War Two, tended not to speak about the experience with their post-war families. For Eric Lomax, who recorded his life story in that marvelous, painful book, *The Railway Man*, thirty-five years passed before a psychiatrist was patient enough to hear out his repressed memory of his three years in a Japanese prison camp on the Burma-Siam railway. (2)

Third-person audiences for both victims and perpetrators are essential to the acknowledgment that South Africans are now experiencing through their Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). They have uncovered many an intimate connection between intrapersonal, interpersonal, and public communication of pain and injustice. Such communication can be very disturbing, as when the family of Steve Biko, hearing the details of his death at police hands in a prison cell, thus discovers how much cruelty they must now remember and cope with. Perhaps the TRC experience has already demonstrated that acknowledgment alone is a necessary but insufficient balm for the guilt or hurt of those who enacted or suffered great injustice in the past, but that it can be the essential first step towards changing that past by entering through memory and imagination into what once really was.

A Yale University historian said recently that his profession is dedicated to “the resurrection of the dead,” that is, to making those humans of the past so alive, so credible, and so understandable that people of the present will be persuaded that “They were as real as we are.” Robert Penn Warren suggests that this task belongs to poets, too, for theirs is a “compulsion... to convert what now is *was*, back into what was *is*.” (3) William Faulkner would have liked that. A striking example of that vocation in the actions of an artist came to us in the February 19, 1998, edition of the *Lehrer NewsHour*; in Anne Taylor Fleming’s interview of the Argentine painter, Claudia Bernardi. A witness to her government’s terrorism in the 1970s, Bernardi joined the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team in the early 1990s. Their task was to dig up the bones of as many of the 30,000 “disappeared” as could be located. Her art turns bones and swatches of rotting clothes into paintings. The result, comments Fleming, is “festive, unpreachy sorrow.” Of one arrangement of a child’s bones, Bernardi said, “It was incredible to find within tiny, tiny little t-shirts bones that hardly looked human; they looked very much like maybe the bones of a bird... at a time of working on each individual human remain, my memory is that of deep tenderness and kindness.” (4)

A kindred tenderness was commended to us by a guide at Auschwitz during my first visit to that terrifying place in March 1998. As we were about to view those piles of shoes, eyeglasses, and clothing left there from the bodies of a million victims, she said softly, “Try to remember that every one of these items was once worn by a living person.” Commenting on the role of Quakers in the Biafran War in Nigeria, Emeka Ojukwu said that the Quakers always listened for the human reality behind the statistics of war. When you say to the Quakers, “only fifty people were killed,” they respond with “silence for a bit. There is a fellow human feeling for the tragedy...” (5)

It is only *human* to try to forget and, conceded Ann Taylor Fleming, rather American. We Americans, she said, and especially Californians, “have a stubborn new beginningness to us, as if people checked their histories at the border in order to reinvent themselves anew on the other side... This is a state full of people from somewhere else, exiles in paradise with their unbearable memories.” “Oh, yes,” responded Claudia Bernardi, “My perception of what I hear in this country about healing seems to indicate that it’s time to turn the page and move on... I think culturally in my country we thrive perhaps on the opposite... We want to look at [evil] in the eye and make sure we will never forget.” It is as if a seldom noticed cultural cleavage separates us in the human world: the rememberers and the forgetters. Each is in danger of falling into a trap. As I have described it elsewhere:

“Pain can sear the human memory in two crippling ways: with forgetfulness of the past or imprisonment in it. The mind that insulates the traumatic past from conscious memory plants a live bomb in the depths of the psyche—it takes no great grasp of psychiatry to know that. But the mind that fixes on pain risks getting trapped in it. Too horrible to remember, too horrible to forget: down either path lies little health for the human sufferers of great evil.” (6)

We may have to conclude that public listening to the acknowledgement of great cruelties and great sufferings is no guarantee of returning health in the body politic, but such telling and such listening may be an essential step away from another trap: the vengeance trap.

2.

A second step in the present righting of past wrong is *forbearance from vengeance*. Age-old is the theory that the way to right a wrong is to visit retribution-in-kind upon the wrongdoers. Only those who have never suffered colossal wrong will dismiss vengeance as having no seductive, perennial human appeal. If we watch almost any American western movie, we are

vulnerable to that seduction. If the sufferers of injustice merely let their initial emotions take over, they readily turn to vengeance. They may even convince themselves that vengeance is as rational as the first law of thermodynamics since to every evil action a first response of many a victim has been the equal (or yet more vicious) counter-action of vengeance. (7)

In contrast, President Nelson Mandela embodies another version of rational, *political* response to great evil. In the presence of President Clinton in late March 1998 in Cape Town, South Africa, he said:

“It was very repugnant to think that *we* could sit down and talk with those people, but we had to subject our plan to our brains and to say ‘without these enemies of ours, we can never bring about a peaceful transformation to this country.’ And that is what we did. The reason why the world has opened its arms to South Africans is because we are able to sit down with our enemies and to say let us stop slaughtering one another. Let’s talk peace.” (8)

In other words: let’s resist vengeance and talk *politics*.

Some will say that this is not politics, nor is it justice. Is some punishment for wrongdoing a part of justice? I think the answer is “yes,” but with the proviso that just punishment must stop short of repeating the crime. The political dream of the oppressed that someday they will be able to do unto others what has been done to them turns out, in Mandela’s view, to be not very political. He would agree with Sir Bernard Crick that “politics involves genuine relationships with people who are genuinely other people... They may be genuinely repulsive to us, but if we have to depend on them, then we have to learn to live with them.” (9)

Politics also consists of contested struggles for power; however, the trouble with those who practice politics only in terms of conflict and domination is that before long they are confronted with the problem, as Crick defines it, of “holding divided societies together without destroying diversity.” (10) It’s an elliptical summary of a complex social-scientific puzzle, but even political *conflict* requires some degree of political *integration*. An analogy to interpersonal argument is not far-fetched—unless the two parties to the dispute share some measure of a common language and common rules of proof, they cannot be said to be engaged in an argument. Even in the most extreme case of organized violent conflict, the contest will be called “political” only if the enemies agree that their respective values and interests are worth the risks of violence; the violence becomes “irrational” when it begins to destroy those very values and interests. The prospect of that irrationality is ordinarily the great argument for one side’s suit for peace. By this logic, Hannah Arendt can say that sheer violence is not a synonym for political power. (11)

The political trouble with vengeance is that it puts integration on indefinite delay. It loves retribution so much that it puts off the day of reconciliation into a far future. Shortsighted indeed is the war strategy that takes little account of the peace that ought to follow. The history of family feuds suggests as much; so did the Treaty of Versailles. Vengeance doesn't *work* very well for the building and maintenance of political power, not to speak of political order. For the validation of this truth, we would do well to study ancient cultures more closely since theirs has often been the challenge of communal *survival*. For survival, infinite revenge is dysfunctional. (12)

In connection now with all of the foregoing, I must pay tribute to several of my predecessors in this lecture series. Among them was the late distinguished economist Kenneth Boulding who, with his equally distinguished sociologist wife Elise, occupied this platform several years ago. Some thirty years ago he addressed the World Council of Churches' Conference on Church and Society in Geneva. There he speculated that as of 1966 the politicians of the world had done a poor job of keeping us out of war and that maybe it was time to give business people a crack at it. Now, in the global world economy of 1998, we are giving them a crack at it. We shall just have to wait and see if global economic interdependence will make war too costly to undertake.

Another of my predecessors, Anatol Rapoport, a great Russian-born social psychologist, would entertain some skepticism on this point. In his lecture, he distinguishes between three conceptions of world order; hegemony, balance of power, and common security. "A threat system," he says, "uses intimidation" to secure social control; "a trade system uses distribution of rewards;" and "an integrated system uses induced identification of self with others." (13) One of his books, *Fights, Games, and Debates*, which I am sure is on reading lists somewhere in the work of this Institute, has been part of my own mental equipment for over three decades. (14) Those three forms of conflict roughly parallel Rapoport's three forms of social control. A fight is simply a contest of raw power in which the strongest wins. A game, on the other hand, is more sophisticated; it has rules, and you cannot win by disobeying the rules because in so doing you simply degenerate into fighting. Almost all true games, for example, have a rule against the purposeful killing of opponents. Therefore, unlike in gladiatorial combat, a death in football is an illegitimate cost of winning and one cannot win by ignoring the multitude of rules governing the process and the referees hired to enforce them. Politics doubtless involves many instances of fights and games; however, the most sophisticated human conflict, for Rapoport, is the debate, a form of competition in which the peculiar instrument is *words*.

In democracies, competitors for power must enter into verbal contests, which can also degenerate into games or fights. The importance of winning a

debate is that each side identifies its disagreement with the other after having *understood* that other. A truly high-level debate requires that each party master one of the techniques used regularly in processes of conflict resolution: that one states the view of one's opponent in a way that convinces him or her that one understands that point of view. At the end of the first week of April 1998, Senator George Mitchell commented that the eventual success of the new Irish Agreement would have been impossible if the conflicting parties had not sat at the table long enough to finally hear each other. That is what Professor Richard Rubenstein referred to when he quoted Martin Buber on the meaning of real dialogue, "Entering a realm where the law of the point of view no longer holds." What does hold is the law of at least two points of view, with the holders of each taking the other into their respective understanding. Written in the early 1960s, Rapoport's *Fights, Games, and Debates* ends with a *tour de force* appendix in which he imagines how a capitalist would state the best possible case for communism and a communist would state the best possible case for capitalism. The virtue being practiced there is *empathy*, the third thing we all can do to change our relation to the wrongs of the past.

3.

We can empathize with both the victims and the perpetrators. Whether experienced or remembered, the role of victim and the role of perpetrator can hardly be empathized with equally at the beginning of their or third-party relations. Like acknowledgement, empathy takes time. Even if we remember that empathy is different from sympathy and even if we recognize the moral falsity of the old saying, "To understand all is to pardon all," we still have great difficulty developing empathy for "those people," as Nelson Mandela called the Afrikaners. Here in northern Virginia, it may be appropriate to remember that General Robert E. Lee often referred to the Yankee army as "those people." As Gary Wills has made clear, the great issue of the Civil War was whether or not the peoples of the not-so-united states could identify with the opening words of the Constitution, "We the people..."

That brings me to another of my predecessors in this lecture series, Professor Rajmohan Gandhi of New Delhi. You may remember that three years ago he ended his discourse on "identity politics" with a salute of admiration to the United States of America. Gandhi was so eloquent that his words are worth remembering at length:

"America's success," he said, has been "in showing that a nation is more than a race, a tribe, or a clan, that a people's link to their country is more than a question of who their ancestors were. The very word 'ancestors' reminds

us of those who were eliminated and others who were enslaved and I know of the volcanoes of unrest in America's valleys of joy. Yet I cannot forget the remark of a woman that my wife and I met on a train in India a few months ago, whose ethnicity I could not readily make out; we discovered that she was born in Ecuador and living in New York. I asked her how she saw herself. I was curious, you see, about her identity. 'I'm American,' she replied with pure conviction...

But rather than tempting his audience then to wallow in national self-congratulation, Professor Gandhi's final words were consonant with darker warnings conveyed to this audience by John Galtung a year later:

"Perhaps the challenge for America today is to move from demonstration to the world to interaction with the world so as to assist in turning the world's ethnic and religious boundaries from fault lines into highways of discovery.

"How this may happen is a question for reflection. Are we listening enough to those across the political, ethnic, cultural, or religious border? Are we willing to take in the hurts and histories of groups other than our own, to recognize that ours may not be the only group to have done or suffered much? Such self-questioning may have to accompany any passion in us on behalf of our group or our people. If the self-questioning leads not to many answers but to another question, that may not be such a bad thing, especially if the question is, 'Who are my people?'" (15)

I am a Southerner by birth, a Virginian. In utilitarian America, the first question we usually ask strangers, after learning their names, is, "What do you do?" In the South, we are more likely to be more provincial. We ask, "Where are you from?" And if we want to get down to the bottom of that stranger's real identity, we ask, "Who are your *people*?" Here, on the eve of the twenty-first century, who are, who will be "our" people? By any chance, is it possible to think that the boundary between "us" and "them" is already porous enough that, with a lot of patient work, we might begin to acknowledge the full humanity of the strangest, the most obnoxious, the most despicable people around? Even the humans whom we call our enemies and who therefore we are much tempted to dehumanize? I grant you that even to ask this stretches the imagination. It may even stretch to the breaking point when one has to confess, "I don't want to empathize with those people, lest I risk thinking that I am in any respect like them." That is an honest, plausible confession and it saddens me to realize that, when they are honest, many a proponent of a so-called universal religion does not want to include some sorts of other humans in their universe of faith. Professor Galtung distinguishes between "hard" and "soft" versions of all three Abrahamic faiths. He sees great dangers in the hard versions and some hope in the soft ones. I am not myself so soft-minded as to

suppose that adherents of various religions "all believe in one God," but I do suggest that we who use the language of "one God" had better work at the spiritual task of believing in *one humanity*.

The more we look at the history of human conflict, the less we will be inclined to speak that phrase blithely. What is more common in all the great wars than the dehumanization of enemies? How much easier it is to kill someone whose humanity doesn't quite measure up to our own or is decidedly inferior to our own. We Americans are fully acquainted with this phenomenon. We called the Japanese "monkeys" in the Pacific War, they called us "demons," and the word "gook" gained its currency in the Vietnam War. Granted, empathy is a dangerous virtue in war—it can dull the edge of combat. It is worth adding that lack of empathy can dull the eyesight of strategy, too, as in the case of Adolf Hitler and his underestimation of the fighting abilities of the Russians. The challenging truth remains, here at the end of the twentieth century, that we humans have unprecedented opportunity and necessity for doing just what Rajmohan Gandhi calls for: "turning the world's ethnic and religious boundaries from fault lines into highways of discovery."

One of my newest heroines as a pilgrim on that highway is a young woman whose name I do not know. She is an African American who, with a fellow Washington grade school student, visited the Holocaust Museum on the Mall. Somewhere along that grim rehearsal of those twelve years of Nazi horror, she turned to her companion and said, "See, other people have suffered, too." For all great, violent conflicts to reach even approximate resolution, there must be an increase of empathy between former enemies. I agree fervently with Galtung that it is high time for us Americans to find the resources for building a museum to the history of African Americans somewhere near the Washington Monument. If we do that, our citizens of Jewish, Armenian, Native American, and every other world origin can take their children to the museum and say, "See, other people have suffered, too." A striking effort in this direction was reported on April 10, 1998, in *The New York Times*' account of the documentary series *Tkuma* (Rebirth), produced by Israel Television. One of its segments, calling to memory the suffering of Palestinians in and after the 1948 war, created a political firestorm in Israel, confirming the opinion of Gideon Drori, the executive producer, that "we're dealing with unfinished business. The scars still haven't healed." One Israeli, Aryeh Caspi, wrote in the newspaper *Ha'aretz*, "The anger at *Tkuma* is because we don't want to know and we can't bear the sense of guilt. The establishment of the State of Israel was justice for the Jews, but it was accompanied by terrible injustice to the Palestinians." Weiss-Berkowitz, the documentary's director, commented wistfully, "I saw this as an opportunity to break the monologue in which only we are in pain and nobody else... I thought that people can be generous and strong enough to

listen to the crying of children and mothers from the other side." And yet, in the midst of this Israeli furor, executive producer Drori paid a high tribute to his country when he observed, "This series is a mark of maturity, and I doubt that something like it could have been produced by a television authority in another country." He was not quite right, I think, about the United States, for our PBS stations did do a better job than did the Smithsonian of showing both sides of the 1995 Enola Gay controversy. Along with some of our movies, PBS documentaries are beginning at last to depict the "conquest of the West" from the standpoint of those who were conquered, Native Americans. But all countries, including our own, have a long way to go before there is empathy between the victims and the victors of our diverse political histories.

Everyone of us carries in our mind combinations of remembering and forgetting that do both justice and injustice to the history of our grief-filled conflicts. Ethical and civic maturity can only come to those peoples who understand and communicate each other's inherited sorrows. As G.H. Mead said, democracy depends upon the ability of voters, when they step inside the voting booth, to vote for somebody else's interests in addition to their own. To be sure, fellow suffering does not always lead to fellow empathy, but it can be the one good thing that comes out of suffering. Sometimes suffering closes down the windows of empathy; a full cup of pain has no room for the pain of others. In this respect, I observe that African Americans tend to be the exception. They are among this nation's most promising travelers along Gandhi's highway towards finding out who are "my people." Some years ago a Baptist minister in Los Angeles said that African Americans should see themselves as the people best equipped to welcome Latin Americans and Asians into American society, for African Americans have had our longest, most painful national forced-immigration experience.

People from around the earth who dare to open the doors and windows to empathy will not find themselves invited on an easy journey. Once launched on that journey, however, they may sense that there is a fourth level of righting the wrongs of the past. I delay mention of it to the last, for it is likely to come at the end of a long, strenuous process of reckoning with acknowledged evil, forbearance from revenge, and the coming of empathy for enemies. It is a fourth thing we can do to change our relation to a pain-filled past.

4.

We can *forgive and repent*. The more one studies the atrocities of violent, politically organized conflict in our century, the less sure we ought to be that in any such conflict forgiveness and repentance belong respectively on only one

of the sides. Ordinarily in our most violent events, there is plenty of sin all around, plenty of need for both forgiveness and repentance. They may be present in differing proportions and determining that proportion is one essential task of truth commissions, as in El Salvador where an international truth commission determined that 95% of the atrocities of its civil war had been committed by the forces of government. One way that South Africa's current commission has shown moral integrity is that it has opened the records of crimes of both the Nationalist Government and the African National Congress.

Forgiveness and repentance are interactive and interdependent, or so my study of theology, ethics, history, and my own experience teach me. The initiative for a forgiving-repenting relation can come from one or both sides. Those who extend a hand of reconciliation towards the offender may induce in the offender some freedom to confess and repent. Those who confess to wrong provide to their victims the occasion at least to think of forgiveness. This dynamic has occurred from time to time in the work of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). While "amnesty for truth" may be a disputable formula, it has in it at least a drawing back from retribution. The TRC process, at the least, invites perpetrators to remember crimes for the sake of repenting of them and victims to remember for the sake of accepting perpetrators back into their civil society. However much work remains before the word "reconciliation" is appropriate to the new relationships, both of these sides are taking a step towards forgiveness. Not to testify to the facts of an atrocity will be not to be able to forgive it. Not to repent of it will be not to be forgivable. Since the rules of the South African TRC do not require personal remorse for political evildoing, I would have to say that forgiveness extended towards remorseless perpetrators is morally problematic.

Though it calls for a longer investigation than can be attempted here, I must add that genuine repentance, in persons and in societies, must involve some measure of reparation for damages. For some crimes, we know, there is no possible reparation. From cookies taken from the jar to lives lost in a genocide, the possibilities for restoration are limited. But, respectful of those limits, we are obliged to stretch them towards the possible, including the possibilities of symbol. Mostly symbolic was the \$20,000 which Congress and President Bush sent in 1990 to survivors of the Japanese-American internment of the 1940s, but it was a powerful, healing symbol. By and large our criminal justice system has woefully underplayed the reparational, restorative side of justice. Why should not perpetrators of crime be required to do work on behalf of their surviving victims? How did we get deluded by the fiction that putting a murderer in jail for twenty years is a system for repaying a "debt to society"? Real social justice requires a balance between symbolic punishments and tangible damage repairs. We can be grateful that the Federal Republic of

Germany, for example, has spent some seventy billion dollars in compensation for diverse victims of Nazism around the world. To be sure, reparation for the damaged members of any society is a complex matter, calling for much consulting with those who have endured the damage. The question involves grave difficulties, but as a society, we do not pursue it with enough diligence. Affirmative action remains one such pursuit. It is a modest but significant effort to remedy lingering past injustices suffered by African Americans and women, in particular.

Some will dispute these claims for the interdependence of forgiveness and repentance on either psychological or theological grounds. Sometimes we must forgive for our own inner health, whether or not our offenders repent, psychologists will say. There is wisdom in that, as there is in the claim of some of my theological friends that the forgiveness of God is unconditional, and so must be the forgiveness of Christians. There is some wisdom, even nobility, in that assertion, but I am not so sure that the Bible supports that theology, or that ordinary human experience does so. In his prayer that we Christians call the Lord's, Jesus requires forgiveness among his disciples as the reciprocation for accepting the forgiveness of God; and that reciprocity is underscored in the parable of the forgiven, unforgiving debtor of *Matthew 18*. Nothing cheapens the coin of forgiveness so surely as detaching it completely from repentance. In our ordinary interpersonal and political struggles over wrong, the rule of mutuality seems mandatory. A forgiving hand extended asks for a repenting hand in return; otherwise there cannot be much of a handshake.

The politics of this matter is more complicated, but the rule of reciprocity seems all the more mandatory politically. In the world of relative good and evil we call politics, perhaps there will always be clearer examples of evil-doing than of forgiving and repenting. One visit to Auschwitz or to the Holocaust Museum is enough to convince anyone of that. Evil seems to have approached a perfection in our century, and examples of perfect forgiveness, repentance, and reparation are hard to find. Still, there are enough examples around to convince a growing number of us that Robert Frost was wise and right when he said, "To be social is to be forgiving." (16) To be social is also to be repentant. In the face of the incredible evils that political power has enacted in our time, we may not be able as a species to survive into another time without these two interdependent social virtues.

Forgiveness and its twin repentance have served our survival mightily already. Where would we be in German-U.S. relations in 1998 if the German government had not begun, in the 1950s, to educate its citizens about the evils of Nazism? Where would Jewish-German relations be in 1998 if in 1970 there had never been a Willy Brandt to fall contritely before the monument to the destruction of the Jewish ghetto in Warsaw? Where would German-Polish

relations be if the same Willy Brandt had constructed no *Ostpolitik*, and if no German and Polish historians had ever met together to try to write history books in each of their languages that did justice to the experience of each in World War Two? How would Japanese-Americans remain proud of their American citizenship if in the 1980s their government had not set the public record straight about the injustice done 120,000 of their parents and grandparents in the 1940s? Imperfect an instrument of reconciliation as it may be, could South Africa avoid mass vengeance without the arduous hearings of its Truth Commission? How much worse would be the relation now between African Americans and Euro-Americans if governments and institutions in this land had not put their legal and programmatic shoulders against the heavy legacies of racism in our history? How much better is that relation even now due to the fact that a Baptist minister named Martin Luther King, Sr., could confess that as a young man he had to decide to stop hating white people, and that his son could tell a young rock-throwing teenager in Louisville, Kentucky, "Young man, we are going to live together in one American society"?

Forgiveness is not the last word in politics. But in its complex combination of our acknowledgment, forbearance, empathy, and will to repair the damages of our evil-doing, it can speak an indispensable first word. In the mid-1980s, Desmond Tutu remarked, "In South Africa it is not possible to be optimistic. Therefore we must hope." Forgiveness builds a bridge between realism and hope. Realism hangs up a sign on the route to our humanity, "Bridge Out, Road Closed"; hope puts up another sign, "Humanity Ahead, Bridge Under Repair."

Notes

1. Nicholas Tavuchis, *Mea Culpa: A Sociology of Apology and Reconciliation*, (Stanford University Press, 1991), p. 6.
2. Eric Lomax, *The Railway Man* (New York: Random House, 1995).
3. From "Rattlesnake Country," as quoted in William H. Prichard's review of *New and Selected Poems, 1923-1985* (New York, Random House, 1985), in *The New York Times Book Review*, May 12, 1985.
4. This quotation and the ones below are taken from the Public Broadcast System transcript of this February 19 broadcast.
5. In Douglas Johnson and Cynthia Sampson, eds., *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 108.
6. Donald W. Shriver, *An Ethic for Enemies: Forgiveness in Politics*, (New York: Oxford University Press: 1995), p. 119.
7. On the significance of vengeance as a positive ingredient in foundations of Western law, cf. Susan Jacoby, *Wild Justice*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1982).
8. *The New York Times*, March 28, 1998, p. A5.
9. Crick, *In Defense of Politics*, 2nd ed., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), p. 128.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Cf. Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1969).
12. Certain African tribes engage in gestures of collective violence until the first individual is injured. They then withdraw from the field. The history of Lebanon since 1975 is a critical example of the political destructiveness of revenge. Ancient Arab culture was well aware of this and invented the ritual of *sulha* for cutting vengeance short, cf. Laurie E. King-Irani, "Rituals of Forgiveness and Processes of Empowerment in Post-War Lebanon," in *Lessons from Lebanon*, (Westview Press, 1997): "If the families of the murderer and the victim do not reach a mutually acceptable reconciliation, the entire community... may be drawn into a destructive cycle of vengeance and counter-vengeance that can last for generations" (p. 283, manuscript). Cf. also two books on forgiveness and reconciliation in the recent history of Lebanon: *Reconciliation Processes and the Displaced Communities in Post-War Lebanon*, George E. Irani, ed., (in Arabic and

- English, Beirut: Lebanese American University, 1997), and *Lessons from Lebanon: The Relevance of Acknowledgement, Forgiveness and Reconciliation to the Resolution of Protracted Inter-Communal Conflicts*, George E. Irani and Laurie King-Irani, eds., (Westview Press, forthcoming in 1998).
13. "Conceptions of World Order," Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, George Mason University, June 1996, p. 2.
 14. University of Michigan Press, 1960.
 15. From Gandhi's lecture, "Race and Identity: Some Reflections on the South Asian Experience," Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, George Mason University, 1995, pp. 18-19. Italics mine.
 16. Cf. Robert Frost, "The Star Splitter," *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979), pp. 176-179.

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