

## The Process of Reconciliation

### Required Reading

Bloomfield, David. 'The Context of Reconciliation' in David Bloomfield *et al.* eds. *Reconciliation After Violent Conflict*, pp. 40-53.

Huysse, Luc. 'The Process of Reconciliation' in David Bloomfield *et al.* eds. *Reconciliation After Violent Conflict*, pp. 19-39

### Highly Recommended Reading

Lederach, John Paul. *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*. Washington: United States Institute of Peace, 1997, pp. 25-35.

### Further Reading

Bland, Byron. 'The Post-Troubles Trouble: The Politics of Reconciliation in Northern Ireland' Unpublished paper.

Daly, Erin and Jeremy Sarkin. *Reconciliation in Divided Societies: Finding Common Ground*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006.

Hamber, Brandon and Gráinne Kelly. *A Place for Reconciliation? Conflict and Locality in Northern Ireland*. Democratic Dialogue Report 18. Belfast: September, 2005. Available as PDF at [http://www.democraticdialogue.org/documents/R18\\_000.pdf](http://www.democraticdialogue.org/documents/R18_000.pdf)

Lennon, Brian. *Peace Comes Dropping Slow*. Belfast: Community Dialogue, June 2004. Available in PDF from <http://www.communitydialogue.org/>

Porter, Norman. *The Elusive Quest: Reconciliation in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: Blackstaff, 2003.

Whittaker, David. *Conflict and Reconciliation in the Contemporary World*. London: Routledge, 1999.

### AV Resources

BBC Radio Ulster Sunday Sequence 19 January 2003. A dialogue between Father Brian Lennon SJ and Jeffrey Donaldson MP. Approximately 45 minutes. Includes discussion of the meaning of on reconciliation (c. 8 mins long and from c. 12 mins to 20mins into the conversation).

### Possible Films

*Gandhi*. (1982) Directed by Richard Attenborough. The life of Mahatma Gandhi and his movement for non-violence (*ahimsa*).

### ***Conflict and Political Violence in the aftermath of the Cold War***

[Slide 2] Since the end of the Twentieth Century's Cold War the number of intra-state conflicts has escalated. Many of these conflicts are over identity differences, and are often referred to as 'ethno-political'. The need for reconciliation is especially important in such conflicts, because in most cases the two sides cannot physically separate after the fighting stops but must continue to live alongside each other. Yet at the same time, the barriers to reconciliation are especially high, because the roots of the conflict are often long-standing and especially sensitive.

In many cases, the legacies of conflict leave wounds that are still raw. Appeals to 'reconciliation' can appear premature and/or to trivialise the suffering that has happened, especially if initiatives under the banner of reconciliation are seen as an attempt to avoid dealing with what happened or a distraction from justice and truth. The psychological impact of the conflict on those who have gone through it can be much greater than an outsider might realise, and even insiders might not fully appreciate how they have been affected.

### ***Reconciliation as a Long-Term Process***

[Slide 3] There are rarely any short cuts to a form of reconciliation that is likely to be sustainable and transformational over the long-term, especially if it is to make a promote positive changes throughout society, including individuals, communities and structures. Instead, the process of reconciliation is often very slow. Some suggest that as a rule of thumb the process of reconciliation is likely to be at least as long as the period of conflict. This means that in many conflicts it is more appropriate to think in terms of decades or even generations rather than months or years.

Where the conflict has been long-lasting, researchers like Vamik Volkan have noted the tendency of parties to the conflict to merge temporal horizons and speak as though events from far back in history only happened very recently.<sup>1</sup> This adds to the complexity of the reconciliation process and the difficulties of dealing with the past.

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<sup>1</sup> Vamik Volkan, *Bloodlines: From Ethnic Pride to Ethnic Terrorism* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1997).

[Slide 4] Luc Huyse suggests three 'stages' of social relationship that are often part of a reconciliation process and the creation of a more inclusive democracy<sup>2</sup>:

- Stage 1. Co-existence - Replacing Fear by Non-Violent Co-existence
- Stage 2. Trust - Building Confidence and Trust
- Stage 3. Empathy – Working towards Empathy

The course 'Reconciliation in Northern Ireland' – Conflict and Reconciliation' offers an excellent case study in the challenges arising in the move from conflict to reconciliation at a local level.

*Question:* Where do you see Northern Ireland at present in this process?

### ***The Dynamics of Reconciliation***

[Slide 5] For reconciliation to be sustainable and transformational, it needs to adequately address the past as a means of building better relationships for the future. Probably the best-known, and most influential thematic framework of the different components that need to be brought into this process is offered by John Paul Lederach, a US Mennonite peacebuilder. Lederach links practical peace work to academic reflection. He speaks of reconciliation as both 'a perspective' and 'a place' (a focus and a locus) that brings together truth, justice, mercy and peace.<sup>3</sup>

*Truth:* Acknowledgement by perpetrators and/or society of wrong-doing and responsibility

*Justice:* Retributive justice; restorative justice (reparation and/or restitution); vindication

*Mercy:* Offer of clemency

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<sup>2</sup> Luc Huyse, 'The Process of Reconciliation' in Bloomfield et al., *Reconciliation After Violent Conflict*, pp. 19-33 (esp. 19-21).

<sup>3</sup> See John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997), pp. 24-31.

*Peace*: More than just the absence of overt violence—peace involves the active creation of just, harmonious, healthy and sustainable relationships at different levels of society.

This thematic framework is the basis for understanding the different components of reconciliation and new relationships in each of the four areas: truth telling (honesty, transparency, clarity, accountability); justice seeking (responsibility, rectification, restitution, reparation and retribution); mercy offering (compassion, dignity, forgiveness, acceptance); and peace-building (harmony, unity, well-being, sustainability).

Lederach's awareness of how the interaction of these dynamics can constitute a 'social place' of reconciliation was influenced by his work in Nicaragua in the 1980s. Nicaraguan conciliators would open their meetings with a reading of Psalm 85.10 'Truth and mercy have met together; peace and justice have kissed'.<sup>4</sup>

David Stevens also adapts Lederach in his model of the dynamics of reconciliation.<sup>5</sup>

[Slide 6] Luc Huyse develops this basic framework in the IDEA Reconciliation Handbook to describe the 'instruments of reconciliation' as: Healing; Restorative Justice; Truth-telling; Reparation.<sup>6</sup>

[Slide 7] Joseph Liechty offers a parallel framework and description of the 'dynamics of reconciliation' (as truth, justice, forgiveness, and repentance) in more overtly to faith-based (Christian) language.

[Slide 8] *Group work questions*:

- What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of Lederach's framework?
- Where might the different mechanisms and dynamics reinforce each other and where might they be in tension?

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<sup>4</sup> Lederach, *Building Peace*, pp. 28-29.

<sup>5</sup> See David Stevens, *The Land of Unlikeness* (Dublin: Columba, 2004), with further elaboration on the different components.

<sup>6</sup> Luc Huyse, 'The Process of Reconciliation' in D. Bloomfield *et al.* (eds.), *Reconciliation After Violent Conflict: A Handbook* (Stockholm: IDEA, 2003), p. 19.

- Do any of the alternative frameworks above have significant advantages or disadvantages when compared to Lederach?

### ***The Context of Reconciliation***

Understanding the context of reconciliation involves trying to understand a number of issues. These include:

- [Slide 9] Understanding the nature of the conflict, including:
  - its extent, duration and causes
  - the social divisions that it has fed
  - what it leaves behind as legacies
- [Slide 10] Understanding the nature of the political transition, including:
  - its completeness, its stability, the balance of power it reflects
  - the peace agreements and new structures that accompany it
  - the level of wider support it enjoys
- [Slide 11] Understanding the social and political context, including:
  - Historical
  - Economic
  - Geographical
  - Ethnic
  - Gender
  - Religious
  - Cultural factors

Which shape the local and wider 'context' of both the conflict and the reconciliation process. To really understand all of this is, of course, an impossible task. However, the more that can be understood about all these issues, the more likely a reconciliation initiative is to be successful.

### **Assessing Reconciliation Initiatives**

[Slide 12] To assess reconciliation initiatives—and the criticisms and fears that there may be about them—it is necessary to analyse them in the conceptual terms outlined last week, especially:

- whether the initiative sees reconciliation as a process or state,
- which level(s) the initiative will work at (and what is happening at that level in the local context),
- which part of the spectrum of reconciliation the initiative might apply to
- how the initiative brings together different dynamics of reconciliation (eg truth, justice, mercy and peace).

However, each of these assessments needs to be made relative to the local context (which involves an understanding of both time and place and the social, political, economic, cultural and historical forces).

*Questions:* Compare and contrast the context of the reconciliation process with one other context that you are familiar with?

### **Limitations/distortions in conceptions of Reconciliation**

- Reconciliation as ‘economic development’ or ‘social-capital building’. Reconstruction that does not address cross-community relationships.
- Reconciliation as necessarily a compromise or betrayal or sacrifice (often involving impunity/injustice or amnesia/forgetting or letting bygones be bygones).
- Reconciliation as necessarily utopian and/or unrealistic.
- Reconciliation as necessarily religious (most usually Christian).
- Reconciliation as necessarily requiring forgiveness (unilateral or multi-lateral).
- Reconciliation as necessarily a return to a perfect state of harmony, ‘reconciliation’, and therefore inappropriate in societies that have never been at peace.