



Reconciliation: Valuing a Desired Future

Public Lecture
Irish School of Ecumenics, Trinity College Dublin

Derick Wilson
UNESCO Centre, University of Ulster



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Summary:

In **Part One** of this lecture I set out four aspects of the desired future of reconciliation I consider we should work for here through civic, political, public and citizen action.

1. A diverse and interdependent society.
2. A reconciling future that is promoted relationally and structurally.
3. An intercultural future where we embed openness to diversity, reject racist actions in our organisational cultures and promote an openness to the wider world in our civic and societal norms.
4. A future where there is lower social inequality and the successful are committed to, and engaged with, the under-achieving.

The desired future I seek is:

A future where reconciliation, securing equality of opportunity and good relations and the future economic success and sustainability of this region, are promoted as deeply inter-related themes and argued for, and addressed, in the actions of public, civic, faith, trade union, political and community interests.

In **Part Two** I identify the basic values and principles of Equity, Diversity and Interdependence and examine how they can practically inform people:

- In the activities of groups and institutions;
- In strengthening engagements around this desired future in public, civic and political life;
- In promoting a learning society here;
- In promoting a more restorative culture within our institutions and civic life together.

PART ONE

1. Reconciliation: Valuing A Desired Future

In addressing our historical memories-acknowledging our hurts and building our interdependence, one desired future is that people will increasingly meet together more as equal citizens than as members of opposed traditions.

Especially in the new political dispensation, where there is an agreed law and order structure, the character of engagement and meeting between people needs to become one of different and equal citizens meeting rather than people seeing themselves or being seen as representatives of opposed traditions.

Such meetings need to become more humane. There needs to be less conditional engagements; such meetings need to be more open and tentative, characterised by each person securing the place of the other- a dynamic at the heart of the meaning of reconciliation, 'meeting otherness'. (Mc Donagh)

Meeting together with our whole being and not just to promote our deeply held, and often mutually excluding, beliefs needs to be the character of such meetings. Perhaps this is the possible gift of the recent agreement-that for each of us there are no further excuses for staying apart?

And if it is the potential gift of the agreement, a more engaged and vocal civil society will be needed to hold our political leadership accountable. Politicians will have to deal more adequately with public and social issues; voluntary and community organisations will need to be less partisan and churches, faith and religious groups will need to be more civic minded than privately religious in their focus.

2. The Desired Future - A Reconciling Future That Is Relational And Structural

Reconciliation between people within the contesting traditions here means establishing new relationships with those who are different to us and multiplying these new practices so that the old patterns of fear and distrust are cut and new habits and patterns established and embedded in day to day structures.

The relational dimension is promoting ease with and trust between 'different others'. This involves each person looking at the habits and patterns we are, often without thinking, part of:

*"Recently a man at a seminar spoke about suddenly realising that at his birthday party there had not been one person there from a different religious tradition or culture than his own - he was dumbstruck
"and I am all for reconciliation", he said.*

The structural dimension we need to promote is securing 'the place of the other' through building, at best, shared institutions and, at least, challenging culturally separate organisations to acknowledge those who do not belong and respect them.

At best it is to open up further the diverse workplaces that are now thankfully more of a reality and release the creative imagination that flows when people work in respectful and interdependent teams, making team work more like the creative, inquiring, industrious places that 'buzzing' primary schools can be. (Handy)

The desired future for all ages here now depends on people, institutions, civic and political groups working together, in an open manner, to embrace both the structural and relational dimensions of reconciliation.

3. In acknowledging our new intercultural reality we need to cut the impulses that feed unease and hate.

The desired future is that we create a diverse and interdependent society.

This current age is a massive migratory period in world history where the human landscape is being dramatically changed by millions of people moving across boundaries on a global scale. The ever present potential is for the newly diverse towns, cities and societies to become anything but interdependent places where all are at ease with difference.

To learn of the asylum seeker who is a professional person denied her right to practice at home;

To meet the footballer who was a refugee and who now gives a percentage of his earnings back to his village;

To meet a young man in one of our rural towns who walked around the town for three weeks, getting ignored, getting spat on and getting the fingers everywhere from people in vans and cars locally is to be humbled.

(From conversations with diverse people)

The growth of an intercultural society here must become a political and civic priority. For a society well versed in 'sticking with your own', we have to vigorously address the spectre of separation and segregation becoming an even deeper reality here-in housing, in public, professional and civic life.

Good Relations practice in the contested society of Northern Ireland demands that we work with a mental model of people being equal citizens rather than members of identity traditions. This demands that people may, at times, need a critical and reflective distance from their traditions.

Shriver argues that 'sheer ignorance as well as malice accounts for much of the harm that strangers inflict on each other on the city streets' and the need to work for a time 'where strangeness is seen to be more gift than harm'. (Shriver, 233)

The emergence of hate crime legislation is welcome yet the desired future here needs a civic culture of openness and welcome established for all. We can no longer just expect individuals and small groups to risk all, protecting those different to them.

Frank Wright writes about the fragile yet often brave individuals trying to stand against the mob.

"The evidence given by expellees from Protestant districts indicates that their neighbours were almost invariably opposed to expulsions which targeted all identifiable Catholics. We can start with George McMullan who refused to put out a lodger...though a mob threatened to bring his house down....A case is recounted of one Protestant man who got his house wrecked for refusing to join a mob, and another of a man who came and repaired a wrecked Catholic house for nothing."

People in political life, civic life, faith, trade union and public life have to show 'civic courage' (Shriver, 2005) and build civic minded organisations and public institutions that become blocks to demeaning behaviours being tolerated and that establish good relations between our diverse citizens as an intercultural and citizenship based necessity.

Shriver speaks of one civic role for institutions being that they stand to remind their staff and all citizens that some reprehensible actions will never, ever be tolerated again. He speaks of Rasmussen who defines 'modernity's very trademark as life together as interdependent strangers' and how that market dominated, communication driven space cannot yet 'nourish the needs of humans for intimacy, places to feel at home, associations in which every person becomes a person in the eyes of every other'. (Shriver, EFE, 232)

Civic organisations, especially those where people volunteer to join can, with an interdependent vision, be spaces that nourish intimacy and associations where human beings meet across increasingly permeable lines.

4. In acknowledging we are an unequal, yet interdependent society, the desired future is that civil society and political institutions become more focussed on lessening levels of social inequality and promote the engagement and interdependence of the successful with the underachieving?

In the recent 'Statement of Key Inequalities' developed by the ECNI (ECNI, 2007) Bob Collins spoke of 'all that is good and affirming and positive (about the current time) is but part of the picture. We live in a society where much inequality still exists and where not everyone has the opportunity to develop their talents to the full. (ECNI, 2007, i)

There are many children born into a life of struggle; disabled people are confronted by real obstacles to participate fully, there is a gender differential in pay and income as well as in caring responsibilities. Those who are older, those with mental health difficulties and those who are deemed different through race, sexual orientation and religion, especially those more recently arrived, can face hostility and attack. (See ECNI, ii)

The inequalities agenda is outlined across six areas of educational under achievement, employment, access and availability of health and social care, housing and communities, participation in public life and the impact of prejudice.

This document has vision and hope. It argues that these inequalities are highlighted in order that a hard headed and realistic reminder about the actions we need to have debate about are taken, so that 'the benefits of growing peace and prosperity can be used to improve equality of opportunity...and enrich the lives of many.'

Without getting locked into single issues in this document at this time, it is important to ask how civic, especially faith based groups in terms of this audience, can have open discussion and find agreed priority actions about the inequalities agenda without taking partisan sides? To do so would be a most important civic step.

Baumann in 'Consuming Life' alerts us to what happens as societies increasingly engage their members as consumers rather than as equal citizens of a society, bringing closer a time where the poor may come to be viewed by wider successful members of the consumer society as failed members of society- "*unneeded, unwanted, forsaken - where is their place? The briefest of answers is out of sight.*" (Baumann, p127)

He argues for the retention of the moral community as a task for the broad civil society organisations to embrace because there is the danger that '*the poor are now, for the first time in recorded history purely and simply a worry and a nuisance. They have no merits to relieve, let alone redeem their vices. They have nothing to offer in exchange for the taxpayers outrage.*' (Baumann,126)

To summarise the arguments to date there are, for me, three central priorities now that will anchor the task of reconciliation. We need::

- To build and secure new ways of being with one another that cross the lines of historical enmity.
- To concurrently establish the priority of building an intercultural society here within the vision and practices of all citizens and civic organisations. (Sondhi; Modood)
- To work for policies and practices that promote greater equality of opportunity for all.

The first two are about promoting an ease with difference and trust with different others. The third is about facing up to the new inequalities agenda here.

Mike Morrissey, an economist and former member of the NI Economic Research Council, in recent papers for Belfast City Council and the Community Foundation, highlighted two necessary relational priorities that stand alongside economic structural priorities and are conditions for successful regional economies.

He argues that successful regions need:

- An ease with different 'others' and high levels of trust between citizens from diverse backgrounds; and
- Low levels of social inequality. (Hudson and Dunford).

For me, these conveniently bring together the equality of opportunity and the good relations themes of Section 75 (I & ii), NI ACT 1998.

The desired future I seek is:

- A diverse and interdependent future.
- A continuously reconciling future that is promoted relationally and structurally.
- An intercultural future where we embed an openness to diversity, reject racist actions in our organisational cultures and promote an openness to the wider world in our civic and societal norms.
- A future where the successful are committed to, and engaged with, the under-achieving.
- A future where reconciliation, securing equality of opportunity and good relations and the future economic success and sustainability of this region, are promoted as deeply inter-related themes and argued for, and addressed, in the actions of public, civic, faith, trade union, political and community interests.

PART 2 - Now I turn to explore what values will such a desired future be underpinned by?

5. The values for my desired future are Equity, Diversity and Interdependence, values that are both visionary yet practical.

The long term **VISION** is a society:

- rooted in people living interdependent lives (Interdependence),
- valuing its diverse citizens equally (Diversity),
- a society that is just and works to include those who are unfairly treated (Equity) (Eyben, Morrow & Wilson, 1997)

These values can be used **PRACTICALLY** to:

- Focus daily working practices on priorities to address social justice and inclusion.
- Shape the governance and management cultures of public and civic organisations.
(See A Shared Future Recommendation on the EDI framework)

In reality this means that in the different spheres of life people:

- come to value working in diverse groups rather than working only with their 'own';
- come to establish behaviours that include different others as equal citizens;
- come to promote a more socially just and sustainable society.

Vision And Reality - The Creative Tension

To develop such a shared and interdependent future, in a step by step human manner, demands that people and groups live in the creative tension between vision and reality, doing what is human and possible together while having an eye on the greater societal prize. (see Senge)

These values and ways of living and working can underscore the generation of organisational and civic norms for the desired future of a shared society. Thoughtful citizens and staff working for organisations, working to an intercultural vision, can use these principles as checks on whether their practice is promoting this wider vision.

Equity, Diversity and Interdependence can be lenses that:

- 6.1 Challenge the vision and structures of organisations to be fair.
- 6.2 Ensure that the policy and practice of organisations are focused on need.
- 6.3 Enhance the group work and programmes of an organisation.

I deal with these in depth in a recent youthwork journal article (Irish Youthwork Journal, 2007).

Looking At An Organisation's Vision And Structures

For this moment, however, consider asking these questions of your own organisation or group. In reviewing its goals:

- Using Diversity, what differences does your organisation need to explicitly acknowledge or address in order to perform its civic duty and build a more open future?
- Using the Equity value-how does your organisation explicitly address issues of 'social justice'? Are you partisan in this? How could you bring rigour and direction to the organisation by requiring it to concentrate on people who are inequitably treated? (Murtagh, 2006)
- Interdependence is the end point to which everything else works - it is the desired future. Is your organisation explicitly committed to this or does it implicitly promote 'staying with your own'?

In your work of organising meetings, courses, discussion groups and intercultural work Equity, Diversity and Interdependence are parameters for innovative social group work, discussion work and robust encounters between people from diverse backgrounds.

Looking At Your work with Groups or Committees

I see **equity** (fairness plus justice) as the structure of the space, the boundaries around the meeting and the contract that the worker/ manager/ facilitator/ leader creates for people to come into and that they are vigilant about;

diversity (being different and having a place) is the openness to different people that is made clear and the possibility for different views to be expressed. Diversity is in the character of the conversation. It is the ease with difference that grows between group members;

interdependence (being valued as a person and valuing different others) is the increasingly open engagement between members; it is in the growth of empathy and feeling for the 'others experience'. It is that experience of interdependence in a group when different people say "that was just brilliant". Interdependence is the experience when members of a group come to life, engage and work collaboratively together.

In these spaces people meet and engage and the worker brings his or her ease with difference to the individual members of the group, enabling them to imagine new activities and make new choices.

6. These Values Underpinning Organisational And Civic Norms Can Enable Robust Public, Civic And Political Spheres Develop

With my former colleagues, we used these values, applied them to public governance structures and identified three important mutual recognitions that could usefully be applied to the working structures of a local council. (Eyben, Keys and Wilson, 2006)

Drawing on Edwards (2005) work on civil society, and adapting him a little for local conflicting constituencies, the three mutual recognitions that were needed were the civic, political and public spheres:

THE **CIVIC SPHERE**¹ is the space that acknowledges the capacities of effort and energy that broader civil society organisations and institutions bring to the table, as long as they deal with sensitive and important themes.

THE **POLITICAL SPHERE** is the acknowledgement of politics as a set of essential processes that societies and local boroughs must have to resolve competing views and take decisions.

THE **PUBLIC SPHERE** is the space where the contribution of diverse individual citizens contributing to building an increasingly interdependent society is gathered.²

We proposed that responsible political leadership, whilst always free to make their political decisions, would have their decision making best informed through engaging robustly with diverse civic and public spheres, especially when they would meet a diversity of views from people outside their support base.

Citizens and civic groups would also best serve the common good by, however tentatively, building such public and civic spaces for discussion and debate.

Edwards (p54) speaks about - "*Publics are formed when we turn from our separate affairs to face community problems, and face each other in dialogue and discussion*" (Rosen, 2001)

The concept of a 'public'-a whole polity that cares about the common good and has the capacity to deliberate about it democratically-is central to civil society thinking.³

¹ Civil society becomes the arena for argument and deliberation as well as for association and institutional collaboration. It is 'a non legislative, extra judicial, public in which societal differences, social problems, public policy, government action and matters of community and cultural identity are developed and debated. (Mc Clain and Fleming, 2000)

² Keane spoke of the public sphere being a particular type of spatial relationship between... people...in which non-violent controversies erupt...concerning the power relations operating within their given milieu...

³ In this wider citizen public people experience the development of shared interests, a willingness to cede some territory to others and the ability to

- see something of oneself in those who are different
- work together more effectively as a result-

These three spheres whereby citizens, civil society organisations and politicians with a commitment to decide interests in the common good are crucial attributes for

- effective governance,
- practical problem solving
- the peaceful resolution of our differences.

We suggested the Council should develop three inter-related distinct, yet complementary, structures to progress the desired future of good relations within its boundaries.

Promoting a self critical civil society culture that learns to openly deal with sensitive issues together is a priority and strengthening public citizenship forums and actions is essential.

Expecting politicians to 'just do their work' and reduce our fascination with them, would be a new beginning. This beginning is one where all political, civic organisations and citizens 'just do things' as part of their civic, personal / citizen and political contribution to a desired shared society.

7. Such Values, Such New Ways Of Working And The Establishing Of More Diverse Spaces For Robust Engagement Are Aspects Of Generating 'A Learning Society'

Some years ago, with former colleagues, and drawing on the work of various systems theorists (Senge, Argyris, Society for Organisational Learning), we developed a Learning Society culture in courses where staff from diverse public, private and civic partners came together. There we proposed an (abbreviated) working definition of Northern Ireland as a Learning Society-one where we, as citizens, groups and institutions, commit ourselves to:

- acknowledge and address how our conflictual history shapes some current relationships between us; (see 1 above)
- find new structures in which people work through and beyond their inter-communal fears together; (see 2 above)
- acknowledge those who have abilities but a lack of opportunity (see 4 above)
- include the rich diversity of people who now live here (see 3 above);
- value the different abilities, talents and experiences each person brings to groups, communities and societal life; (see 4 above)
- reflect together on ways that release our creative abilities in building a more just, sustainable and interdependent society. (see 5 & 6 above)

If we are to develop a 'learning society' culture here, existing institutions and organisations will need to be encouraged to articulate their civic duty-their reciprocal obligation from drawing on public amenities and / or public and charitable support.

Sporting clubs, youth agencies, cultural groups, faith groups and other organisations generate very influential spaces where people come together; however often these organisations rarely articulate their explicit commitment to the common good.

Schools, Colleges and Universities have a civic duty to introduce people to those they share the one society, and wider world, with (Shriver). Public, civic (including religious and trade union) and private organisations can pro-actively promote or prevent understanding grow between diverse people.

Even those that see themselves as private organisations, or specifically religious or cultural, draw down public support through using public amenities, government grants, tax breaks, charitable status that minimise tax and rate liabilities, public services and VAT relief.

A question for all is how do they, within their governance, within their staffing, programmes and curricula at best bring people from diverse social backgrounds together or, at least, work in ways that model an openness to others who different to those in their own membership? How do such organisations signal that the old partisan ways are now not part of the new civic future?

8. Restorative Practices

Morrissey argues that the Social Contract between public, trade union and private organisations in the Republic of Ireland has created a different working culture and has fed economic development. Such a culture needs developed here. It feeds a more restorative and negotiated culture developing and dilutes a culture of confrontation.

Some years ago I had the opportunity, when in the University of Auckland's Maori Education Department, to explore the value of restorative practices within education and restorative justice in the high tariff cases of the District Courts as well as the Youth Justice System.

Without romanticising this approach, through study and observing the practice, I became convinced of the integrity and value of such work. In my 'desired future' here, another culture that needs developed is the building of a restorative culture into all aspects of our society. This is a priority we need to embrace, post conflict.

An appropriate restorative lens for churches and faith communities here is to seek those texts and models in their history that open up the potential for restorative principles and practices between us such as the Judaeo 'cities of refuge'.

In the civic sphere it is to explore how this can be promoted - in families, in schools, in voluntary organisations, in relationships between public services and citizen, in the legal system and in high tariff offences, and not just work with juveniles.

This theme has such diverse advocates as former paramilitary members in diverse conflicts, High Court Judges in diverse jurisdictions, faith groups, trade unionists, labour relations activists, parents, victims and academics.

A 'desired future' for me is that we, at least, consider the potential to embrace a restorative approach as part of the new culture here, post conflict.

Reparation, restitution and making amends here after so much deep and, perhaps, intractable hurt may be publicly so difficult and yet there is evidence of some restorative meetings, some unexpected acts of acknowledgement taking place.

Restorative and mediative cultures are needed as our population balances change and as the impact of migrations shapes our communal life together.

With such a challenge, is building a new, more openly restorative culture together as a diverse society not a responsible action?

The emergence of peer support and peer mediation in primary and secondary schools are all important signals to children and young people about the need to attend to one another. However, as with 'education for mutual understanding' work this is a task too important to only be left to children and teachers. It is an adult, political, public and civic task.

Finally is not the very agreement and the new dispensation here, one that is restorative in a material manner-whether or not it is acknowledged as such?

In Conclusion

Just as there are different levels of reconciliation (Stevens; Volf) and just as we know that some interpersonal reconciliation is at a much deeper level than some political reconciling agreements, all reconciling actions have to be welcomed and celebrated.

Some political reconciliations that are restorative, as here, can give a mandate to many people to behave differently and can signal to many others that there are new civic norms existing.

This society has a huge ambivalence about whether meeting the other is worth it. It is this deep ambivalence that gets at people as they take risks. It can often tug them back to the familiar separate ways of living here.

There is a similar ambivalence with the development of restorative cultures that is more than a personal ambivalence. In my experience there is a degree of institutional reluctance and legal distrust of such ways.

However the prize of securing a more open society, a desired future where people seek to resolve difficulties; where workplaces are underpinned by restorative and mediative climates; where litigation costs are reduced and processes that are more humane promoted is a unique prize that this society could take for itself.

Building a restorative culture through all levels and spaces in this society post conflict, and now facing into a more diverse and intercultural future, is a desired future worth working towards.

In Northern Ireland, community is often another word for sides; it is more often less a question of 'our interdependence' and more a declaration of 'political opposition'. Communities here have tended to develop as communities in antagonism, defined by beating their opponents. The peace process is the search for an alternative to such active hostility, and the political agreement of March 2007 is a new acknowledgement of diversity and interdependence whether it is articulated or not.

Recent history alerts us to the need for promoting good relations, a shared society and fair treatment here and elsewhere. We still live in the shadow of Auschwitz, the Black Civil Rights Movement, apartheid, the horrors of genocide where communal antagonism led inexorably to destruction and barbarity. Our Northern Ireland conflict stands in this line of reminders of inhumanity also.

Antagonism, if nursed and never addressed, will turn our current transition into a gap between periods of violence. Improving the quality of life for all is the imperative. (See Morrow, 2004)

It makes sense to develop a society where people are treated fairly, where differences are acknowledged and where people live and work together as interdependent citizens.

To be at ease with difference, people must acquire the skills of dialogue, inquiry, negotiation and mediation in diverse relationships and group life in a more diverse society.

Interdependence, in reality, is the search for an end to hostility and enmity, the search for relationships in which people who are different can expect the same treatment and are recognised, appreciated and assured of a place where they are given value and dignity.

This is my 'desired future'.

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