



8 forgiveness



forgiveness, truth and memory
alwyn thomson



introducing the series

This paper is the eighth in a series of 15 papers to be produced over a two year period as part of the *Embodying Forgiveness* project run by the Centre for Contemporary Christianity in Ireland (CCCI). Drawing on a broad range of contributors, from a broad range of backgrounds, the papers aim to explore the meaning of forgiveness in the Bible and in different Christian traditions, and to ask about the implications of the practice of forgiveness for our society. It is worth saying at the outset that we have not insisted on a particular definition or understanding of forgiveness among those who will be contributing to the series. Rather, our hope is that through this series of papers we will come to a fuller and more authentic understanding of forgiveness and its implications for church and society.

president ronald reagan at bitburg

May 8th 1985 was the 40th anniversary of VE day – the end of the Second World War in Europe. That week the President was scheduled to visit an economic summit in Bonn and the West German Chancellor, Helmut Kohl, saw an opportunity to mark the relationship between the United States and West Germany. They would appear together at a German military cemetery, symbolising the reconciliation of their two countries – once mortal enemies, now staunch allies. Kohl suggested the Kolmeshohe cemetery at Bitburg. Few objected.

Only weeks before the visit, however, the media reported that among the 2,000 graves at Kolmeshohe were those of 49 members of the Waffen SS. Following this disclosure the mood changed – remembering soldiers of the German Army was one thing; remembering soldiers of the Nazi regime's enforcers was quite another. Among the most eloquent critics of the proposed visit was Holocaust survivor and writer, Elie Wiesel:

“Mr President, I am convinced, as you told us earlier...that you were not aware of the presence of SS graves in the Bitburg cemetery. Of course you didn't know. But now we are all aware. May I, Mr President, if it's possible at all, implore you to do something else, to find a way, to find another way, another site? That place, Mr President, is not your place. Your place is with the victims of the SS.”

The US press were equally hostile to the visit:

“President Reagan cannot go to Bitburg. It is out of the question for the leader of the Western world to lay a wreath in a war cemetery where Nazi storm troopers are buried... The stated purpose, reconciliation, is being drowned in a rising flood of long buried passions from the death camp survivors who feel as betrayed and abandoned as they did 40 years ago” (Washington Post 23 April 1985).

Yet despite the protests of Holocaust survivors, war veterans, and political friends and foes alike, both Reagan and Kohl were determined to go ahead with the visit. On May 5 1985 the two leaders laid wreaths at a wall of remembrance at Kolmeshohe.

After visiting the cemetery President Reagan and Chancellor Kohl travelled the short distance to an American Air Force Base in Bitburg. There, Reagan addressed the issues head on:

“There are over 2,000 buried in Bitburg cemetery. Among them are 48 members of the SS – the crimes of the SS must rank among the most heinous in human history – but others buried there were simply soldiers in the German Army. How many were fanatical followers of a dictator and wilfully carried out his cruel orders? And how many were conscripts, forced into service during the death throes of the Nazi war machine? We do not know. Many, however, we know from the dates on their tombstones, were only teenagers at the time...

“There were thousands of such soldiers to whom Nazism meant no more than a brutal end to a short life. We do not believe in collective guilt. Only God can look into the human heart, and all these men have now met their supreme judge, and they have been judged by Him as we shall all be judged.”

However, the criticisms of the President had made some impact. Reagan did not refer to the German soldiers, as he had at an earlier press conference as, “victims, just as surely as the victims in the concentration camps



[were].” Moreover, having declined Kohl’s invitation to visit the site of a concentration camp in order not to “reawaken the memories...and the passions of the time,” a visit to Bergen-Belsen was arranged for the same day, before the visit to Kolmeshohe. In his address at Bitburg Air Base, Reagan referred to this visit in the context of the dispute over the visit to Kolmeshohe:

“To the survivors of the Holocaust: Your terrible suffering has made you ever vigilant against evil. Many of you are worried that reconciliation means forgetting. Well, I promise you, we will never forget. I have just come this morning from Bergen-Belsen, where the horror of that terrible crime, the Holocaust, was forever burned upon my memory. No, we will never forget, and we say with the victims of the Holocaust: Never again.”

Few of Reagan’s critics were impressed: Norman Lamm, of Yeshiva University in New York, said, “A courtesy call at a conveniently located concentration camp cannot compensate for the callous and obscene scandal of honouring Nazi killers.”

What had been intended as a symbol and celebration of reconciliation between former enemies had become something very different, a fact Reagan acknowledged:

“This visit has stirred many emotions in the American and German people... Some old wounds have been reopened, and this I regret very much, because this should be a time of healing...”

“We cannot undo the crimes and wars of yesterday nor call the millions back to life, but we can give meaning to the past by learning its lessons and making a better future. We can let our pain drive us to greater efforts to heal humanity’s suffering.”

truth

What is the truth of this scenario? At one level the central truth is quite simple and uncomplicated: among those buried in the cemetery at Kolmeshohe are those who were members of the Waffen SS. Yet this particular truth, while central, fails to get to the heart of the matter.

Beyond this, however, the relative clarity of truth begins to fade. Even at a purely factual level, truth quickly becomes more complex. For who were these SS soldiers? Were they willing volunteers enforcing Nazi ideology on conquered peoples? Or were they conscripts, drafted in to fill the ranks of Germany’s depleted forces in the last desperate days of the war, given no other option than transportation to the camps? That those buried there are all young men, between seventeen and twenty years old, might suggest the latter. But can we really know for sure?

Thus it seems that truth – even this basic factual truth – is more difficult to discover than we sometimes assume. But beyond the merely factual truth lie other kinds of truth – equally, or more, important.

First, there is an ‘interpretive truth.’ Interpretive truth is about the ‘meaning’ that can be given to the factual truth which is supplied by the interpretive ‘framework’ within which the facts are viewed.

Critics and supporters alike agreed that members of the Waffen SS were buried in Kolmeshohe, but the meaning of that fact differed because critics and supporters approached this fact from different interpretive frameworks. For Reagan’s critics the framework is the Holocaust and the other criminal acts of the Nazi regime in general and the role of the SS in

those acts in particular. Viewed within this framework, the meaning of Reagan's actions is that the criminality of the Nazi regime and its functionaries is undermined or downplayed – the guilty are, in some sense, rehabilitated while the innocent are, in some sense, marginalized.

Supporters of Reagan's actions have a different framework. For them the post-war reconstruction of West Germany as a democratic society and as a friend and ally of the West, and the reconciliation of former enemies is key. Viewed within this framework, the meaning of Reagan's actions is that the crimes of the past remain crimes – which is to be acknowledged – but also remain past, which creates the space for the deepening of friendship and reconciliation between former enemies.

Undoubtedly most reasonable people can see the legitimacy of both of these positions, but, despite their legitimacy, they cannot be reconciled. Thus the possibility of agreement on some measure of factual truth will not necessarily result in agreement in the area of interpretive truth.

Another kind of truth can be identified which recognises that truth is never neutral or abstract but that it serves a particular purpose or function for individuals or communities. This 'functional truth' vindicates and legitimises the convictions that a person or a community may hold. It is factual and interpretive truth consciously used to certain ends. In particular, this 'functional truth' often draws on the truth of the past to vindicate positions taken up in the present.

So at Kolmeschohe, the actions of President Reagan cannot be separated from the wider political framework of the era, specifically the role of West Germany as the frontline in the confrontation of East and West during the Cold War. Nor can the actions of his critics be separated from the wider question of the significance of the Holocaust in shaping the identity of the post-War Jewish community in general and vindicating the Israeli state in particular.

At this point, we might be tempted to give up in despair. The possibility of arriving at any shared notion of what 'the truth' in any given situation is, seems beyond our capacity. Yet, while the pursuit of truth in its various forms may not produce consensus or agreement, it can, at the very least, produce clarification. We should not underestimate the significance of the pursuit of factual truth. While factual truth is never complete in itself, that is no reason simply to give up. Factual truth, once established, can have one particular benefit, for factual truth serves "to narrow the range of permissible lies" (Michael Ignatieff). Where few facts are available, individuals or communities are given space for creative self-deception and self-justification – conscious or not. However, the more that is known of what happened in a particular situation, the less room there is for the construction of these self-deceiving and self-justifying narratives. As Wiesel said in his appeal to President Reagan, "I am convinced, as you told us earlier...that you were not aware of the presence of SS graves in the Bitburg cemetery. Of course you didn't know. But now we are all aware."

This, however, is the realistic limit of what can be achieved in pursuit of factual truth – despite President Reagan's awareness of the facts, the interpretive and functional truths that he and Chancellor Kohl brought to the situation allowed them to continue with their plans. Indeed, Reagan was able to appeal to the factual truth – that almost all the members of the Waffen SS buried at Kolmeschohe were between 17 and 20 years of age when they died – in support of his decision to take part in the ceremony.

Turning to other kinds of truth, the attempt to comprehend the interpretive



and functional truths of another person or community – even though we may not agree with them – is worthy of pursuit. For understanding the interpretive truth of others frees us from the temptation to dismiss, demonise or condemn those others. It also frees us to enter into a conversation and a critique of the interpretive framework and functional use of truth on the part of others. And, again, in understanding our own interpretive framework and functional use of truth, we are potentially freed from the temptation to self-deception and self-justification – specifically, the temptation to claim that our grasp of the truth alone is unsullied and uncorrupted and that therefore our understanding of the truth should be privileged.

Discerning the truth is no easy task and it is highly unlikely that any shared understanding of the truth will emerge in situations of conflict or disagreement – that is, precisely the kind of situations in which forgiveness might be a factor. However, the difficulty of finding the truth should not lead us to abandon the pursuit, but rather to pursue the truth with humility and circumspection, together with those whose truth is other than our own.

memory

If truth is complex, memory is perhaps even more so. Yet it is memory that makes truth present for us. This is particularly so when dealing with events that have happened to us personally. For Elie Wiesel, it is memory that makes present the truth of the Holocaust: “Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed.” Yet this memory, which is intensely personal, is also collective, for Wiesel’s memory is not only of his own experience, but that of his family, his neighbours and the wider Jewish community. So personal memories not only make available the truth of personal experiences but also the truth of collective experiences of those communities of which we are a part. Consequently, personal memories and collective memories are inseparably linked and entangled.

More complicated still are those collective memories of a communal experience in which the remembering individual had no direct part. Many Jews who did not experience the Holocaust remain connected to that event through the memories of others that have shaped the memory of the community.

Nor is this something distinctive to the Holocaust and the Jewish experience, for this same phenomenon can be witnessed in most of the acts of public or communal remembrance that take place. Few of those who march past the Cenotaph in London on Remembrance Sunday have any direct experience of the First World War. None of those who march on the twelfth of July in Northern Ireland have any experience of the battles of the seventeenth century the parades commemorate. None of those who march at Easter to commemorate the Easter Rising in Dublin were witnesses of those events.

Yet the memories that are our own are shaped and defined by these collective memories through which we share the experiences of previous generations of our people, or our community, vicariously. To use some of the categories that we applied to the question of truth, our personal memories are interpreted and given shape by the collective memories we share. And our own experience becomes an integral part of that collective memory for our own and future generations – interpretations of the past that will continue to vindicate and legitimise our beliefs and actions in the present.

What, then, should we do with these memories – personal and collective – that will not go away?

obsession

Amos Elon,¹ an Israeli writer, has discussed the distorting effects of the uses of the memory of the Holocaust in Israeli society. Elon argues that it is impossible to exaggerate the effect of the Holocaust on the project of nation-building. Not only was the state founded in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust but, for successive generations of Israelis, the Holocaust has been all-pervasive. The result, argues Elon, is that “to this day there is a latent hysteria in Israeli life that comes from this source.”

Moreover, following the election of a right wing government in 1978 “the use of memory as a political instrument became more evident.” Holocaust denial became a criminal offence; political language increasingly made reference to the Holocaust; remembrance was institutionalised with national rituals and the state education system in a way that it had not before.

The passage of time, it seems, far from relativising memory or producing a more nuanced memory, has witnessed an intensification of memory and the co-option of memory for contemporary political ends. Nor is this merely manipulative. Elon argues that the focus on the Holocaust has profoundly affected the ability of Israel’s leaders to think differently, for “out of it grew a distinct political philosophy, a bleak, hard, pessimistic view of life.”

Some, however, have recognised the dangers for Israelis and for Israel. Yehuda Elkana² of Tel Aviv University and a survivor of Auschwitz wrote of the implications of Holocaust education for Israeli children. His conclusions are worth quoting at length:

“What are children to do with such memories? The somber injunction Remember! may easily be interpreted as a call for blind hatred. It is possible that the world at large must remember... But for ourselves, I see no greater task than to stand up for life, to build our future in this land without wallowing day in and day out in ghastly symbols, harrowing ceremonies, and somber lessons of the Holocaust... The deepest political and social factor that motivates much of Israeli society in its relation with the Palestinians is a profound existential ‘Angst’ fed by a particular interpretation of the Holocaust and the readiness to believe that the whole world is against us, that we are the eternal victim.

“In this ancient belief, shared by many today, I see the tragic and paradoxical victory of Hitler. Two nations, metaphorically speaking, emerged from the ashes of Auschwitz: a minority who assert ‘this must never happen again’ and a frightened haunted majority who assert ‘this must never happen to us.’ If these are the only possible lessons, I for one have always held with the former. I have seen the latter as catastrophic. History and collective memory are an inseparable part of any culture; but the past is not and must not be allowed to become the dominant element of determining the future of society and the destiny of a people.”

Needless to say, Elkana’s argument was not well received, but Elon concurs. He believes that given the pain and trauma of Holocaust memories, and their mobilisation for political purposes, “a little forgetfulness might finally be in order.” He is also at pains, however, to emphasise that, in this case, forgetting bears no relation to forgiving since reconciliation requires remembrance. A little forgetfulness is in order, writes Elon, because this alone can provide “a new equilibrium in Israeli political life



between memory and hope.”

Undoubtedly, some of the hostility towards President Reagan's visit to the cemetery at Kolmeshohe was driven by this intensification of memory in relation to the Holocaust. Here, there is no peace to be made; here, “a little forgetfulness” will never be in order; here, memory remains pristine and undiluted – the single reality that determines all others.

amnesia

In stark contrast with those societies that seem unable to let go of the past or for whom the past simply becomes ever more present, a number of societies that have experienced the trauma of conflict and war have chosen a different way.

The most recent example of this is Mozambique, where a peace agreement in 1992 brought to an end sixteen years of civil war that claimed the lives of as many as one million people. Yet, at no stage during the peace process or in subsequent years has any formal mechanism for investigating the crimes of the past been advocated. Nor has this been a case of the political authorities thwarting the will of the people of Mozambique, for they also resist remembering. Professor Joao Paulo Borges Coelho, who has studied the war and its aftermath, asserts that “at the grassroots level, I'm not seeing any signs of trying to remember. Maybe people are too busy trying to recover, and they know that the price to pay for peace is to forget.”³

This is not to say that in Mozambique people are not conscious of the need to address questions of reconciliation and healing. Reconciliation was a central focus of the peace negotiations and the transitional process. However, in Mozambique the conviction was that “the less we dwell on the past, the more likely reconciliation will be.”

And it appears that this has been the case. Both at a political and communal level Mozambiqueans who fought each other during the civil war are now governing together, working together and living together. This approach was established at the very beginning of the peace process during negotiations between the warring parties. Brazao Mazula, editor of an authoritative work on the peace process, explained that during negotiations “a policy of ‘reconciliation’ was agreed to, which was understood to mean that there were crimes, that they were forgiven, and that there would be a general pardon.” Raul Domingos, a senior leader of the main anti-government group, Renamo, stated that, “the word ‘reconciliation’ is a word used to mean forget the past and be tolerant. We killed each other, but we forget this because we are sons, brothers, and we have to live together.”

At a local level, Priscilla Hayner argues that a natural process of healing and reconciliation has taken place rooted in the traditional structures and practises of Mozambiquean society. A strong sense of community, strong structures of traditional leadership and belief in the efficacy of the powers of traditional healers have all been factors in creating a situation where members of the opposing armies have been able to return to the same home village and live and work together without bitterness or retribution.

Memory does not simply disappear. Hardly a family in Mozambique was untouched by the killings that took place during the civil war. Yet those memories have not shaped a collective memory about the past. Consequently, the peace process and the subsequent political developments have not had to wrestle with the past and its challenge to truth and memory.

decommissioning the past

If obsession is unhealthy and amnesia only appropriate in some situations, how should societies deal with the past? At least four different processes can be identified. Lustration – the purging of representatives of the old regime from public office – has been widely used in the former communist states of central Europe, in the former Soviet Union and in Germany following reunification. Prosecution of perpetrators in special courts was the primary response following the Second World War, and more recently the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda have applied the same judicial model. The use of this approach will certainly become more widespread as and when the proposed International Criminal Court becomes a reality. A third process is based on reparation. This can be financial reparation – as in the case of compensation paid by Germany to Israel in respect of the slave labour practices of the Nazi regime – but it can also take other forms: in Australia, Canada and New Zealand the relationship between the state and indigenous peoples has focused on the return of land and rights over the land. Finally, there are truth commissions. These have been used extensively in Latin America, but the best known is the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).

It should be said that these processes for dealing with the past are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The TRC, for example, included a Reparation and Rehabilitation Committee. However, there are clear tensions between some of these approaches. Amnesty for perpetrators, which is often a feature of truth commissions, and the demand for justice, which requires that those perpetrators be prosecuted, are clearly incompatible. Indeed, it was these conflicting demands that led to the creation of the TRC as the means for dealing with South Africa's past. Those who had led and sustained the apartheid regime wanted amnesty; the African National Congress wanted prosecution. The fear was that the threat of prosecution would have resulted in resistance to the whole process of transition and, possibly, civil war. The TRC was the compromise solution – amnesty, but only in return for full disclosure.

What this reveals is the crucial truth that processes for dealing with the past cannot be understood without reference to the political, social, cultural, religious and historical context of the society in which they are functioning. Consequently, what may be supremely appropriate and effective in one situation may be inappropriate – or even dangerous – in another. Or, more likely, in each society the chosen process will reflect the same complexities and compromises, and generate the same debates and disagreements as the wider political settlement of which it is part. Therefore, to see in truth commissions or other processes for dealing with the past a panacea for a society's ills that can address what remains unaddressed, that can bring 'healing' or 'closure' or 'reconciliation,' is to burden all such processes with a weight of expectation that cannot be met.

Despite this, formal processes, and in particular truth commissions, are currently very much in vogue and there has been discussion of the possibility of a truth commission for Northern Ireland. This discussion has been shaped almost exclusively with reference to the South African model, with little cognisance being given to other processes or other models of truth commissions. Much of this discussion has also been very superficial and has failed to take into account the distinctive dimensions of the situation in Northern Ireland in precisely those areas of politics, society, culture, religion and history that are central to determining the nature, value and effectiveness of any process. Nor does it take into



account the ever-increasing body of analysis and discussion on the TRC's role.

If Northern Ireland is to go down this path, a great deal more thought needs to be given to a number of key questions, not least whether we need a formal process and if this is the right time for such a process. At the moment it seems unlikely that any formal and comprehensive mechanism for dealing with the past will be established in Northern Ireland in the near future, if at all. However, this is not to say that the past remains unexamined. The Victim's Commission, the Bloody Sunday Enquiry, the Cost of the Troubles Study, Healing Through Remembering,⁴ An Crann, FAIR – all of these, and many others, are dealing with the past.

Furthermore, in identifying these different approaches we are also identifying one more process for dealing with the past. In this case, rather than aiming for a process that is formally established or comprehensive in nature, there is an awareness that the messiness and complexity of the past will be best addressed through a process – or a series of processes – that honestly reflect the complexity and messiness of that past.

The result is a “patchwork quilt of truth” (Brandon Hamber) that may leave many loose ends and disputed claims but which represents, precisely because of this, a more honest encounter with the past.

...and forgiveness?

Does telling or knowing the truth about the past make forgiveness possible? For some people the answer is yes; for others, no. Taking the TRC as an example again, the Commission proclaimed its aims and ethos in two slogans – ‘Truth - The Road to Reconciliation’ and ‘Revealing is Healing.’ Its aim was not just truth recovery, but national reconciliation. Whether or not it succeeded is an open question and one that has been and continues to be fiercely debated.

What is true, however, is that at the level of the individuals who testified to the Commission the picture is mixed. On the one hand there are many inspiring stories of forgiveness; on the other, there are those like Charity Kondile, whose son Sizwe was murdered and his body burnt, who said after testifying to the TRC, “It is easy for Mandela and Tutu to forgive.... [T]hey lead vindicated lives. In my life, nothing, not a single thing, has changed since my son was burnt by barbarians... Therefore I cannot forgive.”

The best we can say is that telling the truth and knowing the truth may help create the conditions under which forgiveness becomes possible. However, alongside that, we have to acknowledge the possibility that telling the truth and knowing the truth may make forgiveness even more difficult. If someone has caused me hurt and tells the truth about what they did and why, I may well come to understand that person's actions and motives better. But in understanding their motives and actions I might conclude that I have even greater cause for anger than previously, and greater cause to insist that there can be or will be no forgiveness.

This is so because to tell the truth is not to repent. Those in South Africa who told the truth during the TRC hearings did so for a variety of reasons. For some it was a matter of reconciliation and forgiveness; for some it was an opportunity to justify and defend their actions; for others it was a means to the end of gaining an amnesty for their crimes. And so it will always be, irrespective of which particular vision or model of truth-telling is advocated or employed.

Neither in our lives as individuals, nor in our life together as community, is it possible to prescribe or orchestrate the circumstances under which forgiveness becomes possible, whether that be through truth-telling or some other means. It is vital to bear this in mind because too easily those who have been victimised become victims once more through the expectation that, having heard the truth, they must now forgive and the unspoken assumption that a refusal to forgive is an unreasonable or morally flawed perspective.

In Northern Ireland we also have our examples of those who have chosen to forgive. Among these are Gordon Wilson, whose daughter was killed by an IRA bomb in Enniskillen and Michael McGoldrick, whose son was killed by loyalist gunmen. While Gordon Wilson became the focus of media attention in the immediate aftermath of the attack and was often held up as an inspiring example for others, the truth was always more complicated. Wilson was only one of many who lost family, friends, or their own health as a result of that attack. Many shared the same Christian faith as Gordon Wilson but their perspective on the events of that day is quite different. For many, forgiveness remains a real possibility, but in the absence of any repentance from those responsible, it remains no more than a possibility. Moreover, the possibility of repentance and forgiveness is not viewed as an alternative to the punishment of those responsible, for their Christian moral conviction that forgiveness is possible is matched by the Christian moral conviction that justice must be done. For these people truth-telling might have some worth or value, but, in the absence of any meaningful expression of repentance, there is no reason to believe that it will lead to forgiveness.⁵

The most we can expect, it seems, is a “patchwork quilt of forgiveness” that might relate in ways we cannot understand or manipulate to the “patchwork quilt of truth.” While some might lament the limited nature of this outcome, it too represents a more honest encounter with the challenge of forgiveness than some of the more ambitious visions and models.

memory, truth, forgiveness and the church

Memory, truth and forgiveness come together at the heart of the church’s worship. At the Lord’s Table the church meets together to remember the events of Easter, to be confronted with the truth of God’s grace and its own sinfulness, and to receive the forgiveness of God.

The church’s memory of Easter is complex. Christ is remembered as the one who loves the church and who sacrificed himself for it. Christ is remembered both as victim of human violence and state power, and as the one who is in control of the Easter events in obedience to the will of the Father. Christ is remembered both in sorrow on the cross and in triumph in the resurrection.

Alongside the memory of Christ is the memory of Christ’s disciples. These are memories of culpability – even betrayal and complicity, of denial, of fear, of confusion and of failure.

These memories bring the truth to light. Thus the truth of Christ’s loving self-giving for the sins of the world are given meaning only in the light of the truth of our complicity in this world’s sinfulness. So the knowledge of the truth becomes an occasion for celebration and praise on the one hand, and sorrow and repentance on the other.

However, at the Lord’s Table, the church also remembers the centrality of justice. Yes, there is forgiveness, but there is also justice done and seen



to be done. This is not the place to discuss the meaning of justice in the Bible, but it is sufficient to say that the element of punishment, of holding to account, is an integral part of that meaning and cannot be excised no matter how awkward or uncomfortable it may be for us, and no matter how politically convenient such a strategy may be.

It would be tempting to conclude that the church can live with the ambiguity of these memories and of truth because of the promise and experience of forgiveness – but this is only true up to a point. The promise of forgiveness is not in question, but the full outworking of what it means to be a forgiven human being who can stand the encounter with memory and truth is yet to come.

Even forgiveness does not inevitably bring “closure” or “healing.” The church is forgiven, but continues to wrestle with the challenge of the truth about itself, and continues to force itself to confront the memories of Easter as the central part of its worship. “Closure” or “healing” seen in a Christian perspective are not psychological, but eschatological realities.

God’s promise is that there will be a time when there are no more tears, when the wounds will be bound up, but that time is still to come. In the meantime we must live with the “patchwork quilt” of memory, truth and forgiveness. And as we do so, we must seek justice.

notes

¹ Amos Elon, “The Politics of Memory”, *New York Review of Books*, (7/10/1993) pp.3-5.

² Yehuda Elkana, “In Favour of Forgetfulness”, *Ha’aretz* (2/3/1988), p.13.

³ All Mozambique quotations from Priscilla Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths: Confronting State Terror & Atrocity* (Routledge: London, 2000).

⁴ The recently published report of The Healing Through Remembering Project presents fourteen forms of remembering identified in submissions to the project. See *Healing Through Remembering: The Report of the Healing Through Remembering Project* (Belfast, June 2002).

⁵ On Enniskillen see Denzil McDaniel, *Enniskillen: The Remembrance Sunday Bombing* (Wolfhound Press: Dublin, 1997).

recommended reading

L Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids 1995).

websites

www.forgiving.org
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