

Introduction

Pathways to Reconciliation: Bringing Diverse Voices into Conversation

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Discussions of reconciliation often emphasize overcoming conflict, especially through legal, political or diplomatic means. This is partly a result of the work of ‘truth and reconciliation’ commissions in nearly two-dozen countries, especially South Africa, and the establishment of a high profile international legal structure to deal with allegations of human rights abuse. However, reconciliation encompasses a broader field than conflict resolution alone, extending to the establishment of peace, justice, fairness, healing and forgiveness. It refers to the recovery of cultural identities, building trust and overcoming personal enmities. It includes understanding and responding to relationships within and between communities, the role of cultural, religious and other factors in promoting or obstructing dialogues, and the sensitivity of such dialogues to local variables. It covers a range of social, cultural and legal goals, including human rights, social justice and mutual coexistence.

The broad scope of reconciliation raises the question of whether it is too far-reaching and diffuse to be of practical use. Yet, as recent history has demonstrated, the concept and ideas it commands remain a potent force. One of the objectives of this book is to investigate the vicissitudes of reconciliation, its character and complexity, in order to help refine the issues it is able to address.

The theory of reconciliation spans many disciplines, including theology, philosophy, social theory, law, history and psychology. The word itself in English has a rich cultural history that differs somewhat from that of its correlates in other languages (de Gruchy 2002, 29). While this book largely focuses on Western theories and concepts, all major traditions of thought emphasize a concept of reconciliation. In Arab cultures, for example, there is an ancient structure for resolving conflict (Jabbour 1996; Irani and Funk 1998). Since before Islam, the practice of *sulha* (settlement) was applied to resolve disputes in the absence of a legal system. *Musalaha* (reconciliation) is reached in a step-by-step process emphasizing the links between the psychological and political dimensions of communal life. According to *sharia* law, ‘the purpose of the *sulha* is to end conflict and hostility among Muslims so that they may conduct their relationships in peace and amity ... on both the individual and community levels’ (Khadduri 1997). *Sulha* remains widely practised and in some countries is integrated into the judicial system.

In Indian cultures, the earliest theoretical statement on conflict occurs in the *Brihad-Aranyaka Upanishad*. Conflict was seen not as a clash of interests, not as a clash at all, but as a difference in interpretation, arising from an imperfect understanding of the essential oneness of all beings (*Brihad-Aranyaka Upanishad* 2004). Reconciliation, therefore, was a hermeneutical exercise requiring dialogue with the self and the application of interpretative skills through self-purification, abstinence and fasting, meditation and pilgrimages. This approach has been pervasive throughout Indian culture and formed a central part of Mahatma Gandhi's struggle for India's independence (Devy 2004). In Buddhism, the integration of a variety of ideas and concepts through a hermeneutic process of 'reconciliation of doctrinal controversies' is also common, as is the project of reconciliation with community: Through a manner of right-mindedness, 'heart and soul, subjectivity and objectivity, become fused into one whole' (Williams 1989). In this view, all individual entities and things are fundamentally interconnected and interdependent, and the recognition of this is a condition of Enlightenment (Suzuki 1963).

Western concepts of reconciliation derive from a number of sources, which often refer to the idea of 'alienation' and ways to overcome it. These include ancient Greek philosophers, such as Plotinus and other Platonists, Christian thinkers and more recently, those in the Marxist tradition. Plotinus argued that a discrepancy between human thoughts and perceptions and the objective world lead to a duality in human nature which obliged us to regard the known world as essentially different, or alien, from ourselves. This led to a loss of faith in the possibility of paradise and a self-sufficient being representing supreme good (Kolakowski 1978, 16).¹ Similarly, alienation from God and the ensuing project of reconciliation has been a major theme in Christian thought. According to Rowan Williams, every Christian begins 'from the experience of being reconciled, being accepted, being held (however precariously) in the grace of God' (Williams 1990, 2).

John de Gruchy has argued that in Christian doctrine, the word 'reconciliation' is used in two ways. The first is interchangeable with 'salvation', 'redemption' or 'atonement' (de Gruchy 2002, 45). The second is the concept introduced by St Paul, of the human possibility of overcoming alienation from God and achieving a state of grace:

Created 'in the image of God', all of us share a common humanity and are included in the scope of God's love and purpose... [A]s a result of human disobedience humanity is alienated from God, experiences enmity in its own ranks, and is estranged from nature... God, out of love and grace, freely chooses to overcome this alienation and redeem humanity from its bondage to sin and its consequences (de Gruchy 2002, 48).

This idea of reconciliation refers to the messianic tradition of transcending alienation from God, which belongs to the common heritage of Judeo-Christian belief. It led to four interrelated senses of reconciliation: the theological, the interpersonal, the social and the political (Barth 1981, 440). In all, the path to reconciliation required the development of 'a shared life and language, a public community of

1 See also Plato, *Letter 7*, 344a, quoted in (Kolakowski 1978, 16).

men and women, gathering to read certain texts and perform certain acts' (Williams 1990, 2).

Hegel developed a version of this approach in his concept of *Aufhebung*, the overcoming of difference as the transcendence in a unity of opposites (Hardimon 1994). According to this conception, humanity created itself by a process of alienation, alternating with the transcendence of that alienation. Alienation was the alienation of self-consciousness and all objectivity was alienated self-consciousness. The spiritual transcendence of alienation, or reconciliation, occurred when humans re-assimilated their essence and realized their true nature, a process that would come about when the Mind had passed through the travail of history and finally came to assimilate the world as its own truth and to actualize everything in it that was originally only potential (Hegel 1971).

In the 'humanistic' writings of the young Marx this Hegelian idea was applied in a socio-historical context (Marx 1967, 289–90). Marx's point of departure is the eschatological question derived from Hegel of how humans are to be reconciled with themselves and the world (Kolakowski 1978, 177). In place of the Hegelian Spirit, Marx, following Feuerbach, located alienation in the 'earthly reality' of human beings. With the creation of private property and the capitalist mode of production, humans came to be separated from their work, their own products and other people. They were dispersed into solitude, which appeared as an eternal social pathology (Poster 1975, 286). What was left was a denuded, alienated person that had become a mere 'abstraction'.

Marx argued that this distortion of human nature was a direct and inevitable result of capitalist economy and society. Its overcoming required the re-establishment of the 'unity of living and active human beings with the natural, inorganic conditions of their metabolism, with nature, and therefore the appropriation of their nature'. This was to be realized in communist society, which would enable the 'complete return of man to himself as a social (human) being – a return become conscious, and accomplished with the entire wealth of previous development' (Marx 1967, 293–7). Reconciliation through communism was 'not a state to be achieved or a goal to be reached' rather; it was a dynamic, continuing process of healing the breach and reuniting all elements constituting a human being (Marx 1967, 426).

In post-Marxian Western thought, the emphasis shifted from ontology to language. The task of reconciliation became understood as that of overcoming blockages to communication, albeit often still in a schematic and universalistic manner. According to Habermas it is possible to identify and reconstruct the universal conditions of possible understanding, the 'general presuppositions of communicative action' (Habermas 1976). Habermas identified the discrepant dynamics of the large-scale social steering mechanisms, and the local contexts of meaning embedded in the lifeworlds of individuals, as major sources for social and psychological pathologies. Meanings, which arose from individual speech acts, were inherently dependent on the complex horizons of meaning arising within different lifeworlds and remained entwined with the intuitively present background knowledge of participants (Habermas 1987, 350).

The linguistic turn drew attention not only to the link between reconciliation and communication but also to ethics. The problem of reconciliation arose out of, and

solutions could only be generated by, the connections established through language, not as an external tool or device but immanently, as the medium of communication itself. In the new formulations language was at once the medium, the mechanism and the embodiment of the struggle for common meaning: it was always already both a trace and infinite self-transcendence (Agamben 1999, 44).²

This fluid and dynamic character of language is the basis for all ethical contact. As Levinas has shown, through language a commitment is established between my interlocutor and myself, based not on our participation in a transparent universality but on our proximity and through the act of speaking. Whatever the message transmitted, it is the speaking itself that represents the contact (Levinas 1990, 155). Speech is never a solitary or impersonal exercise of thought: it is an irreducible and primordial part of an ethical interchange. This is not a purely formal or logical process: speech unfolds immanently out of my proximity to the other (Nancy 1991). However, there is always a relationship in speech with a singularity located outside the theme of the speech itself: a singularity that is not thematized by the speech but indirectly approached by it. Accordingly, speech and language are at once the primordial foundation of ethics and society and a great and unlimited creative source of meaning (see Pettigrew this volume).

The link between reconciliation and language raises the question of the possibilities for and limitations of communication across different theoretical and cultural standpoints. This question was central in the twentieth century philosophy of science in terms of incommensurability between theories that stood in the way of mutual forms of intelligibility (Komesaroff 2008, 64–8). The analysis of language, however, has suggested that there are no theories or cultural standpoints that are in principle opaque to each other (Habermas 1976, 116–23). No matter how divergent the theoretical perspective there is always some possibility of translation, of the joint construction and sharing of meaning, even if it remains limited, imperfect and partial. However, these debates highlight the depth of the questions and the complexity of the passage from the inception of the project of modernity.

In the classical project of modernity ushered in by Galileo there was thought to be a single ‘book of nature’ written, for those who could interpret it, ‘in geometrical characters’. This conviction was subsequently challenged by the idea that there was a collection of disconnected regions of knowledge and experience unable to communicate with each other. In the postmodern setting it is accepted that there are differentiated forms of knowledge rooted in culture and language but which are not completely disconnected: a conditional, partial intelligibility cannot be extinguished because it is embedded in the founding ethical bond forged by discourse and language.

Commenting from a contemporary viewpoint on the complexity of the various Western traditions, Habermas refers to an essay by Derrida:

2 ‘Language, which is in the beginning, is the nullification and deferral of itself, and the signifier is none other than the irreducible cipher of this ungroundedness’ (Agamben 1999, 44).

There are only books in the plural because the original text has been lost... [Yet] this book written in God's handwriting never existed, but only traces of it, and even they have been obliterated. This awareness has left its imprint on the self-understanding of modernity, at least since the nineteenth century... This lost certainty, this absence of divine writing, that is to say, first of all, the absence of the Jewish God (who himself writes, when necessary), does not solely and vaguely define something like 'modernity'... Modernity is in search of the traces of a writing that no longer holds out the prospect of a meaningful whole as the book of nature or the Holy Scripture had done (Habermas 1987, 164).

The contemporary project of reconciliation is to recognize and honour the complexity of human communication and to preserve the possibility of continuing dialogue. Culture, religion and politics are now understood to be part of a rich palimpsest, subject to ceaseless scrutiny and interpretation. The mediating role that Christianity and Hegel had attributed to God and the Spirit, and which Marxism reserved for social practice, has been enriched by recognition of the intertwining of lifeworld experiences, large-scale social institutions and communicative practice.

The praxis of daily living together rests on a base of common convictions, self-evident cultural truths and reciprocal expectations. Conflicts arise from distortions in communication, from misunderstanding and incomprehension, from insincerity and deception (Habermas 2003, 35). Overcoming difficulties of understanding requires a deliberate and careful process of widening perspectives into a 'fusion of horizons', the development of a common intersubjectivity, a shared horizon of background assumptions and structures of communication that are free from coercion and distortion (Habermas 2003, 37).

This brief review of the history of the concept of reconciliation leads to some broad conclusions. A key feature of reconciliation is that it refers to a process involving communication across the obstacles presented by – among other things – culture, race, religion and politics. Such communication is often difficult, unpredictable, ambiguous and fragile (Habermas 2003, 38). Untrammelled communication may not be possible but some kind of dialogical contact always is, at least where there is a readiness to pass beyond the tyranny of violence and fear.

Reconciliation is a process, not a state to be achieved or a goal to be reached. It can contribute to consolidating peace, breaking a cycle of violence, restoring justice at personal and social levels, bringing about personal healing, reparation for past injustices and building non-violent relationships between individuals and communities. It can help recreate and confirm people's sense of being and belonging (Bloomfield et al. 2003, 77). In the process it can utilize many vehicles, from the arts to economic forms of cooperation. Which objectives are relevant and which practices are likely to be effective depend on local conditions. However, a key question is always how to establish and maintain the process of communication, which may be fraught and requires sensitivity to local possibilities and limitations.

Reconciliation is concerned with dialogue, understood in both a broad and a specific sense. On the one hand, it involves a sharing of meaning-generating perspectives, to use Habermas's expression. As explained by Bohm, it also entails an open, creative process that stimulates 'a stream of meaning ... among and through us and between us ... out of which may emerge some new understanding' (Bohm 1996, 6). On the other hand, this open dialogue occurs between discrepant discourses and

the meanings produced are different from the pre-existing meanings within each of them. The process of communication, or dialogical contact, is not one of pure translation, and the result may be novel and fruitful, or partial and unsatisfactory.

Every utterance arises from a particular environment. As language, it is anonymous and social: as an individual utterance, it is simultaneously concrete and filled with specific content (Bakhtin 1992, 272). Communication and dialogue cannot be isolated from the concrete conceptualizations that fill them or the continuous processes of their historical becoming (Bakhtin 1992, 288). Every concrete utterance is irreducibly a social act. Abstracted from their social contexts, words, grammatical forms and sentences, turn into technical signs of meanings that are only possible at a formal level but not individualized historically (Bakhtin 1994, 156). Understanding of any concrete utterance is not possible independently of its values and evaluations in the cultural environment.

Communication across discourses, theories, belief systems and cultures requires a process of translation. It is well recognized that translation involves the production of new meanings rather than a simple transfer of old meanings. The task of the translator is to find an effect upon one's own language that produces in it an echo of the original (Benjamin 1969, 76). Similarly, a person seeking to communicate may introduce into the new discourse a kind of stuttering, which is not simply a stuttering in speech, but a stuttering of the language itself (Deleuze 1997, 107). Reconciliation dialogues are always intractable and obdurate; there is no universal language: in reality, language and communication are the absolute, and maybe the only, presuppositions (Agamben 1999, 43).

There have been many attempts to develop general methodologies of reconciliation or to define common principles. These include formalizing the processes of negotiation or conflict resolution or elaborating techniques for developing 'communicative competence' (see for example: Guliver 1979; Lederach 2005; Agamben 1999, 32–3). As useful as these efforts may be, they are subject to limitations, for the precise reasons that were given above: the practical process of communication is complex and, irreducibly and unpredictably, subject to the local conditions in which it takes place (Komesaroff 2008). There is, and can be, no 'general method' of reconciliation. It is always necessary to embark on a process of negotiation, within which occurs an exchange of information and learning, an exploration of differences and modification of expectations and requirements in the search for mutually satisfactory outcomes (Guliver 1979, xiii).

The experiences of the truth and reconciliation process in South Africa illustrate these points. In addition to the innovative legal framework it introduced, within which both personal experiences and conventional facts were recognized as valid evidence, a distinctive feature was its employment of forgiveness as a key strategy (Tutu 2000). In this setting forgiveness was itself a process to foster dialogue rather than an end in itself: a dynamic mechanism to make it possible for protagonists in a dispute to 'plunge... into the night of the unintelligible and to address not only the malign facts of the operation of state power but also the deep personal pain they engendered (Derrida 2002, 49; 42).³ Desmond Tutu explains:

3 See also: Helmick and Petersen 2001.

[W]e allowed those who came to testify mainly to tell their stories in their own words ... [and discovered that] there were in fact different orders of truth ... There was ... forensic factual truth ... and there was social truth, the truth of experience that is established through interaction, discussion and debate. The personal truth ... was a healing truth... [M]any bore witness to the fact that coming to talk to the commission had had a marked therapeutic effect on them (Tutu 2000, 26–7).

Forgiveness is just one of many strategies which can be used to overcome blockages to communication and the free flow of meaning. Whichever methods are used, like the utterances embedded in language, they are culturally rooted and must be appropriate to the setting. These methods themselves may need to incorporate deliberate steps to undermine cultural stereotypes, including orientalist prejudices and culturally bound assumptions about the nature of truth.

The restorative justice Desmond Tutu proposed for South Africa arises from the traditional African concept, closely linked to forgiveness, referred to as *ubuntu* in the Nguni group of languages or as *botho* in the Sotho languages, according to which one cannot separate one's own self-interest from that of the others in the community (Tutu 2000, 31).⁴ A person with *ubuntu* is open to and affirming of others and can act on the basis that he or she is part of a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated, oppressed or merely treated with disrespect (Govier 2006):

[T]he central concern is not retribution or punishment [but]... the healing of breaches, the redressing of imbalances, the restoration of broken relationships, a seeking to rehabilitate both the victim and the perpetrator, who should be given the opportunity to be reintegrated into the community he has injured by his offence ... [J]ustice, restorative, is being served when efforts are being made to work for healing, for forgiving, and for reconciliation (Tutu 2000, 54–5).⁵

These examples highlight the theoretical complexity and empirical specificity of the concept of reconciliation and illustrate how it can be associated with many different pathways (see also Deutsch 2006). Pathways already mentioned may aim directly at conflict resolution and peace-building, fostering intra-communal and transcultural dialogues and understanding, developing concepts of justice and fairness, or promoting healing and forgiveness. They include the use of health care, the arts, sport, environmental activism and economic cooperation. There are many others that have been developed with striking effect, for example: aid work, union activities, memorialization, peace activism and empowerment through the provision of micro-credit.

This collection seeks to map some of these pathways through reflecting upon practical instances as well as engaging reconciliation in theoretical terms. It is set out in two parts, which we have entitled 'The Complex Pathways of Reconciliation' and 'Sites of Reconciliation'.

The collection opens with a preface by the prominent Indigenous Australian leader and activist, *Jackie Huggins*, who argues for Indigenous Australia's expectation of

4 For an elaboration of Archbishop Tutu's theology of *ubuntu*, see: Battle 1997.

5 It has been widely pointed out that Archbishop Tutu's concept of *ubuntu*, like that of forgiveness, reflects his Christian theology. See: Battle 1997.

equality to be met through the promotion of health, education and quality of life. The first part of the book then addresses current notions of justice, reconciliation and conflict resolution in the work of Derrida, Kant, Nietzsche, Nancy, Ricoeur and others, bringing together established and new voices from the fields of philosophy, ecumenical studies and cultural studies.

Philipa Rothfield's lead essay for this section uses concepts derived from contemporary French philosophy to evaluate reconciliation, arguing that reconciliation will always have an ambivalent character. This is because of a tension between the social and the singular, here enacted between the social goals of reconciliation and the singularity of suffering which provokes it. The interests of the social are inclined to produce normative tendencies, particularly as regards forgiveness. Drawing on a number of authors, including Derrida, Nietzsche and Klossowski, Rothfield seeks to explain the radical difference between corporeal singularity and the interests of the social. *David Pettigrew* also addresses the notion of the singular in a different fashion. He begins by confronting the failure of the *United Nations Declaration of Human Rights* to respond effectively to recent examples of genocide and proceeds by delving into the nature of the human being and his/her relation to justice. He then considers Nancy's thought on human singularity, something which we share but which also separates us from all others, leading to a proposal that textual creations relating to genocide constitute a form of justice, spoken to and offered to the world. *Alfonso Lingis* develops a conception of justice within conflict resolution that integrates reason with emotion as an alternative to revenge and retributive conceptions of justice. He offers a concept of justice that exceeds individualistic notions of responsibility as it creatively refashions our sense of restoration. Lingis looks to our global context in light of this conception of restorative justice, arguing that even the poorest have something to contribute to conflict resolution. *Modjtaba Sadria* does not attempt to rid society of conflict; rather, he looks to the ways in which inequalities of power stand in the way of justice-serving forms of communication. Drawing on post-colonial theory, Sadria argues that listening to the voice of the other rather than the echo of oneself is one of the most demanding yet least obvious conditions for the realization of reconciliation, showing how dominant frameworks of understanding skew the ways in which listening is practised.

Geraldine Smyth argues for an account of the provenance of the notion of forgiveness, tracing its origins in Christian theology. She argues that the theological genealogy of forgiveness needs also to be situated in relation to the socio-political sphere, in part, because reconciliation is relevant to believers and non-believers alike. Smyth's account suggests that forgiveness is self-transcending, bringing about a mutual form of reorientation. *Damian Grenfell* offers an elaboration of Benedict Anderson's influential work on the nation as imagined community, interpreted here in relation to the concrete specificity of reconciliation work in Timor-L'Este as a form of nation building. Grenfell offers an embodied perspective on the practice of nation building by considering the ways in which embodied forms of interaction have played a role in Timor's nationalizing process. Locating her discussion in South Africa, *Kay Schaffer* critically evaluates memorialization projects in post-TRC times, considering how memory is preserved and perpetuated in memorial projects. She also examines the case of a witness to the TRC whose testimony raised questions

about modes of listening and an ethics of difference. *Julian Jonker's* work highlights the limitations and legacy of South Africa's reconciliation processes by reflecting on the problem of memory in relation to sites of burial and reconciliation. The physical and historical past of apartheid are an abiding presence in Cape Town; Jonker shows how economic prosperity is ruptured by the ghosts of the past as excavations unearth a traumatic history, calling for the work of memory and mourning.

The second part of the book offers a selection of reflections and first-hand experiences in relation to different geographical locations. *Paul James'* lead essay introduces this section by addressing the extent to which institutions of international justice are equipped to deal with matters of reconciliation. He reviews the inadequacies of reconciliation practice: its proceduralism, juridical limitations and temporal and financial finitude. Drawing on social theory, he delineates a range of levels of social subjectivity, arguing that reconciliation must take all these levels into account. He proposes an international body charged with sharing, communicating and arbitrating the experience and insights of reconciliation around the globe. *Helena Cobban* situates her discussion in South Africa, Mozambique and Rwanda. She contrasts Western notions of accountability with African responses to conflict and post-conflict reconstruction, which do not always adhere to individualist conceptions of justice. Cobban builds a case for non-Western alternatives to the Nuremberg model of accountability, using the successes of Mozambique as her means of support. *Patrick Burgess* provides an account of the community reconciliation procedures that he participated in designing and implementing in Timor-L'Este from his perspective as Director of the UNTAET Human Rights Unit, charged with leading the United Nations role in establishing a truth and reconciliation commission for a nation emerging from colonialism and conflict. He describes the challenges and rewards of building a reconciliation process relevant to the local context and which built on local skills and traditions. *Vince Gamberale* reflects on how programs of economic development can generate cooperation and provide incentives to overcome ethnic divisions. In his capacity as Country Director for CHF International in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Gamberale oversaw the implementation of a program designed to improve the economic environment in a number of municipalities in post-war BiH by establishing partnerships between municipal governments, the private sector and civil society. *Daphna Golan-Agnon* presents the search for a future horizon of reconciliation in the Middle East from a present marked by division, conflict and trauma. She looks towards South Africa as a source of insight to resolve the problems that beset Israelis and Palestinians. *Andrew Gunstone* examines why Australia's ten-year reconciliation process failed to meet its goals or its overall aim. His work emphasizes that while governments may establish mechanisms to formally foster reconciliation, any progress will be undermined by a failure to recognize and address indigenous concerns. Finally, *Derick Wilson* shows how community facilitation in conflict resolution and research has promoted citizenship in public institutions in Northern Ireland. He argues that the time is ripe for the lessons of conflict resolution to be incorporated into public bodies and that any legislative goal towards reconciliation will need to be reflected at all levels of state institutions.

This collection examines many examples of effective communication being established across the barriers of narrative voice and lifeworld, philosophical

assumptions and epistemological difference, and deep cultural and geographical distance. In each case there is an obvious achievement, although boundaries and limitations remain. None requires or entails the exact transmission of information unchanged between cultural systems of meaning. However, in all there is a common making of sense, of mutually enriching contact, of enhanced respect and understanding, of communication.

These reflections suggest some conclusions, which provide the framework for much of the discussion in this book. First, reconciliation is concerned primarily with the process of restoring fractured communication and enabling dialogue where it has encountered obstacles, where language is difficult or has proved deficient. It seeks to break the silence, to speak the unspeakable. Second, there are no theories or cultural standpoints that are in principle mutually opaque to each other. No matter how divergent the theoretical perspectives, it is always possible to construct some common meaning and sense. Third, the modern theory and practice of reconciliation draws on an extensive tradition, which has addressed ways of dealing with and overcoming past alienation, enmity and pain and of moving forward, personally, socially and spiritually (de Gruchy 2002, 27). Over the years there has been a shift in focus from universalistic formulations, strategies, algorithms and goals to recognition of the singularity of personal experiences and the irreducible complexity of social relationships.

Fourth, the process of reconciliation is effected through the sharing of meaning, by fomenting mutual reflections that generate individual relationships and forms of association that are themselves creative of new meanings. Reconciliation stands in opposition to the installation or enforcement of one dominant discourse in preference to another; it avoids *a priori* commitments to particular goals or end-points, even where they may support beneficent causes such as human rights, social justice or conflict resolution. Fifth, reconciliation dialogues themselves may be complex and span various discourses, and there are no formal rules or algorithms to guide their conduct. There are many modalities of cross-discursive communication and the cultural specificity of any particular experience or utterance is irreducible. This means that understanding may always be imperfect or uncertain or at least subject to limitations.

Finally, reconciliation interventions may occur at the level of civil society and within institutions of power: the two are complementary and interdependent. Institutional change only becomes possible when preconditions are satisfied at the community level. Conversely, to ensure enduring outcomes, community change must ultimately rely on a firm political framework.

As the essays that follow demonstrate, reconciliation does not have a unitary form. It supports – encourages – diverse and at times contrary viewpoints and strategies. The activities and ideas emerging under the banner of reconciliation are not uniform, evolving as they often do from the dissonance of war and conflict in different social and religious settings. At its core, however, there is agreement on a central point: that reconciliation is concerned with bringing diverse voices into conversation with each other and finding a way to balance the perspectives they present.

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