

# Neutralizing Religious Chauvinism by Inter-Confessional Peace Building

DAVID B. BURRELL

*David B. Burrell, C.S.C. is Theodore M. Hesburgh Professor Emeritus for Philosophy and Theology at the University of Notre Dame, South Bend, Indiana. He is an expert on Thomas Aquinas and medieval Arabic philosophy. Dr. Burrell has a vast experience from inter-religious dialogue and has lived and taught in Bangladesh, Jerusalem and Uganda. This year, he was awarded a Doctorate in Theology, honoris causa, by the Faculty of Theology in Lund. In that connection he delivered the lecture published below.*

In the last quarter century we have witnessed how unscrupulous political leaders have been all too able to find support for their irredentist policies in religious identity markers, leaving in their wake a crying need to discover resources in those same religious bodies to reweave the torn fabric of their societies. These reflections will attempt to show how such societal crises can be a blessed opportunity for the religious groups themselves: to discover together their enhanced potential to foster reconciliation in society. Yet their initial step will have to be one of neutralizing the hostility to one another as «other,» a hostility often exacerbated, if not effectively created, by the same irredentist political forces. One thinks especially of Bosnia-Herzegovina, where Muslims, Orthodox and Catholics worked side by side, and even intermarried, until Serbs and Croats trumpeted ethnicity to realize their ambitions. Or the disaster in Rwanda, where tribal differences, long present, had been relatively fluid, again to the point of frequent intermarriage, until colonial masters found it useful to exploit them. The result was not only the brutalities that country had to endure, but — to add insult to injury — a western insouciance fueled by the stereotype of «African tribalism.» Like the Balkans, we could all too easily view them as «barbaric,» so little aware we are that the barbarism had been triggered quite recently by forces closer to home.<sup>1</sup> Given my recent context in the Holy Land, the religious groups shaping these reflections will be those also present in the

Balkans: the Abrahamic faiths: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; though other milieux could yield further examples.

Let us begin with the gospels. It was just after Jesus had (according to Luke's account) «set his face towards Jerusalem» (9:51) that he excoriated the people amongst whom he had lived, announcing to «the seventy disciples: «Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago» » (10: 13). Moreover, he had just rebuked two of his closest disciples, James and John, when they asked him (in the spirit of Elijah): «Do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume [these Samaritans who refused us hospitality], with the words: «You do not know what manner of spirit you are. The son of man came to save souls, not destroy them» » (9: 55).<sup>2</sup> It is a prominent feature of the gospels that Jesus' closest associates — whom he would remind, on the eve of their slinking away, were rather friends than servants — kept missing the point. Indeed, the rare ones who got it were a Samaritan woman, a pagan

<sup>1</sup> See «Christianity, Tribalism, and the Rwandan Genocide: A Catholic Re-Assessment of Christian «Social Responsibility»,» in Emmanuel Katongole, *A Future for Africa* (Scranton PA; Scranton University Press, 2005)

<sup>2</sup> Words which «some ancient authorities add,» as the RSV notes.

woman from that very region of Tyre and Sidon, and a Roman centurion: «I have not found faith like this in Israel» (Lk 7:10). Ironically enough, remarks like these were often construed by the successor community to belittle the Jews for their rejection of Jesus, while their manifest intent has to be to warn any in-group that the out-group may be better positioned to recognize the disruptive truth in what they have come to assimilate as their revelation. Had not Jesus, just before rebuking James and John, had to address some disciples intent on maintaining the boundaries of their group — «Lord, some people were casting out demons in your name and we told them to stop,» insisting: «Let them alone; whoever is not against you is for you» (Luke 9:50)? Finally, if the gospels are more proclamation than they are history, «the Pharisees» refers less to an historical group than it presages any set of religious leaders intent on preserving the integrity of their community, as they construe it.

So we are led inescapably to conclude that religious «others» will often provide the key to understanding the reaches of the faith we espouse, and even more strongly: should we link our adherence to that faith with a concomitant rejection of these «others,» then we will have missed the point of the revelation offered us. Can our failure to recognize the crucial role which «other-believers» play in our own faith commitment be one of those cases where a clear gospel teaching has remained obscure until events conspired to force us to acknowledge it?<sup>3</sup> For we have freely traded the epithet of «infidel» with Muslims from the crusades until quite recently, leaving it to western political leaders to it resurrect now. Yet the prescient document from the second Vatican council, *Nostra Aetate*, while reminding us that Jews remain God's covenanted people, renounced centuries of mutual antagonism by asserting that Muslims «worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the creator of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to [human beings]. They strive to submit themselves without

reserve to the hidden decrees of God, just as Abraham submitted himself to God's plan, to whose faith Muslims eagerly link their own.»<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the contemporary fruit of that singular document may well lie in bringing Christians to a keen appreciation of the role that those of other faiths can play in articulating our own, rather than offering counsel on the nugatory question of whether other-believers can be saved. For whatever «salvation» might mean — and its sense differs from one faith-tradition to another — it is clearly God's business and not ours.<sup>5</sup>

But how can we effectively portray the role which other-believers play in helping us to articulate our faith-traditions, and how can it contribute to shared peace building? I shall argue that these two questions lead to a single answer: only by recognizing the role which other-believers play in enhancing and confirming our faith — whoever «we» might be — can we activate the powers latent within that faith for reconciling differences, precisely there where our standard responses to difference have proved so deadly. That has of course been in the domain of political life and interaction, where religious difference seems to exacerbate rather than temper animosity. But what makes us reduce religious heritage to our possession? What Karl Barth liked to call the devolution of *faith* into *religion*, I suggest, yet while he would have wished to restrict the term «faith» to Christian revelation, we are in a position to find similar correctives in each of the Abrahamic faiths. Correctives, that is, to the propensity of staunch believers to feel that they have grasped the import of their faith-tradition, and would certainly need no help from others — especially «other-believers» — to enhance their grasp of their own faith.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the philosophical thrust of my response will remind us how faith cannot be something which we grasp, but which must

4 *Nostra Aetate*, par 3.

5 On his issue, see Augustine DiNoia, O.P. *Diversity of Religions* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1992), Gavin D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism* (New York: Oxford, 1986), and Paul Griffiths: *Problems of Religious Diversity* (Malden MA / Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> This is the burden of Karl Rahner's celebrated «world-church» lecture, published in *Theological Studies* 40 (1979) as «Towards a Fundamental Interpretation of Vatican II.»

grasp us; but let us first be instructed by the gospel.

Shortly after having reminded the disciples that they were ignorant of «what manner of spirit they were,» Luke tells us that Jesus «sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go,» admonishing them to «cure the sick who are there and say to them: <the kingdom of God has come near to you>» (10:9). Then when «the seventy disciples returned with joy, saying <Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!>» Luke recounts a reflective turn on Jesus' part: «At that hour Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said: <I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will>» (10: 21). Since we are clearly the «wise and intelligent,» I want to suggest that Jesus is identifying an epistemological failure we all share when it comes to appropriating a God-given revelation by faith. My guide to exposing this failure will be Aquinas, but my chosen commentator will be Oliver Sacks. What recommends the author of *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* for this task is not only his luminous prose, but his reflections (introducing Part One) on «deficiencies,» acutely displayed in the way in which he practices neurology.<sup>7</sup> Neurologists, he reminds us, are preoccupied with *deficiencies*, often those induced by injury or trauma. Yet what came to fascinate Sacks were the ways those deficiencies opened his patients to modes of understanding unavailable to us who regard ourselves as whole and complete. This practitioner of neurology recovered the art of medicine at the precise point where he came to recognize the limits of his science. Or put more positively, his intellectual acumen led him to a point where he could identify yet other powers of a human person shining through what were manifest deficiencies. And what should interest us is the way he allows himself to be carried

beyond the limits of what he could claim to know, only to learn from these «deficient» persons something that they alone could teach him. What can such a remarkable commentary on Jesus' words of praise to his Father tell us about the inner structure of faith and its endemic need for «others» to illuminate its import for us believers?

Aquinas' response is simple and straightforward: in speaking of God (and the «things of God») we can at best but «signify imperfectly.»<sup>8</sup> His generous account suggests the «glass half-empty, half-full» dilemma. Yet it means, of course, that we will get it wrong much of the time, and especially so when we think we have it right! So we will ever be in need of correction when attempting to articulate the content of a purportedly divine revelation. That does not militate against what Robert Sokolowski identifies as the central task of theology: «working out terminal distinctions» to secure the grammar proper to discourse about God.<sup>9</sup> But just as it took four centuries for the early church to explore the import of those distinctions, the focus in our time must be on interfaith encounter. As Jean Daniélou noted fifty years ago, the prevailing story of Christian missionary activity — bringing Christ, say, to India — obscured the effective drama of mission practice. Indeed, it would be more accurate to say that we meet Christ there.<sup>10</sup> The explanation is as simple as «reader-response» criticism: try to speak of Jesus to people formed as Hindus, and the questions they raise will force us to a new perspective

<sup>8</sup> *Summa Theologiae* 1.13.5, with an illuminating Appendix to the Blackfriars' edition by Herbert McCabe on «imperfect signification» (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965); see my «Maimonides, Aquinas and Ghastly on Naming God,» in Peter Ochs, ed., *The Return to Scripture in Judaism and Christianity* (New York, NY: Palest Press, 1993) 233–55.

<sup>9</sup> *The God of Faith and Reason* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1989); for an extended reflection on Wittgenstein's aphorism, «theology as grammar,» see George Lindbeck: *The Nature of Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984).

<sup>10</sup> Jean Daniélou, *Salvation of the Nations*; translated by Angeline Bouchard (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1962).

<sup>6</sup> What Paul Griffiths calls «the neuralgic point of creative conceptual growth for Christian thought» (*Problems*, 97). Why else would it prove «neuralgic» except for this propensity?

<sup>7</sup> New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970; 1–5.

ive on the life and mission of Jesus. What ensues is our discovering a fresh face of Jesus; or even better, another face of God reflected in Jesus. Indeed, such an encounter can open a new chapter in theology, as Sara Grant shows so eloquently in her Teape lectures.<sup>11</sup> Constructing a conversation between Aquinas and Shankara, she demonstrates just how unique the relation between creation and its creator must be. Once we attend to the import of Aquinas' formula for creation as «the emanation of being entire from the universal cause of all being» (ST 1.45.1), we find that we cannot speak of creator and creature as two separate things. What Sokolowski calls «the distinction» of God from God's creation is real enough, certainly, to block any naïve pantheistic images; yet we can hardly speak of two separate things, since the very being of creatures is a «being-to» God (ST 1.45.4). So the term adopted by Shankara and redolent of Hindu thought — «non-duality» — turns out to render the elusive creator/creature distinction better than anything else. But it took a person whose study of Shankara's thought had been augmented by years actively participating in an *ashram* in Pune in India to bring to light the treasure latent in the Christian doctrine of creation.

Read in conjunction with Rudi teVelde's *Substantiality and Participation in Aquinas*, Sara Grant's slim volume offers a contemporary perspective on Aquinas' recourse to this instrument of Neoplatonic thought to render coherent the radical introduction of a free creator into Hellenic metaphysics.<sup>12</sup> Yet he only accomplished that in conjunction with Avicenna and Moses Maimonides: an Islamic philosopher who introduced a distinction which would prove key to Aquinas' elaboration of the creator as «cause of being,» and a Jewish thinker steeped in «the Islamicate.»<sup>13</sup> So what many regard as the classical Christian synthesis of philosophical theology, Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*, proves in retrospect to be an intercultural, interfaith achievement, constructively elucidating that

faith cannot be something which we grasp but which must grasp us, as well as displaying the role those of other faiths can play in articulating one's own. Let us now consider the ways our present generation is called to a fresh appreciation of the need to enrich our faith-perspective with that of others who believe quite differently than we do, as the only hope of reconciling those differences which a self-enclosed view of «religion» can so easily escalate into deadly conflict.<sup>14</sup> What sets the stage for conflict will turn out, in fact, to be notions of the divinity with idolatrous consequences, opposing one another like tribal gods, yet all the more deadly in that they presume to have total sway (or in the case of messianic Jewish groups like Gush Emunim, exclusive hegemony over a piece of land). This is hardly new, of course, since the Crusades might be considered a delayed western reaction to Islam's spectacular spread within a century of the death of the Prophet, while the later «mission civilizatrice» of colonialism represented a belated western recovery from the shock of Christian withdrawal from the Holy Land following the demise of the Crusades, capitalizing upon the subsequent defeat of Ottoman Muslim forces at Vienna in 1529. Later Zionist recovery of that same land fulfills the pattern as well, even though its origins were expressly secular, utopian and socialist, the symbolic forces it unleashed easily transmuted into virulently religious forms of nationalism.

When religion can so easily mask and mercifully legitimate forces intent on dominating land, as well as natural resources crucial to the industrialized world like oil, what hope have we of turning those same religious traditions into forces for reconciliation? Very little, humanly speaking, and each of the Abrahamic faiths deploys its symbolic resources to help us under-

<sup>11</sup> Sara Grant: *Towards an Alternative Theology: Confessions of a Nondualist Christian* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002).

<sup>12</sup> Leiden: Brill, 1996.

<sup>13</sup> See my *Knowing the Unknowable God* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986); the term «Islamicate» was coined by Marshall Hodgson to convey the extensive cultural milieu: *Venture of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

<sup>14</sup> For the response 138 Muslim scholars to Pope Benedict and other Christian leaders: «A Common Word between Us» (13 September 2007), see [www.acomonword.com/](http://www.acomonword.com/)

stand that fact. What Christians call «original sin,» Jews call *yetzer ra* [inclination to evil], and Muslims *jahiliyya* [state of ignorance]. In Islam, this description of Bedouin tribes in the Hejaz before the revelation of the Qur'an «came down» to Muhammad became normative for all human beings bereft of revelation, wandering aimlessly in the desert as they follow the whims of their own wayward desires. Indeed, that parable sounds familiar to Christians, with Paul's reminder that «the good that we would do we don't do, and the evil that we would not do we do do;» indeed, nothing can save us from this «body of death» but «the grace of God in Christ Jesus our Lord» (Romans 7:18), reminding us of Chesterton's quip that «original sin is the only part of Christian theology which can really be proved.»<sup>15</sup> The inertial pull of *yetzer ra* in Jewish ethos can be detected in any conversation among Jews, particularly ones intent on improving a current situation, whatever it may be. Yet the contrary path of Torah observance stands, as Muslims have the living presence of God's creating and healing Word in the Qur'an, and Christians «the grace of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.» So a grim diagnosis of the human condition is matched by a strong antidote for its crippling effects. But how effective have these antidotes been, for as long as they have been present in the traditions taken separately? Francis of Assisi, whose very life reminded his century of the efficacy of that «grace of God in Christ Jesus,» was said to have been as impressed with the faith of the Muslims whom he met at Damietta as he was depressed at the conduct of the crusading knights with whom he had been transported there. Yet it may be that the opening provided by *Nostra Aetate*, together with cultural changes in attitude catalyzed by increased commingling of cultures, will bring people of faith into alliances which can foster mutual illumination and unveil other dimensions of these faith-traditions. Put more directly, we may now be given the opportunity to accomplish

<sup>15</sup> *Orthodoxy* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1996; original, 1908); excepting radical Calvinist views which have given the doctrine an unacceptable name.

together what each of us has failed to do separately.

What I would like to suggest is that the presence of other-believers can help faithful in each tradition to gain insight into the distortions of that tradition: the ways it has compromised with seductions of state power, the ways in which fixation on a particular other effectively skewed their understanding of the revelation given them. Minority voices within a tradition can often help make that clear, as Mennonites trace compromising elements in western Christianity to an early alliance with Constantine, while Sufi Muslims remind their Sunni and Shi'a companions in faith of the crippling effects of a soul-less *shari'a*, harkening to the way religious and secular leaders colluded in Baghdad in 922 to dispose of Ibn Mansur al-Hallaj: «his hands and his feet were cut off, he was hanged on the gallows, and then decapitated; his body was burned and its ashes cast into the Tigris.»<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the memory of his martyrdom continues to haunt the Islamic world as a poignant reminder of God's presence among us in holy men and women. In fact, this towering figure became the inner guide of Louis Massignon, the French Islamicist whose life spanned the first two-thirds of the twentieth century, guiding his return to his Catholicism in a way which allowed him to continue to be instructed by the vibrant faith of his Muslim friends.<sup>17</sup> His friendship with Paul VI also allowed his voice to resonate in the way that *Nostra Aetate* directed Catholics to a fresh appreciation of Islam. Indeed, each of the twentieth century figures who stand out as spiritual

<sup>16</sup> Rabia Terri Harris, «Nonviolence in Islam: the Alternative Community Tradition,» in Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, ed., *Subverting Hatred: the Challenge of Nonviolence in religious Traditions* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1998) 95–114, at 101. See the four-volume study of Louis Massignon: *the Passion of al-Hallaj, Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, translated by Herbert Mason (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), and Herbert Mason's dramatic précis: *the Death of al-Hallaj* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979).

<sup>17</sup> Mary Louise Gude, C.S.C., *Louis Massignon: The Crucible of Compassion* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996).

leaders in their respective traditions reflects a creative interaction with another faith-tradition, from Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig in Judaism, to Louis Massignon, Jules Monchanin and Bede Griffiths among Catholic Christians; and in Islam, the Pathan leader and man of God, 'Abdul Ghaffar Kahn, who responded to the inspiration of Gandhi to form a hundred thousand Pathan nonviolent soldiers, to help bring independence to India. The fledgling state of Pakistan, led by mullahs and military men, could not countenance Badshah Kahn, however, so imprisoned him and systematically suppressed his army of Khudai Khidmatgars, yet a recent assessment of Pakistan by William Dalrymple notes how the movement has «made a dramatic comeback under the leadership of Ghaffar Khan's grandson, Asfandyar Wali Khan.»<sup>18</sup> So even when religious and political leaders unite to reject the challenge of voices proposing renewal, those voices can also re-emerge.

Yet the fact that each of our religious traditions displays a shadow-side (to borrow an illuminating expression from Jung's psychology) which can easily be manipulated by those intent to harness it to the service of power, seems fated to impede the self-corrective momentum of our traditions.<sup>19</sup> These shadow sides have been reinforced whenever relations among the communities have been governed by polemics, notably the polemics of power. We have seen how centuries of trading the epithet of «infidel» prevented both Christians and Muslims from thinking of one another as «people of faith,» while the genocide at Auschwitz culminated eighteen centuries of «teaching of contempt» (Jules Isaac) as ostensibly Christian societies kept Jews as the other in their midst, alternating between

begrudging toleration and outright persecution.<sup>20</sup> Can it be any wonder that Ashkenazi Jews' relation to Christianity reflected a «know your enemy» scenario? Sephardic Jews, ensconced in the Islamicate, developed a very different set of attitudes, for while they shared a recognized but subaltern (dhimmi) status with Christians, leaders like Moses Maimonides could also flourish in his role as court physician to Salah ad-Din, while continuing to serve his own community in countless ways. (Indeed, articulate Sephardim can bemoan the way Zionism was fostered in the polemical soil of Ashkenazi Judaism, thereby shaping attitudes prevailing in the ensuing Israeli state.<sup>21</sup>) As recent events have revealed a shadow-side of Islam, western societies have reacted so as to reveal their own, with predictable results. What is most significant about this phenomenon is the way it can turn religious traditions into collective idolatries, as they allow themselves to be so fixated on negative features of an opposing community as to block their access to the power to transform hatred and fear in the revelation given them. A contemporary Sufi writer has rendered the name «Islam» as «reconciliation with God,» so highlighting that any tradition will need to become reconciled with its God concomitantly with reconciling to others, for the shadow side effectively obscures the revealing God from the community called to receive revelation in fruitfulness.<sup>22</sup> The dialectic of love and rejection dear to the Hebrew prophets works itself out in each of the Abrahamic faiths.

Yet the God shared by Jews, Christians and Muslims is the free creator of «heaven and earth,» whom the Qur'an describes so simply as «the One who says «be» and it is» (6:73). John Milbank remarks how startling is the biblical

<sup>18</sup> Rabia Terri Harris, note 12, 103; see Eknath Easwaren: *A Man to Match his Mountains: Badshah Khan, Nonviolent Soldier of Islam* (Petaluma CA: Nilgiri Press, 1984), William Dalrymple, «A New Deal in Pakistan,» *New York Review of Books* 55:5 (3 April 2008) at 16.

<sup>19</sup> See my review of two studies by Avital Wohlman: «A Philosophical Foray into Difference and dialogue: Avital Wohlman on Maimonides and Aquinas,» *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 76 (2002) 181–94.

<sup>20</sup> Jules Isaac, *Has anti-Semitism Roots in Christianity?* (New York: National Conference of Christians and Jews, 1961)

<sup>21</sup> See David Sasha in *Sephardic Heritage Update* (8 October 2002), available from slipstein@aol.com.

<sup>22</sup> For the relations among Revealer, revealing Word, and receiving community, my suggestion of the triadic structure of Abrahamic faiths in *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993).

account of the origins of the universe in an «original peaceful creation.» Yet he also reminds us how that text has become so «concealed ... beneath the palimpsest of the negative distortion of dominium» that the church must continually «seek to recover [it] through the superimposition of a third redemptive template, which corrects these distortions by means of forgiveness and atonement.»<sup>23</sup> For the «dominion» to which he alludes extends beyond nature to include other human beings as well, legitimizing force to subdue any recalcitrant group. Yet any effort to restore the original peace of creation, by Jews, Christians, or Muslims, will entail recovering the ways by which each tradition has left room for our own desires to distort the community's aspirations, so warranting the use of force ostensibly «in the way of God» yet along paths we outline ourselves. And since each one of our Abrahamic communities has shown itself less than exemplary in that task, we may find our best resources lie in learning from each other's relative successes or failures.

What we dearly need at this point are ritual ways of expressing that «triangulation through friendship» which Louis Massignon enjoined and exhibited in his life. Couples facing the prospect of interfaith marriages, who sense how fidelity to their respective faiths will prove crucial to their mutual fidelity over a lifetime, have come up with exemplary exercises. Yet even in relationships of far less intimacy, and especially for those who are striving together towards a shared goal, joint ways of prayer will prove crucial. Ronald Wells tells a story of a eucharistic service intended to reinforce faltering efforts to bridge the acrimonious religious divide long blocking peacemaking in northern Ireland: in the face of ecclesiastical rules preventing full eucharistic participation to express their shared hope for reconciliation, an older Catholic woman took the communion wafer in her own hands to her Protestant counterpart, offering half of it to him with the words: «The body of Christ broken for us.»<sup>24</sup> Let us attend to the total symbolism here, for if age bears the fruit of a wisdom born of suffering, her gender allowed her to

bridge the ecclesiastical divide. Indeed, women may best serve to foster reconciliation between forces now dividing our world into Christian and Muslim, much as women's groups helped to defuse the conflict between Christian societies in Ireland. Moreover, the need for ritual expression reminds us forcibly of Jesus' distillation of the multiple commandments of the Torah to two: reconciliation with God will only be effected as we reconcile with one another, and how better express that intertwining than in rituals?

In his Holy War, Holy Peace, Marc Gopin exploits his rabbinic background and conflict resolution training to ask how religion can bring peace to the Middle East? And his sensitivity to the deeply divisive human issues involved culminates in the final section: specific steps toward a new relationship.<sup>25</sup> These specific steps follow upon a recognition of the ways in which traditional practices (sulh) adopted from Islamic and Christian Arab society, as well as teshuva (repentance) from Jewish religious practice, can contribute to reconciliation by neutralizing abiding obstacles stemming from fear or from insult to honor (183–94). So some of the steps he outlines come under the rubric of «myth, ritual, and ceremony» (204–19). These embody the ritual remembering of events which once poisoned the atmosphere, yet doing so in a context where ritual can bring a sense of participating in one another's pain and so eliciting a shared hope. Already groups of bereaved parents are meeting together across the divide, teaching one another how much each set of parents needs the other to bridge the chasm caused by the violent death of their children. What is especially significant here is that the bereaved faces in «the Parents' Circle» are not at all like the stereotypes of those who pulled the trigger or carried the bomb. Rituals may be second-best to such face-to-face groups, yet they carry a potency which can reach yet more widely.

<sup>24</sup> Ronald Wells: «Northern Ireland: A Study of Friendship, Forgiveness and Reconciliation,» in *The Politics of Past Evil: Religion, Reconciliation, and the Dilemmas of Transitional Justice*, edited by Daniel Philpott (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006).

<sup>25</sup> New York: Oxford, 2002.

<sup>23</sup> *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990) 317.

Finally, there is mounting evidence that nothing short of the quality of forgiveness at once demanded and facilitated by the Abrahamic revelations will be able to empower people to continue in hope in the face of devastation endorsed by the shadow sides of those same religious faiths. For once religion has been misused to reinforce chauvinistic aspirations, indeed to legitimize demonization of others, appeals to fairness and human rights will hardly be able to be heard. Nothing short of mutual acknowledgment of responsibility for the ensuing human disaster will be able to clear the air to the point where the parties in conflict can envision one another sharing a common destiny. Only then, as Alan Torrance reminds us, will Jews, Christians, or Muslims each be freed to act towards the other from the unconditional acceptance rendered to each by the free creator freely revealed in their respective scriptures.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, short of that, no fresh start will be given a chance, for

each attempt will be measured against the accumulated resistance and resentment engendered by protracted conflict. As South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission has exhibited, and Terri Phelps' literary analysis of the documents so poignantly delineates, only the truth, compassionately related and received, can liberate.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> See his essay in *The Politics of Past Evil: Religion, Reconciliation, and the Dilemmas of Transitional Justice*, edited by Daniel Philpott (note 23).

<sup>27</sup> *Shattered Voices* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

