

Politics and Forgiveness

Some years ago Daniel Cappon of the Department of Environmental Studies at York University, told the *Globe and Mail* that Canadians should not harbor the false illusion that they are somehow immune to racism. He said, "They aren't." The racial troubles are only beginning. He was right. Racial intolerance in Canada is growing. Non-whites complain about the alarming increase in racism. The plight of those who descended from black Loyalists in the Maritimes, the appalling treatment of Canada's native people and the increase of anti-Semitism give the lie to our society's pretense of encouraging diversity. Ours is not a perfect world. Fallen man, though still an image bearer of God is prone to aggression and mistrust. The ethnic cleansing campaign in the Balkans is a gruesome testimony to what people can do to each other when enraged by unjust actions. Injustice and the inability to forgive have led to a relentless drive for revenge. Is reconciliation still possible in a world of unspeakable atrocities? Or must vengeance have the last word? Herbert Marcuse said, "One cannot, and should not, go around happily killing and torturing and then, when the moment has come, simply ask, and receive forgiveness." Marcuse was not a Christian.

Christians are exhorted to forgive those who injure them. They are to forgive because God for Christ's sake has forgiven them. But many Christians seem to make a distinction between private and public forgiveness. But just as forgiveness has an important place within the life of the family, so there is an important place for it in political life.

Some recent Christian writers have begun to develop what they call a "politics of forgiveness." Forgiveness is viewed as a dynamic concept of change. Atkinson comments that it acknowledges the reality of evil, wrong and injustice, but it seeks to respond to wrong in a way that is creative of new possibilities. Forgiveness does not seek revenge. It leads to reconciliation. On rare occasions nations have repented of their sin and sought forgiveness. Before unification West Germany paid out \$30 billion in compensation to the Jews. After East Germany had elected a free parliament, its first order of business was an act of contrition. "We feel sorrow and shame, and acknowledge this burden of German history," said the deputies. "We ask all the Jews of the world to forgive us." And today Germany and the state of Israel have harmonious relationships. In the name of our Lord, who said to his executioners, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34), we must implement the politics of forgiveness. Repentance and forgiveness are the major steps toward reconciliation between white and coloured races, between the oppressors and the oppressed. Without forgiveness, we have no future.

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