
Donald Shriver, Union Theological Seminary President Emeritus, describes Honest Patriots as a sequel to his 1995 book, An Ethic for Enemies: Forgiveness in Politics,1 where he began a significant conversation on forgiveness as a political virtue. For him, repentance is “indispensable to a genuine forgiveness-transaction between human beings.” (vii) This book has begun an equally important and powerful conversation on repentance as Shriver explores social political repentance in the recent histories of Germany, South Africa and the United States, with the former two countries’ experiences as suggestive of ways citizens of the United States might “work harder” at repenting for the treatment of African-Americans and Native-Americans in our own country. Shriver then documents ways that Americans have begun to deal with these transgenerational traumas, including his own personal journey.

Shriver combines civic shame with civic pride by documenting what people have done “to confront the past for the sake of ridding the present and future of its lingering effects.” (5) According to Shriver, “this is more a ‘how to’ book than an ‘ought to’ book.” (6) He quotes Kenneth Boulding, “If it has happened once, it must be possible.” (265) This is a very hopeful and instructive book in that we see what has been done, not just what we believe ought to be done. Its focus is on the positive steps that can be taken through museums, monuments and in histories and narratives about the past: “The ethical language of this book has majored in the declarative mood. It has largely skirted imperatives, in view of the dangers of moralism.” (267) However, Shriver goes on to point out, “Yet the imperative ‘never again’ resides in every act of acknowledgment celebrated in these pages.” (267)

HONEST PATRIOTS

In the context of a nation’s history, what is an “honest patriot”? Shriver quotes William Sloane Coffin who says,

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There are three kinds of patriots, two bad, one good. The bad are the uncritical lovers and the loveless critics. Good patriots carry on a lover’s quarrel with their country, a reflection of God’s lover’s quarrel with all the world. (3)

Shriver gives his definition:

This is a book about citizens in three countries who have revisited pasts of which their moral and historical sense makes them ashamed but who have done so, not in a spirit of moralism but with explicit intention to confront a past for the sake of ridding the present and future of its lingering effects. I will call that citizen spirit and intention honest patriotism. (5)

Following Alexis DeToqueville in the 1830s, Shriver recognizes the reluctance of Americans to be critical of their country.

Nothing is more annoying in the ordinary intercourse of life than the irritable patriotism of the Americans. A foreigner will gladly agree to praise much in their country, but he would like to be allowed to criticize something, and that he is absolutely denied. Americans have long seen themselves as shaped by a certain innocence lacking in the Old World, an innocence hardly redressed apart from a framework by which an honest patriot is to be measured.

In America’s Battle for God. A European Christian Looks at Civil Religion, German theologian Geiko Muller-Fahrenholz offers a theological critique of American civil religion and advocates a vision of reconciliation politics grounded in John Winthrop’s, “A Modell of Christian Charity,” drawing from the “counsell of Micah” (Micah 6:8) three primordial criteria for just power—justice, mercy and humility. (181) The early Christian Letter to Diognetus speaks of Christians as living in their own countries as “aliens” while every foreign land is also their “fatherland.” According to Shriver, honest patriots are able to “sit free” of their own country enough so as to be able to bring a critical perspective, the “counsell of Micah,” to their citizenship. To be an honest patriot, even a good American, cannot be just a matter of loyalty. At this point, Shriver’s book requires some additional reflection on the domain of social ethics as charted variously by John Rawls, Richard Rorty and Stanley Hauerwas (and others) in order to save us from potential journeys to impunity, for example, the debate around Judge

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BOOK REVIEW

Michael Mukasey as Attorney General and the failure of the United States to ratify an International Criminal Court at The Hague.

REMEMBRANCE

The journey to repentance starts with remembrance. Shriver writes,

As so often illustrated in these pages, there are two ways down which a body of humans can go after its members have experienced gross damages from each other. They can retreat into memory as into a prison, nourish mutual hostility, and make plans for reprisal. Or, having revisited the memory, they can search together for keys that unlock the prison. They can covenant not to repeat the past and can commit mutually to finding new ways of living together. (260)

Shriver contends, “We need to remember more accurately and more publicly.” (4) We need to get the story, the history straight. Remembrance is key to our “moral, psychological and spiritual health.” (4) Without this, shared memories will not be truly reformed.

Shriver’s documentation of efforts at remembrance is rich. He shows how history books have been rewritten through many twists and turns in Germany, South Africa and the United States. He finds forms for remembrance in the creation of new anniversaries: a Day of Remembrance in Germany, and Reconciliation Day in South Africa. Monuments and museums have been created that memorialize these histories, including living memorials such as the effort at a common history through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and a common future through a new Constitution in South Africa.

The stories of how three cities in the USA, Richmond, Rosewood, and Tulsa, have dealt with their negative pasts are instructive. The lessons he draws outline a path forward:

- A society must be somewhat open to the voicing of minority memory.
- However small, some group must keep the memory alive.
- An individual must speak up, and an institution must support him or her in doing so.
- Some degree of law and law enforcement have to facilitate these freedoms.
- A coalition of the few, from both sides of divided memories, may have to meet to strategize for correcting public consciousness.
- Political institutions must be pressured to put a stamp of
Legitimacy on the new memory.
Public contention must continue, but the issues and burdens of proof have changed. (153-157)

Stories such as these beg us answer the question of whether all memories are equal. In Memory, History, Forgetting, 5 Paul Ricoeur writes of the problematic of forgetting and forgiving: of forgetting, the problematic of memory and faithfulness to the past; of forgiving, the problematic guilt and reconciliation with the past. The dilemma is recognized by Shriver as he recounts these in relation to competing monuments in South Africa, the thirteen-acre Freedom Park on a Pretoria hill not far from the Voortrekker Monument, the symbolism of both saluted by Nelson Mandela. (84) However, as Ricoeur reminds us, we are left with “the hierarchy of the uses and abuses” of the past, “what echo, what response” we wish to invoke, “the difficulties and equivocations raised by the presumed duty of memory can expect to encounter on the side of forgetting—and why one absolutely cannot speak of a duty of forgetting.” (418) In the end, which statue remains in the Cape Town Gardens close to Parliament, that of Cecil Rhodes or the as yet to be built statue to Nelson Mandela? Identity is constituted in what we choose to remember. Identity is the stuff of contemporary conflict. This is a chapter yet to be written.

Repentance and Reparations

Honest patriots remember and repent. Remembrance of wrongdoing must lead to action—to acts of apology, repentance, and attempts to right the wrong. The most difficult issue that arises here is that of reparations. For the United States of America, this encompasses the “Old Unpaid Debt” to African-Americans. Rather than try to prescribe a course of action, Shriver asks for a conversation—a public dialogue, “with no forgone conclusion.” Citing Randall Robinson,

The catharsis occasioned by a full-scale reparations debate . . . could launch us with critical mass numbers into a surge of black-self discovery . . . . We could disinter a buried history, connect it to another, more recent and mistold, and give it as a healing to the whole of our people, to the whole of America. (193)

An ensuing list of questions (195-203) points out that these issues also apply to reparations for Native Americans, recognizing that “Indian claims for tangible redress have long clustered around two daunting

Repentance and reparations are about justice. Surprisingly, Shriver does not present one of the primary gifts from South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, an understanding of justice as restorative justice. When asked why there were no trials, no retributive justice, Bishop Tutu and others spoke of another form of justice, restorative justice, where the focus is not just on punishing offenders. It is about harm, accountability and engagement, identifying the needs of those harmed and what needs to be done to make things right by offenders as well as communities to promote healing. Restorative justice principles, implicit in the TRC, were designed to be prelude to a new Constitution. So also, restorative justice lays out the tangible acts of repentance that can lead to new community.

Further dialogue among honest patriots is needed. Arguing from the Centre of Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics, University of Melbourne, Janna Thompson\footnote{Janna Thompson, \textit{Taking Responsibility for the Past. Reparation and Historical Justice} (Polity 2002).} writes that there are two contemporary discourses about injustice: one is legalistic and backward looking and the second is theological and forward-looking. The first is concerned with restitution, entitlements and compensation while the second is concerned with apology, forgiveness, remorse, atonement, and reconciliation. Shriver opens the door to this forward-looking proposal, with fuller entry being made by his colleague and fellow theologian Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz with his conception of “reconciliation politics.”

The supposition of Shriver’s book is that for the United States of America to find itself in the twenty-first century, full entry down a path of reparations, yet to be defined, is required. For Thompson, this means remembering between the terrain of vengeance and forgiveness.\footnote{Martha Minow, \textit{Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence} (Beacon Press 1999).} We honor treaties, legal contracts, deeds and entitlements which predecessors have made. Positive historical obligations like these draw us to reparations\footnote{Robert Nozick, \textit{Anarchy, State, and Utopia} (Basic Books, Inc. 1974).} such as those raised by Shriver. Questions might be asked of American society, such as the following: Are provisions for gambling or gaming on native reservations efforts at restorative justice or a deeply cynical means allowing for other forms of exploitation? How are different ethnic groups invited to the political table while they are discouraged through banking or other forms of monetary policy to
hold onto property—a central point in Lockean and Hegelian theory for full political and civic rights. Yet, how do we open the way for a future so as not to remain in a past cycle of anger and resentment that only yields further retribution and violence?\(^9\) Further discussion is needed at this point, for the realities of social psychology remain distant from the world of politics.\(^10\) Restorative justice provides a set of principles and practices to enable discussion toward what might be reparative acts. Restorative justice, a form of Winthrop’s “counsell of Micah,” can authenticate apology; but without meaningful restoration it becomes another tool in the toolbox of impunity.\(^11\)

**AN AGENDA FOR THE AMERICAN FUTURE: MOURNING, APOLOGY AND RESPONSIBILITY**

Shriver concludes, appropriately, with an agenda for an American future by launching a conversation around three points. First he cites the need to *expand the scope of public mourning*. Shriver cites Abraham Lincoln as a guide. In his Second Inaugural Address (1865), Lincoln promised “charity for all,” for “him who shall have borne the battle on both sides, and for his widow and his orphan.” (273) Few politicians have followed this lead. He adds, “The mourning of foreigners requires courage and moral imagination not popular in any nation. . . . But there is a deep moral flaw in exclusive domestic grief.” (269) Shriver would like to see a conversation on making October 12 an All-America Day—a day of repentance for all forms of dehumanization in the history of the United States, similar to Remembrance Day (January 27) in Germany or “The Day of Reconciliation” (December 16) in South Africa.

The second point of Shriver’s agenda relates to *the scope and role of apology*. Here Shriver asks us to follow the lead of Harry Truman who, in 1947, laid a memorial wreath at Chapultepec Castle on the monument to six Mexican army cadets who one hundred years before had killed themselves rather than surrender to the American army [during the Mexican-American War, 1846-48]. Truman said, “God forbid that I should claim for our country the mantle of perfect righteousness. We have committed sins of omission and sins of commission, for which we stand in need of the mercy of the Lord.”

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In response, a local newspaper headline proclaimed: “Rendering Homage to the Heroes of ‘47, Truman Heals an Old National Wound Forever.” Apologies have a political impact and Shriver concurs—a point American society might do well to heed in our current political climate.

Third, with power comes responsibility. Shriver raises the question of the scope and limit of our American responsibility for the lives of our world neighbors. This area of the book invites further analysis. It implicitly invokes a “Niebuhrian humility,” something taken up more pointedly in Andrew Bacevich’s alert to the “thrall of military power”—shock and awe—that has captivated the American imagination in an effort to rid the world of evil through what C. Wright Mills identified as “military metaphysics,” the tendency to see international problems as military problems. Shriver invites us here to look at a more fundamental problem which reminds us of what Niebuhr saw at the start of the U.S. national security state: that without a deep understanding of cultural differences American foreign policy would lunge between the extremes of offering economic advantage in exchange for strategic cooperation or overcoming intransigence with military force.

Shriver speaks of developing an international political ethic. We encourage him to pursue this important project. To do so would take us to what Müller-Fahrenholz calls a “reconciliation politics,” which is, for him the Reapoltik for the twenty-first century. Such a politics asks us to face the common human identity of all persons; the fact that guilt and shame are an inevitable part of all relationships. It asks us to admit that a deep remembering finds focus in the necessity of apology; and that a realistic assessment of our global predicament asks us to look at the “underside” of western civilization (slavery, genocide and racism) as well as to the “overside”; and it asks us to acknowledge the legitimate public roles to be played by religious institutions, humanitarian movements and global NGOs, referred to as “Track II” diplomacy (Joseph Montville), together with governments, in promoting “humane global governance.”

Shriver concludes his book with the hopeful words of two Christian laypersons from Germany:

America will achieve leadership in self-restraint and critical self-reflection. The problems ahead of us in the global village are too

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big even for the strongest nation to handle alone. Gratitude and contrition make honest patriots, and such patriots are best qualified to be responsible World citizens. (285)

This combination of “criticism with celebration” (5) is a note sounded throughout this book. Whether we walk with Bonhoeffer, writing from his cell in 1943, or with our contemporaries facing such daunting challenges as nuclear armaments, ecological devastation or unjust distribution of wealth, this note of grace is an important religious point to sound amid tasks that are fraught with deep theological and practical implications. In conclusion, we are reminded of Bishop Desmond Tutu’s phrase, “When I dehumanize you, I dehumanize myself.” Shriver’s Honest Patriots has shown us a way out of global dehumanization.

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