

THE SOUL OF EUROPE

IMAGINATION – CONFISCATED

A PAPER FOR DISCUSSION
BY
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*What is the price of experience?
Do men buy if for a song
Or wisdom for a dance in the street?
No it is bought with the price
Of all that a man hath, his home,
His wife, his children.
Wisdom is sold in the desolate market
Where none can come to buy
And in the withered field where the
Farmer ploughs for bread in rain.*
William Blake

INTRODUCTION

The Soul of Europe is an NGO whose aim is 'to create tangible signs of hope in Europe'. I founded the Soul of Europe in 2000 after 30 years as a parish priest in London.

It was not until my colleague Peter Pelz and I arrived in Banja Luka, Bosnia, in 2000 that we discovered what the Soul of Europe had to do.

Banja Luka is the administrative centre of the Srpska Republic, one of the two entities which make up Bosnia and Herzegovina, and was created in 1995 as part of the Dayton Agreement. Today Banja Luka is predominantly a Bosnian Serb city. This was not always the case. Over the past 5 centuries it used to be predominantly Muslim. Under Tito the Serb population grew, the Croats stayed the same and the Muslim population, though still the majority, declined.

Banja Luka did not constitute a war zone during the war in Bosnia. The city saw no fighting, but it experienced the worst abuses of human rights in the whole country. Nearly all non-Serbs were forcibly removed from their homes. The numbers are still being contested, anything between 30,000 and 70,000. As they left, so Serbs being driven out of the Serbian enclave in Krajina by Croats took their place, as well as Serbs from Sarajevo.

Since the war the international community has made considerable efforts to make it possible for people to return to their homes. A number have returned but most sell up and leave. This is mainly due to poor employment prospects, and continuing discrimination and violence by Serbs against non-Serbs.

Banja Luka is a frontier town, about the size of a place like Nottingham. It became an important northern outpost of the Ottoman Empire, on the boundary with the Austro Hungarian Empire. The town is situated at the entrance to the Vrbas Gorge, with the mountains of central Bosnia to the south, the flat plains stretching north to Zagreb and east to Belgrade.

In 1969 a violent earthquake damaged the city. Today it is a mixture of shabby non-descript high-rise buildings and streets of small houses surrounded by mostly unkempt gardens. Banja Luka still does not

feel like home to the large numbers of Serbs from the Krajina who took over Muslim properties. This is mainly because these Serbs came from farming villages, and are not used to living in cities. Banja Luka used to be one of the most beautiful places in Bosnia, a popular vacation centre for Serbs and Muslims from all over former Yugoslavia, because of its attractive natural setting, and medieval castle overlooking the River Vrbas which flows through the city - also because of the Ferhadija Mosque, a celebrated jewel of Ottoman architecture, designed by Sinan, who built the great Sulejmanija Mosque in Istanbul. The Ferhadija Mosque was destroyed with 16 other mosques in 1993 as part of the Bosnian Serb programme of ethnic cleansing.

The destruction of the mosques, the desecration of Muslim cemeteries and the shredding of property deeds owned by Muslims sent a clear signal that history would be rewritten. The guidebook to Banja Luka makes no mention of the Ferhadija Mosque, and just refers in one sentence to the 'centuries of suffering under *cruel* Turkish rule'. The foundations of the mosques were carefully dug out. As a Serb general said: 'When they (the Muslims) see what we have done, they will leave on their own accord.'

Today Banja Luka has pretensions to be a capital city. The Srpska Republic has its own president, two vice-presidents and a National Assembly of Deputies. France, Germany, the UK and US have Embassy offices in Banja Luka. There are tree-lined boulevards typical of any town in the former Austro-Hungarian empire, along which stand municipal buildings alongside the Orthodox and Catholic cathedrals. One park has a tennis club popular with the international community.

The Soul of Europe discovered its mission in Banja Luka. We learnt about ethnic cleansing and the deliberate destruction of the Ottoman heritage. We quickly found out about the intentions to remove every trace of Islam in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

So we promised the mufti of Banja Luka, and the Reis ul Ulema, the senior religious cleric in Bosnia, that we would see the Ferhadija Mosque reconstructed exactly as it was. The mosque represented the heart of Banja Luka. Even Catholics and Orthodox loved it. One Serb told me that it was 'part of the landscape of the town'. The destruction took place with military precision. Local residents were warned by the police to keep their windows open so that the blast of dynamite would not blow the glass in. A curfew was imposed. The stones were then crushed and removed by lorry.

Once we made the decision to help the mufti, we wrote to the leaders of Banja Luka, senior politicians, religious leaders, the mayor and his cabinet, teachers and business people, to meet together to discuss what steps could be taken towards *Prosperity, Reconciliation and Peace* in their town. Fourteen months after our first visit to Banja Luka we all met at the Centre for Reconciliation at Coventry Cathedral. It took that time to persuade them to come. We had after all arrived in Banja Luka unknown and uninvited. We soon encountered the visceral mistrust of the west. Were we spies from the CIA? But they all came. No one walked out. We were invited to return and continue working in Banja Luka.

We said: 'We come with open hands. We want to rebuilt the Ferhadija, but we want to do all we can to strengthen the Catholic and Orthodox dioceses, to breathe new life into politics. We want to reverse history, to show Bosnia and Europe that Banja Luka can once again become a unique city in Europe, where all three ethnic groups can flourish equally, as they have done for centuries before.'

This introduction is no more than a sketch of Banja Luka. A more complete picture of Bosnia and Herzegovina would describe the progress since the war of the efforts of the international community, the UN, Nato, the EU and the Office of the High Representative, to push Bosnia towards integration into Europe.

Unless Bosnia takes its place in Europe it will have no future. Banja Luka will become an economic black hole, dominated by the mafia and a breeding ground for Serb nationalism. It has to be said that is anyone's guess if a whole range of reforms, of the judiciary, the police, education, the system of taxation and much else being implemented by Paddy Ashdown, the present High Representative, will stick.

I will not continue to describe the activities of the Soul of Europe in any detail. Our plans for reconstructing the Ferhadija Mosque as a heritage project, a unique example of collaboration between Islam and Christianity, our intention to establish a place where cultural memories are honoured, our attempts to bring together Catholic and Orthodox communities, and the birth of the Banja Luka Civic Forum, whose central tenet is that *change happens when those who do not usually speak are heard by those who do not usually listen*; all these have been described elsewhere. (1)

IMPEDIMENTS

What I need to do now is develop an argument about how the processes by which funding is obtained compound the problems. It is not just a question of finding funds to do the work. This is common to anyone engaged in any form of pioneering activity. It is simply that the values which inform funding by governments and the European Commission contradict the aims of a small NGO committed to address the issues of justice and the slow difficult work of reconciliation.

For two years the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London supported the Soul of Europe. We have also had to rely on gifts from individuals, grants from foundations and at two critical moments, significant donations from the Libyan Philanthropic organization, The World Islamic Call Society.

The Soul of Europe prepared and submitted a bid for funding to the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights, under the section: *Support for Democratisation, Good Governance and the Rule of Law*. This bid concerned establishing the Banja Luka Civic Forum.

The funding was for a 3 year project. It took three months to prepare. We submitted it in November 2002. The results of the bid were to be announced in June 2003, but not until October 2003 did we learn that the bid had failed. (2)

One of the more curious aspects of applying for funding through the European Commission is that applicants are forbidden personal contact with anyone connected with the Application. Queries can be submitted to an email address, but that vanished once the deadline passed.

The reason for this regulation is that it prevent any opportunity for bribery of officials. A proper distance has to be preserved between potential recipients and donors.

But there is another reason. Given the way applications are framed and evaluated, human contact becomes unnecessary. The Application asks, quite reasonably enough, for a clear statement on aims, objectives and strategy. And then these demands intensify. Activities have to be described in detail. Priorities for each activity have to be justified. A three year project meant that the activities for each month, month on month, had to be described in detail, and how each activity related to what had happened before, and what was planned. Questions about internal and external continuous assessment have to be answered. Local partners have to provide value, and estimating and measuring the impact on target groups was essential. Every activity had to relate to every other in order that the aims and objectives of the project could be placed in a logical frame, like a complicated jigsaw puzzle. Any piece missing and as an official told me: 'your bid will be binned!'

A technical and financial grid evaluated the Soul of Europe's application. The title says it all. Social engineering is the core conviction, which affirms that the world 'out there' can be analysed, observed, measured and activities can be controlled and managed. If the world beyond the project is uncertain and unstable, a successful log frame will insulate the project from all that.

If this is the way the world works then inevitably it conveys a view of human nature which is reductionist and mechanistic.

For example in Bosnia there is considerable apathy and unwillingness to take part in the many programmes, which NGOs concerned with developing civil society arrange. A friend put it: 'We had the Turks for 500 years, then the Austro Hungarians, then 2 world wars, then fifty years of communism, and you expect us to take charge of our destiny? Now we have become a training ground for people like you, with your bright ideas!' To which I would add that a few workshops on 'building capacity' while better than nothing, do not really begin to touch the problems. We are confronted in Bosnia as in so many other places with a demand to be productive: instant solutions, quick fix and rapid results. Funding has to produce concrete results, (concrete is a favourite word in NGO circles) which satisfy politicians and taxpayers.

But this one-dimensional view of human nature does not acknowledge the astonishing potential in each of us. In Bosnia for example there are hardly any opportunities for recognizing and celebrating the stories of generosity, compassion, bravery and courage of many Serbs, Muslims and Croats during the war. And one of the triumphs of the 20th century is the survival and flourishing of the cultural and intellectual life of the people of Sarajevo. If ever a testimony to the human spirit was needed, it happened there, and continues to thrive.

Of course much of this argument needs careful nuancing. Projects fail for many different reasons. There are many successful projects because the managers have learnt to play the game, which is played from the day the completed application arrives in Brussels or Whitehall. And only the most cunning managers see their projects succeed, in spite of the straight jacket of the neutral, technocratic approach which informs the process.

The language in which the work of reconciliation is couched is 'business speak': impact, stakeholders, fast track, level playing fields, resources, targets, bullet points, delivery, outsourcing, benchmarking, ring fencing, business plans, etc. The language is ugly. It is sloppy and often meaningless.

I remember an official telling me: 'Make sure you deliver the deliverables in a sustainable way!' (When I challenged him to define in what sense he was using the word 'sustainable', he could not answer me.)

Three pictures:

Two Bosnians in their twenties now living in London, refugees from Banja Luka in 1995. They arrived at a meeting of the Bosnia Diaspora, brandishing well-thumbed paperbacks on '*How to Succeed in Business*'. One of them enquired how we were measuring the impact of the project to reconstruct the Ferhadija Mosque.

In Banja Luka I sat in the Palace Hotel with a courageous Muslim woman who had stayed in Banja Luka throughout the war to be with her sick mother. She insisted: 'This is my town.' She has become a seasoned fundraiser from foundations and the EC. We had spoken personally about her experience and what happened to her during the war. Then she talked about her work. Out it poured: outputs and outcomes, concrete projects and the rest. She suddenly stopped. Her eyes filled with tears. 'I can't go on like this!' she cried.

In another part of Bosnia I visited an NGO. I asked the four people sitting in front of their computers what they were doing; preparing reports for their funders, they told me. What are you doing locally? I asked. Well, they said, we are networking with our European colleagues. At the heart of their activities there was a void. Language, yes, but no life.

People deserve better.

How have we academics, intellectuals, politicians, officials, experts in development allowed this to happen. What has gone wrong? What is the root of the problem?

Bureaucracy is not to blame. (3) Bureaucrats are the guardians of the public purse. Their task is to see that public money is spent in a way that is accountable to the public. If all that is required consists of streamlining systems then changes can and are continually being made to lessen delays and increase efficiency.

But the problem is deeper and more critical.

What I am describing is that the values, assumptions and principles informing the concept of 'materialistic determinism' do not fit the patient, slow work of peacemaking and reconciliation (anymore than they do for cultural activities or intercultural dialogue). Moreover 'materialistic determinism' has become so pervasive, so embedded in the way we operate and in the institutions we have created that they are felt as facts. (4) This it is believed is the way the world is and will be; this is how the world is imagined, described and desired. That is why it is so difficult to locate the causes of the 'misfit'. So, for example, when I speak about these matters to senior diplomats at the Foreign Office in London they say: 'we are just marionettes.' And who pulls the strings? I ask. 'Our political masters,' they reply. Talking to politicians, particularly in Brussels they say: 'Yes, bureaucracy is a problem... is there anything I can do to help?' I am grateful for the offer but decline.

The ways of describing the world 'out there' are based on illegitimate principles. These secular and autonomous assumptions are based on claims of power and pragmatism. But these claims do not ultimately work because they are cut off, removed from fundamental aspirations. In the west we find compensation in consumerism and a host of diversionary activities. Ultimately the myths around materialistic determinism do not touch people. Ultimately they are not compelling. Therefore they lack legitimacy. (5)

But there are those who say: 'It has always been like this, and it is the same the world over.' Both assertions are untrue.

I have been fundraising for over 30 years and I can name the year, 1980, in the UK when 'business speak' began to creep into the discourse about 'development' (and the arts). Before then philanthropy whether from state or private patronage has had a long and complex history.

It is also wrong to say what I am describing is universally true. Two significant donations from the World Islamic Call Society in Libya were unexpected. They showed no interest in business plans. The Libyans needed to ensure that their interests and ours coincided. We found advocates whom the Libyans trusted; the World Islamic Call Society appreciated our tenacity and persistence. What might have irritated the Brussels bureaucrats was for the Libyans, and other Arab donors, a sign of our seriousness. (6)

What we in the West have construed, we can change. We need not; we must not be enthralled by the world of 'business speak'.

WE ARE FACING A CRISIS OF EPISTEMOLOGY – A CRISIS OF WHAT COUNTS AS KNOWLEDGE.

There is another way.

This is the way of knowing through the imagination.

THE IMAGINATION

*I am the necessary angel of earth
Since, in my sight, you see the world again.*
(Wallace Stevens – on Imagination)

Imagination is like Adam's dream, he awoke and found it true
(John Keats)

*'As Kingfishers Catch Fire' – a meditation:
Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lonely in limbs, and lonely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men's faces*
(Gerald Manley Hopkins)

The possible's slow fuse is lit by the Imagination
(Emily Dickinson)

The authentic Utopia is grounded in recollection
(Herbert Marcuse)

I would even say that it (the imagination) plunges into the most impressive tradition: that of liberating acts, of the Exodus and Resurrection. Perhaps there would be no more interest in emancipation, no more anticipation of freedom, if the Exodus and Resurrection were effaced from the memory of mankind.
(Paul Ricoeur)

*We know now we have always been in danger
Down in our separateness
And not up here together but till now
We had not touched our strength.*
(Adrienne Rich)

I make no apology for prefacing this paper with quotations: they signal a change of gear, not of direction.

Imagination is a problematic concept in our post modern world. Post modernism describes, sometimes too extravagantly, the fragmentation, incoherence and nihilism of contemporary culture. Only 'market economics' and 'the market state' remain unchanging and invincible.

So the briefest of sketches of the genealogy of the imagination will show that our present melancholy landscape has not always been so.

Once upon a time the artist used his skills and honed his disciplines to lead the worshipper to God through the image of the icon. The intense but passive eyes and stylised features focussed attention of the worshipper beyond and through the image. Then the portrait painter stressed the image as a means of self expression in, for example, Rembrandt's sombre portraits which study his physical disintegration before death or Van Gogh's vivid paintings which explore his mental disintegration before suicide.

Today the pop poster revels in surface effects, incorporating at random, images, which the artist has ransacked arbitrarily from any source.

Or to put the matter differently: once the artists were craftsmen whose task was to serve and imitate the transcendent plans of the Creator. The inventor replaced this theocentric pattern, taking the place of God. Today he has been replaced by the artist as an 'operator' playing with images, symbols and metaphors.

This genealogy of the concept of the imagination – its development and narrowing of focus is well beyond the scope of this paper, except to say that it is a fleeting reminder that to move beyond the post-modern confusion we need pay attention to how we arrived at where we are, and look for a way forward.

Two aspects of that story are relevant for our enquiry into the nature of imagination. One is that we cannot renege on our responsibility to ‘the other’. The ‘face’ of the other invites and demands a response: to the victim and from the powerless an unconditional response. ‘Where are you?’ comes the question. ‘Here I am. Here we are,’ is the response. (7)

This is the ethical imagination – an imagination which has nothing to do with daydreaming, wishful thinking or the creation of the fantastical.

But this understanding of the imagination is neither stern nor censorious. It does not sentimentalise ‘the other’, because it is balanced and informed by the imagination of hope. Imagination is that capacity to picture, portray and receive the world in ways other than it appears to be at first glance; it is a valid way of knowing. When the imagination begins to function, then we live ‘as’ if we are free, ‘as’ if justice will be done, ‘as’ if forgiveness and peace are possible. The imagination rejects as false what has been long accepted and beyond criticism. It is astonishing how a long established ‘as’ can keep people in their places until a counter ‘as’ emerges, is imagined and given a voice. Oddly, hope begins to be a strength when everything is hopeless; its expression is often unreasonable and indispensable.

There is something old-fashioned, steady and ancient about the ethical and hopeful imagination. Hopeful imagination is not about ‘pie in the sky when you die’; neither is it ‘hoping for the best’. It is a communal and public assertion in which our connectedness is expressed and nourished. Far from being separate, distant and detached as a world informed by facts of materialistic determinism, there is a striving for connection, communion and community although at every turn these aspirations are always being threatened and sometimes defeated.

The working out of the ethical and hopeful imagination in peacemaking and reconciliation has at least 3 implications:

Firstly there has to be a willingness to trust whatever emerges; not manipulating, not even searching for explanations. Attention is as necessary as analysis. Stories as well as statistics. In Bosnia this is particularly difficult: the outward appearance of normality easily induces amnesia about the recent past. I am trying to convey something of the way an artist or a poet goes about her craft.

Secondly the process of peacemaking and reconciliation is as much the product as the end result. Time is needed – a lot of time. Those who initiate this type of work are like weavers, slowly, patiently weaving a strong new cloth. Sometimes the threads will unravel, but with patience the unravelling can resume so the weaving continues. I am speaking about the long haul, not the quick fix.

The process is slow because all the players have to be involved. No one is excluded. It is slow because confidence and trust have to be built up between the different groups. The decision to reconstruct the Ferhadija and the beginning of the project on site immediately raises the question: what do the other groups feel about this, and what should be done to keep their trust. The weaving has to continue and momentum is established (which may be destroyed if funding is not available). As far as possible all levels of society need to know what is happening: national governments, international organizations, local governments and NGOs, all need to be kept in the loop. And always there has to be readiness to take risks (the Coventry Consultation was one such). These are some of the strands which the weaver has to incorporate. And time is needed. (8)

Thirdly it becomes difficult to fit the emerging developing work into a rigid log frame. The future cannot be so easily contained. There is a tentative provisional quality because if the hopeful imagination is flourishing, a new reality whose outcome cannot easily be measured is being born. (9)

If what I have written is true, it requires an upheaval in thinking, and in the way international organizations and institutions, establishing democracy and working for peace and reconciliation, function. Therefore I hope it will be possible to consider this paper as a start for conversation.

Donald Reeves

NOTES

1

Reports and updates are available on the Soul of Europe's website: www.soulofeurope.org or from our office at:

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2

Our application received 85%. I asked for a copy of the Evaluator's Report, which I received with the Evaluator's name removed. They found little to criticise except to say 'that it was somehow too ambitious' and that the Soul of Europe had had 'no experience in handling large budgets.' A conversation, a meeting or an interview would have resolved the first criticism; and had the Evaluators taken up unsolicited references they would have discovered I was responsible for a budget of a turnover year after year of 800K during my ministry at St James's Church Piccadilly.

3

That is not quite true, because of the length of time it takes to process Applications. There are delays. The Soul of Europe had to wait 11 months before we received the result of our Application. Our work in Banja Luka proceeded intermittently because of funding processes. The effect of these delays on those who worked for us increased their cynicism about 'Europe' and reaffirmed their suspicions that they were not being taken seriously. When I informed our partners about the failure of our Application to the EC they shrugged their shoulders: 'What else do you expect?' they said.

4

'Materialistic determinism' is a phrase used to describe the world view I have been outlining. I came across it in Edward Luttwak: *The Missing Dimension*, in Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson (Eds): *Religion: the Missing Dimension of Statecraft* (OUP).

5

This is the argument of Jurgen Habermass in his *On Legitimization*. He is a difficult writer, and I hope I have got his argument right.

In the UK there is an instinctive and widespread distrust of politicians who use the language of 'business speak' – 'delivering resources, etc.' Voters are not impressed with this sort of language applied to Health and Education, etc.

6

I appreciated the contrast made by Professor Leonce Bekeman in his introductory report: *Europe's Duty in Intercultural Dialogue* in *Intercultural Dialogue* published by the European Commission.

‘The Atlantic (western tradition) of mainstream economics lost its original sense of culture and became an abstraction free of culture, less and less inspired by the effort of understanding reality and man’s place in society. On the contrary the pre-modern ‘Mediterranean’ tradition of economic thought perceived the economy as embedded in a complex web of social and cultural institutions regulated by religion and ethical norms (discussed in L Baeck’s *The Mediterranean tradition in economic thought*, Routledge).’

Although this approach may be increasingly marginalized our experience with Libya and to an extent with Qatar, indicates that old habits die slowly. Try doing business in Ramadan.

7

The work of Emmanuel Levinas has meant a lot to me, in his understanding of *the other* – particularly *Totality and Infinity, an Essay on Exteriority* (Pittsburgh 1969). More immediately in Bosnia, the Soul on Europe relies on this understanding. Because we use interpreters, the ‘eyes’, the ‘face’, the body language of ‘the other’ becomes a significant part of communication.

8

A story: One of the first actions by the Banja Luka Civic Forum was a decision to ask the mayor of Banja Luka if they could attend City Council meetings. The Civic Forum could then take the debate out on to the streets and into different neighbourhoods. The mayor refused permission. The committee of the Forum, made up of Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats, were not able to handle this refusal. Two left the committee. The remainder did not know what to do. They had no experience of confronting local officials. Instead of considering different options, the group began to disintegrate. Meanwhile pressure was put on the group to produce high profile events, round tables, conferences etc.

9

Space prevents a consideration of the place of ‘celebration’ as part of hopeful imagination as well as ways of dealing with deep disagreements as an opportunity for building trust. Peace making is an art.

POSTSCRIPT

A CASE FOR BEING BILINGUAL (1)

This paper was written in such a way that I hope it will be understood by anyone concerned with the issues I have raised.

I write as a Christian and as one for whom Christianity matters. Had I written the paper using religious and theological language, some of my readers would have been dismayed – especially those who regard Christianity and religion as incomprehensible or inimical to the pursuit of justice and reconciliation.

However this matter will not be solved just by getting the language right - writing in such a way that theology resonates beyond the church door.

What is at stake are two epistemologies – two different ways of ‘knowing’; and therefore for those who are ‘religious’ – Jew, Muslim or Christian for example – there is a need to stay close to home, to the roots of their traditions, otherwise they will have nothing to offer than an echo of whatever happens to be the prevailing wisdom.

A story from the Hebrew Scriptures illustrates the case for being bilingual. It occurs in 2 Kings, chapter 18, verses 1-27. Jerusalem is under siege. The Assyrians are at the wall of the city, surrounding it.

Rabshakeh is the negotiator; he stands by the city wall and shouts out the terms of surrender: 'You have no choice: your God has failed!'. Agents of King Hezekiah of Judah say: 'Speak in Aramaic; this we understand. But don't speak to us in Hebrew within the hearing of the people behind the wall.' In other words: 'Speak to us in the language of international diplomacy, which ordinary people do not understand. If you speak in Hebrew they will know what is happening and they will be terrified.' Rabshakeh ignores the request and speaks in Hebrew. This intimidation makes negotiation impossible.

There is also another conversation going on behind the wall: here the Judeans only speak to each other. King Hezekiah orders the Judeans not to answer the Assyrians directly. He goes to the 'house of the Lord'. The prophet Isaiah is summoned to pray for the city. Yahweh – the living God – cannot be mocked. And Isaiah's response is remarkable: 'Do not be afraid of the Empire.'

Two conversations: one on the wall, one behind the wall. On the wall, the language is that of politics, public policy and the project: the agenda is that of the prosperity of Empire. All other claims are excluded. Behind the wall, there is a communal language which holds them to the primal source of their faith – Israel's conversation goes deep into its strange, unique experience expressed in Isaiah's words: 'Do not fear.' The oddity of the conversation behind the wall is often forgotten – not just the emergence of the Torah (which was an 'alternative' reading of reality) but later in the reality of the Kingdom of God where sins are forgiven, the dead raised, debts are cancelled and outcasts return home – always a critique of whatever is the dominant reality.

Two conversations are occurring simultaneously, one on the wall, one behind the wall - but also together, because what is happening is too serious to be one-sided.

Those behind the wall do not, should not compromise their truth. They seek to counter what passes for official truth in the conversations by those on the wall.

Some say there is only one conversation: the one behind the wall. No other conversation is valid. (2)

Others say there is only one conversation: the one on the wall. The story that has lost its power and legitimacy is the one behind the wall.

But beyond the 'conservative' and 'liberal' is another position: that of the person who is learning to be bilingual, living with different epistemologies, so he/she is being recreated by the radical Gospel behind the wall, and is also ready to engage with those on the wall. There is nothing obscurantist about this position; but whether the Churches have it within themselves to be self critical, so clearing a way for renewal, that is a different story.

Donald Reeves
11th November 2004

1

Much of this postscript comes from Walter Brueggemann, whose writing have been an inspiration. His exposition of the story comes in *The Legitimacy of a Sectarian Hermeneutic – in Interpretation and Obedience*.

2

In the USA those on the wall have hijacked most of those behind the wall for its own version of Christian imperialism