The Spirit in Contemporary Culture

FORGIVENESS

A Dilemma of Democracy

Michael Henderson

IN NOVEMBER 1942 THE RUSSIAN PHILOSOPHER, SEMYON FRANK, wrote in his notebook:

> In this terrifying war, in the inhuman chaos which reigns in the world, the one who first starts to forgive will in the end be victorious.[1]

Many people, if they had been privy to his thinking at the time, might have been forgiven for dismissing such a thought as nonsensical. In the heat of battle, when survival seems to be all that matters, it is rare to take the longer view. Even at the best of times, when peace prevails, it is sometimes hard for political figures to regard forgiveness as anything more than a worthy religious or personal abstraction, unrelated to affairs of state. Even to suggest today, for example, that forgiveness holds any key to the future of Europe's institutions is to invite ridicule in some quarters.

Yet, looking back after sixty years, it can be argued that Frank's unrealistic view has been borne out, and that today's Europe rests to an appreciable extent on the bedrock of forgiveness. Most of us take it for granted that the countries which hated each other during World War II are now working as one. The different nationalities may have instinctive reactions which hark back to earlier times, and may occasionally see their neighbours simply in terms of stereotypes, or even make childish or stupid remarks about each other in the European Parliament. But the idea that they might again go to war is laughable.

[1] Philip Boobbyer, *S. L. Frank* (Athens, Oh: Ohio UP, 1995), 203.

The Way, 43/2 (April 2004), 41-56

Baroness Williams,[2] who, as much as any politician in Britain, has devoted her political life to Europe, feels that one of the continent's great achievements in the past decades has been its demonstration of a reliance on political solutions instead of on war. She writes:

> Blasé as Europeans are, most of us simply fail to recognise the scale of that achievement. Yes, it is tirelessly bureaucratic, complicated, deficient in democratic accountability. But in the scales of history, none of these factors begins to outweigh its three great accomplishments, the end of war in the entire European continent, the creation of a common regime of European law based on human rights and the achievement of a single market of 350 million people.[3]

In her view Europe has also become the pioneer of an international system that transcends the nation state, rather like the Holy Roman Empire before the Peace of Westphalia in 1648—an international system that subscribes to certain common standards and values, including rules of behaviour such as those embodied in the Geneva Conventions and in the United Nations' treaties and conventions on weapons of mass destruction.

These accomplishments in Western Europe have been undergirded by forgiveness, in ways that are now often overlooked. As Europe expands to the East, forgiveness continues to be important for any serious approach to maintaining democracy. The prospect of an end to today's continuing cycles of violence may seem distant, but it is certainly no more distant than a peaceful Europe must have seemed to Frank in 1942.

Some definitions might be in order here. For the word 'forgiveness' invites misunderstanding or misrepresentation. It is sometimes mistakenly construed to mean an overlooking or excusing of evil, or an amnesia about crimes, or a relinquishing of the concept of justice. It is not any of these. To use a simple analogy, the Pope forgave the man who tried to assassinate him, but the man still remained in jail. However, what is at stake here is more than the noble act of an individual; collectively, forgiveness can become the dominant mood of

[2] Leader of the Liberal Democrats in the British House of Lords.
[3] Shirley Williams, *Caesar and God* (London: Continuum, 2003), 18.

a country. As the civil rights leader Martin Luther King wrote, 'Forgiveness is not just an occasional act; it is a permanent attitude'.[4]

Forgiveness presupposes its partner, repentance. 'Forgiveness', therefore, as used here, is a shorthand for some of the elements that contribute to the peaceful living together of human beings; it includes facing up to past wrongs, both individually and collectively, and meting out justice, without which old crimes can become the source of future divisions. In Europe, a forgiving attitude has been the motivation for generous economic and political arrangements, in which the United States, too, has been involved.

Forgiveness, in short, is the tough option, not the easy one. The US academic and writer Dr Donald Shriver has written extensively on forgiveness as it applies to the public sphere. He describes it as a complex, demanding discipline:

> It is, in one process over time, an act of intellect, emotion, self-assertion, and other-affirmation. Abandon simplicity and light-heartedness all ye who enter upon the road of forgiveness! It will test your mettle, and your ability to wrestle with evil until you defeat its power to continue harming you. It will draw you to rehearsing the pains of the past in the hope that they need not be repeated. It will divert you from the easy road of taking up the guns of revenge. It will ask you to lift heavy stones for reconstructing a home in which both you and your enemies may live together.[5]

Breaking the Hold of History

Historic evils, long forgotten or minimised by their perpetrators, often live on in the psyches of the victims' descendants. They do not forget. If anything, their resentment increases and the stories become exaggerated. When ancient or modern wrongs are denied by their perpetrators, they will always be a source of potential future conflict. When the enemies of yesterday are still alive, then the challenge is even greater.

Thomas Masaryk, the founder-president of Czechoslovakia, described the Europe that was emerging after World War I as 'a

[4] *The Words of Martin Luther King*, edited by Coretta Scott King (London: Collins Fount, 1984), 23.
[5] Donald Shriver Jr, Speech delivered in Caux, Switzerland, 31 July 2001, printed as a pamphlet, *The Forgiveness We Need* (Washington, DC: Initiatives of Change, 2001), 18.

laboratory atop a vast graveyard'. How much more that observation applies today. The healing of hurts and hates, which is achieved in good measure by both forgiveness and repentance, has to accompany all efforts, political and economic, to create united countries and a united continent

No one should pretend that forgiveness is easy, or that all are agreed on how much priority should be given to it. It is contentious in Russia, for example. The dissident writer Vladimir Bukovsky, author of *To Build a Castle*, has this reaction to the subject:

> Why should anyone talk about forgiveness in the country where evil still triumphs? Far from being repentant, the perpetrators of evil are openly proud of their deeds, past and present. We have to win our battle before we can revert to forgiveness as a cure for our ills. Our worst enemy today is not the vicious circle of hatred, but a complete and stunning apathy on the part of the population.[6]

One must respect the views of a man such as Bukovsky, who has suffered for his convictions. He may not have grasped fully the nature of a forgiveness that does not imply that we should turn a blind eye to evil, or that perpetrators of evils should escape punishment, but his evaluation of some of the challenges facing today's Russia needs to be taken seriously. However, the spirit in which those challenges are tackled may affect the outcome. And those who can be regarded as obstacles in the path of reconciliation may be more ready to accept new truths from people who are not at the same time condemning them.

Another dissident, the poet Irina Ratushinskaya, author of *Grey is the Colour of Hope*, has by contrast spoken publicly about her belief in the importance of the subject of forgiveness for modern Russia. She had received the longest sentence of any woman dissident in the Soviet Union since the days of Stalin, but at the Moscow launch of the Russian edition of my book, *Forgiveness: Breaking the Chain of Hate*, in 2003, she said that she had forgiven those who tortured her—even though they had not asked for forgiveness. To do so was not to justify what they did. Her words echoed those in her book:

[6] E-mail to author, 12 August 2001.

> You must not, under any circumstances, allow yourself to hate! Not because your tormentors have not earned it. But if you allow hatred to take root, it will flourish and spread during your years in the camps, driving out everything else, and ultimately corrode and warp your soul. You shall no longer be yourself, your identity will be destroyed, all that will remain will be an hysterical, maddened and bedevilled husk of the human being that once was.[7]

Ratushinskaya dares to think that a past evil, once faced and forgiven, might help us think differently about those whom we would otherwise hate.

Yuri Pavlov, a former Soviet Ambassador to Costa Rica and Chile, will, of course, approach the subject from a different angle from those who suffered under the Soviet regime. He says that it is difficult to overemphasize the great role of forgiveness in the life of human society. Without it, he claims, there can be no reconciliation or peace. Forgiveness helps to remove the seemingly insuperable barriers of hatred and revenge that divide countries, nations and individuals: 'Russia's rebirth as a great Eurasian power will be impossible without national reconciliation'.[8]

Anatoly Krasikov, the former head of Yeltsin's press office, believes that without forgiveness and repentance Russia will not be in a position to create a civil society which can break free from the hold of the past.[9]

At the Heart of the New Europe

To return to Semyon Frank's thought about forgiveness, let us look for a moment at what has actually happened between the two key countries at the heart of Europe, France and Germany. They had fought three wars in seventy years, and in 1945, as the horrors of the Holocaust were revealed, there were many in the Allied camp who were consumed by the desire for revenge against Germany. Serious thought was given to the dismantling of German industry, and to the creation of a pastoral economy. But at many levels broader considerations prevailed, particularly as it was remembered how the

[7] Irina Ratushinskaya, *Grey is the Colour of Hope* (London: Sceptre, 1989), 278.
[8] Letter to the author, 10 February 2001.
[9] Message for the launch of the Russian edition of *Forgiveness: Breaking the Chain of Hate*.

repressive and punitive reprisals of the Versailles treaty after the First World War had provoked the bitterness in Germany on which Nazism could feed. Indeed, Frank believed that humanity would have recovered easily from the destruction of the First World War if the spirit of hatred and revenge had not poisoned the economic and political life of the following decades.

In September 1946, the former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill spoke in Zurich of his vision of the future of Europe. He said:

> The first step in the recreation of the European family must be a partnership between France and Germany …. There can be no revival of Europe without a spiritually great France and a spiritually great Germany. … Great Britain, the British Commonwealth of Nations, mighty America, and I trust Soviet Russia—for then indeed all would be well—must be friends and sponsors of the new Europe and must champion its right to live and shine.[10]

There were outstanding men of vision at the helm in post-war Europe, such as Konrad Adenauer in Germany, Robert Schuman and Jean Monnet[11] in France, and Alcide de Gasperi in Italy. Michael McGwire, a former attaché in Moscow who now works at the Brookings Institution, describes their motivation and work in an essay in *International Affairs*:

> Driven by the carnage of two World Wars and the certainty that any future war would spell the destruction of their homelands, a small group of far-sighted European statesmen rejected the existing paradigm, where war between their countries was an immutable feature of the international system, and envisioned a new kind of evolving political structure and new ways of resolving disagreements that would achieve the goal of a war-free Europe.[12]

The impetus for unity was aided by the onset of the Cold War.

At the heart of the moves to build a new Europe was the bringing together of the coal and steel industries of France and Germany. As

[10] Quoted by Paul Johnson in *A History of the Modern World* (London: Weidenfeld, 1984), 599.
[11] President of the European Coal and Steel High Authority (1952-1955). He told BBC interviewer Alan Watson in 1973, 'We need to change the psychology of Europe. We need to end the spirit of dominance, replacing it with a spirit of equality and shared interest.'
[12] 78/1 (January 2003), 9.

French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman wrote to German Federal Chancellor Konrad Adenauer in 1950:

> The elimination of the age-old opposition of France and Germany, and a pooling of resources and production, will make war between the two countries not merely unthinkable but actually impossible.[13]

There was a generosity of spirit at work in the United States. The massive flow of capital into Europe provided by the Marshall Plan was the institutional fruit of a change of thinking in government and public opinion in that country. And alongside these structural elements was the effort to help individuals break free of their past. One place, whose work was once described as the ideological equivalent of the Marshall Plan, has been singled out by historians for its contribution to European reconciliation: the centre at Caux in Switzerland.[14] When it was established in 1946, its organizers insisted on the presence of Germans as equals.

An example of the depth of change in individual Europeans was the experience of a French woman, Irène Laure, who attended the Caux conference in 1947. She had been in the Resistance when the Germans occupied her country during World War II. Her son had been tortured, her comrades executed. At the end of the war she had wanted Germany wiped from the face of the earth. She became a member of parliament and leader of the Socialist women. She was invited to the Swiss conference, and was horrified to find Germans there. She was challenged with the question: how can you rebuild Europe without the Germans? She retired to her room and for several days and nights thought about whether she would give up her hatred for the sake of the new Europe. When she came out, she asked if she could speak. She did so. She turned to the Germans in the hall and said, 'Please forgive me for my hatred'. A German woman came up from the hall and took her hand. Irène said it felt like 100 kilos being lifted from her shoulders. She went to Germany and repeated her

[13] Letter, 9 May 1950.
[14] One example is *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft*, edited by Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson (Oxford: OUP, 1994).

apology, and everywhere she went Germans were willing, as a result, to face up to their past for the first time.[15]

In hatred, Laure came to believe, there were always the seeds of a future war. She would have identified with Semyon Frank's words:

> No bombs, not even atomic bombs, none of the cruelties of war cause so much destruction of normal conditions of life or are the cause of so much ruin and evil as the spirit of hatred. Comparatively soon ruined houses will be rebuilt: the slain will be buried …. But hatred which has entered the world has the capacity of prolonging itself indefinitely. Leaping like a spark from one soul to another, the spirit of revenge gives birth to ever new fits of hatred.[16]

Peter Petersen, later to become a senior member of the German Parliament, had been in the hall that day when Irène Laure spoke. Her words did for him, he says, what no finger-pointing or blame had ever done:

> All my past rose up in revolt against the courage of this woman. I suddenly realised that there were things for which we, as individuals and as nations, could never make restitution. We knew that she had shown us the only way open if Germany was to play a part in the reconstruction of Europe. The basis of a new Europe would have to be forgiveness.[17]

Petersen had been forced by Laure's words to review his whole life. And he suddenly remembered an incident a few years earlier. He had seen some emaciated people being herded from one cattle car to another. And he had said to his officer, 'who are these people?' The officer had replied, 'don't worry—they're just Poles and Jews'. He realised that he had been unperturbed by this reply; and he suddenly became aware of what he called 'the moral insensitivity in me that had made Hitler possible'; that, but for the grace of God, he could have been in the SS. He decided then to be fully honest about his past and to give his life to building a new kind of Europe; and he faithfully did so over the years, often working with Laure. One sees in this an

[15] Michael Henderson, *All Her Paths Are Peace* (West Hartford, Ct: Kumarian Press, 1994), 17-27.
[16] Boobbyer, *S. L. Frank*, 204.
[17] Cited in *Fresh Hope for the World*, edited by Gabriel Marcel (London: Longman, 1960), 24.

The Caux Conference Centre

example, which has been repeated many times over, of how an apology for hatred can actually inspire repentance in another person.[18]

Such encounters were the building blocks of the unity between France and Germany that we now take for granted. Those initial steps have been followed up, both at the level of personal exchanges and with significant public gestures. In September 1984, for instance, German Chancellor Helmut Kohl met French President François Mitterand on the battlefield of Verdun, where more than one million German and French soldiers had died during World War I. Their joint

[18] Michael Henderson, *The Forgiveness Factor* (London: Grosvenor Books, 1996), 18-20.

declaration was very simple: 'We became reconciled. We started to understand each other. We have become friends.'[19]

Unfinished Business in Ireland

It sometimes takes time for the truth about the past to become clear, or to be faced. Take, for example, the way in which some revelations about World War II are only now beginning to emerge—whether it is the involvement of Swiss banks in Nazi Germany, the less-than-noble behaviour of some of the French authorities in Vichy France, or the role of US industry in helping the German war machine. The Czech President Vaclav Havel has spoken of his country's 'duty to apologize' for the way millions of Germans had to leave their ancestral homes at the end of World War II—with two million dying on the road.[20] It was only in 1989 that the Soviet authorities admitted that it was a special NKVD commando unit, and not Germans, who had been responsible for the deaths of many thousands of Polish officers in the Katyn Forest. The Polish Prime Minister, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, accompanied by the Deputy Prime Minister of the Soviet Government, Laviorov, went to the forest. Kneeling in front of the monument, Mazowiecki said, 'Lord, give them your eternal peace'. The Dominican friar who celebrated the requiem mass added, echoing the words of Alexander Solzhenitsyn: 'The frontier between good and evil does not run between states, not even between people, but straight through the heart of each one of us'.[21]

If I could be permitted at this stage to introduce a personal note, I do not come to the subject of forgiveness through academic study, but through fifty years of interaction with men and women who have been working for reconciliation. These people work on the basis that you start from where you and your own people need to be different, rather than by pointing the finger of blame at others. It has been my commitment to live in this way. Perhaps, therefore, I can fairly say that we in Britain have yet to do our share of making amends for the way in which we have treated the Irish people over the centuries. I was first

[19] Quoted by John Lester and Pierre Spoerri in *Rediscovering Freedom* (London: Grosvenor Books, 1992), 40.
[20] *International Herald Tribune* (16 January 1990).
[21] *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (28 November 1989).

introduced to the idea that forgiveness and repentance are more than just personal or religious matters, and to their role in healing history, through the example of my Irish mother. My family lived for hundreds of years in Ireland. But in 1922, at the time when Ireland was becoming independent, my grandfather, Ivan Tilly, was told to leave the country by the end of the week or be shot. My family were Protestant and had been landowners; for several generations they had also been members of the Royal Irish Constabulary—the police.

It was not until many years later that my mother faced up to how deeply she felt about being forced out of Ireland. As a family, we attended a conference at the Caux centre in 1947. One day an Irish Catholic Senator, Eleanor Butler, spoke. She was a member of the Council of Europe. Everything in my mother rebelled against her. Who is this woman talking about unity in Europe, when she chucked me out of my country? But in the spirit of that place—where you take time in quiet to face up to where you and your people need to be different—she felt she should apologize to Senator Butler for the indifference we had shown to Catholics over many years. She did so, and they became friends and worked together as part of that great army of women who have kept the peace hopes alive. They have both died now. But they would rejoice at the progress that has been made, and would be sad at the setbacks. They would agree with Senator Mitchell[22] that the great challenge facing Northern Ireland, along with the decommissioning of weapons, is the decommissioning of mindsets.[23]

Forgiveness and repentance are not just individual matters

There are numerous examples of courageous people who are working for that decommissioning of mindsets. Just occasionally their actions become known to the public. One example is Jo Berry, whose father, Sir Anthony Berry, was killed by the IRA bomb that went off during a Conservative Party political conference in Brighton in 1984. She has been meeting with the man who planted the bomb, Patrick Magee. He had been given eight life sentences for his action, but was released in 1999 as part of the Good Friday Agreement. She says that both of them are on a journey, and both have been transformed by

[22] Former US Senator who headed the negotiations that led to the Northern Ireland Peace Accord or Good Friday Agreement.
[23] George Mitchell, *Making Peace* (London: Heinemann, 2000), 37.

meeting each other. In 2003 they launched a charity, the Causeway Project, to help bring other victims and perpetrators together.[24]

Another example is Colin Parry, whose son was killed by an IRA bomb in the northern English town of Warrington in 1993. He has been helping his city reach out to the people of Ireland in an astonishing way, with exchanges, peace walks and the building of a youth centre to bring people together. A trust in the name of his son, and in that of another boy who was killed, has created a Peace Centre, which provides learning programmes for young people of all ages and from all parts of the United Kingdom and Ireland. Donald Caird, the former Archbishop of Dublin, says that Warrington has become a symbol of gracious response in the face of evil.[25]

To apologize is an act of courage, not of weakness

Yet another person who is building bridges with Ireland is Canon Nicholas Frayling, formerly the Rector of Liverpool and now Dean of Chichester. In a sermon in Westminster Abbey, Frayling stressed the need for an apology by Britain to Ireland, and particularly for the Established Church to take the lead. 'To apologize is not to demonstrate weakness', he said. 'Rather it requires a particular kind of courage and statesmanship which transcends politics.'[26]

The Prince of Wales has also played a part in this regard. Prince Charles spoke in 2002 at the Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation in Ireland—one of whose founders was Senator Eleanor Butler. 'We need no longer be victims of our difficult history with each other', he said. The underlying meaning of peace was not just the absence of conflict. It was equally 'a climate in which understanding of others goes beyond caricature and where frozen images of hatred and negativity yield to a new vision of shared values and goodness'. He said that, without glossing over the pain and suffering of the past, we could integrate our history and memory in order to reap what he called the 'subtle harvest of possibility'. 'So let us then endeavour to become subjects of our history and not its prisoners', he said.[27]

[24] *Sunday Times* (8 June 2003).
[25] Henderson, *Forgiveness*, 162.
[26] Nicholas Frayling, *Pardon and Peace* (London: SPCK, 1996), 111.
[27] *Irish Times* (16 February 2002).

His speech was described by the *Irish Times* as 'a peace bombshell'.[28] The paper had a front page headline that read, 'Prince's Unexpected Remarks Likely to Boost Reconciliation'. The paper's foreign affairs correspondent wrote:

> While not bearing on any immediate political problems, the prince's comments were seen in Dublin as likely to improve relations, in the wider sense, between the two communities in the North. His speech was seen as the most significant of its kind since Mr Blair expressed apologetic sentiments in June 1997 over the Great Famine.

Although the Prince was not offering an apology, but only an acknowledgement of the past, his words were no less significant for that; in some circumstances such an acknowledgement is as appropriate as an apology.

The Example of South Africa

For a long time ideas such as forgiveness and repentance have been written off as irrelevant by those in public life, or else have been relegated to some personal or religious pigeonhole. If there is one person who by his actions and attitudes has challenged such assumptions, it is Nelson Mandela. Chairing the first session of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Archbishop Tutu said, 'One lesson we should be able to teach the world, teach the people of Bosnia, Rwanda and Burundi, is that we are ready to forgive'.[29] And they have. Locked away for 27 years, and emerging as the natural leader of his country, Nelson Mandela has refused to operate on the basis of vengeance. And by his example he has helped a spirit of forgiveness to prevail in his country.

South Africa faces enormous problems: criminal violence, educational and economic disparities, the AIDS epidemic. But no one, even fifteen years ago, would have predicted that the country would get as far as it has today without bloodshed and a civil war. It is thanks to forgiveness, and to what Archbishop Tutu calls *ubuntu*, a Bantu word encompassing humaneness and an inclusive sense of community

[28] *Irish Times* (16 February 2002).
[29] Henderson, *The Forgiveness Factor*, xix.

which values everyone. As the South African interim constitution stated:

> There is a need for understanding but not for vengeance, a need for reparation but not retaliation, a need for *ubuntu* but not for victimisation.[30]

The comparative absence of racial violence also owes a great deal to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which tore the lid off much that was hidden during the apartheid period. By its clear announcement that retribution was no part of its agenda it enabled the country to get a picture of what had gone on. The surviving victims of injustice had a chance to describe their sufferings and confront their tormentors.

One little-noted contribution to the healing process in South Africa has been the apology to President Mandela by Wilhelm Verwoerd, whose grandfather, Hendrik Verwoerd, is regarded as the architect of apartheid. In a letter to Mandela, Wilhelm Verwoerd said that he could not ask forgiveness for his grandfather, but 'what I can do is to assure you that my wife and I want to spend our lives trying to convert words of apology into deeds'.[31] Meeting the younger Verwoerd, Mandela's first, generous words were:

> How is your grandmother? When you see her again, if she won't mind, would you please convey my best wishes to her. Don't worry about the past. Let us work together for a better future. As a Verwoerd you have a great advantage, when you speak, the people will listen.

The Verwoerds now live in Dublin; Wilhelm's wife, Melanie, became first an African National Congress Member of Parliament, and now Ambassador to Ireland—a Verwoerd representing the new South Africa! Wilhelm Verwoerd believes that there is a downside, however, to Mandela's generous approach: 'It prevents our having to face up to what we have done'.

[30] Alex Boraine, *A Country Unmasked* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), 39.
[31] Wilhelm Verwoerd, *My Winds of Change* (Randburg, South Africa: Ravan Press, 1997), 130-131.

The Road Ahead

Like South Africa, Greater Europe faces immense challenges, whether it is working out economic interdependence and the reform of outdated institutions, resolving questions such as policy preferences and burden sharing, dealing with the problems of asylum seekers and refugees, combating crime, or guaranteeing its own security and protection against terrorism. Great skill and imagination will be required to secure the right legislation and get agreement on it. But institutions and legislation have their limits. They will have to be undergirded by the willingness of enough individuals to move away from the past—to decide, in Prince Charles' words, not to be prisoners of history.

In a speech to the US Houses of Congress, the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, said that the new countries joining Europe would help to transform the continent 'because their scars are recent, their memories are strong, their relationship with freedom still one of passion not comfortable familiarity'. I cannot and should not say what Russians have to do. But I have noted what some Russians have been saying. They have observed the tensions between fellow countrymen who have been members of the *nomenklatura* and those who have been dissidents, and also the tensions between Russians and the people of countries suppressed by the Soviet Union. And they have been willing to be honest about their own shortcomings. Sergei Kovaliov, a former chair of the Russian Parliament's Human Rights Commission, has said:

> When we Russians discuss our tragic history, we have no sense of guilt. We blame everyone else except ourselves. But we are guilty of the fact that we permitted this regime to exist for 70 years and all that went with it. So the responsibility applies not only to the Communists, but to everybody including those of us who were politically repressed. Without looking into the past properly, I do not believe we can look into the future with clarity.[32]

Again, Richard von Weizsäcker, the President of Germany at the time of reunification, has written:

[32] Henderson, *The Forgiveness Factor*, 115-116.

> Contemporary history should not be suppressed, but neither should it be made into an ideology or used as a political instrument. The better we manage this, the more likely it is that the historical roots which are common to us in East and West will lead to peace and not danger for the future. The younger generation need to contribute to this task too. They are not responsible for what happened to them, but they are responsible for what history will make out of it.[33]

As we look to the future, each of us is going to have to decide for ourselves how far we are prepared to recognise our responsibilities. After World War II, Semyon Frank wrote, in an unpublished essay:

> The responsibility for evil [lies] not only with those who actually commit it, but also with all their contemporaries, with all those who help to create and share in the common conditions of life—to wit with all of us.

For Frank, the fundamental task of *Realpolitik* is expressed by the words, 'the true victor will be the one who first starts to forgive'.[34] He wanted to combat the idea that *Realpolitik* was always cynical, or always saw the bloodiest or most dishonest political option as the most realistic. In a hopeless, hate-filled world, forgiveness had to be the hard choice of the realist. The Russian philosopher's views remain a considerable challenge. For as long as we do not face the past, it can continue to control the political agenda, and fuel collective hatred.

Michael Henderson is a freelance journalist and the author of nine books, the latest being *Forgiveness: Breaking the Chain of Hate* (London: Grosvenor Books, 2002). He has been a TV presenter and a broadcaster, as well as having worked for many years in the service of peace and understanding in some thirty countries.

[33] Richard von Weizsäcker, *Die deutsche Geschichte geht weiter* (Munich: DTV, 1985).
[34] Boobbyer, *S. L. Frank*, 204-205.