

Healing the Wounds of History

A reflection by the late Sir Conrad Hunte taken from a talk that he gave at the IofC international centre at Caux, Switzerland on 20th August 1994

'I would like to begin by quoting from the inaugural address by President Nelson Mandela on 10th May 1994. This speech was carried to millions of people all around the world on tv, by radio and by the press.

At the beginning he said, *Out of the experience of an extraordinary human disaster that lasted too long must be born a society of which all humanity will be proud.* In the middle of his speech he said, *The time for healing of the wounds has come. The moment to bridge the chasms that divide us has come. The time to build is upon us. We must act together as a united people for national reconciliation, for nation building, for the birth of a new world. Let there be justice for all. Let there be peace for all. Let there be work, bread, water, and salt for all.* And he ended on this note, *The sun shall never set on so glorious a human achievement, let Freedom reign, God bless Africa.*

In calling for healing the wounds of the past, Nelson Mandela was calling attention to a fundamental aspect of history. Recent or ancient, the history of yesterday or the history of long ago, the fundamental aspect is this: the doors to the future we all long for are barred and blocked by the unhealed wounds of the past.

Let me put it another way: In order for all of us to go forward together as human beings, there is a need for forgiveness of those of us who have suffered at the hands of oppressors, and there is a need for repentance of those of us who have caused such suffering. When forgiveness meets repentance, or the other way around, a new energy, a new dynamic and creative synergy, is released that the world has scarcely begun to tap.

Underlying, the economic, political, social, ethnic and ideological divisions of our times, inside nations and between nations, are Seven Rivers of Hate. They originate back and back in history. Many have forgotten where and how they began. In the definition of hate that we are accustomed to, it means *I wish you, my enemy, to disappear from the face of the earth.* But I want to draw your attention to another definition which includes the first: *I wish to separate myself away from you although you may still live on earth.*

The seven Rivers of Hate are:

1. The Industrial Revolution, which in practice made the rich richer and left the poor poorer.
2. The Trans-Atlantic trafficking of slaves between Europe, Africa and the new world of the Americas and the Caribbean. This historic act made a gulf out of the gap that already existed between the races. It is now an unbridgeable gulf except by divine intervention.
3. The legacy of Colonialism and Imperialism which treated some men as gods and some as dogs.
4. The Western Nations' wrong treatment of China. Notably the Opium Wars.
5. The breakup of family life, and the alienation of the different generations.

6. The deep divisions between people of faith.
7. The elevation into philosophies of Right or Left, man's ever-present inclination to reject God.

Two aspects of the long journey of these rivers of hate through history are worth examining closely. Firstly, at some time or other along the banks of these rivers some people who were formerly victims turned around and later victimized others. And secondly: the unhealed memory of past wounds causes us to be more conscious of how and where others hurt us and are hurting us. At the same time this lack of healing blinds us to how and where we have hurt others - where we are hurting others.

This has created a cycle of revenge which goes something like this: those in power suppress those under them and, because the human spirit will never be permanently suppressed, this creates suffering and out of that suffering will come struggle, and out of that struggle can come success, and out of that success, can also come suppression. So there's a complete circle that goes on and on through history. I think that circle can and must be broken.

These Rivers of Hate can and must be blocked. We must become turbines who would turn this raging fury into a power, to shed light where there is darkness, forgiveness where there is injury and repentance where there's pride. We can be an instrument of such peace and nation-building when, as individuals and then as representatives of our own ethnic groups and our nations, we acknowledge our hurt or our guilt, accept forgiveness, or give it, and create a new synergy together. The embryo of a new beginning, a new chapter in a new history.

This is a very broad and very general analysis of history and an insight of an answer. I need to assure you that these thoughts didn't just come out of some theory, they're part of my own real and concrete experiences - for after all, I come from a people who have throughout history been enslaved. And we carry the memory with us. For some of us that memory has not been healed, but in my case I can say that I, through these ideas of MRA¹ and many faithful friends, have experienced healing.'

Conrad Hunte was born in 1932, the eldest of the nine children of a sugar plantation worker in Barbados. His gift for cricket took him into the West Indies cricket team during a golden period when they won seven out of ten series, memorably beating England in 1963. In 1967 he left cricket to work in Britain to prevent racial violence and build relationships between recently-arrived immigrants and the host community. This work subsequently took him to the USA, India, Kenya, and South Africa where he made a major contribution to the development of cricket. In 1998 he was made a Knight of St Andrew, Barbados's highest honour awarded by the Queen of Barbados, Queen Elizabeth II, for "extraordinary and outstanding achievement and merit in service to Barbados or to humanity at large". He died in 1999.

¹ MRA, Moral Re-Armament, renamed Initiatives of Change in 2001