

CHRISTIANITY AND THE BATTLES FOR REMEMBERING

REFLECTIONS ON THE DEBATE SURROUNDING THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION IN PERU

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The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was an organism created by the transitional government (after the fall of President Alberto Fujimori, 2000-2001) for the purpose of examining the process of violence which the country lived through between 1980 and 2000 in the context of the fight against terrorism. The Commission also includes in its study the effects and consequences of the violence. The TRC's mandate included the task of assigning political responsibility to those who were negligent in fulfilling their public functions in the process of pacification and even pointing out cases of human rights violations which could be subject to a judicial and criminal process. The TRC was requested to present an Integral Plan of Reparations and to propose institutional reforms which would contribute to a project for national reconciliation. The TRC made its Final Report public at the end of August, 2003. The document provoked an intense and bitter debate in many public forums and among political leaders. In large measure the debate came down to the question of whether it was pertinent or convenient to remember the violence that wrecked havoc in Peru's recent history.

This essay will examine the participation of Catholics in this debate, or rather, the reference to Catholicism to justify the arguments presented in the debate over the public recuperation of the country's memory and the ethical and political ramifications involved in the concept of reconciliation. Since this debate is still ongoing, our approach will be rather exploratory. Recourse will be made to the conceptual tools which contemporary political philosophy (especially liberalism, neo-hegelian thought and hermeneutics) and some reflections on the suffering of the innocent (in particular, Johann Baptist Metz and Gustavo Gutiérrez). As our aim is to analyze a public debate, and not merely academic discussions, our work will consist partially in unveiling the philosophical and theological categories implicit in the different positions in dispute.

Our first section will be devoted to the theme of critical remembering. We will examine the ties between the project of the public recuperation of collective memory and the idea of transitional justice. Following Ricoeur and Todorov, we will describe the exercise of remembering as a selective process, which consists in discerning what is worthy of remembering and those experiences which deserve to be forgotten. The opposite of remembering is not forgetting, rather controlling memory and the construction of an "official history," designed to serve the interests and desires of an elite or a power group. This is a "history" without victims or crimes, and without situations of oppression. The work of the different truth commissions in the world have all aimed to salvage the testimony of the victims and contrast their testimony with that of other actors, and incorporate critically these perspectives into a wider history which in turn will call for taking measures to guarantee that that history not be repeated. For this to happen the recuperation of memory must be *public*.

In the context of the writing and publication of the Final Report of the TRC the press became the center of a debate over the moral and political relevance of remembering the past which involved quite a few reflections based on Catholic thought, or at times what was presumed to be Catholic thought. Progressives like Gustavo Gutiérrez had recourse to the Gospel and its prophetic tradition to point out the necessity to *uncover the truth*. The memory of the cross –and the suffering of the innocent- invites us to act in favor of the

to political conflicts (Hegel) or economic crises (Marx) to explain the meaning of history, the Judaic-Christian tradition reserves a special place for the perspective of the “insignificant”: the poor, the defeated, the victim. Metz describes this perspective as *anti-historical*. It should be evident that this line of thought converges with that of the truth commissions which carry out their task based upon the premise that the public recuperation of memory presupposes in the first place (although not exclusively) hearing the stories of the victims.

In the second section or chapter we will examine the debate over the idea of reconciliation as part of the future horizon of Peru. To begin with, defining reconciliation is a problem. When President Alejandro Toledo (2001-2005) added the phrase “and Reconciliation” to the Truth Commission (2001) many Catholic conservatives who belong to Peru’s political class and the church’s hiera