



## The Corrymeela Podcast - Season 2

Thanks so much for listening to The Corrymeela Podcast. You might like to discuss the episode and the accompanying questions with friends, family, or a discussion group, or just use them for your own writing and reflection.

If you're part of a group, be mindful and considerate of one another's willingness to engage in the discussion - leave space for people to keep their reflections to themselves if they want to. You might also want to agree on some general principles to stick to, like: everybody's invited to speak once before anyone speaks twice, and: try to assume that everybody is speaking with good intent.

In group discussions at Corrymeela, we seek to locate political and religious points of view within the story of the person speaking. If you're gathering as a group, consider how to create a sense of connectedness among you.

You might like to choose one or two of the Very Short Story questions that we like to put to guests at the end of each episode. Your answers to these can be one sentence long, or a few. Belongings are plural, as are identities and nationalities. So feel free to respond to these story prompts in a way that reflects your own story.

- What's something important that you've changed your mind about?
- Are there books, poems, films, albums, works of art, etc that you've turned to again and again?
- Tell us about a time when your national identity felt important to you.
- Tell us about a time when you felt foreign.
- Is there a very short story you can tell us about a time when you said something that surprised you?
- Has anyone ever said that you were disloyal to one of your cultures or identities? Why?



## Season 2, Episode 6. Professor Duncan Morrow reflection questions & episode transcript

1. What relationships have been most important to the shaping of your identities? These might be personal, professional, associations with particular groups, etc.
2. In talking about the long and complex narratives which can reinforce conflict and justify violence, Duncan mentions the need for a 'stumbling stone': something which can disrupt the old stories and open the possibility of something new. Have you noticed something similar? If so, what are some instances of this? If not, what would you add?
3. In explaining mimesis, Duncan says 'We are given models, whether those are parents, whether those are saints, whether those are teachers, whether those are people who you are identifying with even as, as fans, and we copy their behaviour...this mimetic behaviour is that we are- it's not independent; we learn what to desire from our models, and we discern, we learn what's important from our models'. What are some of the broader implications of this tendency, on a societal level? In what ways do you think it is harnessed?
4. As an example of mimesis, Duncan highlights how children learn and grow, not just by being taught explicitly, but by instinctively (and often unconsciously) copying or mimicking the behaviour of those around them. Where do you see mimetic behaviour occurring in your own circumstances (work, politics, community, family, friends)?
5. As you think of scapegoating, what are some instances of it you notice – whether from history, current affairs, or literature/film?

Duncan Morrow is a lecturer in politics and Director of Community Engagement at Ulster University. In 1998, he was appointed as a Sentence Review Commissioner, and from 2002-2012 he was chief executive of the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council. He has also chaired the Scottish government's advisory group on tackling sectarianism. Duncan's academic interests include conflict, ethics, and religion.

*Welcome to The Corrymeela Podcast: exploring stories and ideas about conflict, peace, theology, and art.*

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

*My name is Pádraig Ó Tuama and you're listening to The Corrymeela Podcast. With me today is Duncan Morrow. Duncan is a professor in politics and Director of Community Engagement at Ulster University. And his academic interests include conflict and ethics and religion. He was chief executive of the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council, and he chaired the Scottish government's advisory group on tackling sectarianism, and he is a long-term Corrymeela member. Duncan, you're very welcome to The Corrymeela Podcast.*

**Duncan Morrow:**

Thanks Pádraig, nice to be here.

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

Duncan, today in conversation with you we're going to be looking really at some philosophies and ideas behind, you know, the imagination of sectarianism and conflict and human relationship. But I'm going to make sure that we stay grounded in stories, and I'd like to start with one. Was there any part of your childhood that you feel prepared you for some of the work you do now? Or any experience in childhood?

**Duncan Morrow:**

Well, you know, at some level, all of it, erm- of course, like anybody else. I grew up through Corrymeela - I wouldn't say in Corrymeela, but through it - my parents were extremely involved in it. But also, being in the family I was in, we were always slightly strange- we moved a lot, so we were always different in different places, and differently different in different places, funny enough: you know, Irish in Scotland, Scotland in the south of Ireland; southern Irish, when we came north again. And so there was this kind of distinctiveness; also, being from the background I came from, I suppose, clerical families are already distinguished at some level or other in communities, because there's something about being a cleric even - particularly in those days - which marked people out...

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

Your father was a minister. Presbyterian?

**Duncan Morrow:**

Yeah, my father was a Presbyterian minister, and he moved- his job moved him around. And he had moved within his own, even his own profession to being in a slightly unusual position in that he was not a member of a congregation after a while: he was part of chaplaincy in Queen's and then part of Corrymeela. So, yeah, we were in odd spaces, and we were [in] moving spaces. And at the same time I suppose the continuous thread was between family and the issue of Corrymeela, I suppose, and so that did prepare me then I think - a lot - for the job that I've done since then.

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

How interesting. And your mother's Scottish?

**Duncan Morrow:**

Yes, my mother's Scottish. And I certainly think she had a sense of being different. I mean, she died when I was 40, so I've never fully had these conversations with her, but I think she probably felt that, for her, Ireland was a bit of an escape from a fairly restrictive background. And so I think she had a sense of being, if not on her own, at least being very much different and distinctive, and then distinctive again in Ireland; my father came from a very large, extended family. And, you know, she was very much a different kind of a person at that stage: she'd had a university degree at a time when women didn't, but also a lot of people didn't really, and I think all of those things added up to her sense of distinctiveness.

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

I'd love to start off in talking with you, you know, you do political work, political theory, through sociology, but so often with you, words like 'identity' and 'relationship' are at the core of your political analysis. And I wonder if we could start off talking about relationship. You wrote once 'people still think that relationship work is soft work when it comes to conflict and peace work'. Could you say a little bit more about that idea- about relationship, and why it is that perhaps you're saying it's not the soft work?

**Duncan Morrow:**

Yeah, we used to have this little phrase we used all the time saying that the distinction people draw is between hard and soft. I once went to a meeting where a senior civil servant in Northern Ireland was asked about community relations, and he said: oh, yes, that's the cucumber sandwiches of policy. And if you're called 'cucumber sandwiches' and if you're called soft, then to be honest with you, you're on the slope to the way out, you know, this is not important, it's the kind of out work. And I remember thinking at the time, they- distinguished politicians and political people make the distinction between what they can measure and which they can hold on to or- which is objects and deliverables and numbers.

And they call that hard. And then all the other things which they can't control - such as how people react with each other, how people use those things, how people are in the middle of those things they're delivering - are soft. And I remember thinking: no, it's not hard and soft, it's hard and harder. And they're harder, not in the sense of being, you know, robust or, you know, non-movable; they are harder in the sense that they, you don't control them, you have to work within them, they're constantly moving around you, and then my sense always was that that's actually where change happens: in people's relationships, and that's what changes people, is the relationships they're in.

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

And do you think like, you know your academic work is in sociology and you, you lecture in politics, and maybe political theory: do you think you have a lot of companionship in having that emphasis on relationships as an academic as well? Or do you think it's the kind of activist side of you that, that really brings in the interest in relationships? Or maybe all of them?

**Duncan Morrow:**

Well, I think there's two sides to that: I think, you know, good sociology is interested in social relationships. Good politics is interested in political relationships, so, anybody who does these things also knows, you know, a politician knows that they have to position themselves in relationship to their voters, but also their parties and to their opponents and all of these things, and that's, that's part of it, so they do understand that. I think, the way in which I believe that human relationship actually transcends politics and sociology comes from my experience in Northern Ireland, but also increasingly from my theoretical understanding that politics isn't the end all; politics is a way of describing power relationships. But we have to have- we either have a horizon which says there are other relationships, or there is at least other relationships outside of power in which people have a sense of their own being and their own importance and their own value, which doesn't simply come from your place in politics or sociology, that then defines I think, the way I think, and I think that did definitely come both from my experience in Corrymeela, in Northern Ireland, but also, probably it's a faith statement as well at some point is that there is another reality against which even politics has to be measured.

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

And we're going to talk about faith and theology in a bit. So, you know, you're talking about relationships, and that politics is a way of describing relationships and looking at relationships and power. How would you bring us into the way it is that you weigh the concept of identity when it comes to your work?

**Duncan Morrow:**

Well, I mean, I think one of the interesting things about the word identity in English is that it clearly has the same root as the word identical. And so identity is a way of describing myself in relation to something else. I'm always using externals to describe something about me. And I think that is a very foundational fact, which is that: although a lot of our life is, of course, internal and belongs to us, it is also rooted in the things that are happening to us and the situations that we're in. And so, it's not a fixed reality, and so my sense of identity always involves an other, or others, or it is itself located in something which is outside myself.

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

And has that been- have you had experiences of difficulty of that in your life, Duncan? I mean, we'll be talking about this as a political analysis in a while, but I'm curious: have there been times when for you, the identicals of your life have been challenged, or you've moved away from them, or somebody...? Yeah, I'm curious as to whether you could locate this in your life.

**Duncan Morrow:**

I suppose it's a strange- well there's two, two ways to answer that. One of course, is that it's never finally fixed: you meet another situation, you meet other realities. So, you asked about experiences: I suppose, you know, really big events in your life like getting married or new friendships, or going to new places or, you know, actually meeting somebody who, who radically, if not upends, at least alters the way you look at the world. And I think that's, that's almost my expectation now, that I will meet people and I won't know, so my identity is at that level always changing. And then there's another part of it, which is, I'm always- and now because I'm so, it's so deep in me that really, that who you are depends on who you identify with, that my question to myself all the time is: who ultimately am I, who do I identify with, who do I find some sense of purpose and continuity and meaning in, or what do I find continuity and meaning in? So that, the two sides of that: it's a mobile thing, and it's always going, but it's a constant question which you have to go back to.

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

Yeah. I know you have worked on a huge level with questions to do with victims and survivors of sectarian murder and state-sponsored murder too, and you have had enormous engagements. And so, questions to do with identity when identities have been systematically denied, and targeted, and people have been murdered because of identity: could you bring us into that? 'Cause it, yeah, it seems to me that identity- when identity has been the subject of particular, long-term generational cyclical mistreatment and denial, it seems to me that identity then becomes something different than just questions to do with identical; there's another important level to it there, too. How do you measure it then?

**Duncan Morrow:**

Well, I think that's absolutely true, I think. And I suppose the modern way of describing that is trauma. Is that there are these traumas, some of which are personal, some of which are events in whole communities, so that the entire community is marked by that trauma. Some things are to do with characteristics which are picked on, and, and those things then become almost more important; they certainly can't be got away from and that, that whole operation of the way trauma operates where it's in the past, but it's not in the past: it's constantly with you. And I think sometimes that can be, of course, a source of strength for people and a source of community. And sometimes it's a terrible wound really. Maybe sometimes it's both, maybe it's both: it's a source of community in the wound. What it would mean, um, whether, you know, that is still our final identity is in the trauma, I think, is a complicated question for people; I certainly don't think you can say to people who've been through terrible events, you know: you have to let that go. I think there is a sense in which though, you might want to ask: do you want to let that go, certainly as trauma? Do you want to let that go, can that now be? But I think you're right, I mean, we live in a society here where those experiences have shaped people's sense of what the world is like, and shaped their identity in it, but that is both what they're defending and how they react in circumstances. It's alive, it's a very live thing. And, and actually, the more people try to take it off them, the more they defend it. That's the other side of it.

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

So like in talking about relationships and identity - and obviously, we particularly are speaking about the British/Irish circumstances that occur in Northern Ireland, you know, rather than thinking this is the, this is the lens through which all of the questions of conflict and partition etc in the world can be looked at - but in the context of identity and relationships in the North of Ireland, between British-identifying and Irish-identifying people; Protestant or Catholic, unionist or nationalist, loyalist, republican: all these terms that can be used really to divine the camps of whether your primary identification is with Britishness or your primary identification of Irishness, erm, identity and relationship often seem to serve to keep people apart rather than together. How do you work with that within the context of your imagination about what peace can be?

**Duncan Morrow:**

Because I think everything's relationships... Everything. I don't think there is life outside of it. I don't think people- I anyway don't feel in my own life I could live outside of the, if you like the ecosystem I live in, which is- it's what makes me unique, and it's a changing one and it's an organic one, but I don't- I think that the question of relationship is different from the question of: what relationship? In other words, relationship with trauma, and relationship through trauma, and through mutual trauma, and through mutual threat, which is very deeply built into this society, often means that actually people's

sense of identity is giving a name to what they're not. In other words, that the relationship is actually incredibly present for them: they're not British, they're not Irish, they're not this thing. And this thing that they're not is whatever this threat is, and that threat is grounded in some sense, usually a sense of story: there's nearly always a story behind it- either a story of me, or a story of us. And that is- so those stories both tell and retell and reshape and then encompass the next event and the next trauma and they, they kind of give you a lens and a way to look at things so it becomes, if you like, some kind of critical pathway.

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

Well I suppose to examine that story then or to look at other points of view can sometimes feel like a threat, understandably, 'cause sometimes it is. I mean, there's- you mentioned earlier on about the past; a phrase we hear often enough in government statements about what's happening in Northern Ireland is, you know: a divided past and a shared future. Could you talk a little bit about that- do you think that's possible? And do we have a divided past? I mean, do you- how do you bring yourself into those?

**Duncan Morrow:**

We - well many of us, I suppose - the dominant stories of this place have been interconnected with each other, so you can't tell the story of Irishness in the North of Ireland or Northern Ireland, without telling the story of Britishness, that particular story, and you can't tell a story of Britishness without telling a story of Irishness, so they're interconnected at that level. On the other hand, we have tended to tell almost- what makes Northern Ireland so interesting in its binary nature, and makes this process of relationships so clear, is that they're the same story, but they're told from the exact opposite side of the lens. It's like the story through the looking glass. So the story that people tell of Britishness is almost the opposite- depending where they come from, you can tell who they are by their story. So we have, in a sense, a common past, but a very divided version of it. My own view is that unless there is something intervening, some other new event, something which makes us meet each other in a different way, then the power of those patterns is to repeat themselves- they repeat themselves until something else comes in the way in which it's no longer true. And the question then is: so how and when, and in what way, are these stories of - which have become very bitter, and have created all sorts of justification, up to and including killing - how do they get interrupted? What interrupts that? And that's the big question.

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

*My name is Pádraig Ó Tuama, and you're listening to The Corrymeela Podcast. With me today is professor of politics, Duncan Morrow.* Duncan, we're talking about identity, and we're talking about pain and trauma and colonisation and partition: huge things that kind of stretch back centuries, and also are very present in terms of the everyday of British-Irish politics, particularly as it relates to the North



of Ireland. And one of the big questions about identity is: who was hurt the most? And when there's conflict about victim, where one person or one grouping of people will say: here is why our actions or political point of view or our narrative should be given particular place because of this experience; and another group will say: well, no, actually, we're on the exact opposite side of the coin. So when there's- I mean, Claire Mitchell says that it's 'conflict about what the conflict's about'. How do you go about in any way having actions that can be gathering of a community for something like a shared future when you're, when the most basic understanding of: a) what country are we in? and b) who's suffered- how do you, how do you go about that - and: who's the perpetrator? to use really violent, crude terms - how do you go about doing any positive peace work, when even those most basic understandings seem to not be shared?

**Duncan Morrow:**

Well, I mean, first of all, I think the answer most people give to who is the greatest victim, or where's the greatest pain, as you put it...it's quite close to me, or mine. And because that's what looms large, we see things through perspective, and while we can acknowledge other people's pain, the pain that's actually infringing on us, the size and sheer mass of that is our own. So that's the risk is that the- ultimately if we're feeling part of this relationship, the pain we prioritise is our own over others'. And that- the, the paradoxical outcome of that here is that the justification for me causing pain to you is as a way to get rid of my pain. So there's a kind of way in which, who's perpetrator and who's victim: yes, we can trace this back and you can make a history of it, but it gets interrupted by the fact that it's human beings making the choice is the bit that matters; and second of all, who's a perpetrator and who's a victim, certainly, if you tell a community story or a state story or an anti-state story or whatever story you want to tell, is almost a punctuation question: it's a question of where you're starting from, where you start in a long chain. And what we know is that people start from that long chain, and they start from themselves. And that they discount the bits that kind of counteract that. So that eventually, at least in the present, in the present, it's impossible almost to tell who's the perpetrator and who's the victim, because they become really similar; now, you may then tell a narrative which gives you a really strong story hundreds of years ago as to why that's true. But ultimately, the value of that depends on, on the quality of the narrative; and also this competition for pain eventually depends on there being a third party who can judge and who can, you can bring onto your side to try to change the story. If you don't have that possibility then, you know, it's just he said/she said, or she said/he said or whatever, you know, so that is the difficulty.

You said: how do you, how do you start in that situation? I think, I don't- I think it's almost like, you know, we have to bring it to a halt, you have to bring it to a stumbling stone, you have to bring it to the point where our ownership of what is happening is not just theirs, it's also partly ours. Or if we- that what we are doing, we also see, or what they have suffered, we also recognise as something which

we've been through. So the question is: how do you...what transcends my experience of pain? And I suppose my answer to that is that I recognise the pain of the other as part of me, but also I recognise my own participation somehow or other in what caused the pain, and so the question of peacebuilding is: when does that become possible, how do we begin to tell those kinds of stories, where, where do we meet in that way?

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

That's radically threatening for people who have experienced the unbearable and are bearing the unbearable, to furthermore have to bear the possibility of being generous with imagining the experience of somebody who might be identified with the other side. And again like, we are speaking particularly about populations in Northern Ireland here and, you know, British/Irish identities in the North, so, I'm- I don't think of this as a lens through which to look at the wide world. But like, how do you, how do you bear in having an imagination of reconciliation, that asks people who have borne the unbearable to be generous in their imagination of the other?

**Duncan Morrow:**

You know something: you can't, there's no law. It's a choice- you have to choose. It would be very- at the end of the day it's keeping the possibility alive: another possibility, a contrasting experience that comes across people. It's certainly not a: you must/you have to/a law situation. It's a, it's a possibility. And without that possibility, you're locked, I have to say. I think that's the truth, is that without that possibility, the really problematic issue for the globe is that in a nuclear age, there is no way to force that context. There is no way. We are- we're living in the period now, where at a global level and a global political level - and we see it in Ukraine, I suppose - is, that if it tips one way, all of these conversations will become rather academic. Because it doesn't matter who puts the nuclear bomb off. You know, that- we've reached the technological point at a global level, which is quite similar to Northern Ireland, which is that the rightness of the cause doesn't guarantee that we will find our way out of this. And so it is, I totally agree with you that this is a massive challenge to us as human beings. How do we- and it's not just: how do I stop hating you? It's: how does, how do we reestablish a relationship in which, first of all, I don't have to fear you and threaten you and so we- I can let you in a bit. But on the other side, how can we establish a relationship in which what I have done or what has been done in my name can be acknowledged without me feeling I have to defend myself? But can actually be acknowledged.

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

I wonder if this'd be a good time to ask you if it's possible to give us a couple of tentative steps into some of the thinking about how René Girard has helped you thinking about relationships. I know René Girard - French theorist, he died only a few years ago nearing a hundred, had been based in the United

States for a long time - he's kind of a polymath of theology and sociology and literature; extraordinary thinker, a controversial thinker, too. I wonder if you could introduce us to two concepts: one- mimetic thinking and two- scapegoating. And you might want to mess that around, Duncan. But certainly those are the two areas that I'm interested in.

**Duncan Morrow:**

No, I think that, there are two where I think you have- which are absolutely critical to Girard's thought. Well mimetic thinking: part of the language is the academic mimetic language. However, it points to two facts that Girard at least postulates, one of which is that we are, as human beings, relating to each other at every level well before we think about them; the thought is the kind of raising to the surface of what is happening to us anyway and that we are mimetic beings. It's almost like magnetism, and mimetic means that at some level we are shaped in our interrelationships.

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

It comes from mimicry, too, doesn't it? Mimetic and mimicry- same word....

**Duncan Morrow:**

It's the same word, yeah. It's, mimicry, the difficulty with mimicry - which is a derivative word from 'mimesis', the Greek - is that, if you don't watch out, it becomes very conscious: I'm gonna copy you. But, what Girard is actually saying is: we are, we are being shaped in our being by our mimetic relationship, by our interrelationship with each other, even way before we start. And that if we want to understand what's going on in our own lives, we have to reinterpret that by trying to work out what are the relationships in which that was formed.

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

Yeah. And could you locate that in some kind of story- maybe there's an anecdote, or maybe there's something that you've seen that you feel comfortable sharing; I'm curious if you could locate mimesis and mimetic behaviour in something that people go: oh, I get what you're saying.

**Duncan Morrow:**

Well, I mean, I suppose that actually the whole basis of childrearing is that we teach, that children learn - both positively and negatively, by the way - not just, it's not just, I teach you consciously, but they pick up the way the world is: we pick it up from our parents, but also from our siblings, and also from the things that happen to us. And so we, and so, we are given models, I suppose, by society sometimes, whether those are parents, whether those are saints, whether those are teachers, whether those are people who you are identifying with even as, as fans, and we copy their behaviour, so fashion moves round like that, or...so this mimetic behaviour is that we are- it's not independent; we learn what to desire

from our models, and we discern, we learn what's important from our models, and we- and so it's really important, I suppose, who our models are, but that, that mimetic nature of who we are is, at one level, just a way of stating facts. We live in our relationships, we get, we learn who we are in our relationships, and those relationships are happening to us way before we understand it; so we pick up language, not mainly by understanding the words, but by copying, by imitating, and then we gradually become people who can manipulate that and work that and think about that.

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

And then scapegoating: could you open a few doors for us in terms of Girard's idea of scapegoating?

**Duncan Morrow:**

Well, scapegoating is, I suppose, Girard's question was: well, so if we copy each other, and if what I want, what I wish, which might be, you know, to become very famous, means that you want to become very famous, and then that- because you want it, I want it more. And so potentially where Girard becomes important in conflict is he says that if this is unconstrained in human beings, we end up in conflict, but not just in conflict, conflict which is potentially mortally threatening to the community and to our lives together. So his question was: well how do, how do communities sort that out? How do you sort that out? And his answer was that they direct it - externally, if you like - but at somebody who they decide is the other, the person who's responsible, and that person or that thing or that group is the person who then we all dislike and that creates unity for us. That creates unity for those of us who are doing the scapegoating, and the scapegoat, then, is driven out, but funny enough (and I was, I was kind of referring to this earlier where I said, you know, sometimes our identities are not being somebody else), the scapegoat's really, really important because he - he or she or it or they - is the thing which unites all of us against it; so scapegoating is a way for us to deal with conflict: it externalises responsibility on somebody or some other group, and then allows us to continue as if we don't have any further responsibility, or at least gives us our peace. And that's why it's really important is that, you know, we have built our peace not just on being good people, but on actually pushing out the responsibility on someone or some other group and making them pay.

A proper scapegoat, funnily enough, is someone who everybody is just so sure they're responsible we don't even know, so we live with this innocence. And, and in the bible - and I know we're going to talk about theology later - but it talks about hypocrisy. And the notion of hypocrisy is that we all assume we're the good people, and the bad people really are identified as scapegoats. But in fact, we're all part of the system, we all have our living and our being in some senses or other by having other people having paid a price for our life.

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

Yeah, coming back ter, and staying with Girard for a while, Duncan, like how has the thinking of Girard influenced some really practical ways in which you analyse your participation in sectarianism, or peace, or conflict, or division, or reconciliation in Northern Ireland?

**Duncan Morrow:**

Well, I mean, for me personally, it's been huge, a whole load of different levels. One of them is, you know, you have to recognise: I'm part of this too. And, in Girard's thinking, you know, you don't escape mimesis. Mimesis is part of the human conditions; we are mimetic beings, we are relational beings. The question is: so, how do we find a different mimetic relationship, what- how can we, kind of, if you like, come into relationship with a different kind of peace, and find our way out of this scapegoating way. So that's one thing: my own participation. The second one is as a tool of analysis, to be able to kind of understand, or at least throw light on, how one group reacts against another, how politicians lead people - some politicians lead people - into heightening the mimetic rivalry by deliberately causing trouble, but also how people respond to that, and how small things can create huge escalation very very quickly. And then on the third level, in peacebuilding terms, you know, the question of what would bring change is kind of interesting. You know, there are ways of thinking about that politically where you might find enough of a consensus that everybody agrees this is how we go forward, and I suppose it's always worth looking for that. But there's also the question then of, of how we break the cycle of just responding to each other in this way of mimetic hostility, how we don't live just as rivals, we begin to find ways forward. So for me, it affects both my understanding of myself, most [of] my analysis of the conflict, but also how I think about, well, peace must be about how do we try to find different relationships or try to talk to each other or meet each other or be with each other in a different way?

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

*My name is Pádraig Ó Tuama, and this is The Corrymeela Podcast. With me today is Professor Duncan Morrow, professor of politics.* And Duncan, I'm really interested, like we're talking about relationships and identity and conflict and scapegoating. And I can hear you veering towards the demand - or not the demand, the possibility - I can hear you veering and moving towards the possibility of practising something like reconciliation and forgiveness in public, and I wonder if you could talk about those terms through the lens of theology, because I know that theology shapes your thinking, as well as shapes your imagination for society.

**Duncan Morrow:**

I suppose my feeling about theology now is that- now I suppose I'd come to the bible also through Girard rather than Girard through the bible, if you know what I mean. And I, I look at the bible and I see a Jesus figure and also in the Old Testament the whole kind of story of the Jewish people as

struggling to find a way out of relationships that end up in violence and scapegoating. How do we find what does that even mean? And that is in a very violent world. And so the story of forgiveness is really the story that even though we are these people, there is a possibility of a relationship at the end. And the notion of God, not as a big angry power who judges - it's totally changed the way I understand the whole nature of theology - but rather as somebody who, rather than take revenge is prepared to, to take all of this scapegoat- be the scapegoat, actually, and, and still offer forgiveness and still say that beyond all of what we have done to each other, there is- there's an offer of humanity in the space there. And I actually believe that that exhaustion, the exhaustion of violence, that beyond violence, there's still the possibility of love, that people can still be called back to being human again, is unbelievably important, because if it's not true, if you postulate it as not true, what do we believe? That it's just a struggle to see who wins? Maybe.

And I suppose I, I now believe - and this isn't about law at all - is that the future of human, of us as human beings is dependent on our receiving forgiveness, on our- because once we receive that, (our own forgiveness) we have the possibility of seeing other people as other people caught in the same loops that we were, and that forgiveness becomes a possibility. But I personally believe that, that that is an unbelievably new intervention in the world: the possibility that beyond violence, there's something more because, you know, you know - we have lived through - the history of Ireland, but, you know, the history of the world is littered, and literally littered, with slaughter. And the big question is (and of discrimination and of exclusion and of all of the things that happened to people and happen to people) and I suppose the big question is not a sentimental forgiveness, where that's all right, then. But, is there a possibility that even these, this can be transformed into something else- is there a humanity beyond that? And that, to me, is the importance of, of, of this language of- to forgive and to be forgiven. That's not to say it's easy, or even remotely likely, but it is to say its existence means that, I think it changes the nature of the world, gives us a hope that there's a possibility beyond this.

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

When you teach politics, Duncan, do you, d'you bring in questions to do with forgiveness and relationship? I'm curious about that. I hear you synthesising so many different streams of thought; is this something you do, and, d'you get pushback, as well? I suppose that's the second part of the question.

**Duncan Morrow:**

Oh, I think there's three- there's so many answers to that question, which there shouldn't be; there should be a yes or no, but there isn't. Um, OK, so one part is that the rivalry over religion in our society is so great that the language of forgiveness is really hard, now. Really hard. The language of anything that's faith-based is hard for people because they hear it as power. And that is very complicated. So you have to be very careful.

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

And, by being very careful, do you mean to find clever ways to say the old thing, or to undo yourself, because it might be that you're participating in something poor?

**Duncan Morrow:**

Well, I suppose actually what I should do is offer myself as the scapegoat and just be honest, actually, but I, if I'm very honest about it, I probably am, um, too nervous sometimes to do that. Although I think as I get older, I get less nervous, because I'm pretty convinced of its, of its truth, and also maybe you don't mind so much. The second thing is, erm, I think- but I do think it's real, though, that the triggering of people's deep response to their own experience is, it's very real so you have to watch yourself. The second thing is: if you start preaching it as law, you destroy it. So you're right in terms of it has to be about story and redemption and about the possibility of transformation. And does that exist for people, is that a reality; and in the end, it's a faith statement. And thirdly, I think for some people, it is hard, actually, to even, to even grasp that it would be possible, or...even desirable, or, what are we talking about this for? For them it's still a question of struggle; I'm not there anymore, I actually believe that the, the intervention of even moments of forgiveness - meaning that people who previously couldn't have had a relationship find one - creates a few planks on which people can walk across the marsh. I don't believe it's ever the real world where people live in. I think we all struggle with all of this all the time. But I also believe that unless you put those planks under people's feet- so to answer your question, I sometimes lead people to what I think is the next logical step, I sometimes speak it out very directly, and I sometimes very occasionally find the courage to simply say: we haven't got a choice, I don't, I haven't got a choice here... That's, that's the hypocrisy I live in.

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

I know that you've had big involvement on political levels with, you know, leading the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council, of consulting with the Scottish government on their policy regarding sectarianism. And, you know, I've heard you talk too about amnesty that was offered to people who were serving custodial sentences up to and around the time of the Good Friday Agreement. I mean, those are ways within which ideas of forgiveness go from, you know, do I forgive somebody next door to me, to the big political realm. How would you speak about the, the messiness of trying to do that, and maybe the value or the benefit of trying whether or not you think it was successful?

**Duncan Morrow:**

In terms of trying, I don't think there's a choice. I think you're- because certainly our experience in Northern Ireland is that the biggest obstacle to what you were talking about as a shared future is the past. In other words, what makes it- and the problem is a crisis of faith. In other words, the past makes



it impossible to believe in one. And actually possibly rationally stupid to believe in one. So you have to, actually, you know, there has to be something else changed, and I think, there was a moment, I mean I was thinking... 35 years ago this year, there was a week in Northern Ireland politics, which was quite formative in my life. Where it started out with Gibraltar, which was SAS shooting IRA operatives about to bomb, but with no weapons, and they shot them dead. Then at the- so that was a complex situation, but nevertheless, that's what they did, the state killed them. Then there was the funerals of those people, which led to a individual, Michael Stone, shooting the people who were at- the mourners at the funeral, directly in front of TV cameras. And then three days later, British army soldiers - two soldiers - found their way into the cortege of the funeral. And they were taken out of the car and lynched by the mob. In front of TV cameras. And all of these things happened in a week. We saw it all in front of our face. That's 35 years ago. 30 years ago this year, there was a bomb in a shopping centre in Warrington, which was, two young children were just killed, totally random children killed because they were out in a shop, one very young and one about 10. And that shocked people because a cause and the outcome were so, so complex. And then 25 years ago, we had the agreement.

And so if you start looking in those terms, the agreement was like a miracle of its own moment; it was this kind of moment where something else is possible, something, something that's not the story that went before it was possible. And I do believe that that's almost what people are hanging on to, is the possibility that the agreement represents and exists. And so the biggest problem since then, has been not the possibility, it's almost been: we now have to deal with this, and we find it really hard to deal with the stuff in the past. That's where we've found it really hard; people have been able to say: OK, so we're not going to do that again, and that doesn't work. To a point at least, although that feels sometimes fragile, but nevertheless, the vast majority, and there's been a big change in people's experience of their lives since then. But the issue of how we deal with the past has become really complex. And I- it's this balance between: there has to be something which authentically owns responsibility for the pain that was caused somewhere along the line. But there also has to be something which says: and the way in which we've tried to make people individually and personally responsible for this has to change as well, as we, as we begin to own this in a different way. And I think that process has been, you know, stopped because there's so many political interests trying to shape the narrative and all of these things and we've found it quite difficult. But somewhere along the line, it's an honourable and necessary task. And if there's a lesson from Northern Ireland's peace process and its failures, it is that the hardest thing that people have found is facing up to being, to being dishonourable people in the past and still being- and then the second part of it is, and that we will have to make them honourable in the future. And if there's a definition of forgiveness, that's what it is. It's: how do people who have done dishonourable things become honourable members of society in the future, *and* own the responsibility for what they did? And that's really hard.



**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

Duncan Morrow, thanks so much for coming on The Corrymeela Podcast.

**Duncan Morrow:**

You're very welcome.

*The Corrymeela Podcast is created in partnership between Corrymeela and FanFán. It's produced by Emily Rawling, with mixing, editing, and theme music by Fra Sands at Safeplace Studios, and presented by me, Pádraig Ó Tuama. The podcast is generously funded by the Henry Luce Foundation, and the Community Relations Council Northern Ireland, and the Irish government's Reconciliation Fund. Thanks to them, and thanks to Corrymeela's friends and supporters, and thanks to you for listening.*

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

So Duncan, a Very Short Story question for you: what's something important that you've changed your mind about?

**Duncan Morrow:**

Funnily enough, Scottish independence: I'm now for. The other thing, actually, massive, massive is the nature of God...

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

Scottish independence and the nature of God!

**Duncan Morrow:**

I was thinking, the nature of God: I used to think of it as a big thing. And now I think of it as the opposite of that.

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

I'm gonna just go on to the next short story question before I fall down the rabbit hole of Scottish independence and the nature of God... Duncan, are there books or poems or works of art that you've turned to over and over again in your life?

**Duncan Morrow:**

Oh yeah, lots...

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

What's some of the important ones?

**Duncan Morrow:**

Well obviously, if you're in Ireland, Seamus Heaney follows you. And *The Cure at Troy* follows you. And in a sense, I only read it- it was a cliché first, and then I read it and I thought: gosh, he really gets it, he really gets the problem of this.

*Friends, Pádraig here with a quick message just as we end this first part of season two of The Corrymeela Podcast. It's been fantastic to be with you and to hear back from you. We'll be back with another six episodes in the autumn. And in the meantime, you can catch up with all the episodes wherever you get your podcasts and you can access full transcripts and discussion questions to go along with the episodes if you want to listen with groups of friends or groups of people from your church or community or organisation. We look forward to being back with you soon. And thanks very much for being with us along the way.*