

The Bones of the Dead

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Lord Eames and Denis Bradley, co-chairs of the Consultative Group on the Past, have just given a keynote speech laying out some of the major issues that society needs to address. Their report is due in the autumn.

We are in a better place than we were 30, 20, 10 years ago. This ought not to disguise that making peace has involved moral murk and the creation of a sometimes queasy political accommodation.

Peace has been built on the bones of the dead (Matt 23: 27). But sepulchres have been whitened and made beautiful – rather than dealing with what the dead represent – the profoundly shocking nature of what we did to each other, and what the State sometimes engaged in – accepting responsibility and expressing contrition. If we cannot cease being hypocrites some humility would be nice.

We owe the dead some honesty and truth, and we know our capacity for honesty and truth is limited. It is on that limited terrain that the Consultative Group on the Past must manoeuvre, hoping over time that that territory might expand.

We owe ourselves (and our children) attention to ‘the weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy and good faith’ (Matt 23: 23), so that we can establish society on a different basis to anything that has gone before and there is no more shedding of blood.

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