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Identity Formation for Conciliatory Existence: How We Perceive the Other

Abstract

In this article we interface mission, theology and psychology in an exploration of what hinders and what enables conciliatory existence. Whereas common approaches to reconciliation focus on redressing past wrongs, we propose identity formation that would prevent such wrongs. We consider how people integrate elements of their social context into a social identity that influences how they perceive “the other.”

Understanding this to be divine action that transforms psychological processes, we draw from all three disciplines to understand the dynamics of *how we come to see the other*.

Biblical theology provides penetrating narratives into the nature of fallen humanity and its proclivity toward self-aggrandizement and strife. Psychosocial analysis recognizes that the processes of socialization so necessary to promote belonging and identity formation, are also quite capable of turning others into objects of scorn and hatred. Yet, both theology and psychology, posit that despite however distorted human nature may be, it has the potential of being re-created. We locate the work of reconciliation as beginning with the being and action of God on behalf of humanity and demonstrated powerfully in the transformation of the apostles in the book of Acts.

Key words: reconciliation, identity, prejudice, missiology, koinonia

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Asbury Seminary, where both the authors of this paper teach, is located in a small Kentucky town. On one occasion, I (Chris) phoned one of our students about an academic matter and asked at the onset of the conversation how he and his family were faring. “Great,” said the student, “my son is outside with a number of other children and I just realized that there are seven nations playing in my backyard.” Not only was I struck by the glad tidings in his voice at finding such a rich place of communal living for his seminary work, I thought there was something of an eschatological vision in his salient statement.

We are theologians with specializations in missiology (Kima) and in developmental psychology (Chris). These disciplines, global events, and our own radically different life experiences, have brought us to consider how people integrate elements of their social context into a social identity that influences how they perceive “the other.” Kima grew up Mizo, his family went through civil war and military atrocities in the northeast part of India. Chris grew up in West Texas, often referred to then as the “bible belt” of American Christianity. Our lives have been touched differently through the years by growing ethnic, racial, national, religious and sexual diversity. Yet, despite the different sociological contexts of our origins, we share a concern that is felt most everywhere. Diversity has rarely produced a global sandbox of contented play among the peoples of the world; but rather has fomented conflicts that in many cases have threatened the annihilation of people groups. While we acknowledge that human community has come a long way in the process of globalizing worldviews, it is the “proximate other” who remains the most difficult to deal with (Smith 1985, 5). One can easily romanticize people of distant lands or dismiss those who do not challenge our sense of identity. However, the reality seems to be that closer interactions created by technology and required in the global economy have just as often brought more tension than alleviated it. At the core of the issue is “being other” and dealing with “the other.” Indeed, the tendency to rank the other (ethnic or cultural group) often leads to a perception of the self as either superior or inferior, which in turn produces prejudicial attitudes, and more often than not, identity-based tensions and conflicts.

I (Kima) have explored the relational aspects of identity formation in relation to the theology of reconciliation in some of my earlier works (Pachau 2007 and 2009). Reconciliation is historically talked about as righting the

(wrong) relationship. Reconciliation comes first from God who gives us the ministry of reconciliation (II Cor. 5:18). Based on God's reconciling work in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are endowed with the ministry of reconciliation between and among peoples. However, whereas the most common approach to reconciliation is focused on redressing past wrongs and retrospectively restoring relations, this approach seems limited. A comprehensive Christian ministry of reconciliation must move beyond only addressing the wrongs of the past, and should also seek to prevent such wrongs from happening. Therefore, functionally speaking, an important goal of the Christian ministry of reconciliation is to form an identity for a conciliatory existence. Ephesians 2:11-22 provides a clear explanation of how God's work in Christ reconciles differing peoples (Jews and Gentiles) by "putting to death the hostility" (Eph. 2:13-14) between conflicting peoples, and by forming a new identity ("new creation" II Cor. 5:18) in us to witness to His reconciling works.

So, in this paper we interface mission, theology and psychology in an exploration of what hinders and what enables conciliatory existence. We marvel in the work of the Holy Spirit to cleanse the perceptual schemata by which we view the "other." Understanding this to be divine action that transforms psychological processes, we draw from all three disciplines to understand the dynamics of *how we come to see the other*. We begin with a look at Creation in the design of a Trinitarian God, contending that the first chapter of Genesis offers remarkable insight into the nature of God, the nature of humanity, and the expected moral relations that we are privileged to have toward Him and toward one another. We set this in contrast with the portrait of humanity that immediately follows after humanity decides on a course of treason.

Creation and the Fall

The narrative presented to us in Genesis 1 is that the Trinitarian godhead, in apparent dialogue with one other, creates human beings in His own image, a likeness of his own "community of divinity." So God brings forth "man" – a generic term that the passage makes explicit is inclusive of both male and female, to reflect His divine community. Both male and female are charged by Yahweh to care for creation and to multiply upon the earth. It is their complementariness and their capacity to create life that reflects the divine image, the difference within the oneness of the Godhead. The ontological nature of the Trinity, suggests Plantinga, is that no part of the godhead can be defined apart from the mutual interiority of the other (Volf, 1996). Hence, being created in the image of God situates the other as partner in the completion of the self. (Anderson, 2001). Hence, it is in the relational nature of human beings (individual as well as social or group relations), that the

Trinitarian image can be seen. As Trinitarian theology forms our understanding of personhood, so can it shape our conceptions of conciliatory existence with others. Recognizing the image of God in others and their essentiality for the shaping of our own identity (i.e., accepting that we are being completed by them) is foundational for conciliatory existence.

Hence, Adam perceives Eve as one like unto himself, perfectly suitable for companionship. With her, his own personhood will now be defined and so will hers be defined in relation to him. In fact, the freedom that Adam and Eve each possess will be exercised in its full impact on the other, on creation, within themselves and on their relation to God (Anderson, 2001). In Creation, male and female stand together in solidarity and co-humanity before their Creator. Both mutually receive the blessing of God and the divine charge to procreate. Both are given the privilege of serving as co-regents over the earth, exercising a shared dominion over all other living things in the created order (Joy, 2000). In all of the creative acts of God in this opening chapter of Genesis, it is only humans that are addressed by God, indicating that they are uniquely made for relationship with him and with one another, created as persons free to act and to make choices. In the very nature of the Triune God, that is, in the dialectics of the oneness and difference of the three Persons, we can begin to think of how human community is created to be one amidst cultural and gender differences. It is in the presence of another that we learn our common identity. However, important in any consideration of conciliatory existence is the balance between a person's or a group's needs for individuality and independence and the necessity of subordinating one's uniqueness in order to find common ground and belongingness. Too much identity assertiveness comes at the expense of mutuality, too much accommodation comes at the expense of psychological subordination. An important starting point for conciliatory existence is then to recognize the common divine image within each of us, but to recognize that in this divine image is unity within diversity.

As the narrative unfolds however, both the man and the woman exercise their individual freedom in an attempt to gain moral autonomy - the knowledge of good and evil. The consequences are devastating, God is usurped and the joy of seeing the other as companion - one made like me for oneness - vanishes. When God moves to evoke confession from the man, in fear and shame, Adam responds with blame and accusation. Eve is now seen as threatening and becomes scapegoated. Adam does not call her by name, but points the finger at her and at God saying, "the woman whom *you* gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." (Gen 3:12). Ray Anderson (2001) notes that the very structure of humanity is now shattered for "No longer is human personhood in the form of co-humanity the criteria for moral responsibility (p. 209)."

This rift between Adam and Eve becomes further shredded with the next generation; the murder of Able at the hands of his brother Cain. Miroslav Volf (1996) described processes that accompany our exclusions of others, among which are: *abandonment, dominance, and elimination*. By the third chapter of Genesis, these three consequently follow after humanity's act of treason. Adam goes silent and seems to *abandon* Eve when the tempting serpent begins his deceit. Differentiation between the man and the woman turns to *dominance* as the consequence of the fall is described – “your desire shall be for your husband and he will rule over you.” And now, the complete *elimination* of one's own brother occurs in an act of murder. The far-reaching consequences of how humanity's rebellion against God so quickly filters into how we see and regard those closest to us is staggering. Our failure to see the image of God in ourselves and others often leaves us vulnerable, seeking our security and significance in our own efforts to find an alternate anchor for our identity, a task that often comes at the expense of others.

John Steinbeck (1952), in his novel, *East of Eden*, yields insight to the prototypic nature of the Cain and Able narrative. Cain, he suggests, is representative of all of us, who in our fallen state and for whatever reason, fail to find a sense of being ultimately accepted. When the non-acceptance runs deep, one's identity can become fashioned by insecurity and rejection, which then becomes projected outward. At a pivotal point in the novel, Steinbeck has one of his characters muse about the Cain and Able story:

I think this is the best-known story in the world because it is everybody's story. I think it is the symbol of the human soul. I'm feeling my way now – don't jump on me if I'm not clear. The greatest terror a child can have is that he is not loved, and rejection is the hell he fears. I think everyone in the world to a large or small extent has felt rejection. And with rejection comes anger, and with anger some kind of crime in revenge for the rejection, and with the crime guilt [and shame] – and there is the story of mankind. . .it is all there – the start, the beginning. One child, refused the love he craves, kicks the cat and hides the secret guilt; and another steals so that the money will make him loved; and a third conquers the world – and always the guilt and revenge and more guilt. Therefore I think this old and terrible story is important because it is a chart of the soul (p.268-269).

The summons for Cain, as it is regarded in Steinbeck's novel, is to not allow his non-acceptance, forged from perceptions of his standing relative to his brother, to become definitive of his destiny - “sin is crouching at the door; it's desire is for you, but you *mayest* master it.” The pivotal word in the Steinbeck novel is the discovery of this Hebrew word, *timshel*, translated in

the novel as “mayest.” Whereas some translations have God say “Thou shalt master it” and others “Do thou” master, the translation of *timshel* as “Thou mayest” makes all the difference.

Now, there are many millions in their sects and churches who feel the order, ‘Do thou’ and throw their weight into obedience. And there are millions more who feel predestination in ‘Thou Shalt.’ Nothing they may do can interfere with what will be. But ‘Thou mayest’! Why, that makes a man great, that gives him stature with the gods, for in his weakness and his filth and his murder of his brother he has still the great choice. He can choose his course and fight it through and win (301-302).

For Steinbeck then, this is every one’s story and everyone’s dilemma: How does one overcome the natural and easy vengefulness of the human spirit that arises from the proximal other?

God approaches Cain with a question that emerges from the presupposition of brotherhood or what Anderson (2001) has called “co-humanity” (209) – “Where is your brother Able?” Cain’s response evidences the same abandonment of concern for the other that had been exemplified by his father’s turn from Eve – “I do not know, am I my brother’s keeper?”

Yet, despite being devoured, God is not through with rebellious humanity, or even with murderous Cain. In a remarkable act of grace, God becomes a moral advocate for Cain. Rather than banishing him from the human social order or allowing reciprocal vengeance to escalate between the subsequent families, God places a mark on Cain permitting him to live within the human community without fear of retaliation, (Anderson, 2001, 209). Even in these early Biblical narratives, Yahweh acts as moral advocate, initiating measures toward conciliatory existence.

But if there is precaution and challenge for those who feel what they have to offer is unacceptable, there is equal precaution to be made to those whose identity allows them to feel favored. Such was the case with Israel. What missiologists often refer to as “the scandal of particularity,” i.e., the calling of a particular person or nation by God is a biblical teaching that often upsets modern readers. God calls Israel to be his people, his chosen ones (Deut. 7:6) – an identity intended to serve as a witness to the rest, becomes far less than conciliatory. Reading the history of the formation of Israel as God’s people in the Bible, missiologists relate the tension between God’s call for his people to be a “people for other” and the people’s propensity toward a self-centered view of their call. Among the “false ideas” around the doctrine of election,” Lesslie Newbigin named “the idea that election is election to privileged status before God” as the first and most obvious one (Newbigin 1989, 84). In the story of Israel in the Old Testament, “there is an ambivalent attitude toward other nations,” says David Bosch. Positive attitude toward other nations can

be pieced together from the Old Testament as recipients of God's salvation as promised in Abraham to be a blessing, while the nations are also presented negatively as Israel's political enemies or rivals. Such ambivalence and the strong Israel-centeredness of the Old Testament led Bosch to conclude that "on the issue of mission we run into difficulties" in the Old Testament (Bosch 1992, 16–19). Studies in the past have concluded that it was "the apostasy of Israel" to understand its election as favoritism (Blauw 1962, 23) that has led to Israel-centeredness of the Old Testament. Such a self-understanding of God's privileged people had prevented Israel from practicing its missional duty. In fact, it has clouded the missional nature of the entire Old Testament.

In a recent study on God's mission in the Bible, Christopher Wright argued that "the whole Bible is itself a missional phenomenon" in that mission is the basis of the Bible not just that the Bible is the basis of mission (Wright 2006, 22). From that point of view (of understanding God as "the God of Mission"), Wright makes a strong case for the mission of God's people in the Old Testament based on the covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12: 1–3) which he argued "is the single most important biblical tradition within a biblical theology of mission and a missional hermeneutic of the Bible." Yet, God's mission of blessing all nations is mentioned scarcely outside Genesis in the OT. If the self-centeredness of Israel overshadowed this missional nature of Israel's biblical religion, it contradicts the very purpose of election for other-centeredness (other-oriented nature) of God's mission.

So, Cain and Able are two brothers with radically different identities – one a shepherd, the other a tiller of the ground. Co-existence became impossible for them and ends in elimination by the one who felt disregarded. Israel, delivered, set apart and blessed to be a blessing to other nations; turns their election into favoritism and their particularization into separation and fear of defilement by the other. Neither ends in what God intended, and both have to be corrected by the intervention of God. Looking through a theological lens, it seems readily apparent, that East of Eden, humanity is hardly inclined toward conciliatory existence. Sin brings enmity; and enmity in the vertical relationship plays out in enmity within, enmity with those closest in proximity, and enmity with all of Creation. But if our premise is correct that spiritual realities operate through psychological processes, we should find evidence of similar proclivities in the psychology of identity formation. For this we turn to a consideration of Erik Erikson, highly regarded for his insights into psychosocial identity formation.

Erik H. Erikson: Prejudice as Normative Self-idealization

In 1970, Erik Erikson retired from his professorship at Harvard University and launched one final initiative that centered around what he called the

Conference on the Adult. Carol Hoare in her book, *Erikson on Adulthood* (2002), reports on the unpublished papers of Erikson that flowed from this conference. We draw heavily from this book in this section. Erikson had lived through two world wars and had begun writing about the dangers of violence in a nuclear age. Through this conference, Erikson gathered scholars in a quest to surface insight about the generative potential and developmental pinnacle of adulthood (Hoare, 2002). He recognized that ego investments across the lifespan change and he was eager to promote the ways that identity could express itself in the adult years through love and work (intimacy and generativity). Through this conference he sought to chronicle images of adulthood that would provide conceptual itineraries whereby defensiveness and protection of one's own preferred customs could be overcome and ideological commitments could be embraced in an ever expanding social world. With nuclear annihilation probable, it seemed essential to Erikson to fashion ways that would encourage a collective abandonment of prejudice, or what he termed "pseudo-speciation" (Hoare, 2002). This challenge was exacerbated in the Western world, especially in the United States, precisely because conventional identity development moves one toward a kind of autonomy that made the embrace of higher ethical and relational forms of engagement difficult (Hoare, 2002). How this occurs, and how it might be overcome, is instructive for our understanding of identity formation as conciliatory existence.

A keen observer of human behavior, Erikson recognized that prejudice originates from normative self-idealization. In other words, the natural tendency of developing individuals, longing to belong, is to hold membership in particular groups with which they identify. These groups by nature inculcate identification among members by expressing preferences, showing biases, requiring adherence to particular standards, and holding ideological positions that provide clarity to who they are (Hoare, 2002). Groups naturally move to evoke a belief in their own specialness. Erikson found this sense of self-idealization everywhere; in nations, professions, clubs, neighborhoods, races, families, politics, and in the legends that people use to narrate their identities. Hence, he sought to explain how it occurs rather naturally at various points along the lifespan.

In childhood, for example, Erikson would have us consider the moral and religious codes parents interject into their children. Even in infancy, the quid pro quo reciprocal interactions as a mother smiles and bestows "yeses" that convey desired responses establish a sort of moral nursery for the child. Rather quickly, oft repeated rituals provide familiarity for a child, who first becomes habituated to them and then develops a preference for them because of the familiar expectancy they provide for daily experience. Connected to these rituals are powerful positive and negative imprints of what constitutes

clean, good, correct, industrious, trustworthy, and other such values (Hoare, 2002). In the West, for example, parental warnings and directives are given about what constitutes cleanliness; efficiency is epitomized as of highest value, and those who show initiative are prized for their industriousness. In the East, what is honorable in the society is what parents try to interject in their children. Children may honor or shame their parents based on the social norms set by the society, and thus, the society has much to say in the upbringing of the children. Not only do these create and sanction particular preferences in children, they also teach one to project negative identity elements that one must avoid. Indeed, Erikson realized that when the childrearing views of others are regarded as harmful or deviant, it becomes easy to label one's neighbor as monstrous. Take for instance the practice of one tribal group who practiced thumping their babies heads to evoke a rage response necessary to insure their future as brave warriors. Such a practice in many cultures today would be regarded as abusive because the intended outcome of development is not shared.

As children become imprinted through identification and socialization toward parental ideals and preferences, so likewise, do adolescents find identity largely through group affiliations. Eager to find an ideology to be loyal to, an adolescent identifies with and begins to define themselves according to particular perspectives and a shared world view. Habits, roles, beliefs, language, fashion easily come to absolutize a particular interpretive view of the world, perpetuated by the peer group, whereby anyone different can be easily repudiated. In fact, the "out-group" often comes to provide a screen whereby the "in-group" can project elements of an identity they wish to avoid (Hoare, 2002). By so doing however, Erikson illuminates the natural human inclination to locate one's personal devil and evil as residing not in own's own domain but rather as existent in the domain of others (Hoare, 2002). Identity formation necessarily involves making distinctions in the adolescent years of who I am and who I am not, consolidating various identifications into a core sense of self. Once attained, realized Erikson, not only is there specific content given to the identity, but there also develops a logic to safeguard the identity once consolidated (Hoare, 2002). The quite natural, and perhaps appropriately self-protective strategy, is to exclude any inimical or foreign influences. Often, the child, now turned adolescent, has replaced external parental requirements by incorporating particular values into the domain of their own conscience. Self-idealization naturally follows, Erikson explains, whereby a person comes to be convinced that the version of humanity offered by their group and incorporated into their own sense of self is best. Group solidarity then perpetuates forbidden boundaries, often unconsciously, not only by which others are excluded, but in its most dramatic fashion, from which the "in group" inadvertently creates a sense of "manifest destiny" (Hoare, 2002). We

should mention here however, that there may be an opposite tendency in minority groups to incorporate into their psyche the derisive opinions the majority group holds of them. Unconsciously colluding with this diminished status, a person may turn negative self-assessments inward to depression and/or self-hatred or outward toward dependency or aggression. This toxic shame has to be acknowledged and validated or it will always sabotage attempts at conciliatory existence (Fowler, 1992.)

I (Chris) can think of several examples from my own life. As a junior in college I had the privilege of spending a month in Europe. In the youth hostels we were staying in I remember meeting an attractive woman about my age and wondering what it might be like to have a romantic interest in someone from another culture. My supposition was quickly squelched however when she lifted her arm and I discovered that Europeans don't shave their armpits. At that point in my life, whatever initial attraction might have been, could not overcome the violation of inbred propriety and supposed hygiene. She remained to me nameless because I had now identified her as "strange." Erikson likened the way humans erect fences, laws, customs and words to keep others out, to that of animals that spray the periphery of their properties with excretions to show where others best not step. With a maturing of my perception and sensibilities, the outcome may have been quite different. Similarly, not long ago I witnessed a German family verbally attack a Nigerian security officer at the airport for the lack of efficiency in getting them through customs. When habituated expectations go unmet, it is easy to repudiate that which is different and to locate the problem not in ourselves but in the other. It is not difficult to elevate these dynamics to gross atrocities. By inflating identity fears and warning of a culture's potential demise, nations annihilate one another, securing their own identity by forcing others to relinquish theirs.

One might hope that higher levels of understanding and the gift of a secured identity would enable a different orientation toward others among adults, and this is indeed part of what Erikson hoped to help fashion. In reality however, adults seemed to become more prejudiced than less so. Part of the explanation Erikson offers revisits the effect of repetitive ritual and habituation on adults. As the world became increasingly bent toward mechanization, tool use and technology was put in the service of providing rapid and frequent mass production. With rapid mechanization and the development of technology, Erikson pointed out, intellect functions in such a way that it becomes routinized, requiring less awareness in the completion of tasks - i.e. one rarely thinks about *how* a tool is being used or about why one might be doing it (Hoare, 2002). Tools and technology are used for pragmatic reasons and for expediency. Furthermore to increase productivity it follows that making repetitive as many tasks and procedures as possible is

desirable, so the mind can be free of the encumbrance of having to consider every move it makes. Hence, mindless activity become the norm. One can go through the routine of getting ready in the morning almost mindless of the procedure they are following; one can shop in a familiar grocery store while thinking about other things; one can direct the mind in one direction while multi-tasking with another activity requiring less attention. So accustomed do we become to these conventions, that if they are interfered with, significant agitation can occur. Consider the internal angst created when there is no hot water, when the local grocery restructures where things are located or when the cell phone use is interrupted. Hence, adults come to inadvertently submit to acquired methods, defined roles and institutional norms and standards. The result is that identity becomes vested not in ideological commitments but in the safety of work roles in organizational life (Hoare, 2002). The mind then no longer becomes free, vital or animated but constricts to narrow bias and rigidity.

This reality, Erikson felt, was especially true of institutionalized religion inasmuch as its rituals propagated patterned prejudices against those who saw the world differently. Although Erikson sought to avoid detracting from the potential generative power of religion for the good, he also recognized that narrowly patterned behavior and thought easily deteriorated into isms: ritualism, moralism, ceremonialism, legalism, perfectionism, authoritarianism, absolutism and dogmatism (Hoare, 2002). All of which contribute to the thwarting of peaceful coexistence. Prejudice in a time of technology may be especially treacherous because harm, or even elimination of another, can be inflicted by one who is largely visibly removed from the conflict.

Hence, Erikson mapped the developmental relations between a child's early imprinting and later adult biases. On the one hand, he recognized the need for "sponsoring collectives" whereby a person might find identity in affiliation with groups (Hoare, 2002), and he noted the importance of groups to espouse cohesive views. On the other hand, he recognized that adults become enmeshed in over-adjustment to work roles, resistant to encounter and challenge. He especially hoped to help us see how religion, when focused on scrupulous ritual, could serve to diminish conscience rather than to form it.

However, though Erikson felt adults would grow increasingly resistant to transcendence, he also held out hope that if people could gain a comprehension of their unconscious accumulated biases, and if they gained a deep sense of empathy, they might be enabled to move beyond their ego-primary identity, their sanctioning of reciprocity as the highest form of justice, and live into more inclusive identities. Erikson's term for what was needed was "insight" - a listening with the heart both to how others are positioned in life and to one's own inner voice that compelled an enacting of truth for which one was willing to live or die (Hoare, 2002). Through insight, one could do for others

what would aid their growth, regardless of whether reciprocity was guaranteed.

Erikson recognized that developing such an awareness could create significant dissonance, but he regarded as critical developing the capacity of perspective taking as antidotal to overcoming the natural assumption of ethnic, class, religious, or historical superiority. The needed awareness was that culture existed both **inside** a person's perceptual apparatus by which they view the world; and **externally** in the ideational modes of thought and behavioral norms held by others (Hoare, 2002). Erikson noted for example, how the historical reality of American being an independent nation, emerging as an ever expanding frontier, embeds within notional ideas of freedom and the idealization of newness into our collective psyches (Hoare).

Interestingly, Erikson believed what we call conciliatory existence in this work could be fostered not so much via a system of thought, as much as it would be discovered experientially through responsible love and care. Mutuality and leeway – i.e the capacity to give freedom to others to be themselves, while yet engaging in shared participation with a minimum level of defensiveness, would best be attained through the accrual of virtues gained through the stages of life, virtues that would finally endow one with wisdom (Hoare, 2002). Wisdom entailed ego integrity that emerges from sustained mutual intimacy, generative care for others, and an adherence to principles and convictions. Wisdom in its fullness would exemplify a generosity of being that flows from the cultivation of the interdependent self, missed by those who could never relinquish the needs of the self to share in cooperative living and the honoring of commitments. Wisdom showed others the way to be and the way to act, thereby insuring a fund of trust and hope for future generations.

Integration, critique and concluding thoughts

Biblical theology provides penetrating narratives into the nature of fallen humanity and its proclivity toward self-aggrandizement and strife. Psychosocial analysis recognizes that the processes of socialization so necessary to promote belonging and identity formation are also quite capable of turning others into objects of scorn and hatred. Yet, both theology and psychology posit that despite however distorted human nature may be, it has the potential of being re-created. In Steinbeck this possibility opens by positing that any human being *mayest* master those negative identity fragments that seek to become definitive of identity. As Wesleyan theologians, we affirm the emphasis on destiny that is not fated, but we claim that the capacities to make moral choices for good are themselves an enablement of grace. Just as Yahweh becomes the moral advocate that provides a way for Cain to co-exist and be returned to humanity without retaliation, so do we locate the work of reconciliation as beginning with the being and action of God on behalf of humanity. God's reconciling work with the human is the restoration of that

relation with God and the relationship between and among humans in the way it was meant to be. Trinitarian theology provides us with a fundamentally transformative and pedagogical dialectic that can be set in opposition to current sociological pressures that by default typically become definitional for personhood (Groome, 1980).

With Erikson we affirm that identity is inherently psychosocial and deeply influenced by familial and societal contexts. We began this paper with theological reflections affirming a view of personhood that reflects being created in the image of a Trinitarian being. Akin to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, any one of us can only be explained by the web of relationships in which we find our being (Kinlaw, 2005). As Dennis Kinlaw observes in his reflection of Jesus' relationship with the Father, "none of us are self-originating, none of us are self-sustaining, none of us are self-explanatory, and none of us are self-fulfilling."

We also find meaningful the conceptual itinerary and directives Erikson suggests to move us to aspects that transcend autonomous identity. We share the importance of gaining insight into ourselves and others that comes from deep intuition and the jettisoning of defensive posturing. We find resonance with Erikson's assertion that offering sustained care to others may be more beneficial than rational argument in moving one toward new perceptions of the other (I Cor 13). Similarly, we recognize the immense value of empathizing in such a way that multiple perspectives are entered into and taken into account in conflictual situations (Acts 9), and we affirm that the accrual of particular virtues through resolution of developmental tasks lends itself to relational betterment. Yet, consonant with our critique of Steinbeck, we find Erikson overly optimistic that human beings have within themselves and others the capacity to re-orient the heart away from self-interest. Our theology compels us to believe that if conciliatory existence is to be realized, it will not be found in acts that originate with us or by us, but from our receptivity to the Word and Spirit that flows from the missional heart of God.

As a relational being, the human person constructs his/her identity-consciousness in interaction with the other. Between the "sameness" and the "difference" seen in the other, one forms ideas of who and what he/she is. This is in sharp contradistinction to constructing identity through processes aimed at individuation or autonomy. A healthy acceptance of the other as other and the otherness of the other is key in opening space in the self for the other. Such an acceptance comes, as indicated earlier, in recognizing the essentiality of the other in the very formation of the self. In his popular study, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks wrote "identity divides" (Sacks 2003,10). But a healthy acceptance of one's identity in relation to the other leads to unity. Therefore, we can say that identity also unites (Pachua 2009, 54). In this sense, identity not only unites those who share the common identity, but

also those who are of different identities. Such a healthy sense of identity built on Trinitarian theological understanding and expressed in the creation of “co-humanity” in the image of the Triune God is key to ministering God’s reconciliation.

Christian theology of mission originates in the mission of the Triune God. The mutual interiority among the three persons is also expressed in exteriority, so to speak, of the divine self-donation and self-sending in the person of the Son and in the person of the Spirit. As Miroslav Volf so aptly articulates, the self-donation of Christ becomes the construct for conciliatory identity by positing the opening of space within ourselves to receive the other (Volf 1996). It is the person and work of Christ that becomes the basis of God’s reconciliation (II Cor. 5) and the reconciliation between peoples (Eph. 2: 11-22). But if there is conciliatory existence patterned in the self-donation of Christ that breaks the walls of hostility, so is there conciliatory existence patterned in the life of the Spirit. Being created in the image of God and being restored by God in Christ in the power of the Spirit, we are called to live such a conciliatory existence.

In a wonderful devotional commentary on the book of Acts, titled *Mastery*, E. Stanley Jones (1955) points out that if the way of salvation and kingdom living offered in Jesus had simply been proclamation, and not incarnation, we would only have words. We needed demonstration, so we could see the life of God lived out among us; and we have it offered in the person of Jesus. However, this is not all that is needed, argues Jones. Just as we needed the incarnation of the Divine Person in order to understand God, so do we need the Divine Order enfleshed so that we can grasp the Kingdom of God. The book of Acts, suggests Jones, offers a portrait of the Holy Spirit upon the framework of human living in such a way that we are given a demonstration of the Divine Order, “the Kingdom of cameo” (Jones, 1955, vii), a portrait of humans living in conciliatory existence with each other and towards those they encounter.

Consider the formational and missional center of the book of Acts. The early chapters record the event of Pentecost, usually celebrated as the birth of the church. Jones (1955) points out however that the Greek word for church (“ecclesia”) does not appear in the early chapters of Acts. The reality that does appear is the fellowship or (“koinonia”). This koinonia, constituted by people from virtually every nation, and mysteriously endowed by the Spirit for witness, exemplifies the mobility and freedom of sacrificial commitment to birth unlimited demonstrations of conciliatory existence. The constitution of the koinonia itself is a witness to the overcoming of linguistic, cultural, and religious barriers through the power of the Spirit. But not only was this true with the in-group, it was also manifested toward those in the out-group. Jones focuses on the astonishing witness of Peter, standing with the other

Spirit-filled followers of Christ, facing the men “whose hands were still red with the blood of their Master. (Jones, 114). Luke records the speech in Acts 2:29; 3:17 – “Brethren, I may say to you confidently . . . And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance as did your rulers.” Magnanimous in his address, calling the murderers of Jesus “brethren;” and reminiscent of their Master’s word from the cross “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do;” the disciples appear to have caught the mind and heart of their master. Gone, says Jones, was the spirit of wanting to call down fire from heaven on those who wouldn’t receive them; gone was the drawing of the sword to cut off the right ears; they were now doing and actualizing what the Master had told them – “Love your enemies.” (Jones, 114). The result among those Peter was confronting was equally astonishing. Dumbfounded and their conscience pricked, they were cut to heart and asked in what was now a kindred spirit - “Brethren, what shall we do?”

Using the title of his book, Jones (1955) proceeds to chronicle the structure and collective life that emerged, in part, a fellowship made out of former enemies:

- overcoming of privilege based on blood or social standing
- abolishing of the inferior status of women
- conciliation between youth and age
- mastery over social and race distinctions
- healing of inner conflict and cleansing of the subconscious
- relinquishment of negative, ingrown and critical attitudes
- reformation of trying to change the world and others first
- humility replacing always having to be right

It would be naïve and overly-simplistic to assume that any one approach to conciliatory existence can be prescribed. Ethnic identity alone and the complex histories that accompany people groups makes absolutizing any approach to conciliatory existence problematic. The balance between individuality or identity assertion and connectedness or psychological subordination for the sake of the other will no doubt differ depending on the social landscape of a given situation. Yet, for those who regard their being as flowing from the image of a Trinitarian God, who follow the crucified and risen Christ, and who seek to walk by His spirit, can only be astounded by the conciliatory acts of this God. Perhaps none is so profound as that which is enacted each time the communion cup is passed and the words are re-presented once again, “on the very night in which Jesus was betrayed, he took the bread . . . and he took the cup.” These were the elements that would become sacramental as the breaking of his own body and the pouring out of his own blood would soon make efficacious. Yet, at this moment, when invoking them must have brought him to a place of remarkable personal vulnerability, he offers them even to the one he knows will betray him. If Christ can offer his own broken body and spilled

out blood to his betrayer, how far might his followers go in their offers of conciliatory existence?

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