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## Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation

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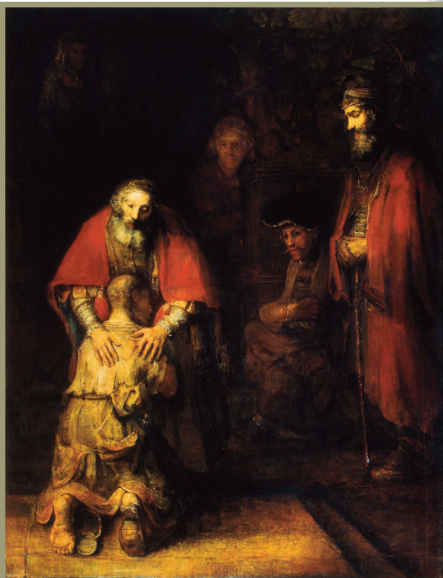


Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series

VOLUME 16



# Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation



Edited By

**Robert Schreiter and Knud Jørgensen**



REGNUM EDINBURGH CENTENARY SERIES  
Volume 16

# Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation



## REGNUM EDINBURGH CENTENARY SERIES

The Centenary of the World Missionary Conference of 1910, held in Edinburgh, was a suggestive moment for many people seeking direction for Christian mission in the twenty-first century. Several different constituencies within world Christianity held significant events around 2010. From 2005, an international group worked collaboratively to develop an intercontinental and multi-denominational project, known as Edinburgh 2010, and based at New College, University of Edinburgh. This initiative brought together representatives of twenty different global Christian bodies, representing all major Christian denominations and confessions, and many different strands of mission and church life, to mark the Centenary.

Essential to the work of the Edinburgh 1910 Conference, and of abiding value, were the findings of the eight think-tanks or “commissions”. These inspired the idea of a new round of collaborative reflection on Christian mission – but now focused on nine themes identified as being key to mission in the twenty-first century. The study process was polycentric, open-ended, and as inclusive as possible of the different genders, regions of the world, and theological and confessional perspectives in today’s church. It was overseen by the Study Process Monitoring Group: Miss Maria Aranzazu Aguado (Spain, The Vatican), Dr Daryl Balia (South Africa, Edinburgh 2010), Mrs Rosemary Dowsett (UK, World Evangelical Alliance), Dr Knud Jørgensen (Norway, Areopagos), Rev. John Kafwanka (Zambia, Anglican Communion), Rev. Dr Jooseop Keum (Korea, World Council of Churches), Dr Wonsuk Ma (Korea, Oxford Centre for Mission Studies), Rev. Dr Kenneth R. Ross (UK, Church of Scotland), Dr Petros Vassiliadis (Greece, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki), and co-ordinated by Dr Kirsteen Kim (UK, Edinburgh 2010).

These publications reflect the ethos of Edinburgh 2010 and will make a significant contribution to ongoing studies in mission. It should be clear that material published in this series will inevitably reflect a diverse range of views and positions. These will not necessarily represent those of the series’ editors or of the Edinburgh 2010 General Council, but in publishing them the leadership of Edinburgh 2010 hopes to encourage conversation between Christians and collaboration in mission. All the series’ volumes are commended for study and reflection in both church and academy.

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REGNUM EDINBURGH CENTENARY SERIES  
Volume 16

# Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation

Edited by Robert Schreiter and Knud Jørgensen

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## FOREWORD

There is hope – even if it is “Hope in a Fragile World”, as the concluding chapter of *Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation* puts it. At the very heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ is a message of hope and reconciliation. Nothing could be more relevant and more necessary in a broken world than this Christian message of hope and reconciliation. Jesus has taught us to speak of it as the coming of God’s kingdom. Reconciliation is not our achievement. God is at work in our world turning hopeless and evil situations into good so that his “Kingdom may come” and his “Will be done on earth as it is in heaven”. Life and justice and peace will triumph in the end. One day “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Rev 7:17, 21:4). The healing of our broken world and humanity, their reconciliation are not only things that are desirable. They are eschatologically assured in the Cross and Resurrection of Christ. There is hope.

There is hope, for the Christian gospel is a significant contributing force to the quest for justice, peace and reconciliation. The gospel is that the Kingdom of God has come near (Mark 1:15). Witnessing to the gospel is inseparable from the daily witness Christians are called to give in solidarity and unity for the common good. But sin denies the worth and dignity of human beings, disrupts community, and hampers the flow of life. The sin of human beings contributes to, and belongs within, a wider context: a disorder which affects the whole of creation. Paul expresses this graphically: “The whole creation has been groaning” (Rom 8:22). This cry for help seeks healing and reconciliation.

But Paul is also greatly concerned that those whom Christ has reconciled in himself should not be divided, and that community life should be the first and foremost expression of God’s plan to reconcile all things. Paul envisages the unity of not only Jew and Gentile, but also of slave and free, male and female, in Christ (Gal 3:28). Therefore, we need the ecumenical movement of the Cross. Only through the Cross of Christ we can be briefly reconciled and united, sharing the burdens of life and the cross each one of us has to carry.

Christians are called to be a healing and reconciling community. It is a threefold call of reconciliation, as *Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation* points out, between God and human, among human beings and of the cosmos. Where do Christians get their inspiration to respond to this call? The answer lies in the healing and reconciling ministry of Jesus Christ as a model for Christians to follow in their lives every day, also today. Healing and reconciliation include the transformation of life. Christ proclaims salvation, the great gift of God which is liberation from everything that oppresses life, a gift that brings both healing and reconciliation, as well as

forgiveness of sin, in the joy of knowing God and being known by him. Mission means bringing this good news into all the strata of humanity and through its influence transforming humanity and the whole world: "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation" (2 Cor 5:17). A new creation and humanity renewed by baptism and by lives lived according to the gospel affirm: Christians are not hopeless, but believe in a costly reconciliation, not in an easy and unrealistic optimism, under the reality and the hope of the Cross.

There is hope, and it is expressed in this excellent book. The well researched reflections on reconciliation in *Section I* consider it. The sometimes very moving experiences of reconciliation (or the lack thereof) in a local, regional and global setting in *Section II* speak of it. The authors analyze meticulously and give faithful accounts of their experiences. Thus this book opens up new perspectives on mission as reconciliation, healing and hope. At the same time, it provides a valuable route map for a pilgrimage of reconciliation, justice and peace around the world taking its readers to all the continents. This is a book that instigates hope; it invites and encourages the reader to hope.

I would like to congratulate the editors of *Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation*, for they listened carefully and planned with farsightedness. During the past years reconciliation indeed has become an emerging theme that shapes Christian mission in today's "global village". And a rediscovery of the role of the Holy Spirit in healing and reconciliation really is at the heart of today's mission theology. As my former colleague, Jacques Matthey, points out in his contribution, this was already reflected in the 2005 World Missionary Conference in Athens. It is now newly affirmed and stressed in WCC's recent mission statement *Together towards Life*. There would be more examples worth mentioning. This rich book offers a valuable elucidation of the importance and the understanding of mission as ministry of reconciliation. It expounds its practical implications in a variety of settings. It unites perspectives from different church traditions, including the Lausanne Movement and the Catholic Church. It takes the interfaith aspect into account and also speaks about the socio-ethical implications of mission.

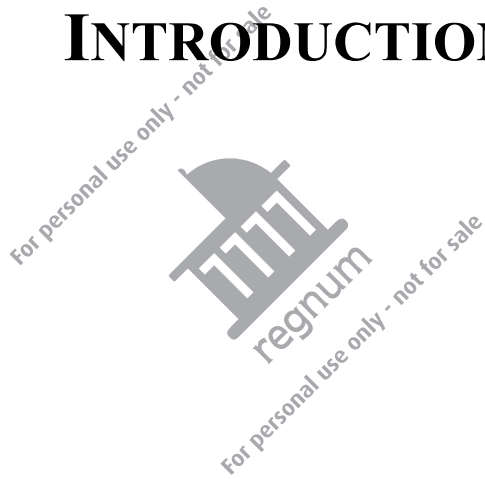
All the issues reflected in this book have significant ecumenical impacts. "Evangelism is the test of true ecumenism," my predecessor, Philip Potter, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches from 1972 to 1984, used to say.<sup>1</sup> And I would like to add: Mission is the benchmark of genuine ecumenism, the ecumenical movement of the Cross.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit  
November 2012

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Potter, Address on "Mission, Evangelism and the World Council of Churches", US Conference of Churches 1970, quoted by Michael N Jagessar, *Full Life for All, The Work and Theology of Philip Potter: A Historical Survey and Systematic Analysis of Major Themes* (Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum: 1997, 207).

# INTRODUCTION



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# EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION: RECONCILIATION AS A NEW PARADIGM OF MISSION

Robert Schreiter and Knud Jørgensen

This book is one of the volumes in the Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series, a series that has grown out of the celebration of the Edinburgh 1910 World Missionary Conference and a series that eventually will include more than twenty volumes on mission in the twenty-first century. Most of the titles will relate to the nine themes of the Edinburgh 2010 study process while other titles will explore missiological thinking within the major confessions. In addition, there will be titles on mission and the next generation, mission at and from the margins, the Bible in mission, and mission and Diasporas. The series will also include volumes reflecting on major 2010 events in Tokyo and Cape Town.

But why a volume on mission as ministry of reconciliation? The primary reason is that we view “reconciliation” as a new paradigm of mission. Related to this is a second reason, namely, that some of our major Christian traditions in recent years have dealt with and lifted up this focus on reconciliation.

Reconciliation has over the last 7-10 years emerged as a paradigm of mission. A paradigm is a kind of model or framework that helps us understand who we are, where we are, and what to do. It grows out of the context, the needs of our time, and the ways we respond. A paradigm is meant to provide orientation – give us new and better eyesight so that we may see our way into the future. As a new paradigm, reconciliation may take us beyond some of our old paradigms, such as liberation, evangelism (*marturia*), service (*diakonia*), proclamation (*kerygma*), fellowship (*koinonia*) and worship (*leitourgia*). At the same time, it carries forward and includes these perspectives and dimensions. The opening chapter of this book will deliberate on what this is about and focus on the characteristics of Christian reconciliation. Someone has talked about reconciliation as the “dangerous memory” of what God has done in Christ and what we therefore are set free to mirror. We believe that this has to do both with healing the past and with the moral reconstruction of a new society.

“Reconciliation” and “Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation” have in recent years been overriding themes and perspectives for some of our major Christian traditions. For that reason, three key documents have been major references for the book and its writers:

- *Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation*, preparatory paper for WCC Conference in Athens 2005.
- The Apostolic Exhortation of Benedict XVI *Africae Munus* (The Challenge of Africa) from 2011.
- *The Cape Town Commitment*, from the Lausanne III World Congress on World Evangelization, October 2010.

These three documents affirm that reconciliation is the work of the triune God bringing fulfilment to God's purposes of creation and salvation through Jesus Christ. The biblical and existential background to the renewed call for reconciliation, the documents say, is the fact and the experience of broken communion and hostility. Reconciliation needs to heal three overlapping realms of brokenness: reconciliation between God and human beings; reconciliation of different groups of human beings; and reconciliation of the cosmos. The affirmation of reconciliation as born of the Father's initiative and springing from his love runs as a visible and sometimes hidden undercurrent throughout this book. In all the chapters of the book one may sense the yearning for communion between God and humanity and for communion among human beings. The parable of the prodigal son is still alive and well in our broken world. And as with the prodigal son, the stories and perspectives of the book show that reconciliation is not an isolated act but a lengthy process. So often, if not always, this calls for us as God's people to remember that we bear within ourselves and our fellowships the same wounds and pain as the broken world around us. We therefore need the Lord's healing to make us credible witnesses of reconciliation. Reconciliation to God cannot be separated from reconciliation to one another. And a radical cross-centred reconciliation cannot be separated from the call to radical obedient discipleship. In a new paradigm of mission these two, reconciliation and discipleship, walk hand in hand.

Of particular importance for mission and church is viewing what we do, from within the perspective of reconciliation: How are some of the primary dimensions of mission carried out in light of this paradigm? What is the unique contribution of the church towards reconciliation in society? What does the gospel of redemption imply for reconciliation? How may values such as love for your enemies, repentance and forgiveness be dimensions of reconciliation?

The following chapters deal with these questions from various perspectives: biblical, historical, diaconal, political and social, intra-church and inter-church, ecumenical, and through selected experiences and case studies.

Section I of the book presents various perspectives on mission as ministry of reconciliation. The overall focus of the section is to paint a biblical and theological image of reconciliation and to show that this image is one of mission: God's mission in the world and for the sake of the world, and our call to participate within that mission. The perspectives also



include chapters on the three major references for this book, mentioned above. Central to the section is the description of *The Emergence of Reconciliation as a Paradigm of Mission*, and the chapters on *The Biblical Image of Reconciliation* and on *The Meaning of God's "hesed" (loving kindness/mercy) within Mission as Reconciliation*. The other chapters provide varying entry points for mission as a ministry of reconciliation: ecumenism, our wounded and unjust society, diakonia, Liberation Theology, powerlessness/vulnerability, and an interfaith perspective.

Section II contains a broad spectrum of experiences of reconciliation locally, regionally and globally. The leitmotifs in these case stories are truth-telling, healing, forgiveness and justice. Mission as ministry of reconciliation takes place *in ministry*, in the concreteness of life, in the call to penitence and the gospel of forgiveness – all of this rooted in and incarnated in the web of life and history. We believe that in these experiences God draws near to us and walks with us in a fragmented, divided, and conflict-ridden world. The stories and experiences come from all the corners and continents of God's world and from all sorts of contexts.

In a concluding chapter we then try to bring the many strands of the weaving together by focusing on the reconciling mission of the church.

This book is the work of 32 persons representing various walks of life, various church traditions and a diverse range of views and positions. They have been asked to contribute based on their experience and knowledge of reconciliation, either from within such disciplines as theology, sociology and mission or from having been involved personally in processes of reconciliation in church and society. Some are church leaders, others are leaders within organizations, some are politicians while others again are teaching theology, mission and conflict resolution. They come from all six continents and bring with them a great mix of expertise and experience. We believe this is part of the strength of the volume. As far as we know this is the first time that such a diverse group of people "come together" in one book on mission as ministry of reconciliation. We want to thank our many collaborators and colleagues; it has been exciting, sometimes cumbersome, but always stimulating to work with them and to walk this tiny piece of God's road in their company.

Robert Schreiter and Knud Jørgensen

January 2013

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**PART ONE**  
**PERSPECTIVES ON MISSION**  
**OF RECONCILIATION**



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# THE EMERGENCE OF RECONCILIATION AS A PARADIGM OF MISSION: DIMENSIONS, LEVELS, AND CHARACTERISTICS

Robert Schreiter

It has become commonplace in missiological circles to organize thinking about mission through the use of paradigms or models. David Bosch's ground-breaking work on the history of mission (1991) first set the standard for thinking in this way by the use of the language of "paradigms".<sup>1</sup> He took the language of paradigm from the work of historian of science Thomas Kuhn,<sup>2</sup> who organized a scheme presenting patterns of change in scientific innovation as organized into implicit frameworks or paradigms that guided research. Bosch's proposal continues to shape our description, analysis and critique of mission. In their magisterial work, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*,<sup>3</sup> Today,<sup>3</sup> Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder speak of "models" – both to describe historical forms of mission as well as to reflect upon contemporary ones. If we use the idea of models as a heuristic device, Clifford Geertz's distinction between "models of" (as descriptive) and "models for" (as normative) is useful.<sup>4</sup> By making this distinction as we think about approaches to mission, it allows us to see how models of mission arise out of the praxis of missionaries as a response to the world around them, as well as how they might serve as normative theological models for appraising and guiding any future praxis.

I would like to use the framework of models in this essay to examine one important development in mission that has occurred in the past quarter-century, namely, the emergence of reconciliation as a model *of* and a model *for* mission. By so doing I hope to sketch something of how this model has been developed, and how it relates to other paradigms of mission that are at play in the Christian *oecumene* today.

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<sup>1</sup> David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

<sup>3</sup> (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

### The Emergence of Reconciliation as a Model of Mission

The second half of the twentieth century ushered in both crisis and opportunity to the understanding of Christian mission. The struggle for independence from colonialism in many parts of the Global South led to a profound questioning of the very nature of mission itself. Was mission simply part of the imperial schemes of domination and exploitation by Europe? Should the presence of foreign missionaries in newly independent lands be tolerated at all? Such searching questions seared the very heart of mission as it had been understood among the churches of the Global North, both churches in the newly founded World Council of Churches as well as the missionary religious orders in the Roman Catholic Church. For the latter, the breakthrough that refocused the crisis of the “why” of mission into a renewed sense of the “how” of mission came in the 1981 SEDOS Seminar on the Future of Mission.<sup>5</sup> There a hundred missionaries, mission scholars, and leaders of those missionary orders pondered together these questions of “why” and “how.” What resulted was a fourfold way of seeing the “how” of mission: mission as (1) proclamation, (2) dialogue, (3) inculturation, and (4) liberation of the poor. The significance of this outcome was two-fold. First of all, it focused more directly on the interaction of missionaries and those to whom they had been sent, rather than giving attention only to the task or charge of the missionary; this created a greater sense of mutuality in mission. Second, it made the concrete contexts of mission the starting point for reflection rather than a priori concepts of mission. Or put another way, an effort to discern the *missio Dei* as it was unfolding in specific places provided the prompting toward renewed missionary praxis.

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union were the first of a series of events that reshaped the context for mission. This demise of a bipolar world order had two immediate impacts that were to reverberate through mission. The first was the freeing up of the nations once part of the Soviet bloc in central and Eastern Europe which opened the opportunity for a revitalization of the Christian churches there. But in the rush to rebuild and evangelize it became apparent that deep divisions ran through churches and society. Many church leaders had been severely compromised by being part of the surveillance network of government informers. Civil society had been effectively destroyed by the communist regimes there. Such things would have to be confronted and healed.

The second impact of this demise of a world order was to be seen in the upsurge in the number of armed conflicts taking place in countries of the Global South and parts of the Global North (especially the Balkan Peninsula), as well as the Rwandan genocide. The conflicts happened

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<sup>5</sup> Joseph Lang and Mary Motte (eds), *Mission and Dialogue: The 1981 Sedos Seminar on the Future of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1982).

within countries rather than between countries. What this meant was that the rebuilding after the conflict was even more difficult since combatants were often neighbours. The genocide in Rwanda brought that point home even more. Missionaries often found themselves in the midst of violence, and churches were often being called upon – as one of the few remaining credible actors in civil society – to lead peace processes and efforts at rebuilding society. These were tasks for which the churches were unprepared. The end of apartheid in South Africa put a spotlight on this role of the churches there in a special way.

Other events in the decade pushed missionaries and churches into roles as agents of reconciliation. The commemoration of the arrival of Christopher Columbus in the Americas prompted the United Nations to declare 1992 the Year of Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous peoples in the Americas, in Australia and New Zealand and elsewhere, used this opportunity to testify to their suffering (and in some places, near-extinction) by European colonial powers. This prompted nations and churches to consider how to heal these grievous wounds. The year 1994 saw the UN Conference on Women in Beijing, an event that underscored the worldwide pattern of violence against women.

The end of the bipolar political order and the consolidation of neo-liberal capitalism as the sole worldwide economic system became more evident with the advance of globalization. The effects of globalization included an increase in migration (the majority of migrants today are women and are Christian), more multicultural societies, greater polarization in societies (due to growing economic inequality around the world and social hyper-differentiation in wealthy cultures<sup>6</sup>), and a compression of time and space through information technology and the media. These effects produce new fissures, divisions and wounds in society, often at a quicker pace than such effects did in the past. Within the Roman Catholic Church in the United States and in countries in Europe, the revelation of the sexual abuse of minors by the clergy has added an additional layer of challenge for reconciliation and healing.

In the midst of all of these challenges arising from human interaction, yet another challenge began to loom ever more largely: climate change and the consequences this would have within the coming decades.

It is out of this miasma of violence and division that the theme of reconciliation began to surface as a compelling response to all that was

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<sup>6</sup> “Hyper-differentiation” refers to the increasing differentiation in post-modern cultures to the extent that individuals and groups will form enclaves of like-minded people and try less hard to communicate with people who think differently. The multicultural growth in urban societies because of migration adds to this process of self-isolation. Polarized politics is one of the by-products of this hyper-differentiation.

happening in terms of mission.<sup>7</sup> By the turn of the twenty-first century, it had been a theme for the British and Irish Association of Mission Studies (2002), the WCC's Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (2005) and the International Association of Mission Studies (2008), as well as a perspective explored in the Lausanne Movement at Cape Town (2010) and elsewhere.<sup>8</sup>

It had become evident that the world was in need of reconciliation in so many places and in so many different ways. Reconciliation – with its implications for healing and for service – was something people expected to find in the churches. The churches and missionaries found themselves drawn into work for reconciliation at many different levels. Why did the events of the 1990s spawn such an interest? Some suggest that the utopian visions that had played such a role beginning in the optimistic 1960s (in the theology of hope and the theologies of liberation) had crumbled in the face of the challenges that the end of the Cold War era now portended. Reconciliation was a more modest way of building the future by attending especially to healing past wounds that could compromise future well-being – be it the wounds of war, of social injustice, of exploitation of the earth. We are probably still too close to all these events to have a clearer picture. What *is* clear, however, is that reconciliation provided a model of twenty-first century mission. We now turn to how reconciliation is a model *for* mission, based on Scripture and a theology of reconciliation arising out of missionary praxis today.

### Reconciliation as a Model for Mission: Biblical Foundations

The theme of reconciliation is prominent in the Scriptures, even though it is spoken of directly very little.<sup>9</sup> The word “reconciliation” does not appear in in the Hebrew Scriptures, although there are powerful stories of reconciliation, such as that of Esau and Jacob, and of Joseph and his brothers. Even in the New Testament, the language of reconciliation is largely to be found only in the Pauline writings. Indeed, Paul’s message has been called a “Gospel of reconciliation” inasmuch as he had experienced being reconciled to God and the followers of Jesus by a gracious act on the part of God, not due to anything he himself had done.

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<sup>7</sup> Cf Robert Schreier, *Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992); also, *Mission in the New Millennium* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001); also, “Reconciliation and Healing as a Paradigm of Mission,” *International Review of Mission* 94 (2005), 73-84; John de Gruchy, *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Books, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> See the articles in this volume by Jacques Matthey and Chris Rice for more details on these developments.

<sup>9</sup> Tormod Engelsen's essay in this volume explores the biblical foundations in more detail.



Most of the earlier theological literature on reconciliation focused on what has been called the “vertical” dimension of reconciliation; that is, God’s reconciling humanity to God’s own self. Indeed, this vertical dimension constitutes the central Christian narrative of what God has done for humanity. It is presented concisely in Romans 5:1-11:

“Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person – though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely therefore, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”

It is this vertical dimension that the sacraments – baptism, Eucharist and reconciliation especially – draw upon as their source and place in Christian life. Indeed, much of the liturgical language of the churches focuses on this vertical dimension of reconciliation.

The interest in reconciliation as a model for mission that began in the 1990s continues to draw its life from this vertical dimension. For this vertical dimension is the foundation of all Christian discourse on reconciliation: what God has done for humanity through Jesus Christ. What is new is the deeper exploration of the “horizontal” dimension of reconciliation; that is, reconciliation between humans, as individuals and as groups. This too is rooted in Pauline teaching in three sets of biblical passages: 2 Cor 5:17-20, Eph 2:12-20, and its cosmic consummation in Christ in Eph 1:10 and Col 1:19-20.

“So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away: see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” (2 Cor 5:17-20)

“... Remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has

broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.” (Eph 2:12-20)

“... as a plan for the fulness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.” (Eph 1:10)

“For in him the fulness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.” (Col 1:19-20).

In the passage from Second Corinthians, Paul reiterates the teaching of Romans 5, but notes how the ministry and message of reconciliation have now been entrusted to us, thereby laying the foundation of the mission of reconciliation on earth. The passage from Ephesians provides clearer focus about the ministry and message by examining the reconciliation between Gentiles and Jews. The two passages from the hymns at the beginning of the letters to the Ephesians and Colossians point out the cosmic dimensions of Christ’s reconciling acts. The cosmic dimension not only forms the basis for a comprehensive understanding of reconciliation, but is now being drawn upon especially to draw attention to the ecological imperative arising out of climate change on our planet.

What we see in these Pauline passages is how reconciliation is a central way of explaining God’s work in the world. Through the Son and the Spirit, God is making peace – between God and the world, and thus also within all of creation itself. When this insight is brought together with the concept of the *missio Dei* developed a few decades earlier in missiology, we see the biblical foundations for reconciliation as a paradigm of mission, a paradigm that began taking on a particular poignancy and urgency in the last decade of the twentieth century.

### Reconciliation as a Model for Mission: Theological Elaborations

Building upon this biblical foundation of reconciliation as a model for mission, it has been possible to elaborate theologically its significance for missionary praxis today. Such a theological elaboration makes possible a bigger framework in which to examine the challenges for bringing about reconciliation in the world as well as seeing how the distinctive characteristics of the Christian understanding of reconciliation respond to those challenges. This section explores such theological elaborations, noting how they relate to the biblical mandate, as well as the practical consequences in missionary praxis. These are set forth in five principles.

First of all, *reconciliation is first and foremost the work of God*, who makes it a gift to us in which we in turn are called to co-operate. From a theological point of view, only God can bring about reconciliation, as set forth in Romans 5. It is based in the very *missio Dei* of God in the world. And the ministry of reconciliation is entrusted to us, as ambassadors for Christ's sake. Our work for reconciliation, then, is dependent upon God's action and always occurs through co-operating with God's grace.

What are some of the practical consequences of such a principle? First, true reconciliation does not come about because of what we do. Our effectiveness as messengers and ministers of reconciliation arises out of our co-operation with God. Anyone who has worked for reconciliation, especially social reconciliation, knows how difficult and frustrating such work can be. Failure is more common than success, and any success is often only a partial one. Given this situation, we need to come to see ourselves as mediators (or "ambassadors", as 2 Cor 5:20 puts it) of God's action. This is not an encouragement toward passivity. It is merely a careful reiteration of what Christian discipleship means. Our work is always to be seen within God's action. Berhanu Ofga'a's witness to how reconciliation came about in the divided Mekane Yesus Church in Ethiopia – presented elsewhere in this volume – is an eloquent record of seeing God's work in human efforts toward reconciliation.

A corollary to this insight provides an impetus toward a spirituality of reconciliation. If God is indeed the author of all reconciliation, then we will be effective messengers and ministers of reconciliation only to the extent that we live lives that are in deep communion with God. We need to seek out spiritual disciplines that will facilitate and sustain such deep communion. A spiritual discipline that can promote and sustain such a spirituality can be found in the mystical traditions of the Christian churches; namely, the practice of contemplative prayer. In this form of prayer, we do not speak to God as we do in prayers of praise, petition or thanksgiving. Rather, we wait for God to speak to us. Those same mystical traditions remind us that God often does not speak when we hope that such will occur. That learning to wait on God heightens our capacity to attend more closely, not only to God, but also to the situations crying out for reconciliation.

The ministry of reconciliation, then, is more a spirituality than a strategy. Strategies and techniques are important tools, but every situation where reconciliation is being sought is different: in its history, its actors, and its intended consequences. A spirituality that is rooted in deep and ongoing communion with God is essential, from a Christian perspective, for any measure of reconciliation to be effected.

Second, *God begins the reconciling process with the healing of the victim*. The normal scenario for reconciliation envisioned by most people entails wrongdoers showing remorse for their actions, apologizing to their victims, followed by the victims accepting the apology and forgiving the

wrongdoers. That is indeed the framework one finds operative in Jewish and Muslim traditions, the two Abrahamic faiths whose understandings of reconciliation most parallel the Christian understanding. Unfortunately, wrongdoers often do not apologize. Sometimes they are no longer on the scene – having gone away or even having died. Where does this leave the victims? Are they held hostage to events of the past because there is no one to show remorse and apologize to them? Experience has shown us that victims can sometimes come to healing and forgiveness, even when no one apologizes to them. What makes that possible? Christians believe that God looks out in a special way for the victims and the marginalized generally; this is a message found in the great prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures and in the message and praxis of Jesus himself. It is encapsulated, for example, in Roman Catholic Social Teaching's option for the poor and implied in the World Council of Churches' commitments to justice.

In God's commitment to the poor and the marginalized, that healing can begin. It can be understood as God's restoring to victims the humanity that has been wrested from them by acts of injustice and wrongdoing. Christians believe that all human beings are made in the image and likeness of God (cf Gen 1:26-27). Treating them as less than being made in the image and likeness of God takes away a portion of their humanity. The healing brought about in the reconciliation process is the restoration of that humanity – a restoration that can even result in their offering forgiveness to their wrongdoers, even if those wrongdoers have not repented. Such forgiveness does not ignore or exonerate wrongdoing. Rather, it recognizes that the wrongdoer sometimes does not repent. The healing of the victim is thus not totally dependent upon the wrongdoers' remorse and apology. The healing of the victim can even create the social space in which the wrongdoer can come to repent.

What does this mean for a missionary praxis of reconciliation? It means that special attention is given to victims and their healing. The *accompaniment* (in the Latin American sense of the term) of victims becomes a prime example of the work of reconciliation. Work with wrongdoers remains important and an imperative. But there is also the acknowledgement that wrongdoers may not be immediately susceptible to changing their ways. It must also be said that not all victims will experience healing in this way; nor should they be pressured into acts of forgiveness if they are not ready to do so. This would result in their being victimized once again. What is at stake here is that healing cannot be blocked completely by intransigent or absent wrongdoers; God's reconciling actions are simply larger than that, and missionaries are called upon to witness to them.

Third, *reconciliation makes of both victim and wrongdoer a "new creation"* (2 Cor 5:17). That is to say, the healing that takes place is not a return of victims to a *status quo ante*, even as much as victims may long for this. But experience teaches us that profound senses of loss mean that we can never go back to where we were before. Rather, reconciliation has to

take all the parties involved to a new place, often a place that they could not have imagined for themselves. This sometimes surprising moment is interpreted by Christians as the work of the hand of God, again affirming that God is the author of all reconciliation.

With that experience of a new creation, healed victims sometimes hear a call or vocation to engage in some kind of healing work themselves – often parallel to the experience of healing that they themselves have experienced. Part of missionary praxis is to help facilitate this entry into the work of reconciliation.

Fourth, *the release from suffering is patterned on the passion, death and resurrection of Christ*. Any work toward reconciliation must deal with the concrete suffering that victims (and sometimes wrongdoers) experience. Suffering in and of itself is not redemptive; it is destructive of persons. It can only become redemptive for individuals and for societies if it is patterned onto a narrative larger than itself. This is evident in the opening verses of Romans 5, where Paul frames suffering by the experience of the peace received through justification – so much so that he can “boast” of his suffering. In that he creates a new narrative of his suffering: suffering can lead to endurance, endurance to character, and character to hope – a hope that does not disappoint. For Paul, all of this comes through the reconciling work signified in Christ’s shedding his blood on the Cross.

This narrative of the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ, is the central part of the larger narrative of God’s reconciliation of the world to God’s own self. Only by being patterned onto the narrative of Christ’s suffering and death can we hope to come to know the power of the resurrection (cf Phil 3:10-11).

This participation in the suffering of Christ has long been part of Christian discipleship. We are admonished to take up our own crosses and follow Jesus (Mark 8:34-35, Luke 9:23) In the so-called Christ-mysticism of Paul, the same participation is expressed (Gal 2:20).

What might this mean for missionary praxis? In the first principle outlined above, it was noted that a spirituality of reconciliation entails an ever-deepening communion with God. What is outlined here is a call to communion with Christ, especially in those events that mark his reconciling activity. In view of the prevalence of suffering that calls out for healing and reconciliation, such framing of human suffering within the reconciling suffering of Christ becomes an important way not only of experiencing suffering as redemptive, but also of growing in communion with God, the author of all reconciliation.

Fifth and finally, reconciliation will only be complete when God has reconciled the whole universe in Christ (Eph 1:10), when God will be “all in all” (1 Cor 15:28). Even in our best efforts at working for reconciliation, we typically find what is achieved is still incomplete. We are thus reminded that reconciliation ultimately remains the work of God and that, in a manner of speaking, there can be no complete reconciliation until all is

reconciled – under the earth, on the earth and above the earth – to echo Ephesians 1. We are reminded too that reconciliation is not only a goal or end; it is also a process in which we are called to co-operate. And in this process we receive but glimpses of the end product, of the new creation.

A corollary of this principle for missionary praxis is that we must find ways of sustaining hope in that eventual end. Hope here is understood theologically, as a gift from God that draws us into the future God is planning for all creation. It is more than human optimism, which is based on our measure of our own strength. One of the practices for finding sources of hope is the celebration of small victories; i.e. seeing those small moments of grace in the midst of the frustrations and setbacks that often mark work for reconciliation.

In an important way, this fifth principle brings us full circle: we are back to affirming that God is the source of all reconciliation and we are called to be the messengers and ministers of God's reconciling work.

### **The Practices of Reconciliation as a Model for Mission**

If this provides the theological framework for reconciliation as a model for mission – based as it is on the *missio Dei* itself – what are its concrete manifestations, and what are the practices that move the reconciliation process along? It is important to examine these manifestations and practices in order to give concreteness to the idea of reconciliation as a form of mission. Indeed, most of this volume is about such manifestations and practices. Moreover, reconciliation is both a process and an end or goal. Most often we find ourselves somewhere in the midst of the process with at best in intuition of the end point. This too makes necessary delineating some of the practices as a kind of guide to the work of reconciliation. I say here “kind of guide” because reconciliation processes are rarely linear ones. They involve much frustration, seeming roadblocks, and doubling back over ground already covered.

Put most simply, reconciliation is about *healing the past* and *building the future*. Healing the past is necessary because otherwise the memories and consequences of what happened in the past can block any future directions we may wish to take. Building a different kind of future requires at least some measure of assurance that past trauma does not continue or is able to disrupt that building of the future by a Freudian “return of the repressed”.

What then are the practices of a ministry of reconciliation that make up reconciliation as a model for mission? I would like to note four of them here.

The first is *healing*. For individuals, healing might be seen as the restoration of their humanity; that is, their refulgence as having been created in the image and likeness of God. This healing affects their agency or capacity to act. It restores their dignity. It rebuilds broken relationships with self, with others, and with God. For societies, reconciliation means

coming to terms with a destructive past that often remains toxic for the present and unduly delimits the future. It means assuring that the wrongful deeds in the past cannot be repeated in the future. Put another way, reconciliation is about healing wounds, rebuilding trust, and restoring right relationships.

Healing is extended into three dimensions: the healing of memories, the healing of victims and the healing of wrongdoers. The healing of memories involves coming to terms with the traumatic memories of the past in such a way that they are no longer toxic to the present and the future. This requires reconstituting the narratives we have about the past. Memories are powerful vehicles of both individual and collective identity. How we narrate the past shapes how we relate to the past and live in the present. To attempt simply to repress the memories of a traumatic past does not erase the past; rather, it sets the stage for a return of those memories, often in distorted or displaced forms through revenge, retaliation or victims themselves turning into perpetrators.

The healing of victims, as already noted, is about restoring their humanity, theologically understood; that is, their dignity, their relationships and their violated rights. Their own narratives about the past will need to be reconstructed. This entails acknowledging loss, lamenting what has been lost,<sup>10</sup> and finding new sources of meaning and hope.

The healing of wrongdoers is best mapped out by the western Christian tradition of penitential practices as set forth in the early church, however they might today be enacted.<sup>11</sup> Acknowledging wrongdoing, seeking forgiveness, promising amendment of life, and accepting punishment are all part of those practices. The ancient tradition of separation of the penitent from the community may need to be practised, because wrongdoers – by their deeds – have separated themselves from the community and have to go through a process of gestation and rebirth before they can be readmitted to the human family.

The second practice is *truth-telling*. Situations that call for reconciliation often become saturated with lies and are muffled under palls of silence. Breaking through a culture of lies and a culture of silence that sustain those lies is a key part of reconciliation. Truth-telling involves testimony to what really happened in the past, and a common effort to reconstruct a public truth. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa has helped us see the four dimensions of that public truth: *objective truth* (the who, what, when and where of events), *narrative truth* (the why or possible meaning and causality of events), *dialogical truth* (a narrative where

<sup>10</sup> On lament, see especially Emmanuel Katongole, *Reconciling All Things: A Christian Vision of Justice, Peace, and Healing* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> For a contemporary use of these rituals, see Jay Carney, “Roads to Reconciliation: An Emerging Paradigm of African Theology”, *Modern Theology* 26 (2010), 549-59.

conflicting sides can discover their own and others' truth), and *moral truth* (what lesson can be drawn from the past for the future). Such practices of truth-telling help establish a culture of truthfulness for the future, as envisioned in the Hebrew concept of *'emet*: trustworthiness, dependability and reliability.

The third practice of reconciliation as mission is the *pursuit of justice*. Truth-telling must in some measure precede the pursuit of justice, lest efforts at justice turn into revenge or "victors' justice". Specifically three forms of justice come into view here. The first is *punitive justice*: the punishment of wrongdoers to impress upon them their wrongdoing and to say publicly that such wrongdoing will not be tolerated in the future. This is justice for the wrongdoer and the state. The second form of justice is *restorative justice*, which is directed toward the healing of victims. It may involve restitution and reparation, as well as opportunities to explore how to rebuild a just and meaningful society. The third form is *structural justice*, which involves changing social structures through deliberative and political processes in order to reduce economic, social and political structures in society becoming sites that promote and sustain injustice.

Within the discourse of human rights that is so central to the liberal model of peace-building, there can be a tendency to reduce reconciliation to the pursuit of justice, or to say that there can be no reconciliation unless there is full justice. From the theological point of view this is an inadequate view of both justice and of reconciliation. There cannot be reconciliation without justice, to be sure. But as noted above, we do not experience full reconciliation – and therefore full justice – until all things have been brought together in Christ. Thus to demand the fulfilment of complete justice can paralyze or obviate other practices going into the process of reconciliation.

The fourth practice of reconciliation is *forgiveness*. Forgiveness is itself a process, both for individuals and for societies. The process can be a long and difficult one. After social trauma, it is not uncommon that work on forgiveness can take more than a generation. Difficult as it is, Christians believe that, with the grace of God once again, it is possible. It is God who forgives, and we participate in that forgiveness. It is not accidental that forgiveness is placed as the last of the four practices being considered here (although processes of reconciliation are rarely linear). There is a constant danger of cheap forgiveness or forgiveness being forced upon victims. At the same time, processes of forgiveness are often beset by fears. There are fears that forgiveness means forgoing justice or punishment (it does not mean that); forgiveness is directed at wrongdoers, not the deeds they have committed. There are fears that forgiving requires forgetting (it does not; when we forgive we do not forget – we remember in a different way that is not toxic to the present and the future). Forgiveness entails coming to see that the wrongdoer is, like the victim, a child of God. It does not condone the deed but seeks the rehabilitation of the wrongdoer. Without forgiveness,



the past continues to determine the present and the future. Indeed, in the words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, there is no future without forgiveness.<sup>12</sup>

### **Reconciliation and Other Forms of Mission**

Mission was construed in many different ways in the twentieth century, especially in the post-colonial crisis period of the 1960s and 1970s. In the Editorial Introduction to this volume, it was noted that reconciliation as a paradigm of mission may well take us beyond the existent paradigms of liberation, evangelism, diakonia, proclamation, fellowship and worship. To that list might be added dialogue, inculturation, and care for the earth. Some of these topics have chapters devoted to them in this volume.

In presenting reconciliation as a new paradigm of mission, it would be worthwhile to situate it among these other paradigms of mission. This situating would involve seeing how the paradigm of reconciliation contributes to or reframes other paradigms, as well as – on occasion – goes beyond them.

#### *Liberation*

Perhaps the most prominent paradigm of mission to emerge in the second half of the twentieth century was mission as liberation. Taking its charge from the so-called “Nazareth Manifesto” (Luke 4:18-19), mission was seen as bringing good news to the poor and liberation from all suffering and oppression. It gave central focus to justice, and the reform of social structures that have sustained injustice in a society. It was first associated with the works of the theologians of liberation in Latin America, but quickly spread to Asia and Africa as well as oppressed minority groups in North America as well.

In its first instances, especially in Latin America, the term “reconciliation” had gained an undesired connotation. Its use on the political and theological right associated it with turning away from the struggles for liberation to seek a harmony that leaves the sources of oppression untouched. In political circles, reconciliation meant forgetting about the wrongdoing of the past and focusing instead on the future. Not surprisingly, such an understanding of reconciliation was usually to be found on the lips of the wrongdoers. As a result of this, reconciliation became seen as the opposite of liberation, a giving way to the oppressive status quo. In some conservative Roman Catholic circles, reconciliation was presented as the alternative to liberation. Liberation connoted conflict and struggle, whereas reconciliation evoked harmony and communion.

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<sup>12</sup> The title of his memoir of chairing the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission: *No Future without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 1999).

Such an understanding of reconciliation persists to the current situation, in groups such as the *Sodalitium christianae vitae* movement in Peru.

Such manipulations of the concept of reconciliation were not confined to Latin America. The authors of the Kairos Document in South Africa in 1985 condemned similar talk of reconciliation as a kind of “church theology” that tried to forgo the necessary struggle against apartheid. Consequently, reconciliation as a form of mission still needs to define itself more clearly vis-à-vis liberation.

Attempts have been made to do this.<sup>13</sup> Within the understanding of reconciliation as a form of mission presented here, it becomes clear that reconciliation cannot be seen as an alternative to pursuing justice; rather, seeking justice is a prerequisite for coming to reconciliation. As outlined above, it is especially truth-telling and the pursuit of all forms of justice that must be engaged in during the process of reconciliation. The point of contention that arises, however, is that the justice sought is almost never the justice finally achieved. What ends up in the messiness of transitional justice (the attempt to establish a just society after a time of conflict) is justice only partly achieved. This can be due to a whole host of factors: the balance of power between the combatants, meagre resources available to establish distributive or restorative justice, the absence of perpetrators, and the impossibility of bringing back the dead. Yet the fact that justice is always incomplete does not absolve us from the task of seeking it and establishing it as best we can. A reconciliation that overlooks or sidelines the quest for justice is a hollow and ultimately false kind of reconciliation.

There are efforts at times among Christians to treat reconciliation as something that only can be attended to when everything has been done to achieve justice – so much so that reconciliation comes to be left out of the picture altogether. To do so subscribes to a narrow and shallow understanding of reconciliation. Reconciliation is both a process and an end-point. And that end-point cannot be reached if the practices of reconciliation – especially truth-telling and the pursuit of justice as well as working toward forgiveness – are not engaged along the way. To think that reconciliation can only happen sequentially, i.e. after justice is put in place, is to overlook how much individuals and societies are shaped and conditioned by their surroundings. If, for example, no work can be done toward building the practices of reconciliation until there is “regime change” or the overthrow of an authoritarian leadership, we cannot expect those people so liberated to know how to function in a democratic society. Experiences in central Europe after the collapse of the Soviet empire and the “Arab Spring” in northern Africa and the Middle East indicate how much participation in civil society and democracy is a learned art, not an innate characteristic of human nature.

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<sup>13</sup> I have tried to do this in *Liberation and Reconciliation as Paradigms of Mission* (Sundbyberg: Swedish Mission Council, 2003), Skryfter 5.

What does this mean for reconciliation as a paradigm of mission in view of liberation? Many of the chapters of this book testify to what this means in practice. If we look to the multiple causes of the interest in liberation that emerged since 1990, we see a world that is at once fragmented and homogenized by the powers of globalization. The key to getting people of differing viewpoints to work together effectively is now a prime task of Christian ministry. To be sure, this challenge has always existed; but the need for it is exacerbated by what the world has become. The gospel message of reconciliation is at once an acknowledgement of this need and an important guide for bringing this about. Truth-telling, justice, healing and forgiveness (the practices of reconciliation) have to feature in building a new society. This is an especially acute task in parts of the world where armed conflict has persisted over long periods of time and resources are meagre for building a different kind of society. Conflict and poverty are closely intertwined in many places. And it is often in these places that especially the expatriate missionary can be a sign of bringing the parts and the whole together in a new way.

Reconciliation as a paradigm of mission goes beyond a liberation *from* oppression to a liberation *for* building the new creation. A Rousseau-like “natural human being” does not arise, Phoenix-like, from the broken chains of oppression. Seeing reconciliation as participation in the *missio Dei* helps frame how the Good News of Jesus Christ encounters the world today.

### *Evangelism and Proclamation*

For Christians of the last half-millennium, the charge for mission was rooted in Matthew 28:19-20, known as the Great Commission. Announcing the Good News was seen primarily in proclaiming and preaching the biblical text. While this sense of evangelism or proclamation as the privileged mode of mission has never been lost, the reflection that elaborated other forms of witness in the last half of the twentieth century came to obscure this. In a way, this should not have been surprising. As we shall see, other forms of mission have always co-existed with mission as evangelism and proclamation – most notably in education and healthcare. This has led some church leaders and missionary agencies to reassert the primacy of preaching as a form of mission.

Is reconciliation as a paradigm of mission the latest entry in the crowded field of mission paradigms, diverting attention once more from the task of evangelism? One thinks here of the aphorism attributed to Francis of Assisi: “Preach always – and when necessary, use words.” The power of example and of concrete praxis can speak louder than our words. Reconciliation encompasses the message of a call to conversion to Christ and situates it in a larger cosmic drama of all things being brought together in Christ. It can provide more than a specific set of beliefs that are intended to lead to new action. It reveals too the depth of sin and brokenness in

human life and society from which humanity needs to be delivered and healed. So reconciliation does not replace or reduce the importance of preaching. Rather, it situates it in a larger frame – God’s very intention for the world – and can lead usefully away from a purely conceptual concern about the nature of sin to the concreteness of life that needs to be engaged in if genuine reconciliation is to take place.

### *Dialogue*

Dialogue emerged as an important paradigm for mission in the mid-twentieth century, especially in places where Christians were a religious minority, as in Asia. Its reception in the wider church has been varied, especially regarding the question of the possibility of God working salvation through other religious traditions. Some have seen it as the largest threat to evangelism through preaching, since it can be perceived as diluting the force and urgency of the biblical message of repentance and conversion.

Reconciliation depends upon dialogue in order to achieve its purposes: dialogue with and among victims, perpetrators and bystanders. It is a dialogue with time as well – dialogue with the past so as to create a different kind of future.

Dialogue has been seen by some of Christianity’s interlocutors as a subterfuge to preach and convert in a different way. In other words, it involves winning the trust of “the Other” so as to make “the Other” more vulnerable to the Christian message.

With these suspicions about dialogue as a paradigm and as a procedure, looking at reconciliation as a paradigm of mission takes on a double kind of vulnerability. It must not only justify itself regarding dialogue as both paradigm and procedure; it must also deal in some missionary circles with a contested form of mission. Can reconciliation as a paradigm of mission speak to these concerns?

Part of the matter has to do precisely with dialogue as a paradigm and as a procedure. There is no consistent theology of dialogue across the Christian churches. Roman Catholicism, for example, speaks of four kinds of dialogue: the dialogue of life, the dialogue of common social action, the dialogue of theological exchange, and the dialogue of shared spiritual experiences. These four forms of dialogue necessarily represent different modalities of communication and thereby require different procedures. As one moves across the theological spectrum of the Christian churches, one sees a specific collision with a theology of religions that seeks to present the relative theological value of other religious traditions. And it is here that one begins to see the differences that fragment dialogue as a paradigm of mission.

One might begin to address these concerns with an insight of Pope Paul VI. In his inaugural encyclical letter *Ecclesiam suam* in 1964, he

proposed dialogue as the key to how he understood the leadership he was to give in the Roman Catholic Church. Dialogue was theologically grounded by the fact that God initiated a dialogue with fallen creation with the sending of the Word into our midst, and the Word's becoming incarnate in Jesus Christ. It is this great dialogue that informs all efforts at dialogue with other faiths and ideologies.

Such an understanding of dialogue, as the paradigm of God's communication with us, gives shape to mission as dialogue as both a paradigm and a procedure. "While we were still sinners," Paul tells us in Romans, "Christ died for us." The deep initiation into life with God that the Incarnation and suffering and death of Jesus represent tells us of the nature and extent of God's dialogue with creation – and therefore by extension, the kind of dialogue that should mark our social relationships.

Does reconciliation as a paradigm of mission add anything to the paradigm of mission as dialogue? It does, in that it gives greater specificity to the conduct and aim of dialogue. Dialogue on this view acknowledges the dignity of the interlocutor as a creation of God; it is not an instrumentalist use of dialogue to convince the interlocutor of our opinions and views. Such an attitude should characterize any conduct of dialogue. But at the same time, reconciliation as dialogue is not without an end. It is not a calculation directed at achieving a predefined end; rather, it is the opening toward a "new creation" into which all of us are called by God. By giving greater focus and texture to dialogue, reconciliation as a paradigm of mission can stabilize often shifting motivations for dialogue, as well as give it a goal not designed by us, but by God.

### *Diakonia*

Diakonia or service is a time-honoured dimension of mission. In the modern period, a colonial understanding of mission often centred on a "civilizing" mission to benighted peoples who did not have the advantage of the European Enlightenment, who dwelt in darkness and needed to be brought into the light. Some of this idea persists in certain mission circles, but it is now rejected by many churches and mission agencies. Better candidates of diakonia have been education and healthcare. These were in the nineteenth century the way that women were allowed into mission. In our contemporary situation, it is recognised that the single most important factor for raising people out of poverty is education – indeed, especially the education of poor women. Mission as education not only brought literacy to parts of the world; it also helped preserve local languages against the onslaught of colonialism as missionaries composed dictionaries and grammars of local languages, allowing them thereby to be transmitted more effectively to subsequent generations.

Similarly, advances in medicine in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were also transmitted into mission fields. Even though the coming

of European colonizers and missionaries also brought diseases into the Americas that had devastating effects on native populations, these advances in medicine also brought benefits to those same areas. Especially in countries where Christians have remained minorities, their efforts in education and medicine have gained them the respect in those places by governments and ordinary people.

Does reconciliation as a paradigm of mission add or modify anything in the Christian sense of diakonia as a form of mission? It seems to me that it is adding an important element; namely, practices of peace-building. At the beginning of this chapter it was noted that conflicts internal to countries now accounted for most of such phenomena, and that this had contributed to a renewed interest in reconciliation in many parts of the world. Relief and development agencies, both secular and religious, now add the skills of peace-building to those needed to improve the lot of those persons such agencies are intended to serve. While Christian mission brings elements of peace-building and reconciliation specific to the Christian narrative to bear on these processes, they have helped define common practices of peace-building (especially around the areas of truth-telling, justice and forgiveness) as they work with their religious and secular partners.

Peace-building is not only a skill to be added to the missionary's toolkit. Resourcefulness in peace-building is something local populations expect of missionaries. Although most projects of peace-building among secular NGOs rely on an understanding of human rights as their foundation for their work, local people who are victims of conflict look for human rights and more. That "more" is the resources of religious faith that has helped sustain them in their suffering. Missionaries now need to be articulate about peace-building as part of their diakonia. This is a frontier that is still being developed. It comes to bear in helping populations heal from the traumas of the past, as well as build a future based on justice and forgiveness. Indeed, it may be that it is in the realm of forgiveness that reconciliation as a paradigm of mission may have most to offer, as well coming to understand the processes of individual and social forgiveness in post-conflict situations.

### *Inculturation*

The 1981 SEDOS Seminar on the Future of Mission had named inculturation as one of the four modes of mission. This focus on how the gospel meets cultures was motivated by two experiences. One was the "strangeness" of the gospel message that persisted in many places (especially in Asia) for a century or more. It consistently viewed Christianity as a western or "foreign" religion that could never acculturate itself into places where centuries-old religious traditions of their own were intricately woven into cultural patterns. The other experience was what Latin Americans called *inserción* by which missionaries came to walk with

their people in all their experiences and not be some superior power over them. This profound sharing of the lives of people helped missionaries see how faith must come together with culture.

The realization of the importance of culture to human beings and human development had grown significantly throughout the twentieth century. It was culture in the so-called “modern sense” – described as the unity of language, custom and territory – that defined the understanding of mission in culture. For Roman Catholics, Pope Paul VI’s Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* in 1975 signalled the importance of the focus on culture. In that document he spoke even of the “evangelization of cultures”, that is, to evangelize people meant to evangelize also their cultures, since people could not be understood aside from their cultural locations. He recognised the complexity of cultures themselves, and their fragility as well as their resilient character. The CWME of the World Council of Churches took up the same theme at its Salvador de Bahia conference in 1996. One can detect a developing awareness of the importance of culture in the documents that have emerged from the meetings of the Lausanne movement as well.

Does reconciliation as a paradigm of mission have anything to offer to inculturation as a paradigm of mission? One of the processes of reconciliation that is especially pertinent is reconciliation’s emphasis of the importance of *narrative* as a source of identity. People and societies that have been through severe trauma and deep divisions have to reconstruct the story of themselves and their enemies if the wounds of the past are to heal in any measure. Such new narratives are important for strengthening the bonds of identity and community. They are the fruits of a “new creation”.

But even those societies that have not gone through the effects of protracted conflicts need to be revisiting – and at times, reconstructing – their stories about themselves, as they take into account their changed circumstances. Here I can think of the challenges of immigration and the pluralization of societies that are being created in urban centres around the world. Immigrating people and “settled communities” both have to come to account for their changed circumstances. In this regard, one thinks especially of the struggles in Europe.

### *Worship and Prayer*

Worship and prayer – and the fellowship these entail – are now recognised as an integral part of mission. This includes not only the solidarity in prayer between “sending” and “receiving” communities, which is certainly the most immediately evident form of participating in mission. There is a realization that worship is only completed in mission. The charge to go forth with the gospel into the world at the conclusion of a worship service is an integral part of the experience of worship itself. The German Roman

Catholic theologian Karl Rahner called it “the liturgy of the world”.<sup>14</sup> In Orthodoxy, Ion Bria spoke of “the liturgy after the liturgy”.<sup>15</sup>

The elaboration of the *missio Dei* understanding of mission provides the framework for understanding this intimate connection between worship and mission. As the Father sent forth the Son to begin the drama of reconciling the world, so we – after the intimate experience of worship of God – are sent forth with the Son to participate in God’s reconciling work. Seen thus, worship is not a prelude to mission nor its motivating force, but an intrinsic part of mission itself.

A second theme, at least in Roman Catholic circles, is the essential missionary character of those who are in solidarity with missionaries through their prayer. In 1927, Pope Pius XI had proclaimed the cloistered Carmelite nun Thérèse of Lisieux (1873-97) as co-patroness of mission, along with the well-known sixteenth century Jesuit missionary, Francis Xavier. Thérèse never left her French convent but was regarded as an active participant in mission. Thus, there was a mission of prayer that always needed to accompany the more obvious “going out” beyond one’s native country.

Does reconciliation as a paradigm of mission add anything to worship and prayer as a paradigm of mission? It can enrich the paradigm by its emphasis on the spiritual practices that allow us to participate in the work of God in reconciliation. The deep communion with God, developed and sustained by our participation in worship and by practices of contemplation and recollection, is an essential part of reconciliation. It reminds us as well that mission is not so much something we do or something that grows out of our initiatives and efforts as it is participating in the *missio Dei*, God’s design for creation.

### *Mission as Care for the Earth*

Missionary activity as care for the earth has not yet been adequately thematized in missiology, although it informs the praxis of missionaries in many parts of the world. The need to care for the earth in the light of climate change, with its devastating consequences for all beings on the planet, calls for conversion from selfish and sinful ways that have brought us to this crucial point.

Similarly, reconciliation with the earth as part of the work of reconciliation is a frequently mentioned theme, but it has not yet been adequately thematized. It was a keen interest of the great Reformed

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<sup>14</sup> For the development of this idea, see Michael Skelley, *The Liturgy of the World: Karl Rahner’s Theology of Worship* (Collegeville, MN: Pueblo Books, 1991).

<sup>15</sup> Ion Bria, “The Liturgy after the Liturgy”, *International Review of Mission* 67 (1978), 86-90.



theologian Lukas Vischer in the final years of his life.<sup>16</sup> Certainly, central to its development will be that the purification of all our relationships will entail examining our relationships with our physical environment as well. It will need to be developed against the horizon of the cosmic reconciliation we are all seeking in Christ.

## Conclusion

Reconciliation as a model of and for mission will likely continue to gain relevance in the twenty-first century. We are already seeing new developments that call out for the work of reconciliation more loudly. Such remarkable recent development is the way it is being introduced into international relations as an ethic, based upon the Abrahamic faith traditions, to bring about genuine peace.<sup>17</sup> As students of international relations come to realize the limits of a purely secular framework for analysis and policy, the religious resources for building reconciled communities is only likely to grow. In a world where the presence of religion is being recognised as an important social force, both positive and negative,<sup>18</sup> Christian mission as reconciliation may be able to contribute something significant both to the realization of the *missio Dei* and a better, more peaceful and sustainable world.

Within the discussions of mission in the churches, reconciliation can help define and relate other paradigms of mission to one another, as I hope this essay has tried to do. Reconciliation as a paradigm of mission does not replace the other paradigms, but can bring them into closer connection with one another within the larger frame of God's intentions for the world. So this two-fold contribution – to the larger questions of reconciliation in the world today and to the dialogue between paradigms of mission within the churches – assures a continuing role for this paradigm of reconciliation in missionary thinking for the coming decades.

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<sup>16</sup> See Lukas Vischer (ed), *Witnessing in the Midst of a Suffering Creation* (Geneva: John Knox Center, 2007).

<sup>17</sup> Daniel Philpott, *Just and Unjust Peace: An Ethic of Political Reconciliation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>18</sup> See for example Timothy Shah, Alfred Stepan and Monica Duffy Toft (eds) *Rethinking Religion and World Affairs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

# ECUMENISM AS RECONCILIATION

Kyriaki Avtzi

The meaning of the word καταλλαγή – reconciliation – used in the New Testament to describe the restoration of the broken relationship with God, is “change”, “transformation”.

Human history, since the Fall, has been marked by the quest for mending, for renewing the broken bond with the triune God as well as with the entire creation. The need for reconciliation is undeniable and many agents of reconciliation – churches, social groups or even individuals – have been striving to this end in past decades. Reconciliation, as a gift from God which Christians have the responsibility to share with the world, is a two-fold process; the vertical dimension of reconciliation is defined by our relationship to God. The horizontal dimension is reflected in the social and political rapport amongst peoples, making reconciliation the cornerstone for all societies seeking a peaceful co-existence. These two aspects of reconciliation are deeply interrelated and cannot stand separately. Reconciliation with God is the foundation for reconciliation on any other personal or social level just as the way to reconciliation with God before the altar goes through our already reconciled relationships with our brothers and sisters: “First be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.”<sup>1</sup>

In today’s contextual reality the issue of reconciliation has become prominent, for a number of different reasons. The global ethnic, cultural and religious maps are rapidly changing – in particular due to the phenomenon of globalization combined with the massive waves of migration all over the world. In a positive, maybe optimistic approach, these new realities of our times could decisively contribute to the cultivation of reconciled pluralistic communities, through mutual learning and the promotion of co-operation in solidarity. Yet, most modern societies keep failing in the establishment of a global culture of peace and reconciliation. Instead, cultural and religious plurality has brought to light alternative ways of expressing unity, a fact that in turn has often generated tendencies of extreme self-determination as people seek out ways to reaffirm their respective identity within social, political and religious realms that are rapidly changing. Additionally, secularization and the rapid growth of aggressive atheism have also generated religious concerns which occasionally have led to inter-religious and inter-Christian clashes. In the midst of all these developments, the churches’ role in reconciliation is fundamental.

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<sup>1</sup> Matt 5:24.

Reconciliation is at the heart of Christian faith, as a gift given to all humanity by the triune God who is the source of reconciliation and *koinonia*. God reconciled the whole creation to himself, through Jesus Christ, who brought peace to humanity, reconciling the human and the divine nature through his cross and his resurrection. It is in the person of Christ that the reconciling love of God becomes flesh and is offered as a gift to humanity “so that in him we might become the righteousness of God”.<sup>2</sup> The new creation that has been established after the resurrection becomes the source of reconciliation for humanity, the latter receiving the ministry of reconciliation as Paul indicates in his second epistle to the Corinthians.

The gift of reconciliation is not just an “attribute” granted to humanity by the Creator. It is also a call that has been extended to us all, and demands our responsible response. Thus, churches are called to become not only reconciled but also to be reconciling communities. The gospel of peace Jesus preached is a universal message of reconciliation, *for* reconciliation – and Christians are commissioned to share this message with the rest of the world for the salvation of all humanity.

In the theological context of soteriology, salvation in the church brings the attention beyond theological arguments, to the issue of reconciliation *in* the church. The reconciling message of the gospel that the church is commissioned to extend for our salvation is universal. The invitation to a new reconciled life with God and with one another is universal but individual at the same time. It extends to the whole world and also to each person, whether or not already a member of the body of Christ. The life-giving, transformative power of the Holy Spirit in creation is all-inclusive and all-embracing. With the grace of the reconciling Spirit, through repentance, the communion within the reconciled body of Christ can be re-established.

Reconciliation has a solid Christological as well as pneumatological foundation. It is through the cross of Jesus Christ and in the power and grace of the Holy Spirit in the event of Pentecost that this new relation between God and humanity is established. Through baptism in Christ a new identity is given to all baptised in his name, which is complemented by the new ethical conduct of love *in* communion instituted with the reconciling work of Christ for all creation. Yet, reconciliation surpasses the qualities of one more “virtue” due to the eschatological dimension of Christian faith in the ultimate sacrifice of God for humanity, the greatest act of reconciliation for the sake of fallen humanity.

Founded upon the reconciling message of God, the church has a pivotal role in the proclamation of the message of reconciliation. Despite the still existing brokenness of Christianity, the church is commissioned to stand as the living witness of the reconciling message of Jesus Christ, empowered

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<sup>2</sup> 2 Cor 5:21.

by the Holy Spirit. The responsibility and the *synergia* (participation) of all Christians in this reconciliatory process are entrusted to us by God, as “ambassadors for Christ in whom God was reconciling the world to himself”.<sup>3</sup> Embodying the transfiguration of all creation, the churches partake in Christ’s mission for the reconciliation of all with one another and with God. This witness that the church is called to bring into the world is in itself the world’s response to God’s plan for humanity as founded upon the blood of the crucified Christ and the hopeful festive message of his resurrection.

A major responsibility of the church is to continuously explore ways for the advancement of reconciliation, through Christian witness and through the proclamation of the reconciling message of the Good News. A primary condition for achieving so is to ensure the ongoing relevance of the message it proclaims to the world, guided in this ministry of reconciliation and peace by the word of God. In the eucharistic celebration, the ultimate reconciling sacrament, the church embodies reconciliation, and as a *koinonia* led by the communion of the Holy Spirit, it is transformed into a healing and reconciling community. Placed within divided and unreconciled contexts, the church as the body of Christ is in constant prayer for the reconciliation of all.

The formation and the development of the ecumenical movement is a visible expression of the church’s commitment: the commitment to share the reconciling message of Christ and to respond to the theological and social responsibility it has in the world through Christian witness.

In the history of the last century the development of the ecumenical movement has been rapid, multi-faceted and undeniably global. The birth and the progress of the ecumenical movement are deeply rooted in the yearning of all churches for the restoration of Christian unity. This restoration would signify the end of ruptured relationships, establishing reconciliation both with God and with the whole of creation. In this sense any effort made with the intention of restoring unity is ultimately a reconciling effort. Thus, the very development of ecumenism as a whole can be seen as one of the greatest impulses for reconciliation in modern Christian history. The importance and the need for building reconciling bridges amongst us was already asserted in 1925 when the ecumenical conference of Life and Work affirmed the dual dimension of reconciliation acknowledging that to get closer to one another means getting closer to the Cross of Jesus Christ.<sup>4</sup>

With devotion to the apostles’ teaching and their example of fellowship (Acts 2:42), ecumenism increasingly finds more organizational, institutional and church-based expressions, all converging to “our common

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<sup>3</sup> 2 Cor 5:19.

<sup>4</sup> Konrad Raiser, *For a Culture of Life: Transforming Globalization and Violence* (Geneva: WCC Publications, Risk Book Series, 2002), 123.

journey towards Christian unity, as we listen to the word of God, faithful to fraternal communion, the breaking of the bread and the prayers".<sup>5</sup> Through the last decades of ecumenical developments, reconciliation processes have distinctly been strengthened, while relations have been rebuilt, or in some cases have newly emerged. The active involvement of so many churches in ecumenical activities and structures can be seen as a painstaking, though vitally significant process of reconciliation. In particular, one should make note of and reflect further on the significance of so many theological convergences among, until recently, opposing denominational traditions. It is inspiring and hopeful to observe such great progress on a theological and liturgical level alike. The remarkable advancement on the understandings of Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry is a major achievement after centuries of complete isolation, even enmity among different Christian traditions.<sup>6</sup>

The accomplishment of building ecumenical fellowships and alliances is a very encouraging sign revealing the reconciling drive that ecumenism has. One could say that the first level in the process of reconciliation among churches has been reached through the major inter-Christian encounters of mutual learning in theological dialogue and tangible developments in co-operation and theological convergence.<sup>7</sup> Yet, this remarkable advancement of ecumenism has encountered and still faces more than a few stumbling-blocks on the way to reconciliation, related to doctrinal as well as non-theological concerns. As churches do their utmost to reaffirm the message of reconciliation in a broken, divided world they are also confronted with the major challenge of becoming reconciled primarily amongst themselves.

Our failure as Christians to live reconciled lives remains a visible "scandal" in the history of Christianity and it gravely compromises the authenticity of our common witness. Longstanding divisions and rivalries among churches are still impediments on the way towards healing and reconciliation, in opposition to the message of reconciliation that the church is commissioned to proclaim. Aware of this reality, plainly contradicting the divine will "that they may all be one", Christians "lament the dividedness of our churches and long for the cultivation of a spirit of reconciliation".<sup>8</sup>

The nature of the church directs its witness to unity, despite divisions and diversities. Out of this inner need, the expression of unity as "reconciled diversity" emerged in the ecumenical movement. Living in

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<sup>5</sup> The apostolic exhortation of Benedict XVI *Africae Munus (The Challenge of Africa)*, §89.

<sup>6</sup> Max Thurian, *Ecumenical Perspectives on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Geneva: WCC Publications, *Faith and Order paper*, 1983).

<sup>7</sup> Examples of such convergences are the Leuenberg Agreement of 1973, the Meissen Agreement of 1988, and the Porvoo Agreement of 1995.

<sup>8</sup> *The Cape Town Commitment*, from the Lausanne III World Congress on World Evangelization, October 2010, Part IIF.1.

reconciled diversity presupposes the understanding of diversity, whether cultural, ethnic or confessional, as an enriching rather than as a divisive reality threatening unity. In the cultural and ethnic cases diversity can be “legitimized” and accepted easier through processes of dialogue, mutual learning and understanding which cultivate a spirit of respect and inclusiveness, with the ultimate wish to ensure a peaceful and reconciled co-existence.

When the issue of diversity is related to denominational differences, the balances are somewhat more sensitive. To acknowledge the real value of being in reconciled diversity within religious contexts, reconciled diversity needs to point to reconciliation for unity. Living in fellowship with one another, churches involved in ecumenical endeavours have been trying to build such bridges of reconciliation despite their denominational differences.

In a spirit of humility and Christian love, the “diverse” is respected and accepted as a gift of the richness in expressions of faith, acknowledging the image of God in each other’s identity. Yet, living in reconciled diversity is not to be considered as the ultimate goal of the churches; authentic reconciliation aims, beyond peaceful and “comfortably” diverse co-existence, at establishing visible unity; a form of unity that reflects the trinitarian hypostatic model of communion, in which the three persons are one in the glory of God. The clear commission “so that all may be one and the world might believe” directs all efforts and actions of the churches to this end. Achieving reconciled diversity is indeed essential and valuable once perceived as a step along the way towards the full unity of the church as expressed through our common witness and participation in the diaconal as well as in the sacramental life of the church.

To walk in the path towards unity in Christ, churches need to come to the realization that being in communion entails more than the rediscovery of our common basis and its celebration with jointly produced theological statements. In recognition of the fact that unity in Christ is an existential need for humanity, we should come together with a sincere sharing of and repentance for the mutual failures of the past. We need to go deeper into these centuries of alienation, and recognise the distinctiveness of each church as it developed over the course of time. The understanding of the social and political parameters that shaped today’s contextual reality could be most helpful for the reconciliatory process ahead.

The authentic process of healing and reconciliation, before bringing a change in the relationships through official declarations, transforms our own self-understanding. It is a transformation of mind-set on a personal and on a collective level. Through this self-evaluation churches can cultivate a sense of mutual accountability and responsibility for one another, and thus be reconciled with the past in the present, striving for a common reconciled future for the salvation of all. In particular, the place that love holds in reconciliation is very significant, “For in Jesus Christ ... the only thing that

counts is faith working through love”.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, in the way of Christ, the unity we are called to live in, is a unity of love, reflecting the trinitarian prototype of love in communion. Through ecumenical engagements motivated by love for one’s fellow human being, and sustained by a spirit of forgiveness, repentance and eagerness for justice, we can actually mend the broken communion of relationships.

Struggles for justice have been the centre of attention for many decades in the ecumenical movement. A just society is a precondition for a reconciled community. In the opposite case, in particular within contexts where oppression and injustices have been experienced, reconciliation can be perceived with suspicion. For this reason, reconciliatory processes need to be very respectful of matters of justice, healing, repentance and forgiveness, but at the same time need to challenge the existing structures of power. Setting as an example the way of Christ, it is our very witness that should inspire and encourage the quest for justice, peace and reconciliation. Working for genuine reconciliation implies a continuous search for paths that will lead to God’s justice, by speaking the truth in love. It is important to respect, uphold and protect human dignity in order to ensure social justice. Sustainable peace can only be the outcome of authentic reconciliatory efforts.

To this end, the practices of forgiveness and of repentance (*metanoia*) are of great importance for the process of reconciliation in ecumenism. The act of love or compassion is incomplete unless sincere forgiveness has been granted in advance. As John 20:23 reads, “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” Forgiveness signifies the establishment of new relations; the church as the body of Christ is a reconciling community because it received forgiveness through the blood of Christ, and itself prays for the forgiveness of all sins.

In conclusion, reconciliation is a continuous process for ecumenical endeavours aiming at unity, which is the primary and ultimate purpose in Christian life and witness. Thus, we are well aware of the fact that our visible disunity weakens the reconciling message of Christian faith, whereas efforts aiming at reconciliation and unity fortify our witness as we commit anew to a life in the way of Christ. To this end, churches need to redefine their place and role in this constantly changing global reality. New approaches need to be followed, having in mind that reconciliation entails a radical change of mind-set towards respect for the dignity of humanity and the integrity of creation. Therefore, in order to transform the future, we need to mend the past of brokenness and divisions we all share.

Hitherto, the gift of reconciliation has already taken root in the life of the churches, among which some have already established ecclesial and spiritual communion, a reality particularly encouraging for further work on community building amongst churches. However, despite our human

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<sup>9</sup> Gal 5:6.

perspectives on it, reconciliation “remains a gift of God and therefore the source of life. Our prayer should be that the churches may learn again to be reconciled with God so that they can become agents of reconciliation in today’s world”.<sup>10</sup> It is through prayer and worship for the unity and reconciliation of all, that we all move ahead in our path to reconciliation with God. Eventually, it is God who supports and sustains all of our efforts and it is only through him that all divisions can be overcome. “Let us therefore strive towards reconciliation though not just for our own benefit, but as diakonia and service for the salvation of all human beings in Christ, without which we ourselves cannot experience salvation.”<sup>11</sup>



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<sup>10</sup> Konrad Raiser, *For a Culture of Life: Transforming Globalization and Violence* (Geneva: WCC Publications, Risk Book Series, 2002), 138.

<sup>11</sup> HAH Bartholomaios I, in *Reconciliation: Gift of God of New Life, Documents from the Second European Ecumenical Assembly in Graz*, Rudiger Noll and Stefan Vesper (eds) (Consilium Conferentiarum Episcoporum Europae [CCEE] and Conference of European Churches [CEC], 1998), 167.



# ATHENS 2005: RECONCILIATION AND HEALING AS AN IMPERATIVE FOR MISSION

Jacques Matthey

Since the integration between the International Missionary Council (IMC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1961, a conference on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) is held every seven to eight years, called and prepared on behalf of the WCC by its Commission on World Mission and Evangelism. The main role of such world mission conferences is to highlight trends in ecumenical mission theory and practice and offer a space for dialogue, debate, often controversial, as well as for fellowship between representatives of the many spiritual, denominational and theological traditions of the ecumenical movement. The particularity of the Athens 2005 conference lies in the decision of the CWME Commission to search for a new style of conference, emphasising spiritual and ecumenical experience over the aim to produce more or less accepted reports and documents. The style of the conference should match the thematic emphasis on reconciling and healing communities.

There is no space for a general presentation of the world context in which the 2005 conference was held. However, a few factors should be mentioned. Athens was the first mission conference clearly influenced by the *Common Understanding and Vision* document<sup>2</sup> in which the WCC revisited its own role as an important, but not the only, instrument of the ecumenical movement, thus opening the perspective to more intentional co-operation with other actors of contemporary world Christianity.<sup>3</sup> The 2005 conference was also the first WCC mission conference held in a majority Orthodox country. This was a consequence of the adoption by the WCC of the report of the “Special Commission for Orthodox participation in the WCC” following several years of thorough and difficult discussions

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<sup>1</sup> For a full report on the 2005 conference, see Jacques Matthey (ed), *Come Holy Spirit, heal and reconcile! Report of the WCC Conference on World Mission and Evangelism*, Athens, May 2005 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2008). The book contains a CD-ROM with all materials from the book, plus the individual listeners’ reports. In the following footnotes, it will be referred to as: Matthey (ed), *Conference report*.

<sup>2</sup> World Council of Churches, *Towards a Common Understanding and Vision of the World Council of Churches – A Policy Statement* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> The study process for Athens ran parallel to the preparations for a “Global Christian Forum”, which took place two years later in Nairobi, Kenya

on relations between Orthodox and Protestant/Anglican member-churches. Both the opening up of the WCC to the larger *oikoumene* and the intense dialogues with Orthodox churches can be understood as contributions to reconciliation and healing processes within Christianity, and in that sense very much linked to the theme of the 2005 conference.<sup>4</sup>

### *Missio Dei and Missio Ecclesiae*

One of the originalities of the Athens meeting is its double title. It tries to capture the renewed conscient connection between what relates to God's mission and to the church's task within it. In the 1960s, when missiologists developed quite radical understandings of *missio Dei* after the 1952 Willingen IMC conference, this resulted in a relative or total neglect of the specific role of the church in mission. In the most extreme cases of the debates of the 1960s, *missio Dei* and *missio ecclesiae* became catchwords for opposed perspectives on mission. Once the conditions for a renewed dialogue between "evangelical" and "ecumenical" missiologists had been developed, it became possible to reconnect a wide perspective emphasising God's mission in the world and the particular role of the church within it.<sup>5</sup> The Athens title connects them as follows:

"Come, Holy Spirit, heal and reconcile" refers to *missio Dei* and reads like a confession of faith to God as the one who wants to heal and reconcile. The prayer reflects confidence that God will act in a way to overcome evil and violence and all that breaks relations. It is also a call to God when humans reach their limits: we cannot "heal the world", we rely on God – God is our hope. But out of the depth of suffering, it can also

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<sup>4</sup> "If ever reconciliation is needed, it is needed between PCCs and other Christians. The ecumenical movement must include this large segment of Christianity to be truly ecumenical, and the vast majority of PCC churches must see the importance of being so included. That said, Athens has made significant achievements with regard to PCC participation" (note from editor: PCC stands for Pentecostal and Charismatic Christian). This was written by Allan Anderson, one of the Pentecostal listeners: "The Holy Spirit, Healing and Reconciliation: Pentecostal/Charismatic Issues at Athens 2005" (*International Review of Mission*, 94:374, July 2005), 342 (*Athens 2005 – Listeners' Reports*). A dozen scholars had been asked to accompany the conference and to comment on it relatively soon after its conclusion. Their individual reports have been published in the above-mentioned issue of *IRM*, which in subsequent footnotes will be referred to as *IRM: Listeners' Reports*.

<sup>5</sup> This trend is visible in the statement published as a study document by the CWME Commission in the year 2000, cf "Mission and Evangelism in Unity Today". In Jacques Matthey (ed), "*You Are the Light of the World*": *Statements on Mission by the WCC 1980-2005* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2005), 59-89. Cf also the results of the consultation held in Willingen, Germany, fifty years after the famous IMC meeting. The papers have been published in *IRM*, XCII :367, October 2003 (*Missio Dei Revisited – Willingen 1952*).

become a prayer in despair, like the psalmist's: "It's urgent, God – do intervene!"

"Called in Christ to be reconciling and healing communities" describes *missio ecclesiae*. It is a limited, but essential mission – community-building. We cannot be the agents of God's entire mission, but we can at our level contribute to creating communitarian spaces where something of God's healing and reconciling offer can be experienced in daily life and socio-political dynamics.

In my personal view, this connection between *missio Dei* and *missio ecclesiae* is one of the most essential elements of missiology and should be carefully kept also in future. When we humans are not able to recognise our own limitations and don't accept the necessary distinction between God's and our own agency, we fall into a dangerous messianism, political or evangelistic.<sup>6</sup> When concentration on the church's mission neglects the width of the Spirit's dynamic presence in the whole of the cosmos, mission falls back into ecclesiocentric domestication of a god that has become our denominational idol.

### The Holy Spirit and Mission

Seldom had a WCC world mission conference highlighted pneumatology. At the end of the 1980s, issues around the Holy Spirit became prominent in the preparation towards the 1991 Canberra Assembly whose reports contain valuable insights also for mission. Due however to the serious conflict on discernment of the Holy Spirit in cultural and political movements during the Assembly, there was no real immediate follow-up on pneumatology in the WCC. It has been positively noted by several observers of the mission scene that Athens succeeded in revisiting a pneumatological emphasis on mission without leading to similar clashes.<sup>7</sup>

The CWME conference did not aim at offering a unique and uniform understanding of mission and the Holy Spirit. The following observations summarise main trends:

- The spiritual and relational aspects of the gospel receive due attention, overcoming earlier limitations of Christian witness to ethical, verbal and rational approaches. Athens' prayer to the Holy Spirit points to the liturgical dimension of Christian life and community.
- The Spirit however must not be considered as a "tranquilizer", leading to an "other worldly" spirituality. It is a creational and

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<sup>6</sup> There is more similarity than is usually admitted between radical militants for justice and extreme evangelistic movements in their understanding of power and their difficulty to enter into dialogue with people defending other positions.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Kinnamon, "Report on the World Mission Conference Athens 2005", *IRM: Listeners' Reports*, 390.

resurrecting power that reconciles God and humanity and people to one another. It is a force and dynamic of healing, empowering people to raise their voice in witness, to take part in God's overall mission and stand for the values and dynamics of God's kingdom and justice. The Spirit empowers in particular the church, by indwelling it, granting charisms for discernment and witness and edifying it into a healing and reconciling community.

- A theology of the Holy Spirit balances between what one could call "certainty" and "uncertainty" principles. Present since the Creation and active in it, the Spirit leads not only humanity, but the whole cosmos towards fulness of reconciliation with God at the end of times. One *can* thus discern the Spirit's influence in Creation and humanity. Such "certainty" is however limited by the Spirit's freedom to blow where she or it wills, often in most unexpected ways and places. This "uncertainty" principle prevents absolute dogmatics about *missio Dei*.
- The Spirit must be received as an "alien", subversive force, which one cannot and must not try to domesticate. It breaks barriers, challenges forms of exclusion, and enables in particular the marginalised to take part in God's mission.<sup>8</sup>

The shift in approaching God, church and world in terms of the Holy Spirit seemed acceptable to many in Athens.<sup>9</sup> This is a significant shift, since most earlier mission conferences were based on Christocentric universality. One would however misread the intentions of the 2005 conference if one thought it moved away from a reference to Jesus Christ. The remarkable freedom and flexibility brought by the new emphasis must not lead to questionable spiritualities.<sup>10</sup> The recognition that the Spirit is constantly at work in hearts, communities, world and creation does not mean that everything which one likes is good and valuable. In Christian theology, the Spirit cannot be dissociated from the Son; "in the earthly ministry of Jesus, the economy of the Spirit and the economy of the Word coincide".<sup>11</sup> When attempting to escape earlier limitations linked to a

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<sup>8</sup> Monica Melanchthon, "What does a Reconciled and Healed Community Look Like? Questions and Reflections Arising from the CWME, Athens" in *IRM: Listeners' Reports*, 398-99.

<sup>9</sup> One can affirm the same for the Edinburgh 2010 conference.

<sup>10</sup> In his plenary address, Wonsuk Ma referred to some segments of the neo-charismatic indigenous movements that "advocate questionable doctrines with which orthodox Christians are not comfortable. This gives rise to the possibility of having groups that may be 'more Pentecostal, but less Christian'" Wonsuk Ma, "When the poor are fired up": The Role of Pneumatology in Pentecostal-Charismatic Mission". In Matthey (ed), *Conference Report*, 159.

<sup>11</sup> Kirsteen Kim, "Come, Holy Spirit': Who? Why? How? So What?" In Matthey (ed), *Conference Report*, 153.

narrow Christocentric base, one must not fall into post-modern relativism.<sup>12</sup> There is a double credibility test: missiology has to remain open to the universal and at times surprising or even disturbing utterances of the Spirit, but never lose the major criterion for discernment of spiritual and other forces, which is Christ-centred.

### *Debate on the vision of the world*

The difficult debate on worldviews between North and South has never featured with any importance at a world mission conference. The preparatory document on healing does so in its attempt to understand suffering, cure and healing. Kirsteen Kim also asked the participants whether they thought that only one Spirit was blowing in the world, or whether one should take the existence of conflicting spirits as the basis for analysis. The debate, mainly between churches influenced by a rationality rooted in the Enlightenment, and churches whose rationality has roots in cultures in which the invisible world is considered real, has only just started. Due to migration and the multiplication of churches resulting from it, this issue gains particular urgency in many parts of the world, because it predetermines possibilities of common understanding and vision between Christians of different cultures. It touches profound beliefs and theological taboos, but suffers also from political and religious manipulations. In the long perspective, it could be one of the most important contributions of Athens to world Christianity to have broken the silence on the matter in ecumenical circles.<sup>13</sup> Healing and reconciliation between churches of different spiritual and cultural traditions will not be possible short of a dialogue and perhaps agreement on the significance of worldviews in theology and mission.

### **Mission as Healing and Reconciliation**

Two separate, but related study processes prepared the Athens conference, leading to a main preparatory document on healing, another on reconciliation.<sup>14</sup> At the conference itself, the subjects were presented in

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<sup>12</sup> Anastasia Vassiliadou, "Discerning the spirit of Athens" in *IRM: Listeners' Reports*, 439, and Athanasios Papathanasiou, "Reconciliation: The Major Conflict in Post-Modernity: An Orthodox Contribution to a Missiological Dialogue". In Matthey (ed), *Conference Report*, 182.

<sup>13</sup> Cf Kirsteen Kim, "Come Holy Spirit", and the preparatory document on healing, published in 2005: "The healing mission of the church" in Matthey (ed), "*You Are the Light of the World*", 127-62. Similar attention started to be given to the matter at the 2004 conference of the International Association for Mission Studies (IAMS) through the creation of a study group on pneumatology.

<sup>14</sup> "Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation" document approved by the CWME Commission, in Matthey (ed), "*You Are the Light of the World*", 90-126. The

different plenaries. The question was rightly raised by participants and listeners whether CWME had succeeded in sufficiently integrating the two approaches.<sup>15</sup> I wish to submit the following reflections on the interconnection and differences made in Athens between mission as healing and/or as reconciliation.

At first glance, the similarity and difference between reconciliation and healing seems somewhat parallel to the recurrent debate on the meanings of the overlapping terms “mission” and “evangelism”.<sup>16</sup> In his plenary address, Samuel Kabue most clearly pointed to the contextual meaning of healing and reconciliation. In societies that have e.g. just come out of years of conflict and bloodshed, he argued, the terms carry something of the hope of a new future and harmony. Where however bloody killing continues to shake society, speaking of healing or reconciliation can emphasise the present stage of suffering and augment it.<sup>17</sup> It was pointed out repeatedly at the conference how often the language of reconciliation had been misused by Christians to cover injustice and plead for an easy peace, leaving out the responsibilities of perpetrators and demobilising victims struggling for justice.

Missiologists struggle with the overlapping meaning of reconciliation and healing. When examining the 2005 conference documents, it is imperative to make a distinction between what relates to the eschatological nature of God’s mission and what relates to the church’s or humanity’s tasks in history. Indeed, Athens uses healing and reconciliation almost interchangeably when meaning eschatology:

“God Father, Son and Spirit leads creation and humanity towards the full realisation of God’s kingdom, which the prophets announce and expect as reconciled and healed relationships between creation and God, humanity and God, humanity and creation, between humans as persons and as groups or societies (healing in the fullest sense as *shalom*, Isaiah 65:17-25). This is what in missiology is referred to as *missio Dei*. ... While affirming the dynamic reality of God’s mission in world and creation, we also acknowledge its profound mystery which is beyond the grasp of human knowledge (Job 38–41). We rejoice whenever God’s presence manifests itself in miraculous

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document on healing is mentioned in the previous footnote. Both documents have also been published in the *Conference Report* and are available on the internet at least as Conference Preparatory Papers on the Athens Website ([www.mission2005.org](http://www.mission2005.org)). In further footnotes, these documents will only be referred to with their title and the §, not with page numbers, since these differ in each case.

<sup>15</sup> Lalsangkima Pachuau, “Athens 2005: A Missiological Reflection”, *IRM: Listeners’ Reports*, 421-22.

<sup>16</sup> David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 409-20. The working definitions of CWME can be found in “Mission and Evangelism in Unity Today”, §7.

<sup>17</sup> Samuel Kabue, “Addressing Disability in a Healing and Reconciling Community”, In Matthey (ed), *Conference Report*, 172. Samuel Kabue from Kenya is general secretary of the Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN).

and liberating, healing changes in human life and history, enabling life in dignity. We also cry out with the Psalmist and Job to challenge the Creator when evil and unexplainable suffering scandalise us and seem to indicate the absence of a merciful and just God: ‘Why, O God? Why me, Lord? How long?’ It is in a profoundly ambivalent and paradoxical world that we affirm our belief and hope in a God who heals and cares.

“Jesus’ healing and exorcist activity points in particular to the accomplishment of his ministry at the cross: he came to offer salvation, the healing of relationship with God, what Paul later described as ‘reconciliation’ (2 Cor. 5).”<sup>18</sup>

Healing, reconciliation, as well as salvation and fulness of life seem interchangeable as expressions of the final coming of God’s universal reign. The intimate relationship between healing and reconciliation processes is also illustrated by Samuel Kabue. Reflecting on the basis of his experience of living with disability, he emphasises in Jesus’ healing miracles not so much cure from physical disease, but the reintegration of the sick and “impure” person into the community of the faithful. In that sense, Jesus’ healing mission results in restoration of communion, inclusion, unity and reconciliation.

The essential theological relation between reconciliation and mission was stressed by Orthodox speakers. In his introductory welcome address, HB Christodoulos, the late Archbishop of Athens and all Greece, explained why he rejoiced in the choice of the theme: “In our ages-long Orthodox theology, the concept of sin was always perceived as breaking and alteration of relationship and estrangement of the human race from God, from one another and with the whole of creation; never, or rather very seldom, as a legalistic guilt. It was on these grounds that salvation is understood as a process of healing and reconciliation with God, with one another and with the whole of creation.”<sup>19</sup>

There are signs of different emphases, however. The earliest document drafted by CWME places reconciliation in relation with “repairing the broken relationships” and healing with “health, balance, wholeness of life”.<sup>20</sup> The preparatory paper on reconciliation also affirms that:

“The very notion of reconciliation presupposes the experience of broken communion. This may be in the form of estrangement, separation, enmity, hatred, exclusion, fragmentation, and distorted relationships. It usually also encompasses a certain degree of injustice, harm and suffering. Reconciliation,

<sup>18</sup> “The healing mission of the church”, §§37 and 40.

<sup>19</sup> Christodoulos, Archbishop of Athens and of All Greece, “‘Come Holy Spirit, Heal and Reconcile’: Welcoming Address”. In Matthey (ed), *Conference Report*, 144. A powerful and inspiring plenary address including such perspectives was presented in Athens by Papatanasίου, “Reconciliation: The Major Conflict in Post-Modernity”, 178-86.

<sup>20</sup> Commission document “Called in Christ to be Reconciling and Healing Communities” (2001). In Matthey (ed), *Conference Report*, 13.

in biblical as well as secular language, is understood as the effort towards and engagement for mending this broken and distorted relationship and building up community and relationships afresh.<sup>21</sup>

One could thus argue that the term “reconciliation” refers to situations in which harm has been done by perpetrators to victims, whether individual or collective. There is need for reconciliation as a result of a conflict. “Healing” however refers to overcoming or coping with evil and suffering, whatever the cause is. In such a perspective, healing will be the more general term and reconciliation a specific case. The complexity of a *theological* reflection on the matter appears when considering with the Orthodox the understanding of sin as a break in relationships. If the break of relations between humans and God is considered the origin of all evil, death and suffering in creation and the world, then reconciliation brought about by Christ is the overarching reality allowing for healing to take place.

### Reconciliation

For Athens’ reflection on *missio ecclesiae*, the shape of the meanings of healing and reconciliation was influenced by the “ecumenical context”, i.e. the former work done on these issues within WCC and in the overall ecumenical movement.

So the study on *reconciliation* was influenced by experiences in recent social and political processes, truth and reconciliation commissions. The particular challenge for CWME was to draw on work done earlier by WCC with human rights and justice/peace movements, so as to formulate the consequences for a contemporary missiology.

What were then the foci of Athens’ approach to reconciliation in terms of *missio ecclesiae*?

“Mission as ministry of reconciliation involves the obligation to share the gospel of Jesus Christ in all its fullness, the good news of him who through his incarnation, death and resurrection has once for all provided the basis for reconciliation with God, forgiveness of sins and new life in the power of the Holy Spirit. This ministry invites people to accept God’s offer of reconciliation in Christ, and to become his disciples in the communion of his church. It promises the hope of fullness of life in God, both in this age and in God’s future, eternal kingdom.”<sup>22</sup>

“The ministry of reconciliation also involves the work for reconciliation among persons and societies. In order to understand what this participation in God’s mission of reconciliation may mean, we will focus upon the goals and processes of reconciliation and healing. This involves both some general thoughts and reflections upon the dynamics of how reconciliation and healing come about.”<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> “Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation”, §13.

<sup>22</sup> “Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation”, §§32 and 33.



It has been critically argued that Athens neglected the *vertical* aspects of reconciliation, at least in its work and deliberations on the church's participation in God's mission. This is to a certain degree correct, but should receive some qualification. The very titles of the Athens event and all preparatory texts refer to the vertical dimension as the ground and essence of Christian mission. Aware of that dimension, the CWME Commission decided to give to the conference a "liturgical" shape, so that through worship, meditative Bible study (*Lectio Divina*), home group sharing, the reconciliatory initiative of God in Christ through the power of the Spirit could be experienced rather than explained or argued about. The emphasis on spirituality in the programme resulted from the acknowledgment of the essential importance of the vertical dimension.

Critical reports on Athens mention in particular its relative neglect of evangelism understood as a specific ministry of *missio ecclesiae* in the vertical dimension.<sup>23</sup> They have a point. However, one must not pretend that evangelism was completely neglected at the conference. Important statements were issued and significant workshops offered on evangelism.<sup>24</sup> The sequence 'reconciliation – evangelism' is trying to make a point: when reflecting on mission as reconciliation, one cannot treat evangelism in the same way as with any other focus in witness. In the context of the thematic emphasis of Athens, evangelism only makes sense if flowing from a healing and reconciling community, as outpouring of *experienced* restoration of dignity and *shared* forgiveness. The first and most important task is the building and multiplication of welcoming and inclusive communities. Only then can people really be invited to a local church where they can be offered a safe space. There must be such a community whose life and involvement creates a space into which to invite people who suffer, who doubt, who are exploited and victimised, or who live with unhealed memories. The mission strategy pursued for and in Athens sets the building and multiplication of healing and reconciling communities as a core condition for the possibility of an ecumenically responsible evangelism.<sup>25</sup> This priority is reflected in the subtitle of the conference and

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<sup>23</sup> The CWME Commission received letters from Pentecostal participants and from some of its affiliated bodies asking for more intentional treatment of evangelism.

<sup>24</sup> "Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation", §§20 and 21 and several workshops proposed during the conference. From those published in the conference report, one can refer to the workshop on "New ways of being church" which opens a discussion on church-planting and new forms of evangelising churches (*Conference report*, 229). The one on mission-shaped church has a specific chapter on proclaiming the gospel (240). Another workshop provides principles for multicultural evangelism (276).

<sup>25</sup> The most careful drafting of the letter to Philemon shows how much Paul was aware of this issue. The credibility of his mission and of the gospel was at stake: either Onesimus would be received as a brother by Philemon and his church and so be able to experience the consequences of resurrection on people's and

explains the particular emphasis of the whole process and the priority setting for the conference.

It remains true that CWME could have worked out in much more detail what evangelism then means. Aware of that need, CWME organised soon after Athens a major consultation dedicated to the subject in Bossey, Switzerland and created a specific working group of the Commission, the results of which strongly influenced the draft for a new WCC mission statement.<sup>26</sup>

It is surely correct to affirm that the *horizontal* aspect of reconciliation received much attention both in the preparations as well as in the conference plenaries and workshops. Athens and CWME owe gratitude to Professor Robert J. Schreiter who was directly involved in the thematic preparations for the Conference since 2001. Much has been written on the particularities, conditions and difficulties of reconciliation processes, so that there is no need to go into details. Some points deserve to be mentioned, because they have not received overall appreciation in the follow-up to the conference. Considering developments since 2005, I am not convinced that the particular perspectives of the reconciliation model of mission continue to be at the core of the debate in WCC.<sup>27</sup> There could be several reasons for this.

Reconciliation is one of the most difficult tasks. Even in the Bible, there are not many stories leading to full reconciliation. Most are open-ended, such as the famous Parable of the Prodigal Son. Whereas it is easy to speak of reconciliation in theology, in practice it seems almost out of reach – in the context of brutal exploitation, rape and extreme suffering. In such settings, how can one imagine living together in the future with perpetrators and then act accordingly? A reconciliation process requires truth, memory, repentance, justice, forgiveness and love, says one of the main preparatory documents for the conference.<sup>28</sup> Truth is almost impossible to establish, because of the contradictory versions of what happened, and it requires long conflicting debates to unveil the distortions of events, mostly by the oppressive powers, but at times also by victims. Healing of memories can

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community's lives, or nothing had changed and Onesimus would have better kept his old pagan religious belief.

<sup>26</sup> See the report from the Bossey consultation in *IRM*, 96:382/383, July/October 2007 (theme: Evangelism). The result of the study conducted by the evangelism working group of CWME is published in *IRM*, 101:1, April 2012, 79-104, under the title "Evangelism: Witnessing to Our Hope in Christ".

<sup>27</sup> It was not a major mission theme in Edinburgh 2010. Nor does it feature as a priority in the new draft for a WCC mission statement: "Together toward Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes: Proposal for a new WCC Affirmation on Mission and Evangelism towards WCC's Tenth Assembly in Busan, Korea: Working Draft 11", in *IRM* 101:1, 6-42.

<sup>28</sup> "Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation", §38.

take decades, and steps in mutual approaches between humans and societies can be jeopardised by relatively small incidents and provocations.

Repentance, forgiveness and love are leading features of the Christian theological tradition. However, even the biblical narratives point to them almost as “miracles”, only possible following an initiative or direction by the Holy Spirit. Love in Pauline terminology is the only charism or gift of the Spirit that will have everlasting (eschatological) value, even over faith and hope, but its radicalism cannot easily be equated with good human behaviour or even the sacrifice of one’s life (cf 1 Cor. 13). The particularity of Jesus’ use of the term is the widening of its scope to unbearable extremes: love your enemies. Here we point to a difficulty of the move from liberation to reconciliation as a paradigm for mission, a move welcomed by many while criticised by others.<sup>29</sup> In order to have a lasting and real reconciliation, what seemed needed is a militant attitude that safeguards the respect for the humanity of even the most violent – and least respectable – exploiter.

Mission as reconciliation thus seems less “militant” than mission as liberation but this has been considered as a backward step in ecumenical missiology by quite a number of people. They have criticised CWME for being less engaged for justice now than in the past.<sup>30</sup> The study process and the conference surely didn’t abandon the centrality of justice, but moved to problematise it by referring to different realms of justice that need different treatments by different actors. In his plenary address, Robert Schreiter carefully distinguishes between *punitive* justice, which is the task of the legally constituted state, *restorative* justice which requires symbolic and socially relevant gestures restoring the dignity of the victims, *distributive* justice and *structural* justice which imply necessary changes in the world of economics, trade laws, land rights and issues of power structures, both national and international.<sup>31</sup> It is a task often overseen by earlier missiologies to carefully distinguish between the specific mandate of churches and that of other actors, such as democratic states and their legal institutions.

Reconciliation efforts also point to the difficulty to draw an absolute line between victims and perpetrators. As happens in inter-personal conflicts,

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<sup>29</sup> Cf Kinnamon, “Report”, 391-92.

<sup>30</sup> See Valdir Raul Steuernagel, “Reflections on the Athens Conference”, in *IRM: Listeners’ Reports*, 431-32; Namsoon Kang, “Towards Healing and Reconciliation of ‘Regardless’: Radicalizing Christian Mission for Today”, in *IRM: Listeners’ Reports*, 373-86; Jesudas M Athyal, “Come Holy Spirit, Diagnose, Heal and Reconcile: Lingering Questions from Athens”, *IRM*, 94:375, October 2005, 535-45 and Kinnamon, “Report”, 391-92.

<sup>31</sup> Robert J Schreiter, “Reconciliation as a New Paradigm of Mission”. In Matthey (ed), *Conference Report*, 216-17. Many more writings of Schreiter could be referred to, of course. This was his much appreciated keynote address in the last thematic plenary.

the same persons or groups can at certain times be victims and at other times perpetrators, and this even in a situation where there is a main line of injustice and exploitation. Athens reconnected somewhat with the point made in the early nineties by Raymond Fung who spoke of people as both “sinners” and “sinned against”,<sup>32</sup> although that terminology was not used at the conference. Missiology that takes this kind of “uncertainty” principles into consideration may have to distance itself from ideological and globalised visions of historical and political developments and thus appear less radical. In my view, this is however a necessary and healthy corrective to the temptation of “dogmatically messianic” theologies.<sup>33</sup>

There is another point which distances a reconciliation approach from a dogmatically messianic one, and that is the need to reach authentic compromises between opposed positions. No reconciliation process will succeed without some kind of search for an understanding of the past and the shape of a future organisation of society that seem at least partly acceptable to all conflicting parties.

A traditional ecumenical mission emphasis that is highlighted by the reconciliation model is “story-telling”, particularly developed in the past by the Urban Rural Mission (URM) networks.<sup>34</sup> A process towards healing of memories cannot succeed unless victims – all those considering themselves victims – but also perpetrators, find a space where they can tell their story. Reconciliation and truth commissions provide such spaces, but one would consider this to be the task of each Christian church and community as well. Story-telling by one group only may not bear the whole truth, surely? But without the possibility of telling one’s story to others who do listen and take it seriously, no solution to conflicts can be found. Mission as reconciliation is based on story-telling. In that sense, one of the best traditions of URM must be kept in future ecumenical missiology.

The link between Athens’ work on the Holy Spirit and its reflection on reconciliation seems clear: The excessively difficult task of reconciliation requires persons with exceptional human qualities. Many of them can

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<sup>32</sup> Raymond Fung, *Evangelistically Yours – Ecumenical Letters on Contemporary Evangelism* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1992), 1-5. When he wrote those letters, Fung was Evangelism Secretary of WCC.

<sup>33</sup> By “dogmatically messianic”, I mean a position that affirms without any doubt a direct and immediate relation between the struggles of specific human groups, persons or churches and the advancement of God’s kingdom. This has led in the past to crusades, inquisitions and other religiously motivated violence, as well as the dictatorial use of power.

<sup>34</sup> URM, a key actor in ecumenical missiology, had for decades a central coordinating office in CWME. Due to various developments which cannot be described here, the WCC office of URM has been discontinued. The international network however continues to inspire mission theory and practice. Several workshops were proposed in Athens by URM people, one of them particularly dedicated to story-telling: “Building the Circle: Community Building Through a Culture of Story-Telling”. In Matthey (ed), *Conference Report*, 241-42.

however stand through the difficulties and frustrations only as a result of empowerment by the Holy Spirit to whom they pray, “Come, Holy Spirit, heal and reconcile.” Theologically speaking, there is no chance for reconciliation in the absence of God the Spirit, a spirit that is of course not limited to Christian or religious circles.

The particular difficulty for the church’s involvement in reconciliation is to keep in balance God’s priority for the victims – the “preferential option for the poor” – with the need to follow the path of the Spirit who is a “go-between”,<sup>35</sup> wanting to repair broken parts, at vertical as well as horizontal levels. It also means for Christ’s disciples to keep a balance between their faith in God’s plan and their confidence in human agency to contribute to that plan. Losing confidence in human agency may prevent faithful discipleship in following Christ to the Cross. Over-confidence in one’s capacity to do the right thing may lead to *hybris* before God and violence against those humans that do not think the same way. I am not sure that in past and present ecumenical missiology this delicate balance has always been sufficiently respected. In my view, it is an essential ingredient of a faithful contemporary *missio ecclesiae*.

Although clearly referred to in the papers, the *cosmic* or circular aspect of reconciliation, reaching to the creation, has not been featured sufficiently in Athens. Aware of the need to deepen the link between mission, spirituality and creation, CWME has now given it a priority in the process leading to a new mission statement.<sup>36</sup>

### Healing Ministry

A last but short word is needed on CWME’s treatment of the healing ministry. The study on the healing ministry could build on work done by WCC since the two Tübingen consultations of 1964 and 1967, and the consecutive creation of the Christian Medical Commission. Without repeating what had been well formulated in a key WCC document on

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<sup>35</sup> “Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation” §65, 83. Reference is made to the book of John V Taylor, *The Go-Between God: The Holy Spirit and Christian Mission* (London: SCM Press, 1972).

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<sup>36</sup> There was an important intervention in the plenary on reconciliation by Pepine Iosua, pastor, theologian and fisherman from Kiribati, Pacific, strongly advocating global commitment so as to enable the Pacific islands to survive: Iosua Pepine, “Reconciliation – Rescuing Victims in their Home Islands”. In Matthey (ed), *Conference Report*, 204-07. Creation did feature, but not sufficiently, in CWME conferences in the past, cf Lukas Vischer (ed), *Witnessing in the Midst of a Suffering Creation* (Geneva: John Knox Center, 2007). However, since Athens, the Commission has given due attention to creation and the relation with spirituality, on the basis of the study by a specific working group of CWME who produced a substantial report, now published under the title “God’s Transforming Spirit: Reflections on Mission, Spirituality and Creation”, *IRM*, 101:1, 61-78.

health and healing,<sup>37</sup> CWME intended to update the place and significance of a healing community for a contemporary reflection on mission. Several studies prepared Athens: one launched in 2000 involving dialogues with Pentecostals; insights resulting from the experience of the networks of people living with disabilities; and the huge involvement of WCC networks and churches in the HIV-AIDS Initiative in Africa. The conference insisted on the multi-dimensionality of evil, suffering and healing, and emphasised also the personal, faith-related, even psychological, aspects of cure and healing, the importance of a theology of charisms, and pointed to the “assets” which religious communities offer, both institutional and ideological, for health politics.<sup>38</sup>

The church’s main contribution to humanity’s longing for healing is the edification of communities which provide a home to those who suffer, who live with unanswered questions, who need a space to deal with their plight, who need empowering for accompanying sick family members, or who are marginalised in society due to their race, caste, gender, age, cultural or spiritual preferences. The shape and priorities of such communities would depend on the socio-cultural context and the existence or non-existence of sufficiently affordable medical and other care services.<sup>39</sup> As a conference, Athens tried to become something of a healing community itself, by offering healing worship services, home groups, pastoral accompaniment,<sup>40</sup> workshops for debates, time for personal encounters, all within a liturgical flow of the days and the week. In that sense, the conference intended to let the participants experience something that could be repeated locally in their own church, monastery or secular community. The ideal of CWME was to match what the documents on reconciliation and healing affirm on the need for healing communities, with at least part of the experience made during the conference.

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<sup>37</sup> World Council of Churches, *Healing and Wholeness: The Churches’ Role in Health. The report of a study by the Christian Medical Commission* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1990).

<sup>38</sup> “Athens argued explicitly in religious terms, looking particularly at the meaning of faith, the gifts of the Spirit, the sacraments and pastoral care for the individual.” Dieter Becker, “Listener’s Report” in *IRM: Listeners’ Reports*, 362.

<sup>39</sup> Theoretical summaries and practical case-studies have been published as a follow-up to Athens: World Council of Churches and DIFAEM, *Witnessing to Christ today. Promoting health and wholeness for all.* (Tübingen: DIFAEM, 2010). A contribution towards the Christian healing ministry compiled by a study group on mission and healing from the World Council of Churches (WCC), Geneva, Switzerland, and the German Institute for Medical Mission (DIFAEM), Tübingen, Germany).

<sup>40</sup> A special multicultural pastoral counselling group had been constituted, offering – for the first time in such a worldwide mission conference of WCC – the possibility for personal pastoral counselling at given times in safe spaces. A booklet emphasising the importance of pastoral counselling was prepared and distributed to all participants. It is included in the CD ROM added to the conference report.

### Mission and Unity

How far that became a reality for each participant cannot be answered globally. Although many reactions to the conference experience were positive, the very fact that we could not organise large encounters with the local Orthodox church – and that we were severely attacked by conservative Orthodox demonstrations outside the gate of the resort where the conference took place – showed how far Christian churches are themselves from a healing of memories. To emphasise reconciliation and healing as a priority for Christian mission highlights the divisions between denominations as a main obstacle to the credibility of the gospel. Several participants who did experience real community with other Christians felt deeply frustrated by the impossibility of sharing the Eucharist<sup>41</sup>. So although Athens was a success as a kind of reconciliation event in terms of common planning, organisation and meeting between representatives from WCC-related churches and the wider oikoumene, it was only one small step on the decades-long process of the healing of memories and reconciliation between divided Christian churches.

For the future agenda of mission, reconciliation and healing must keep their priority place, but this makes sense only if those involved in such mission do all that is in their power to struggle for the necessary reconciliation processes *within* the Christian family itself.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, if Christian churches are unable to make significant steps to heal their own divisions, what hope, what message, what credibility do they have for and in the world? The mission agenda is intimately connected with the unity agenda. As the latest conference in the line starting with Edinburgh 1910, Athens once more witnessed to that essential link.<sup>43</sup>

“Come, Holy Spirit, heal and reconcile... your churches”.

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<sup>41</sup> Melancthon, “What does a Reconciled Community Look Like?”, 403-04.

<sup>42</sup> Becker, “Listener’s Report”, 363-64.

<sup>43</sup> And as seems clear from reconciliation processes requiring structural changes in society, unity between Christians cannot be restricted to some kind of “spiritual” unity. There is no reconciliation without changes in behaviour, theology, community forms and church orders or structures.

# CAPE TOWN 2010: RECONCILIATION, DISCIPLESHIP, MISSION, AND THE RENEWAL OF THE CHURCH IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Chris Rice

“Discipleship and reconciliation are indispensable to our mission. We lament the scandal of our shallowness and lack of discipleship, and the scandal of our disunity and lack of love. For both seriously damage our witness to the gospel.”

2010 Lausanne Cape Town Commitment

The movement for world evangelization known as Lausanne was founded in 1974 to create a global community of self-described global “evangelicals” who found themselves dissatisfied with the World Council of Church’s “ecumenicals” and their emphasis on social justice as the primary expression of “good news”. Yet if Lausanne was founded as an alternative, the hospitable heart and vision of evangelist Billy Graham, its founder, was also the expansive heart and vision of Lausanne. For Graham was creating an alternative not only to the WCC but to American fundamentalism and its missionary sensibilities. These fundamentalists included those who could not stomach Graham accepting an invitation from a liberal Protestant group to hold what became his historic 1957 New York City crusade, and his inviting Dr Martin Luther King Jr to give the opening prayer (a man he introduced as the leader “of a great social revolution going on in America today”).<sup>1</sup> Graham proved to have great room to grow over his lifetime, moving from attending fundamentalist Bob Jones University and his warm endorsement of President Richard Nixon, to his eventual stance against the nuclear arms race, an ever-widening concern for global poverty, and his enthusiasm for Catholic Pope John Paul II. Graham began with Jesus alone and never left his home in Scripture, the preaching of the gospel, and personal conversion. But social justice concerns increasingly widened Graham’s gospel and mission, as well as his intimate connections to a growing global constituency of Christians eager to hold both Jesus and justice together.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael G Long, *The Legacy of Billy Graham* (Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, 2008), 151.



It was this new space of “expansive evangelicalism”<sup>2</sup> which gave birth to Lausanne. Like its founder, Lausanne has been characterized over its four decades by an ever-increasing emphasis on both evangelism and social concern. The first global Congress in Lausanne, Switzerland had 2,300 delegates from 150 countries and was a somewhat contentious affair concerning the two focuses. The second Congress in Manila in 1989 had 4,000 participants from 170 nations and created the Manila Manifesto. For its third Congress in 2010, Lausanne met in Africa for the first time, in Cape Town, with 4,200 evangelical leaders from 198 countries. The Congress was intentionally held 100 years after the historic 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference, a century over which Christianity grew from a western-dominated to a global faith (Africa’s Christian population grew from 1.4% in 1910 to 23.6% in 2010). Cape Town reflected this shift, with high participation from the South and East.

In these shifting winds, Lausanne is shifting as well. The Congress produced the Cape Town Commitment document, subtitled a “Confession of Faith and a Call to Action”. In 1974 Lausanne emphasized that “reconciliation with God is not reconciliation with other people”.<sup>3</sup> In 2010 a different note is struck: “Reconciliation to God is *inseparable* from reconciliation to one another” (19, italics mine). The 38-page document speaks not only about the uniqueness of Christ but strongly and theologically about injustice, poverty and environmental devastation. The shift is significant. At the heart of Lausanne’s emerging vision is an understanding of reconciliation as a new paradigm of Christian mission. But getting at the “why” of this turn and what it says about Lausanne’s diagnosis of both problem and solution requires first seeing this new place for what it is.

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<sup>2</sup> Grant Wacker, “Billy Graham’s America”, in *Church History*, 78:3 (September 2009), 511.

<sup>3</sup> The weight of the six-page 1974 Lausanne Covenant is on the nature of urgency of the evangelistic task. But Section 5 on “Christian Social Responsibility” had pioneering language for global evangelicals, including the following: “Here too we express penitence both for our neglect and for having sometimes regarded evangelism and social concern as mutually exclusive ... For both are necessary expressions of our doctrines of God and man, our love for our neighbour and our obedience to Jesus Christ. The message of salvation implies also a message of judgment upon every form of alienation, oppression and discrimination, and we should not be afraid to denounce evil and injustice wherever they exist. When people receive Christ they are born again into his kingdom and must seek not only to exhibit but also to spread its righteousness in the midst of an unrighteous world. The salvation we claim should be transforming us in the totality of our personal and social responsibilities.”

### **Reconciliation: From Sideline to “Indispensable”**

Reconciliation was not a major Lausanne theme in its first forty years. Neither the 1974 Lausanne Covenant nor 1981 Manila Manifesto draws on reconciliation as a key paradigm. At first glance, this is also true of the Cape Town Commitment. The overall document has two parts striking two broad themes: a confession of faith entitled “For the Lord We Love”, followed by a call to action entitled “For the World We Serve”.<sup>4</sup> And unlike the Athens 2005 WCC document *Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation*, the Cape Town Commitment does not use reconciliation as a headline theme. Indeed, the word “reconciliation” does not even appear for the first time until page 12.

But between there and the end of the document, reconciliation is mentioned no less than 34 times. And in a dramatic conclusion reconciliation takes centre stage when it is named as one of the two primary themes that emerged from the Cape Town Congress:

“Through the many voices of Bible exposition, plenary addresses, and group discussion, two repeated themes were heard:

- The need for radical obedient discipleship, leading to maturity, to growth in depth as well as growth in numbers;
- The need for radical cross-centered reconciliation, leading to unity, to growth in love as well as growth in faith and hope.”

The conclusion goes on to emphasize this two-fold focus of radical discipleship and radical reconciliation as the antidote to serious problems facing global evangelicalism in the twenty-first century:

“Discipleship and reconciliation are indispensable to our mission. We lament the scandal of our shallowness and lack of discipleship, and the scandal of our disunity and lack of love. For both seriously damage our witness to the gospel.”

The “our” and “we” of these scandals is a startling self-critique and call to repentance. The final word of the document is given to the voice of Jesus Christ from Scripture around this compelling two-fold mandate of discipleship and reconciliation:

“We discern the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ in these two challenges because they correspond to two of Christ’s most emphatic words to the Church as recorded in the gospels. In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus gave us our primary mandate – to make disciples among all nations. In John’s Gospel,

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<sup>4</sup> Christopher JH Wright, chair of the Lausanne Theology Working Group, worked with a committee to draft Part 1 of the Cape Town Commitment. The process included consulting a wider group of international theologians. Part 1 was prepared in advance of the Congress but was not handed out until the final day and was not discussed by participants at the event, though comments and suggestions were taken into account in revisions after the Congress. Part 2 was written during and the after the Congress in response to what happened there.

Jesus gave us our primary method – to love one another so that the world will know we are disciples of Jesus. We should not be surprised, but rather rejoice to hear the Master’s voice, when Christ says the same things 2,000 years later to his people gathered throughout the world. *Make disciples. Love one another.*”

These two primary outcomes of the Congress provide a surprising ending to the drama of the document. The approach is indirect and subtle, as if to slowly unfold the diagnosis before offering the decisive cure. One must in effect read the document backwards in the light of these two claims to make sense of the reasoning. Why reconciliation and discipleship?

### **Why Reconciliation and Discipleship? Four Urgent Problems**

What problems are going on in the world and the church such that the new missional paradigm of reconciliation and discipleship is so urgent at this time in history? I will mention four which are prominent in the Cape Town Commitment.

*One problem named is Christian complicity in ethnic violence and oppression.* One lengthy section entitled “Building the peace of Christ in our divided and broken world” plainly describes this complicity “with grief and shame”, as well as “the lamentable silence of large parts of the church when such conflicts take place”. A litany of particular twentieth century contexts follows which includes the history and legacy of racism and black slavery, the holocaust against Jews, apartheid and tribal genocide.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the violence and oppression in all these contexts was carried out within highly “Christianized” nations. And what is the result of this complicity and silence in relation to ethnic conflict? It has seriously undermined “our witness to the gospel of peace”.

*A second problem named is stated unequivocally as “a scale of un-Christlike and worldly leadership in the global Church today” which is “glaring evidence of generations of reductionist evangelism, neglected discipling, and shallow growth” (27).* This is a startling analysis given evangelicalism’s traditional priority on evangelism and church growth. The critique echoes what African-American Christian leader John Perkins has said about a kind of Christianity which has “over-evangelized the world too lightly”.<sup>6</sup> Whether this “reductionist evangelism” includes a preoccupation with strategies and numbers of conversions is not clear. Regardless, the diagnosis reveals why “discipleship” and reconciliation are both needed as a two-fold missional response.

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<sup>5</sup> It is too simple to call these “ethnic conflicts”. They are also deeply political and economic in nature, and are shaped by the powers of both nationalism and racism.

<sup>6</sup> I have heard Perkins make this statement while speaking. Perkins has been a strong advocate of not separating reconciliation from justice in his understanding of Christian witness.

*A third problem named is Christian disunity in an increasingly globalized world.* “A divided Church has no message for a divided world. Our failure to live in reconciled unity is a major obstacle to authenticity and effectiveness in mission” (32). The focus is the divides within churches and Christian organizations, between men and women, and between North and South. There is both a strong focus on mutuality and a warning directed to the powerful: “Let us finally prove that the Church does not operate on the principle that those who have the most money have all the decision-making power” (33).

At the same time, the fact that no mention is made of Catholic or Orthodox believers in the Commitment is baffling. Why is no lament offered about these historic divides? What is one to make of Lausanne’s self-described evangelical identity as “The *whole* church taking the whole gospel to the whole world?” when there was such limited involvement in the Congress by Catholic and Orthodox believers? In many parts of the world Catholicism is fast-growing and is often profoundly evangelical in nature, increasingly sharing more in common rather than less with evangelical Protestantism.

*A fourth problem named is greed and poverty and their relationship to the idolatry of consumerism.* It has been said that Jesus talked more about money than about heaven and hell – and this is certainly true of the Commitment. As Lausanne’s first Congress in Africa, a continent facing widespread poverty, wealth and poverty are a central theme of the Commitment. The church’s captivity to the prosperity gospel on the one hand (which “seriously distort[s] the Bible”, 32), and “our collusion in the toxic idolatry of consumerism” (10) are named as grave concerns.

### **Infections within the Christian DNA**

Other urgent challenges are named in addition to the four problems above. The range is wide, from people who are “unreached” with no known Christian believers or churches among them, to the challenge of unprecedented environmental devastation, to “post-modern, relativist pluralism” and its ideology which allows for no absolute truth, and “affirms as a single absolute truth that there is no single absolute truth” (16).

Yet what is significant about the four problems is not only their prominence in the document and their damage to Christian witness, but that each has to do *with the church itself*. The Commitment states the rationale: “The Bible shows that God’s greatest problem is not just with the nations of the world, but with the people he has created and called to be the means of blessing the nations” (29).

The four problems are not a critique of so-called Christian liberals and ecumenicals but of the Christian “we” of the document. All four might be termed generational viruses which have infected the very DNA of Christianity. Perhaps this explains why the painful diagnosis is inserted

throughout the document in small doses. Yet the overall effect is to describe an impoverishment deeply embedded *within Christianity itself*. The Commitment declares this to be a two-fold scandal within the church, with a distressing result: “We lament the scandal of our shallowness and lack of discipleship, and the scandal of our disunity and lack of love. For both seriously damage our witness to the gospel.”

While Rwanda is not named, it can be seen as a microcosm of why and how these problems have impaired Christian witness and created such a sense of urgency in a way which indicts both “North” and “South”. Nowhere in recent history do these viruses converge more insidiously than in the 1994 genocide and the prevailing forms of Christian life and mission at the time. While Rwanda might be described as a “tribal genocide” and “ethnic” conflict in the Commitment’s language, all four viruses played a role over the generations leading up to 1994. This includes failures of both western missionary institutions and Rwandan Christian leaders in shallow understandings of church growth as well as failure to be a prophetic presence over decades of tit-for-tat violence, colonial power, struggle for social privilege, and the tribalization of the church. Until the genocide, numerous western missiologists and church planters trumpeted that if you want to grow a church, come learn from Rwanda. After the genocide, some Rwandan church leaders reportedly said the country must be evangelized all over again. How might this be a mirror back to problems within the Christianity of the west itself?<sup>7</sup>

Yet the deeper question the Cape Town Commitment probes is this: *What kind of Christianity have we been evangelizing people into?* Only by seeing the two-fold scandal can we understand the power of reconciliation and discipleship as the two-fold way forward for a more authentic, cross-centred kind of Christianity. By naming discipleship and reconciliation as “indispensable to our mission” (35), the Commitment places them within a holy company of “indispensable” gifts that includes only the Holy Spirit (8) and the Bible (26). After generations of decay, the current crisis that Christian mission faces in the world requires a deep cure, and it is this: “radical obedient discipleship” and “radical cross-centred reconciliation”, grounded in the biblical story and empowered by the Spirit. This has the ring of reformation and revival to it.

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### **Theology Undergirding Reconciliation as Mission**

I began with problems because only by seeing the depth of lament does the depth of hope in the new paradigm of reconciliation and discipleship become clear. Yet this hope for change is not grounded in human action

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<sup>7</sup> For accounts of the history leading up to the genocide see *Mirror to the Church: Resurrecting Faith After Genocide in Rwanda* by Emmanuel Katongole, and *When Victims Become Killers* by Mahmood Mamdani.

and its power, but in the first part of the Commitment, “For the Lord We Love: The Cape Town Confession of Faith.”

On a global landscape where the language of “reconciliation” has become increasingly prevalent in post-conflict situations, the academic world and the world of activism, the concept is becoming at the same time increasingly popular, contested and fuzzy.<sup>8</sup> For Lausanne, understanding reconciliation does not begin with problems but with praise. In a world with new “realities of change”, it is “unchanged realities” about the triune God which ground a missional understanding of reconciliation. Later we will see that these theological claims have important implications for Christian action. But the two-part movement of the Cape Town Commitment is itself an argument about what authentic reconciliation is.

### *Indicative precedes imperative*

The Commitment intentionally follows a Pauline pattern of indicative (who God is, what God has done) followed by imperative (the human response to God). Thus the first mention of reconciliation is with God alone as subject in the story:

“God accomplished the reconciliation of believers with himself and with one another across all boundaries and enmities. God also accomplished his purpose of the ultimate reconciliation of all creation” and in the bodily resurrection of Jesus has given us the firstfruits of the new creation. ‘God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.’ How we love the gospel story!”  
(12)

The church’s first language in relationship to reconciliation is praise, not lament or activism. Reconciliation begins with God, with God’s love, with God’s work, achievement and ultimate reconciliation. The risen Christ is the centre of this story, and this indicative shapes the kind of “radical” and “cross-centred” Christian life and mission called for later. Only by getting the story and reality of *God’s* reconciling love deep into our bones does any imperative become possible. Indicative-imperative reflects who God is and grounds the Christian imagination of reconciliation.

### *Triple and double reconciliation*

A second crucial indicative is how the scope of God’s reconciliation stretches beyond the dichotomy of personal salvation (evangelicals) or social salvation (ecumenicals) to embrace what might be termed God’s “triple reconciliation” for individual persons, society and creation. All three are placed on a level field of interwoven divine redemption:

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<sup>8</sup> These range from the field of peace studies, to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, to the *gacaca* court process in post-genocide Rwanda, to a number of prominent Christian evangelical initiatives.

“The Bible declares God’s redemptive purpose for *creation* itself. Integral mission means discerning, proclaiming, and living out the biblical truth that the gospel is God’s good news, through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, for individual persons, *and* for society, *and* for creation. All three are broken and suffering because of sin; all three are included in the redeeming love and mission of God; all three must be part of the comprehensive mission of God’s people. Christian unity is the creation of God, based on our reconciliation with God and with one another” (10).

“All three”: persons, society, creation. This “all” is who God is, how God loves the world (indicative), so this is how those who love God are to love the world (imperative). Yet at the heart of this comprehensive redemptive work of God, Lausanne understands God’s special claim upon and gift of the church and its unity. These are the people God has called to be a blessing to the nations. Their unity is a work of God made possible by God’s “double reconciliation”:

“Paul teaches us that Christian unity is the creation of God, based on our reconciliation with God and with one another. This double reconciliation has been accomplished through the cross” (32).

In the indicative-imperative of the Christian imagination, the call to “love one another” is preceded by *God’s* “double reconciliation”, just as the “all three” comprehensive mission of God’s people is preceded by *God’s* comprehensive mission. Reconciliation and Christian unity can only be faithfully embodied when they are understood first as *God’s* creations.

### *The divine fabric of love: God, “one another”, neighbour*

One of the Lausanne Commitment’s most eloquent aspects is the framework of love and its relationship to the mission of reconciliation. Indeed, love is the central image, from “the Lord we love” to embodying God’s love in “the world we serve”. As stated earlier, the 1974 Lausanne Covenant said that “reconciliation with other people is not reconciliation with God”. The quality and scope of reconciliation is deepened and broadened as an expression of God’s wide and deep love. The sequence of love’s movements is theologically important: from God’s love, to loving God, to loving “one another” within the Christian family, to neighbour love. Yet the overall message is that they are inseparable.

### **Being Divine Love’s Ambassadors: Missional Imperatives of Reconciliation**

How do these “unchanged realities” speak to the world’s changing realities? At one frontier, the world is ever-shrinking and ever more connected and participatory due to the internet and social media. At another frontier, the world is ever-diversifying and ever-pluralizing due to intense migration. Traditionally homogeneous countries (such as South Korea) are

facing the new challenge of becoming multi-ethnic societies, western societies are divided over how to handle an unfamiliar influx of immigrants, and these are turbulent post-9/11 times between Christianity and Islam. What is the primary Christian missional identity which can speak to this complex and changing landscape?

In the Cape Town Commitment, the indicative of God's love moves toward the imperative to be "ambassadors of God's reconciling love for the world" (echoing 2 Corinthians 5:20). This is essentially a new "mission statement" for a new time in history: *To be ambassadors of God's reconciling love for the world*. I will mention four significant missional imperatives which flow out of this vision, each of which flows directly out of the theological framework described above. The first two imperatives have to do with "love one another" – expressing God's reconciling love within the *church*. The second two have to do with "love your neighbour" – expressing God's reconciling love within the *world*.

### *Christian unity in a divided world*

Growing out of the framework of God's love and loving God is "loving one another" in the family of the church. As seen before, in the "double reconciliation" with God and one another, God has put a special, urgent claim upon the people God has called to be a blessing to the nations and what is at stake in their life of unity. This is stated boldly at the end of the entire document: "When Christians live in the reconciled unity of love by the power of the Holy Spirit, the world will come to know Jesus, whose disciples we are, and come to know the Father who sent him."

What is the world to make of the Jesus claimed by Christians in the contexts previously mentioned with their complicity in ethnic oppression and violence? Does it not seem that Christians were serving other gods? A poster I once saw comes to mind: "A modest proposal for peace: That the Christians of the world would stop killing each other." Modest perhaps, yet central to Christian understanding in the light of contexts of black slavery, apartheid, and genocide within and wars between heavily-churched nations.

God's reconciling love does not first ask what Christians are to *do* in bringing peace to the world but who Christians are to *be*. The church must first *be* a community of peace, a community of self-renewal. This in itself is missional, for by this "the world will come to know Jesus".

### *Christian mutuality in a world of power*

A second way God's reconciling love is reflected in the "one another" of Christian unity indicates a major shift in missional imagination. The Cape Town Commitment marks a departure from the century since the 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference, a movement from the age of the



missionary to the age of mutuality. This is central to the new understanding of reconciliation as mission.

Near the beginning, the following is stated about the missionary God:

“We love the Holy Spirit within the unity of the Trinity, along with God the Father and God the Son. He is the missionary Spirit sent by the missionary Father and the missionary Son, breathing life and power into God’s missionary Church” (8).

This is one of only a very few places where the word “missionary” is used in the Commitment, and it is primarily with respect to a missionary *God*. The pervasive language of the document is about the *mutuality* released within the church, flowing from the power of the missionary Spirit.

Times are changing in many global contexts where western missionary groups have traditionally had the money, power and capacity to set the terms of engagement. As one Congolese Christian leader stated it to me, “My father became a Christian and was baptized under American missionaries, then worked *for* them. But I have a PhD from an American evangelical seminary. I have pastored in an American church. I lead a new university in Africa. I want your friendship, your heart, so we might work *together*.”

Partnership is too vague a word to describe the kind of deep companionship this African leader is calling for. Partnership must be placed within the fellowship of the Trinity of “the God we love”, the ecology of the love and “love one another” framework, the call to Christian unity, and marked by the sacrificial practices of mutuality so eloquently described:

“We urgently seek a new global partnership within the body of Christ across all continents, rooted in profound mutual love, mutual submission, and dramatic economic sharing without paternalism or unhealthy dependency. And we seek this not only as a demonstration of our unity in the gospel, but also for the sake of the name of Christ and the mission of God in the entire world” (13).

This call to a new time of global Christian partnership in mutuality is grounded in mutual love and submission and is woven throughout the document as an antidote to divides described between men and women, wealthy and poor, North and South. Mutuality is emphasized over “reverse missions”:

“We rejoice in the growth and strength of emerging mission movements in the majority world and the ending of the old pattern of ‘from the West to the Rest’. But we do not accept that the baton of mission responsibility has passed from one part of the world Church to another ... No one ethnic group, nation, or continent can claim the exclusive privilege of being the ones to complete the Great Commission. Only God is sovereign” (33).

Another mark of mutuality is a shift from missionary to “missional”. While there is certainly great appreciation within Lausanne’s constituencies for the contributions of countless missionaries over many decades, the

missions' task is placed within the broader framework of God's comprehensive "triple reconciliation" of persons, society and creation. A broad range of missional "callings" and gifts is needed and many are named: the "missional calling of people with disabilities" (21), and of environmental advocacy, of multiple "workplace" vocations.

### **Neighbour-Love: Friendship in a Polarizing World**

The missional imperatives of Christian unity and mutuality are about God's reconciling love enacted in "love one another", within the church. Two more imperatives flow out of "love neighbour".

The first calls Christians to pursue relationship with people of other faiths as "neighbours" and "friends", not potential converts. Drawing a strong line between evangelism and proselytizing, the church must repent of a failure to "seek friendships with people of Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and other religious backgrounds" (23). There are strong statements against tit-for-tat violence and revenge. This is followed by a call to be willing to suffer as an "acid test for the genuineness of our mission" (23). The goal of relationship with people of other faiths is stated as *friendship* and *neighbour-love*, not the *reconciliation* and *unity* which is the stated goal of relationships within the church. It is a subtle but crucial claim, as if to distinguish the intimate family nature of relationship within the community of those who worship Christ from other neighbours (the distinction is important and begs for more of a rationale within the document itself).

Yet from the contexts of Christians in places of religious violence like Nigeria, India, Sudan/South Sudan and the Middle East, this call to neighbour-love and friendship is a costly calling indeed. There is a glaring gap however. What does this call to sacrificial, non-tit-for-tat neighbour-love mean for Christians whose countries are at war with countries dominated by other religions? Written in a post-9/11 world with two wars raging at the time in Iraq and Afghanistan, there are only brief allusions to war. The shyness in this "don't ask/don't tell" approach to war effectively ends up supporting the status quo and obscures the profound relationship between war and poverty in many contexts (such as East Africa).

Regardless, the paradigm of friendship with people of other faiths is a shift of imagination. Once again it is undergirded by the theology of who the reconciling God is. God is the primary actor in evangelism and mission; it is the work of the Holy Spirit to convert. The church's vocation is to form friendships and bear witness with truth, love, gentleness and excellence. The results are up to God.

### **Advocacy in an Unjust World**

A second expression of neighbour-love is advocacy for justice. On the one hand, quietism with respect to injustice is rejected. On the other hand,

Christian advocacy requires a certain prophetic distance: “If the state ... forces us to choose between loyalty to itself and our higher loyalty to God, we must say No to the state because we have said Yes to Jesus Christ as Lord” (25). While the Cape Town Commitment names and takes clear stands against a number of injustices, it has an unusual focus on creation care and ecological responsibility and the “abuse and destruction of the earth’s resources” (22). This focus on creation care completes the missional imperative of God’s “triple reconciliation” of persons, society and creation.

### **Disconnect between Commitment and Congress**

The Cape Town Commitment and its two-fold priority of radical reconciliation and radical discipleship is a call for deep reform. Was the 2010 Cape Town Congress as bold and prophetic as the Cape Town Commitment? It is an important question, for as a missional document the Commitment seeks to affect both aspiration and action. Three points are crucial here: the Congress location, the platform content, and the process related to the Commitment.

A first point of discernment is the Congress location in South Africa. The Commitment names the complicity of Christians in apartheid, and that “we could not meet in South Africa without being mindful of the past years of suffering under apartheid”(3). Yet in fact this history was not named from the Congress platform. South American theologian and respected Lausanne leader Rene Padilla observes that “no official mention was ever made that this congress was taking place in a country that not long ago was under the grip of apartheid and is still deeply affected by socio-economic injustice”.<sup>9</sup> Padilla then offers a startling revelation about the conference site itself:

“In fact, [the Congress] took place in the International Convention Centre, which was built on land reclaimed from the sea with rubbish and gravel brought from District Six. In 1950 this area was declared a white-only zone, and as a result about 60,000 black people were removed from it by force, and their homes were bulldozed to the ground. In spite of that fact, the conference organizers ignored the invitation made by the Group on Reconciliation to have Cape Town 2010 officially ‘reject the theological heresies which undergirded apartheid’ and to ‘lament the socio-economic suffering which is apartheid’s ongoing legacy’.”

A second question is the relationship between the content of the Commitment and the content of the Congress. As described above, the Commitment makes a clear critique of a “rampant consumerism” which has infected certain prevailing forms of Christian mission. And one major plenary session was dedicated to naming and confessing the pervasive

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<sup>9</sup> “The Future of the Lausanne Movement” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 35:2, April 2011, 86-87. All quotes from Padilla are from this article.

challenge of the prosperity gospel, marking Lausanne's clear break from evangelical leaders with huge constituencies who focus on success apart from any theology of cross and suffering. Yet Padilla describes an ambivalence within Lausanne itself:

“[A] whole plenary session was dedicated on Wednesday to *the strategy for the evangelization of the world in this generation* (made in USA) on the basis of a chart of so-called unreached people groups prepared by the Lausanne Strategy Working Group. Their strategy chart reflected the obsession with numbers typical of the market mentality that characterizes a sector of evangelicalism in the United States. Besides, according to many ... with first-hand knowledge of the evangelistic needs in their respective countries, the chart ... failed to do justice to their situations. Curiously enough, no unreached people groups were listed for the United States!”

Finally, Padilla names what he considers a “serious flaw” with the process related to the Commitment itself. The drafting committee had laboured for a year with the intention of circulating the Commitment at the Congress. Yet the document was not given out to participants until the final night of the Congress, nor was time allowed to discuss its content. Certainly, advance translation into multiple Congress languages may have been a challenge, perhaps other challenges as well. Regardless, it is regrettable that the global gathering did not have a chance to wrestle with the richness of the document. The Lausanne leadership said that a major reason was the desire to have the Commitment translated to the official languages before it was distributed.

What is one to make of these apparent disconnects between the Cape Town Commitment and its drafters, and the Cape Town Congress and its organizers? Certainly, such tensions come with the kind of “big tent” Lausanne seeks to create, opening up a wide enough space for a global evangelicalism which itself is growing and increasingly pluralistic, from very different contexts and with sharply different perspectives about faithful Christian mission and life.

It is significant that at multiple levels of leadership Lausanne has agreed to make the Cape Town Commitment the “road map” for the movement for the next ten years. There are people and groups taking up different sections especially of Part II for further work and engagement. It has now been translated into 25 languages. A crucial test will be whether Lausanne will pursue a more prophetic or a more “big tent” direction, and whether that wineskin can hold the “new wine” of radical reconciliation and discipleship the Commitment calls for. The claims of the Commitment did not drop from the sky, but emerge from Christian communities who both envision and are living out fresh ways forward. The Lausanne network itself is a primary, muddy ground in working out this radical reconciliation.

### Conclusion: A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Reformation?

Evangelicals are often caricatured in the media and secular contexts as imperialists and intolerant right-wing fundamentalists. But the Commitment reflects evangelicalism in humble pursuit of putting its entire life and missional enterprise under close scrutiny. No “10/40 window”<sup>10</sup> is mentioned, no goals and strategies for reaching the world for Christ by 2020. Thirty-eight years after the first Lausanne Congress in Switzerland, the tone is not celebration, success and strategizing, but a call to lament, reform, and turning toward a new way.

The viruses that are diagnosed; the deep infections to the Christian DNA that are named; the affirmation of God’s reconciling love that is expressed; the imperative of ‘love one another’ that is affirmed; the striving for Christian unity and mutuality and ‘love your neighbour’ friendship that is set forth; the call for advocacy and justice that is made: these lay out a profound vision that seeks to inspire *action*, a radical discipleship and a radical reconciliation.<sup>11</sup> Whether Lausanne’s “expansive evangelicalism” will expand in the direction of the Commitment and the indicative-imperative of the Christian imagination of God’s reconciling love is now a significant question. For “radical obedient discipleship” and “radical cross-centred reconciliation” to become normative in Christian life and mission would be nothing less than a twenty-first century reformation. That seems to be the “great awakening” that the Cape Town Commitment longs for.

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<sup>10</sup> Missionary strategist Luis Bush used the term at the 1989 Lausanne Congress in Manila. The strategy was focused on where most of the world’s unreached and poorest people were said to live, a rectangular area between 10 and 40 degrees north of the equator, stretching from West Africa to East Asia.

<sup>11</sup> It is worth noting that many new evangelically-shaped initiatives have been established over the past thirty years which embody the kind of radical discipleship and reconciliation called for. These range from the Christian Community Development Association in the USA and its membership in the thousands, International Justice Mission, to a number of student movements, to the East African Great Lakes Initiative, a partnership of Duke Divinity School, African Leadership and Reconciliation Ministries (ALARM), the Mennonite Central Committee, and World Vision. In addition, there has been a plethora of books in the field of justice and reconciliation published by evangelical publishers.

# APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION, *AFRICAE MUNUS*: THE CHURCH IN AFRICA IN SERVICE TO RECONCILIATION, JUSTICE AND PEACE

Emmanuel M. Katongole

## Introduction: An Apostolic Exhortation

On November 19, 2011, Pope Benedict XVI published the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Africae Munus* (hereafter AM), marking the climax of the Second Synod of Bishops on Africa.<sup>1</sup> The synod was held in Rome (October 4-25, 2009), under the theme The Church in Africa at the Service of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace.<sup>2</sup> The Exhortation has two parts. Part One (§§ 14-96)<sup>3</sup> identifies the mission of the church, which has its origin in the person of Jesus Christ who, through his passion, death and resurrection, reconciled man with God and with neighbour. Listening to him, Christians are invited to be reconciled with God, becoming just in order to build a peaceable society and committing themselves to fraternal service for love of truth, which is the source of peace. Part Two (97-177) addresses different sections of the church in Africa (bishops, priests, deacons, lay people, etc.), identifying priority areas of ministry and inviting each to promote reconciliation, justice and peace in the church and in society.

The simple structure might easily hide the fact that *Africae Munus* (henceforth referred to as *AM*) is a complex document, which not only underlies the need for reconciliation, justice and peace in Africa, but reinforces the ecclesial dynamism of Africa, while outlining a programme for pastoral activity for the coming decades of evangelization. It addresses not only everyone, but everything about the church's mission in Africa. But

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<sup>1</sup> The exhortation builds on the theme of the First Synod of Bishops for Africa (held in Rome in 1994), which focused on "The Church as Family of God". See John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*: [www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_14091995\\_ecclesia-in-africa\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_14091995_ecclesia-in-africa_en.html)

<sup>2</sup> Attended by over 135 participants, including two Cardinals, 42 Bishops, priests and lay people from 46 countries of Africa, the full title of the Synod was "The Church in Africa at the Service of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace: 'You are the salt of the earth ... You are the light of the world' (Matt 5:13,14)".

<sup>3</sup> All parenthetical references to *Africae Munus* refer to numbered paragraphs within the original document. The Exhortation is available at the Vatican website: [www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_exh\\_20111119\\_africae-munus\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20111119_africae-munus_en.html)

this is also what makes this compact document a challenging one in terms of a simple and coherent vision of reconciliation as a paradigm for mission in Africa in the twenty-first century. First, while the need for reconciliation, justice and peace is the clear focus of the first part of the document, the second part is dedicated to more general pastoral guidelines, but often with very little explicit reference or connection to the first part. Second, while *AM* issues an explicit appeal for the church and Christians to pursue reconciliation, justice and peace, the kind of gift it is for Africa is not made completely explicit. On the contrary, the preoccupation of *AM* with the church's "mission" and with "pastoral guidelines" easily leads to an impression of reconciliation as simply a pastoral agenda (among many), albeit an urgent and timely one. In this way, *AM* reflects the tone of the Final Message of the synod, which encouraged each bishop "to put issues of reconciliation, justice and peace high up on the pastoral agenda of his diocese".<sup>4</sup> But reconciliation should not be viewed only as a priority area of the church's mission: it is also the lens through which the church (in Africa and elsewhere) understands her identity and mission in the world.

It is important to keep in mind that *AM* is a *post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation*. As such, it is a document that is the climax of a long process, the conclusion of a long "ecclesial conversation",<sup>5</sup> and thus it assumes and makes references to statements contained in various documents generated before, during and after the synod.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, the context, genre, style and purpose of an exhortation preclude any systematic and extensive treatment of its theme. As an Apostolic Exhortation, *AM* is a reflection, an extended sermon, in which the Pope speaks as a "pastor" and offers guidelines, recommendations, directives and exhortations to the church,

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<sup>4</sup> "Message to the People of God of the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops", 19. Available at: [www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/synod/documents/rc\\_synod\\_doc\\_20091023\\_message-synod\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20091023_message-synod_en.html) accessed May 15, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Agbonkhanmeghe E Orobator, "The Synod as an Ecclesial Conversation", introduction to AE Orobator (ed), *Reconciliation, Justice, and Peace: The Second African Synod* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> The preparation for the 2009 Synod began in 2005 with an announcement. Following the announcement, a document of Guidelines for Discussion, or *Lineamenta*, was distributed in advance of the synod "to foster extensive discussion on the synodal topic". A working document was prepared from the responses to the "questionnaire" included in the *Lineamenta*. It is this working document, the *Instrumentum Laboris*, that guided the discussion at the synod. At the end of the synod, the bishops and other participants prepared "Propositions" that were submitted to the Pope to help him prepare the post-synodal exhortation. The synod itself generated a number of critical documents: among others is the *Nuntius* or Message of the Synod – the official post-synodal message of the bishops of Africa to the people of Africa. The documents are available on the Vatican website. Another good source is: [www.maryknollafrika.org/Documents/Resources%20for%20the%202009%20Second%20African%20Synod.htm](http://www.maryknollafrika.org/Documents/Resources%20for%20the%202009%20Second%20African%20Synod.htm)

drawing on theological, pastoral and liturgical insights informed by Scripture and by the church's tradition. Without a sense of context, process and the rich sources that inform *AM*, the reader is bound to find it a frustrating document on many levels.

In this essay, while filling out some of this background, I wish to make explicit why reconciliation is a unique gift and vision of hope for the world, and for Africa in particular. I shall do this by outlining six theses around which a vision and practice of reconciliation is pursued. My aim is not only to offer a framework within which the various recommendations and exhortations of *AM* make sense, but to suggest this as the kind of framework that is needed if we are to recover reconciliation as a fresh gift and a paradigm for mission in our time.

### Thesis One: Reconciliation is a Gift

Africa's memory and experience of various traumas and conflicts make reconciliation a particularly urgent and timely gift. In Part One of *AM*, Pope Benedict speaks of Africa as experiencing an "anthropological crisis" (11). This crisis, arising in part out of Africa's painful memory of fratricidal conflicts between ethnic groups, the slave trade and colonization (9) is also connected to current problems such as alcohol and drug abuse, malaria, HIV/AIDS, environmental pollution, political corruption, unjust economic structures, globalization, etc. – all of which pose a serious threat to life in Africa. Using a biblical image (147-49), Pope Benedict compares Africa to the paralytic in Mark's Gospel (2:1-12), and like the four men who brought the paralytic to Jesus, the church is called to mobilize spiritual energies and material resources to relieve Africa's heavy burden and open Africans to the fulness of life in Christ.<sup>7</sup> The recommendations in Part Two of *AM* – addressed to the various constituents of the church (99-146) – must be read within the context of "crisis" and as an invitation to the church to stand in solidarity and creativity in order to remove the obstacles to Africa's healing.

The depiction of Africa's "anthropological crisis" in *AM* is powerful. Even more powerful is the conclusion that behind and connected to various social and human challenges lies a *spiritual crisis* of identity. Echoing Peter in the Acts of the Apostles, Pope Benedict notes:

"[W]hat Africa needs most is neither gold nor silver; she wants to stand up, like the man at the pool of Bethzatha; she wants to have confidence in herself and in her dignity as a people loved by her God. It is this encounter with Jesus which the church must offer to bruised and wounded hearts yearning for reconciliation and peace, and thirsting for justice. We must prove and proclaim the word of Christ which heals, sets free and reconciles" (149).

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<sup>7</sup> In *Ecclesia in Africa (No. 41)*, John Paul compared Africa to the man who fell among brigands and called on church and society to be a Good Samaritan to Africa.



It is the need for a new identity (a new vision of herself – as God’s loved one), and new confidence in herself and her dignity, that makes reconciliation a unique and rare gift for Africa. For reconciliation is not simply a programme or set of skills; it is first and foremost an invitation to experience the new world that God has made possible. It is this new world – the new creation – that Paul talks about in 2 Corinthians 5:16-20:

“So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God” (NIV).

The key reality that Paul is announcing here is not, in fact, reconciliation, but the “new creation”. Reconciliation<sup>8</sup> is the way through which God has made this new creation possible, and it is the gift that makes it possible for “anyone in Christ” to belong to this new creation of restored relationships. Reconciliation therefore does not relate, in the first place, to mission (what we should *do*), but to *gift* (“All this is from God”) and to invitation – to a new experience of God, of ourselves with one another, and with the whole of creation. Only later in the passage does Paul speak about mission in terms of the service (*diakonia*) of reconciliation being “entrusted to us” as though we were God’s ambassadors.

Although *AM* makes reference to sections from 2 Corinthians (particularly 5:19-20), the notion of “new creation” as the goal (the *telos*) of God’s reconciling work is not explicitly invoked, and so the fact that reconciliation is a gift is not emphasized enough. Nevertheless, it is the experience of reconciliation as a gift made possible “in Christ” that Pope Benedict points to as the ground of Africa’s true identity, the source of her dignity, and the basis of her mission in the world. Referring to Africa as a “spiritual lung” for humanity, Benedict notes that if Africa “is to stand erect with dignity, [she] needs to hear the voice of Christ who today proclaims love of neighbour, love of even one’s enemies, to the point of laying down one’s life” (13).

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If reconciliation, then, is a gift and invitation into a new identity, and thus a fresh starting point for Africa, the primary question that relates to mission as reconciliation is: how can Africa receive, enter into, and operate

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<sup>8</sup> According to Richard B Hays, “when Paul uses the verb ‘reconcile’ with God as its subject, he is declaring that God has launched a dramatic new diplomatic initiative to overcome human alienation and to establish new and peaceful relationships” (“Reconciliation: The Heart of the Gospel”, *Divinity*, Spring 2012, 3. Available at: <http://divinity.duke.edu/community-student-life/divinity-magazine/spring-2012/deans-perspective> accessed May 15, 2012).

within this experience of new creation so as truly to live up to her identity and calling? In the remaining part of this essay, drawing from the exhortations of *AM*, I suggest five other theses that explore the practices and disciplines that sustain reconciliation as a way of life.

### **Thesis Two: Reconciliation requires Living into God's Story**

The telos within which reconciliation operates as a gift and invitation is, then, the shalom of God's "new creation". Belonging to this new creation involves a way of seeing and being in the world. Reconciliation is thus not simply a programme, but a way of life. As a way of life, reconciliation is lived around Scripture and the life of the sacraments, realities that bring Christians into contact with, and ground them deeply into, the story of the new creation, which as Paul notes is realized "in Christ". It is this basic conviction that the synod delegates are pointing to when they note:

"Reconciliation involves a way of life (spirituality) and a mission. To implement a spirituality of reconciliation, justice and peace, the Church needs witnesses deeply rooted in Christ, nourished by his Word and by the sacraments."<sup>9</sup>

The same conviction is reflected in the numerous scriptural references in *AM* as well as the specific recommendation for a "biblical apostolate [to] be promoted in each Christian community, in the family and in the ecclesiastical movements" (150), and that "each member of Christ's faithful should grow accustomed to reading the Bible daily" (151). To the youth, the Pope offers a similar exhortation: "We need to help young people to gain confidence and familiarity with the sacred Scripture so it can become a compass pointing out the path to follow" (61).

If there is no reconciliation without Scripture, there can also be no reconciliation without a life lived with the Sacraments, particularly the Eucharist. Word and Eucharist, Benedict explains,

"... are so deeply bound together that we cannot understand one without the other: the word of God takes flesh sacramentally in the event of the Eucharist.

The Eucharist opens us to an understanding of Scripture, just as Scripture for its part illumines and explains the mystery of the Eucharist" (40).

The centrality of Word and Eucharist in *AM* confirm reconciliation as a thick theological praxis, which, when abstracted from its scriptural and liturgical matrix, loses its force and easily generates into a mere programme, a mediation skill (which one picks up and puts down as needed) or simply a convenient political mechanism. But as *AM* makes clear: "Reconciliation is a pre-political concept and a pre-political reality"

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<sup>9</sup> Proposition 9 from the 2009 Second African Synod. Available at: <http://cpn.nd.edu/conflicts-and-the-role-of-the-church/central-africa/the-churchs-role-in-peacebuilding-in-central-africa/african-synod/propositions-1-16-of-the-57-propositions-from-the-synod/> accessed May 15, 2012.

(19). This of course does not mean that it has no political import. On the contrary, it is “for this very reason it is of the greatest importance to the task of politics itself” (19). In other words, the world of God’s new creation does not simply conform to current political realities, but has the power to *reshape* these political realities. That is why, in relation to the challenge of tribalism in Africa, *AM* calls not simply for “peaceful co-existence” between tribes, but for a new vision of community beyond tribal identity. Thus, Benedict writes:

“Beyond differences of origin or culture, the great challenge facing us all is to discern in the human person, loved by God, the basis of a communion that respects and integrates the particular contributions of different cultures. We *‘must really open these boundaries between tribes, ethnic groups and religions to the universality of God’s love’*. Men and women, in the variety of their origins, cultures, languages and religions, are capable of living together in harmony” (39, emphasis mine).

It is this possibility of a new sociality, beyond tribalism, that the Holy Trinity Peace Village in Kuron confirms. Founded by retired Bishop Paride Taban in a remote part of South Sudan, Holy Trinity Village brings together people from different tribes and religions – Muslims, Christians, Traditionalists – in a co-operative village, where they live, raise their children, and work together with a school, a health clinic, clean water, agricultural projects, etc. Taban calls the village a “small oasis of peace” (in a country torn by ethnic and religious violence) and an example of the harmony and peace that is reflected in the communion and peaceful relations of the three persons of the Trinity (thus the name “Holy Trinity” Peace Village).<sup>10</sup>

What Taban is doing is to stand within the story of God’s reconciling love as revealed in the Trinity and improvise out of that story concrete initiatives that not only affirm the inherent dignity of Africans, but open up fresh possibilities of peace, flourishing in the context of tribalism, war and poverty.

### **Thesis Three: Reconciliation is Advocacy Grounded in Lament and Conversion**

Even though the gift of new creation is real, Africans continue to live in a world marked by divisions, racism, tribalism, hatred and violence. Reconciliation is therefore grounded in lament, which involves the ability to see honestly, name truthfully, and to stand within the broken world of our day-to-day existence, and yet not despair in the reality of new creation. It is within this spirit of lament that the synod delegates offered a sombre assessment of Africa:

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<sup>10</sup> See my *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 135-47.

“While ‘rich in human and natural resources, many of our people are still left to wallow in poverty and misery, wars and conflicts, crises and chaos’. These evils, the Synod asserts, are mainly the product of ‘human decisions and activities by people who have no regard for the common good and this often through a tragic complicity and criminal conspiracy of local leaders and foreign interests’.”<sup>11</sup>

Even without using the language of lament, in its extensive depiction of Africa’s “anthropological crisis”, *AM* has been able to ground the search for reconciliation in the painful reality of Africa’s present situation. What is perhaps even more significant is the acknowledgement that Christians are implicated in the crisis. As one of the delegates, Archbishop Palmer-Buckle of Ghana stated: “The church has transformed neither society nor itself ... Where there has been corruption, Catholics have been involved, and where there has been violence Catholics have been among those instigating it.”<sup>12</sup> *AM* captured the sentiment more mildly by noting that Christians are affected by the spirit and customs of their time and place (32).

The acknowledgement of the church’s limitations and failures is not a cause for despair. It is an opportunity for conversion, which, as *AM* notes, “is a necessary condition for the transformation of the world” (103). But conversion is not merely turning away from evil and sinfulness; authentic conversion or *metanoia* is turning towards God the Father, “the source of true life, who alone is capable of delivering us from evil and all temptations, and keeping us in his Spirit, in the very heart of the struggle against the forces of evil” (32). That is why a call to conversion is not a form of escapism into the spiritual realm. For, the more grounded one is in the story of God, the more clearly one is able to assess the limits and contradictions of the current social systems, and the more strengthened one becomes in one’s commitment to build a more just society.

Throughout *AM* there is a tension that the Pope tries to navigate. For while on the one hand Pope Benedict encourages Christians to take their faith seriously as the foundation for building a more just and peaceful African society, he notes that the church “does not have technical solutions to offer and does not claim to ‘interfere in any way in the politics of states’” (22). The pursuit of a just and peaceful society walks the tightrope between the reality of a world reconciled and the hard realities of politics and economics historically construed. In his closing remarks at the end of the synod, Benedict noted:

“The theme ‘Reconciliation, justice and peace’ certainly implies a strong political dimension, even if it is obvious that reconciliation, justice and peace are not possible without a deep purification of the heart, without renewal of thought, a ‘metanoia’, without something new that can only come from the

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<sup>11</sup> Michael McCabe, SMA, “The Second African Synod: Major Emphases and Challenges”, Message, No. 5. Available at [www.missilogia.org.br/cms/UserFiles/cms\\_artigos\\_pdf\\_73.pdf](http://www.missilogia.org.br/cms/UserFiles/cms_artigos_pdf_73.pdf) accessed May 15, 2012.

<sup>12</sup> McCabe, Second African Synod.

encounter with God. But even if this spiritual dimension is profound and fundamental, the political dimension is also very real, because without political achievements, these changes of the Spirit usually are not realized. Therefore the temptation could have been in politicizing the theme, to talk less about pastors and more about politicians, thus with a competence that is not ours. The other danger was to avoid this temptation – pulling oneself into a purely spiritual world, in an abstract and beautiful world, but not a realistic one.”<sup>13</sup>

What one senses behind Benedict’s remarks is not simply an attempt to hedge church-state relations, but rather a recognition of the inevitable “in-between” within which a vision of reconciliation is lived: between the already and not yet; between the new creation and the stubborn realities of old creation; between the church’s own call and mission to be a sign and sacrament of a world reconciled and the church’s own often disappointing witness; between the now and the final realization of a “new heaven and new earth” (Rev 21:3). The observation means that reconciliation will never totally fit; it will constantly be resisted; its vision will seem naïve; its efforts will remain fragile and never be completely fulfilled. It is this realization that shapes reconciliation as a form of ongoing advocacy grounded in lament, working within the limits of the present, but always pressing the limits of current political and ecclesial systems towards an expanding social horizon of God’s new creation. Elsewhere in *AM*, Benedict speaks about a “revolution” and notes that “Christ does not propose a revolution of a social or political kind, but a revolution of love, brought about by his complete self-giving through his death on the Cross and his resurrection” (26). Reconciliation ferments a revolution of love within the sluggish in-between – a revolution grounded in and carried forth through lament and a life of ongoing conversion.

#### **Thesis Four: Reconciliation is Work: Sowing and Nurturing Seeds of Hope**

Reconciliation is a gift. But it is also work. God has entrusted to us the service of reconciliation: we are therefore Christ’s ambassadors. The work of being ambassadors of reconciliation is grounded in the firm conviction that even in the midst of violence, war and pain, God is always sowing seeds of peace (Isa 43:19). The work of peace therefore involves, in the first place, learning to see and live in the world with hope. Even as *AM* names the various social challenges facing Africa, which can seem so daunting, its tonality is one of hope. It invites the church to look at Africa with faith and hope and celebrates God’s many gifts to Africa: her spiritual

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<sup>13</sup> “Synod for Africa, Penultimate Act. The Final Propositions,” [www.chiesa.expressonline.it](http://www.chiesa.expressonline.it) accessed October 26, 2009. Available at: <http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/1340665?eng=y> accessed May 15, 2012. See also *Africae Munus* 17.

dynamism, “her extraordinary human and spiritual riches ... [and her] abundant resources” (13).

That noted, the driving assumption behind *AM* is that to build a reconciled, just and peaceful African society requires concerted efforts in a variety of areas.<sup>14</sup> Thus, *AM* lifts up not only the areas where the church has historically played a considerable role in building a peaceful society in Africa (education, healthcare, communications, etc.) and calls for a doubling of efforts there, it also points to areas of high priority: respect for creation and the ecosystem (79), good governance, empowerment of women (the “backbone” of African society) (58), positive treatment of children (67), etc. Additionally, *AM* offers numerous very specific recommendations regarding a whole range of issues from dialogue with other religions, especially Islam and African traditional religions, to the treatment of immigrants and refugees; from recommendations to establish commissions for justice and peace at diocesan and parish levels, to the setting up of monitoring desks for prevention and resolution of conflict, to instituting national and regional peace-building councils. What the recommendations confirm is that, even as the vision of reconciliation and peace that informs *AM* is thoroughly theological, the pursuit of reconciliation is holistic, practical, concrete, and very mundane.

However, that the pursuit of reconciliation is practical and mundane does not mean that it should operate according to established canons or culturally accepted norms. In a section addressing bishops, *AM* warns against the idols of “nationalism” and of absolutizing “African culture”. Noting that such idols are an illusion, *AM* states that they are temptations that can easily lead one to believe that “human efforts alone can bring the Kingdom of eternal happiness on earth” (102). Accordingly, even as it remains practical and concrete, the pursuit of reconciliation, justice and peace is shaped and sustained by a vision beyond, and presses towards a future promised and not yet seen. That is why reconciliation requires, more than experts, witnesses who are

“... profoundly rooted in Christ and find nourishment in his word and the sacraments. As they strive to grow in holiness, these witnesses can become engaged in building communion among God’s family, communicating to the world – if necessary even to the point of martyrdom – the spirit of reconciliation, justice and peace, after the example of Christ” (34).

A vision and praxis of reconciliation thus requires and involves various efforts (which constitute the search for peace), as well as stories. The stories of witnesses like the “cloud of witness” of Scripture teach us the character of hope: the evidence of things not seen (Hebrews 11). But the stories of witnesses also inspire and encourage us in the struggle for a more just and peaceful society, and confirm that the hope of a reconciled, just

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<sup>14</sup> There is a preponderance of words like “pursue”, “efforts”, “contribution” “build”, “seek”, etc. in *AM*.

and peaceful society, if costly, is nevertheless real! Therefore, part of the work of peace involves the naming, celebrating and preserving the memory of Africa's many witnesses of hope. It is for this reason that *AM* encourages "Pastors of the local Churches to recognize among servants of the Gospel in Africa those who could be canonized" (114).

### **Thesis Five: Reconciliation, Forgiveness, and Justice Go Hand in Hand**

Throughout *AM* the notions of reconciliation, justice and peace are held together as the theme of the synod and the Exhortation confirms: "The Church in Africa: In Service to Reconciliation, justice, and peace." While "forgiveness" is not included in the title, both the synod and *AM* make it clear that there can be no reconciliation (and thus peace) without forgiveness. The reason behind this conclusion is that forgiveness is a natural outcome of God's gift of reconciliation. The delegates thus note in Proposition 14:

"... the fruit of reconciliation between God and humanity, and within the human family itself, is the restoration of justice and the just demands of relationships. This is because God justifies the sinner by overlooking his or her sins, or one justifies an offender by pardoning his or her faults."<sup>15</sup>

This statement not only affirms the interconnectedness of reconciliation and forgiveness, it introduces a fresh logic in the relationship between forgiveness and justice. If we are accustomed to think of justice as a prerequisite for forgiveness and reconciliation, here the synod affirmed the priority of forgiveness, noting that just as "God has justified us by forgiving our sins ... we too can work out just relationships and structures among ourselves and in our societies, through pardoning and overlooking people's faults out of love and mercy. How else can we live in community and communion?"

In *AM* itself, Benedict reiterates the priority of forgiveness over justice, pointing out that after extended periods of war "it is by granting and receiving forgiveness that the traumatized memories of individuals and communities have found healing, and families formerly divided have rediscovered harmony" (21). However, the priority of forgiveness does not mean that the demands of justice must be set aside.

"If it is to be effective, this reconciliation has to be accompanied by a courageous and honest act: the pursuit of those responsible for these conflicts, those who commissioned crimes and who were involved in trafficking of all kinds, and the determination of their responsibility. Victims have a right to truth and justice" (21).

It is with a similar concern for the demands of justice, that the Pope condemns the plunder of Africa's resources as immoral and unjust (24) and also calls for more just international relationships, noting that what the

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<sup>15</sup> Proposition 14, Second African Synod.

world owes Africa is not charity but more just political and economic structures:

“Justice obliges us ‘to render to each his due’ ... It is an issue, then, of rendering justice to whole peoples. Africa is capable of providing every individual and every nation of the continent with the basic conditions which will enable them to share in development. Africans will thus be able to place their God-given talents and riches at the service of their land and their brothers and sisters” (24).

Even as *AM* insists that the demands of justice must be met, justice is not an end in itself. Justice must always be inspired and directed by charity – not charity as “almsgiving” (a charity which fails to respect justice and rights of all is false [18]), but as *caritas*, which is the very essence of God.<sup>16</sup> *Caritas*, *AM* notes, not only establishes our bond with God, “it also shows us what true justice is in the act of Christ taking upon himself the faults of sinful humanity so that we may receive in exchange the blessings which is God’s gift (Gal 3:13-14)”. In a beautiful reflection on the story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), Benedict notes that it is this justice of love that must infuse and open up our love of justice to a new horizon. “Divine justice,” he notes, “indicates to human justice, limited and imperfect as it is, the horizon to which it must tend if it is to become perfect” (25). Additionally,

“The social horizon opened up by Christ’s work, based on love, surpasses the minimum demands of human justice, that is to say, giving the other his due. The inner logic of love goes beyond this justice, even to the point of giving up one’s possessions” (28).

If reconciliation, forgiveness and justice go hand in hand, a vision of reconciliation must constantly press beyond the “love of justice” towards the “justice of love”. The latter is grounded in forgiveness, involves sacrifice, and seeks the salvation of the wrongdoer.

### **Thesis Six: Reconciliation Requires the Church**

The church is not only needed in the pursuit of a just and peaceful society, but reconciliation is at the very heart of the life and mission of the church. *Africae Munus* notes various contributions of the church in Africa: her service in the fields of education, healthcare and communications; her defence of human rights and dignity; her outreach in offering relief and protection to those in need; and her action as sentinel in making “heard the silent cry of the innocent who suffer persecution” (30). However, significant as these various contributions are to the building of a just social

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<sup>16</sup> The theme of *caritas* is at the heart of Pope Benedict’s theology. In *Deus Caritas Est*, his very first encyclical as Pope, Benedict explores this essence of God, manifested in God’s trinitarian nature, in the work of creation and redemption, and in the church as a community of love.



order, they are not the primary reason why reconciliation needs the church – otherwise the church would not be different from an NGO. It is precisely with this danger in mind that AM cautions priests against reducing their ministry to one of advocacy or social service: “to yield to the temptation of becoming political leaders or social agents would be to betray your priestly mission and to do a disservice to society, which expects of you prophetic words and deeds” (108).

Since reconciliation is an invitation into the story of God’s new creation, the church’s primary role is to point to and be a constant reminder of the story of new creation made possible by God’s reconciliation. In one of the most moving testimonies of the synod, Sr Uwamariya, reflecting on her experience of meeting and forgiving the person who killed her father during the Rwandan Genocide in 1994, captured this unique and essential role of the church:

“From this experience I drew the conclusion that reconciliation is not so much bringing together two people or two groups in conflict. Rather it means re-establishing each into love and letting inner healing take place, which then leads to mutual liberation. And here is the importance of the church in our countries since her mission is to give the Word: a Word that heals, sets free and reconciles.”<sup>17</sup>

This unique mission of the church – “to give the Word that heals, sets free and reconciles” – permeates the text of *AM*. Even when Benedict notes the church’s role as peacemaker, agent of reconciliation, and herald of justice, he adds a reminder that “the Church’s mission is not political in nature. Her task is to open the world to the religious sense by proclaiming Christ” (23). Living out that role requires first and foremost that the church becomes the first witness and exemplar of the gift of the Word that heals, sets free and reconciles. The church is a sign and sacrament of that gift. Speaking about peace, the Pope notes:

“True peace comes from Christ. It cannot be compared with the peace that the world gives. It is not the fruit of negotiations and diplomatic agreements based on particular interests. It is the peace of a humanity reconciled with itself in God, a peace of which the Church is the sacrament.” (30)

The practical import of these observations is to suggest that the church’s worship and liturgical practices, her prayer and sacramental life, as well as the scriptural disciplines of mediation and proclamation of the Word, are essential practices through which the church herself is pointed to, receives, and celebrates the gift of God’s peace. These practices are therefore the primary and irreplaceable practices through which the church builds peace. To be sure, they are not the only ones. But unless all other efforts are grounded in, reflect, and are nourished by the church’s own experience of a

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<sup>17</sup> As cited by Paul Bere, “The Word of God as Transformative Power in Reconciling African Christians”, in Orobator, *Reconciliation, Justice and Peace*, 48.

“peace which the world cannot give”, those efforts become an endless and futile attempt to be socially relevant, and eventually lose the essential dynamism to sustain them.

It is also this realization of the church as sign and sacrament of reconciliation that constantly places the church’s own witness under critical scrutiny. This is what *Africae Munus* is pointing to when in calling for ecumenical dialogue it notes that the “path to reconciliation must first pass through the communion of Christ’s disciples. A divided Christianity remains a scandal, since de facto it contradicts the will of the Divine Master” (89). This realization also means that the neat laity-clergy divide, as well as the exclusion of women from full participation in the church’s ministerial and administrative leadership within the Catholic Church, remain issues around which critics will keep pressing for more efforts and actions to promote reconciliation *within* the church.<sup>18</sup>

### Conclusion

My goal in this exploration has been to make explicit the conviction that reconciliation is not simply a pastoral programme, among many, but the lens through which the church understands her identity and mission in the world. The post-synodal Exhortation *Africae Munus* reinforces this conviction, and thus provides a very timely set of pastoral guidelines and recommendations for the mission of the church in Africa in the twenty-first century. A key assumption behind our discussion has been that a full appreciation of reconciliation as a paradigm for mission requires a framework which not only makes explicit the unique gift that reconciliation is, but also highlights the non-negotiable elements of that gift. In our discussion we have pointed to five such elements: story, lament, hope, justice and forgiveness, and church. In exploring these elements, our goal has been to highlight the gifts, practices and disciplines that sustain a vision and practice of reconciliation. The more immediate objective of our discussion has been to show that within this framework the 2009 synod and the Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus* make a historic and highly valuable contribution to the recovery of reconciliation as a unique gift and invitation – a way of seeing and living in the world.

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<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Theresa Okure: “Church-Family of God: The Place of God’s Reconciliation, Justice and Peace”, in Orabator, *Reconciliation, Justice, and Peace*, 13-24: “The church must not only be God’s agent proclaiming reconciliation, justice and peace to the world, but a body that visibly lives, incarnates, and models this divine reconciliation” (15).

# RECONCILIATION WITH GOD – ITS MEANING AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR MISSION

Tormod Engelsen

## 1. Introduction

In this chapter I will attempt to outline why humans have a need for reconciliation with God, how this reconciliation takes place, and what the consequences are for mission as ministry of reconciliation. In doing so, I am indebted to my own Lutheran and evangelical theological heritage, but I am convinced that this heritage is something that has universal significance.<sup>1</sup> I had the privilege of working with theologians and missiologists of different church traditions in producing the ecumenical document “Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation”<sup>2</sup> (MMR) that was prepared by the World Council of Churches (WCC) Commission on World Mission and Evangelization (CWME) for the mission conference in Athens in 2005 which had as its main theme the prayer, “Come, Holy Spirit, Heal and Reconcile”, with the subtitle, “Called in Christ to be reconciling and healing communities”, thereby indicating both the pneumatological and Christological basis of reconciliation and healing.

## 2. Reconciliation as a Major Theme in Contemporary Missiology

Reconciliation is commonly seen as existing in three major dimensions: the vertical dimension (reconciliation with God), the horizontal dimension (reconciliation between humans), and the circular dimension (reconciliation with the physical and spiritual cosmos or the universe).

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<sup>1</sup> In a lecture at the University “Lucian Blaga” in Sibiu, Romania, at a conference commemorating the work of Romanian missiologist Ion Bria in 2009, I emphasized the ecumenical significance of the doctrine of reconciliation with God (the “vertical” reconciliation) as a basis for reconciliation between humans (the “horizontal” reconciliation). Parts of the content in this chapter is taken from this lecture that was published as Tormod Engelsen, “Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation in the Bible and Contemporary Missiology”, in *The Relevance of Reverend Professor Ion Bria’s work for contemporary society and for the life of the Church*, co-ordinated by Nicolae Mosoiu (Sibiu: Editura Universitatii “Lucian Blaga”, 2010), 135-54.

<sup>2</sup> See “Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation”, in *“You Are the Light of the World”*: *Statements on Mission by the WCC 1980-2005* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2005), 90-126. Cf also Jacques Matthey’s chapter in the present volume.

The MMR document elaborates how a focus on the ministry of reconciliation, “a vocation of the church described by St. Paul in 2 Cor 5:18, shapes the content and method of mission, and what scope and significance it gives to mission”.<sup>3</sup> The document claims that since the early 1990s reconciliation has grown in importance both in ecumenical, social and political ethics as well as in missiology. It is exemplified by the WCC decade to overcome violence 2001-10. It has also been a major theme in conferences of various denominational ecumenical bodies, e.g. the Lutheran World Federation<sup>4</sup> and in evangelical ecumenical fellowships such as the Lausanne movement and the World Evangelical Alliance.<sup>5</sup>

One may argue that reconciliation is a theme that spans the whole spectrum of churches and theological positions. But as with other important common concepts that seem to be used by missiologists of quite different theological persuasions, such as *missio Dei* and the *kingdom* or *reign of God*, reconciliation may also be given different meanings, or the emphasis may be placed quite differently within the three dimensions of reconciliation. In this chapter on reconciliation we will base our deliberations on some of the valuable work that has been done in this area, yet add some critical perspectives.

Since the late South African missiologist David Bosch introduced paradigm theory as a framework for analyzing major themes in missiology,<sup>6</sup> it has become customary to speak of various paradigms of mission. The MMR and several other authors claim that reconciliation is an “emerging paradigm” of mission since the late 1980s and early 1990s.<sup>7</sup> The reason why reconciliation has received such a prominent space in missiological thinking is, among other factors, the preponderance of conflicts around the world. The MMR points to “clashes of cultures, religions, economic interest and genders, which leave a legacy of hurt and grievances”.<sup>8</sup> The Cape Town Commitment points to the same reality when it says, “Some things we face give us grief and anxiety – global poverty,

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<sup>3</sup> MMR, 90.

<sup>4</sup> *Mission in context: transformation, reconciliation, empowerment: an LWF contribution to the understanding and practice of mission* with editorial assistance from Jack Messenger (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> The theme of the Lausanne III conference in Cape Town in October 2010 was “God in Christ, reconciling the world to himself”. In the official document from the conference, *The Cape Town Commitment* (CTC) reconciliation plays a prominent role, cf. *The Cape Town Commitment* (Bodmin: The Lausanne Movement, 2011). References to the *Commitment* here are to numbers and letters in the text, not to page numbers. See also Tormod Engelsviken, “Forsoning og enhet i en splittet verden” (“Reconciliation and Unity in a Divided World”), in *Misjon til forandring*, edited by Rolf Ekenes, et al (Skjetten: Hermon Forlag, 2011) 108-19.

<sup>6</sup> David Bosch: *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991).

<sup>7</sup> MMR, 92.

<sup>8</sup> MMR, 92-93.

war, ethnic conflict, disease, the ecological crisis and climate change.”<sup>9</sup> All of these evils call for reconciliation. Yet, this chapter deals primarily with reconciliation with God. What do the two statements say about this aspect of reconciliation? Although there is an inner connection between vertical and horizontal reconciliation, as we shall see, there is also a profound difference. The human predicament is not the same, nor is the remedy. Let us first look at the human predicament.

### 3. The Human Predicament

The basic human predicament that calls for reconciliation with God is the alienation of human beings from God. The cause of this alienation is human sin. The Lutheran Augsburg Confession expresses it in this way:

“...since the fall of Adam all human beings who are born in the natural way are conceived and born in sin. This means that from birth they are full of evil lust and inclination and cannot by nature possess true fear of God and true faith in God. Moreover, this same innate disease and original sin is truly sin and condemns to God’s eternal wrath all who are not in turn born anew through baptism and the Holy Spirit.”<sup>10</sup>

This confessional statement emphasizes that human sin is not primarily a question of morality or of breaking concrete commandments, but one of relationship with God. It is a break with God that includes all human beings from birth.

It must be admitted that it is difficult to speak of God’s wrath today, since many understand wrath as an emotion which is diametrically opposed to love which is the basic characteristic of God. However, God *is* love (1 John 4:8). It belongs to his very essence, while God’s wrath is not part of his nature. It is his holy reaction against and judgment upon human sinfulness, which again is a result of his zeal for communion with human beings. Everything that separates God and humans is under the judgment of God. So also are human beings as long as they are not reconciled to God through Christ.

This view of the basic human predicament is also espoused by the document from the CWME Athens conference in 2005.

“The human predicament that creates the need for reconciliation with God is the alienation from God that is due to human sin, disobedience to and break of communion with God, resulting in guilt and death, both spiritually and physically (Rom 3:23; Eph 2:1-3). This enmity between God and human beings was overcome through the death of Jesus on the cross. ‘When we were

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<sup>9</sup> CTC Preamble.

<sup>10</sup> Article 2 in the Augsburg Confession, in *The Book of Concord*, Robert Kolb and Timothy J Wengert (eds) (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 37-38.

enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son' (Rom 5:10)."<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, the Cape Town Commitment, under the subtitle "Unchanged Realities", states that "some great truths provide the biblical rationale for our missional engagement". The first of these is:

"Human beings are lost. The underlying human predicament remains as the Bible describes it: we stand under the just judgment of God in our sin and rebellion, and without Christ we are without hope."<sup>12</sup>

This is developed further in the CTC Confession of Faith:

"Human beings rebelled against God, rejected God's authority and disobeyed God's Word. In this sinful state, we are alienated from God, from one another and from the created order. Sin deserves God's condemnation. Those who refuse to repent and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ will be punished with eternal destruction and shut out from the presence of God (2 Thess 1:9)".<sup>13</sup>

This view of the human predicament clearly reflects the biblical view of human beings apart from Christ, as for instance it is expressed in Eph 2:1-3.

"You were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath."

In this text from Ephesians, the human predicament is also related to slavery under evil spiritual forces, from which human beings also are set free through the redemption in Christ (cf Col 2:15). It should also be noted that this radically negative view of human beings describes their relationship to God apart from Christ. It is not a general statement that human beings have no capacity for good in the area of inter-human relations or in relation to creation.<sup>14</sup> It is also important that the description of humans in Eph 2:1-3 is immediately followed by a strong emphasis on God's love and mercy leading to salvation by grace through faith (Eph 2:4-5, 8).

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<sup>11</sup> MMR, 17, in Matthey (ed), *You Are the Light of the World*, 99.

<sup>12</sup> CTC.

<sup>13</sup> CTC, Confession of Faith, 8A. In the CTC Confession of Faith 2B, there is also an explicit reference to the wrath of God. Cf also Article 3 in the Lausanne Covenant.

<sup>14</sup> CA XVIII.

#### 4. God's Historical Act of Reconciliation

First of all, it has to be emphasised that reconciliation has its source in God. It is the triune God who is the initiator and author of reconciliation. MMR says that "reconciliation is the work of the triune God bringing fulfilment to God's eternal purposes of creation and salvation" (Col 1:19-20, 2:9).<sup>15</sup> The unity of the Trinity and the mutual love between the three persons Father, Son and Holy Spirit, express the very nature of community, and it is God's purpose to draw us into his love and unity as well as to create love and unity among his people (John 17:20-23, 26).

The church father Irenaeus said that when the Trinity turns towards the world, the Son and the Holy Spirit become the two arms of God by which humanity was made and taken into God's embrace.<sup>16</sup> It is thus through the work of the incarnate Son and by the mediation of the Spirit that reconciliation with God is realized.

The major biblical texts on reconciliation are found in the epistles of the apostle Paul, especially in 2 Cor 5:17-20, Romans 5, Colossians 1 and Ephesians 2. (Greek: *katallage*, reconciliation, four times: Rom 5:11; 11:15; 2 Cor 5:18, 19; *katallasso*, reconcile, 6 times: Rom 5:10, 2 Cor 5:18-20; *apokatallasso*, reconcile, three times: Eph 2:16; Col 1:20, 22.)

According to the Swedish theologian Agne Nordlander, whose book *The Mystery of the Cross* I refer to in this biblical section, reconciliation is the overarching concept used to explain the saving significance of the Cross.<sup>17</sup>

Reconciliation always involves two parties which are in conflict with one another or alienation from one another. This conflict may be *unilateral*, where one party is angry with or alienated from the other, or *reciprocal*, where both parties are angry with or alienated from each other.

It is a matter of contention among exegetes whether reconciliation between God and humans should be regarded as unilateral or reciprocal. All seem to agree that it is the sin, disobedience and rebellion of human beings that – as we have seen – cause the alienation or conflict between God and human beings. The human attitude towards God is characterized by lack of faith and by enmity (Rom 5:10; 8:7; Col 1:21; Matt 12:34). Some scholars do not, however, place any hindrance on the part of God for communion between God and human beings. This is characteristic of the so-called subjective theory of atonement.<sup>18</sup> In contrast to this, I would strongly argue, however, that there is also something on the part of God that prevents communion between God and humans. It was God who in the

<sup>15</sup> MMR, 96.

<sup>16</sup> Miroslav Volf: *Exclusion and Embrace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 128 (referring to Irenaeus' *Against Heresies* 5,6,1).

<sup>17</sup> Agne Nordlander: *Korsens mysterium* (The Mystery of the Cross) (Uppsala: EFS-Förlaget, 1982) 152-78.

<sup>18</sup> On the theories of atonement, see the classical study by Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement*. Trans. AG Hebert (New York: Macmillan 1969).

biblical story of the Fall expelled the first couple from the Garden of Eden and God's immediate presence (Gen 3:23-24).

The conflict must therefore be seen as reciprocal. We have already touched on the reason for this: Human sin offends God, it violates his holiness, and it provokes God's just judgment. The New Testament uses the term "the wrath of God" about God's judging reaction against sin (Rom 1:18-20). Although it must be said that in general in the New Testament God is not the object of reconciliation but the subject – that is, the one providing reconciliation – there is clearly, prior to reconciliation also on God's part, something that prevents peace and communion between God and human beings. This is expressed in 2 Cor 5:19, where it is said that "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, *not counting men's sins against them*". This must mean that without or before reconciliation God actually *did* count men's sins against them, but that this was changed by God through Christ's work of reconciliation. Human beings *without* Christ are therefore under the *judgment of God* because of their sins.

Reconciliation as it is portrayed in 2 Cor 5:19-21 is a process that spans the time from Christ's death until the present. It can be said to have three main stages.

The *first stage* is *historical* and *was finished* by God alone through Christ: "(God) reconciled us to himself through Christ" (18), "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ" (19, and 21 which also speaks of the historical work of Christ without using the term reconciliation). From the context in 2 Cor 5:14-15 it becomes clear that this reconciliation took place when "one died for all and therefore all died" (14). The Pauline term that Christ "died for us" is a reference to the sacrificial, substitutionary death of Christ for us human beings. We cannot in this chapter discuss the whole theology of sacrifice in the Old and the New Testament. We need to say, however, that the death of Christ, the breaking of his body and shedding of his blood, is seen as a sacrifice to God that removes guilt and restores the broken relationship between God and humans. It is expiation, removal of the guilt of sin, by the sacrifice of the life of the holy and blameless Son of God, Jesus Christ, in John 1:29 called the Lamb of God, in our place. He is our paschal lamb. In the liturgical worship services in churches all over the world we are reminded of this in the *Agnus Dei* in connection with the Eucharist: "The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world".

The death of Christ on the Cross is therefore the basis for reconciliation with God. It is this that makes it possible for God both to be the just judge and at the same time the one who removes the guilt and the judgment through his love and grace (Rom 3:23-26; 5:8-11).

It has been argued convincingly that the term "die for" (e.g. 2 Cor 5:15) is a technical term for the substitutionary death of Christ. The death of Christ can be seen as propitiation, turning away God's judgment on rebellious human beings:



“This enmity between God and human beings was overcome through the death of Jesus on the cross ... On the cross the Son of God freely gave his life as an atoning sacrifice for the sins and guilt of the whole world ... Through Christ’s substitutionary death “for us” (Rom 5:8; Gal 1:4) *reconciliation has been achieved once for all*, leading to forgiveness of sins, communion with God and new life in God’s kingdom. This is all by the grace and love of God.”<sup>19</sup>

The Cape Town Commitment expresses the same in this way:

“We love because God first loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins (Confession of Faith, Part 1, 1) ... In his death on the cross Jesus took our sin upon himself in our place, bearing its full cost, penalty and shame, defeated death and the powers of evil, and *accomplished the reconciliation* and redemption of all creation” (Confession of Faith Part 1, 4A4).

The Augsburg Confession also ties reconciliation to Christ’s death:

“He is true God and true human being who truly “was born, suffered, was crucified, died and was buried” in order both to be a sacrifice not only for original sin but also for all other sins, and to *conciliate God’s wrath*.”<sup>20</sup>

## 5. The Present Act of Reconciliation

Although Christ’s death and resurrection represent a finished reconciliation in the sense of removing the cause of alienation, reconciliation is still a process that continues down through history until today through the ministry of the church in mission. The church is sent to the world with the message of reconciliation. This is the second stage as it were, corresponding to 2 Cor 5:19-20: “He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God was making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.” This is reflected in MMR when it states:

“God’s work of reconciliation with human beings was not finished on the cross and in the resurrection; it goes on through history in the ministry of reconciliation that has been entrusted to the church. Based on the reconciliation effected in Christ’s death and resurrection and on God’s behalf, the church challenges and invites all people to be reconciled with God.”<sup>21</sup>

As God’s reconciliation through Christ in history is being proclaimed through the ministry of the church it is realized in the present. The message presupposes that humans are in fact not yet reconciled with the triune God until they hear the message of reconciliation and receive it. The proclamation or witness of the church may take many forms – in word and sacrament, in service and sign. Basically, the church in its proclamation of

<sup>19</sup> MMR, 99.

<sup>20</sup> *The Book of Concord: Augsburg Confession*, Article 3, 38.

<sup>21</sup> MMR, 101, cf also MMR, 105, para 33.

the gospel is acting on God's behalf, together with God, and with his authority, as ambassadors of God relating to people in their concrete situations. The mission of the church is actually included in God's own work of reconciliation. This "message of reconciliation" and its result, the full salvation in the kingdom of the triune God, is the very content of mission. "For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!" (Rom 5:10). A mission that speaks and acts with regard to reconciliation between humans, but fails to proclaim reconciliation with God is a truncated mission that will never accomplish God's ultimate purpose: the salvation of all into his present and coming kingdom.

The *third stage* of reconciliation then is the personal reception of this offer of reconciliation that is presented through the mission of the church. "This offer of reconciliation is received and becomes a personal reality through faith (Eph 2:8)."<sup>22</sup> This reception is done in repentance and faith. In the Lukan writings, conversion is described as repentance and forgiveness. "The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things" (Luke 24:46-48). On the day of Pentecost Peter encouraged his listeners to "repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). Repentance and faith in Christ are two sides of the same coin (cf Acts 11:17 and 15:7-9, where faith is emphasized with reference to baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit).

Without attempting to establish a rigid order of salvation (*ordo salutis*), it is clear that reconciliation with God which is a gift offered fully by grace, does require a human response. This response would consist in *repentance* (Greek: *metanoia*), including *confession* of sin (1 John 1: 9-10), and *faith* in the gospel of Christ (Acts 16:15, 31). It also includes the sacrament of *baptism* as an initiatory rite uniting the believer with Christ and joining him or her to the church (Rom 6:1-7; Acts 2:41).

The result of this response is *forgiveness of sins, the removal of that which caused the alienation from God*. Human sin was not forgiven on the Cross and in the Resurrection of Christ where the atonement took place; it is forgiven when the gospel is received in faith. As the Augsburg Confession formulates it:

"Furthermore, it is taught that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin or righteousness before God through our merit, work or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God out of grace for Christ's sake through faith when we believe that Christ has suffered for

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<sup>22</sup> MMR, 101.

us, and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us.”<sup>23</sup>

Here both the very act of faith and the content of faith are emphasized. Forgiveness of sin is not, however, the ultimate goal of reconciliation. It is the prerequisite for the communion with God that may be expressed in many different ways, e.g. as the righteousness of God (2 Cor 5:21), as the Kingdom of God (Matt 5:3; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 18:16-17, 24-30), as eternal life (John 3:16), as peace with God (Eph 2:14-18), as the redemption and renewal of all of creation (cosmic reconciliation, Col 1:19-20; Rom 8:19-22), and as a mutual love relationship with God. The Cape Town Commitment has chosen to frame the whole statement in love language. This includes God’s love for us, our love for him, and our love for other human beings and for the whole of God’s creation.<sup>24</sup> A reconciled people of God will live out their new relationship with God in a love communion with him in this world and in all eternity in the new creation.

## **6. Reconciliation with God as the Basis for Reconciliation between Human Beings**

In Ephesians 2 Paul emphasises the unity in Christ which is the result of the fact that both Jews and Gentiles have been saved by grace through faith. Preceding St. Paul’s description of how the enmity of Jews and Gentiles, the “dividing wall of hostility”, has been destroyed, and reconciliation achieved both in relation to God and each other (Eph 2:14-18), he emphasizes the common basis of the salvation of both Jews and Gentiles: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves – it is a gift of God” (Eph 2:18). The same is said in Romans 5:1-2 where “peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (= reconciliation with God) is achieved “by faith”. This reconciliation issues in a new creation: “We are God’s workmanship, created in Jesus Christ to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Eph 2:10). “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come” (2 Cor 5:17). Only as communion and peace with God have been established and humans have started to lead the new life, created by God, doing good works, growing in holiness and Christlikeness is the work of reconciliation realized as much as it can be realized in this broken and sinful world. The reconciliation with God through the Cross of Christ, a reconciliation that is shared by all believers, breaks down the wall between Christian Jews and Gentiles, and therefore also all other walls of hatred and enmity between Christians. It should be impossible to be reconciled with God, and at the same time be enemies. Through the Cross God has created one new man out of the two (Eph 2:15-17).

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<sup>23</sup> *The Book of Concord*, Augsburg Confession, Article 4, 38, 40.

<sup>24</sup> See the CTC, Part 1.

This intrinsic relationship between being forgiven by God, and forgiving others, is brought out many times by Jesus himself. It is expressed in the Lord's prayer: "Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matt 6:12), and in the parable of the unmerciful servant, which ends on a very serious note (Matt 18:21-35).

### **7. The Church's Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation with God**

In the light of what we have said about reconciliation with God, the church in its mission as ministry of reconciliation should not assume or take for granted that all human beings are reconciled with God. Neither should the church in mission omit or neglect the invitation to reconciliation with God and only emphasize the horizontal reconciliation between humans, important as that is. It should be a priority of Christian mission to convey the message of reconciliation with God through Christ, in word and deed, with the intention that all people may come to faith in Christ, be joined to God and his church through holy baptism, and live the new life as a new creation in witness, service and spiritual growth. Where the church fails to have this missionary intention, the mission of the church is a truncated mission. The church would then fail to live out its essence as a missional church, sent to the world with the gospel of reconciliation.

The church in mission does have as its task to work for reconciliation in the world also between parties who do not confess or practise the Christian faith (as many chapters in this book movingly describes). Christians are called to be "peacemakers" (Matt 5:9), and that would apply to any context or situation of conflict. Yet, it is important to distinguish between the sources and motivations for reconciliation among Christians and among non-Christians, among people inside and people outside the church. While we do believe that the triune God is active also outside the church, we cannot assume that the Spirit of Christ works in the same way among those who have not received him as among the "household of God", those who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The unity and love of the church in Christ is a testimony to a world which does not believe or have the same unity and love (John 17:21-23). In this way the Christian's reconciliation with God and with each other across all human borders may serve as an inspiration and as a model for the work of reconciliation in the world.

### **8. Cosmic Reconciliation with God**

The biblical notion of a cosmic reconciliation may be difficult for modern people to grasp. The main reason may be that the worldviews of some contemporary cultures are so far removed from that of the Bible that the biblical texts are rendered almost unintelligible. It seems to me that it is the Orthodox churches that often have been best able to integrate this universal

or cosmic vision in their theology, including both the natural and bodily dimensions as well as the supernatural and spiritual dimensions.

It is Colossians 1:19-20 that most explicitly deals with cosmic reconciliation: "For God was pleased to have all his fulness dwell in him and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross." We notice again that the primary focus is on reconciliation with God, and that it takes place through the death of Christ. What is more difficult to ascertain is exactly what or who is being reconciled. We may understand this in the light of Colossians 2:15 and Romans 8:38-39 where the victory of Christ over the "powers and authorities" on the Cross are emphasized, as well as the deep confidence that nothing in creation can separate God's children from the love of God in Christ. But it may mean even more than this, and be connected to the "groaning of the whole creation" in its bondage to decay but with hope of liberation and redemption (Rom 8:20-23). Reconciliation and redemption do not apply only to humans but to the whole of creation, the whole of the cosmos. This perspective may be of utmost importance in a time of globalization and ecological concern. I would like to close by quoting the Cape Town Confession:

"The Bible declares God's redemptive purpose for creation itself. Integral mission means discerning, proclaiming, and living out, the biblical truth that the gospel is God's good news, through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, for individual persons, and for society, and for creation. All three are broken and suffering because of sin; all three are included in the redeeming love and mission of God; all three must be part of the comprehensive mission of God's people."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> CTC, Part 1, 7A.

# THE MEANING OF GOD’S “HESED” WITHIN MISSION AS RECONCILIATION

Cephas T.A. Tushima

## Introduction

In today’s world, people are globally linked so that local practices increasingly become globalized and global phenomena are localized. This is being propelled by the growth of information and communication technology (ICT) that is drawing global communities into the so-called “global village”. Nevertheless, the superfluity of information in the globalizing world also accentuates awareness of differences, thereby creating situations of tension, conflict and combat. The World Council of Churches (WCC) Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) captures this tension well.

The centripetal forces of globalization are accompanied by centrifugal forces of fragmentation, which are being felt ever more acutely. This fragmentation is being experienced at personal, national and international levels ... Peoples who have lived together for generations can no longer stand one another. Cultural and ethnic identities are being used to oppress other identities. “Ethnic cleansing” and genocides are taking place in many parts of the world, bringing immense suffering, increasing hatred and setting the stage for further violence towards humankind and creation.<sup>1</sup>

Such fragmentation tends to generate an acrimonious “see-saw” of attack and counter-attack, and revenge and counter-revenge. Those of us who live within the 10/40 Window, which in the 1990s was projected as the place populated with the largest concentration of unreached peoples, are also now plagued with a sense of it being a strip of strife and violence. In this context, the temptation to hate and accentuate alterity becomes greater. It is in view of all this that the churches and WCC’s recent stress on mission as reconciliation<sup>2</sup> becomes a pertinent call to re-examine our

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<sup>1</sup> *Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation*, CWME Preparatory Paper No. 1 for WCC Conference in Athens, May 12-19, 2005; [www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/mission/m-e-in-unity.pdf](http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/mission/m-e-in-unity.pdf), accessed May 17, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Reconciliation is central to the Christian gospel, in which it refers to God’s redemptive work through the self-giving of his Son to secure reconciliation between God and humanity, within the human community, and between humanity and its habitat.

mandate as a Christian church. In this paper, I will explore the meaning of the biblical concept of *hesed*, which occurs over 245 times in the Bible,<sup>3</sup> and how it is at the core of our identity as a people of God vis-à-vis our task of loving our world and actively seeking to be reconciled to it as well as reconciling it to its Creator. I will use both biblical-theological and case study approaches in carrying out this study.

### ***Hesed* in the Hebrew Bible**

The first major work to address *hesed* in modern times is Nelson Glueck's dissertation, published in 1927. In this seminal work, Glueck understands *hesed* to presuppose an existent relationship, concomitant with which are responsibilities and obligations. He defines the term as "conduct in accord with a mutual relationship of rights and duties, corresponding to a mutually obligatory relationship: ... principally: reciprocity, mutual assistance, sincerity, friendliness, brotherliness, duty, loyalty and love".<sup>4</sup> Glueck closely connects *hesed* and *bērit* such that for him, the former is the essence of the latter.<sup>5</sup> In doing this, Glueck stands upon the shoulders of earlier scholarship. For instance, he quotes approvingly S.R. Driver's definition of *hesed* as "a quality exercised mutually among equals".<sup>6</sup>

Glueck's emphasis on obligation and mutuality in *hesed* has been criticized. Edwin M. Good, taking Glueck's covenantal situation of *hesed*, points out the incongruence between the enriched appreciation of biblical covenant brought about by a better understanding of ancient Near Eastern (ANE) covenants and the mutuality emphasized by Glueck in his conception of the close connection between *hesed* and *bērit*. He writes: "[C]onsidering the covenantal context of Glueck's discussion, we should have to ask whether recent comparisons of biblical covenant formulations to Hittite vassal treaty forms suggest that *hesed*, as the action appropriate to covenantal relationships, may be action between sovereign and subject and hence exactly not between equals."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See EA Heath, "Grace", in T Desmond Alexander and David W Baker (eds), *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2003), 372 [this dictionary will subsequently be referred to in this essay as *DOTP*]; and DA Baer and RP Gordon, "dsx", in Willem A Van Gemeren (ed), *Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, Vol. 2 (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996), 211 [this dictionary will subsequently be referred to in this essay as *DOTTE*].

<sup>4</sup> N Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible* (Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 1967), 55.

<sup>5</sup> Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible*, 47.

<sup>6</sup> Samuel Rolles Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy* (ICC; New York: Scribner, 1895); as cited in Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible*, 74, note 32.

<sup>7</sup> Edwin M Good, A Review of *Hesed in the Bible*. By Nelson Glueck. Trans Alfred Gottschalk, Elias L. Epstein (ed) with introduction by Gerald A Larue (Cincinnati,

Several other works have appeared since Glueck's publication. Whereas some have followed Glueck's path, others have differing emphases. Among those who have followed in Glueck's tradition of linking *hesed* and *bērit* is N.H. Snaith, who writes that apart from "the prior existence of a covenant, there never could be any *hesed* at all".<sup>8</sup> Katharine Doob Sakenfeld reduces the stress on mutuality in Glueck, though the covenant retains prominence in her work. She recognizes that *hesed* often occurs in relationships between non-equals, in which a superior works to deliver and protect another in accordance with the terms of the covenant the former entered into with the latter. In her conception, there is moral responsibility, but it is not a binding obligation that is legally enforceable.<sup>9</sup> Gordon R. Clark<sup>10</sup> approaches the term synchronically. He critiques previous works on the topic for being one-dimensional and giving little attention to linguistic science. Clark's study explores the meaning of *hesed* in relation to other lexemes within its semantic field. While arguing that *hesed* is not adequately translatable into the English language, he points out that its essential sense is intricately linked with *'emet* and *'ēmūnāh* (i.e. truth and faithfulness), which entrenches in *hesed* "a deep and enduring commitment, ... [and] this commitment is at the core of Yahweh's covenantal relationship with his people".<sup>11</sup> H.J. Stoebe questions the close association of *hesed* with *bērit* and the notion that the term contains the idea of legal obligation. Instead, he stresses the association of *hesed* and *rahāmīm* (mercy, kindness), with which it frequently appears in the Bible.<sup>12</sup> Robin Routledge points out that Stoebe interprets *hesed* as "goodness or kindness which goes beyond what one may expect or deserve, and which has its sole basis in a willing generosity towards others".<sup>13</sup>

In the light of this debate, we can conclude that *hesed* is closely connected with such terms as *hānan* (grace: Gen 19:19; 39:21), *'emet* (truth: Gen 24:27, 49), *'ēmūnāh* (faithfulness: Ps 100:5),  $\chi\delta\alpha\theta$ <sup>TM</sup>

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OH: The Hebrew Union College Press, 1967), in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 89.1 (1969), 179.

<sup>8</sup> Norman H Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (London: Epworth Press, 1944), 95; as cited by Gerald A Larue, "Introduction: Recent Studies in *Hesed*", in Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible*, 8.

<sup>9</sup> Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The Meaning of hesed in the Bible: A New Inquiry* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1978), 233-37; as discussed in DA Baer and RP Gordon, "Dsx," *DOTTE*, 211.

<sup>10</sup> Gordon R Clark, *The Word Hesed in the Hebrew Bible* (JSOTSup 157; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993).

<sup>11</sup> Gray Long, *A Review of The Word Hesed in the Hebrew Bible*, by Gordon R Clark (JSOTSup 157; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993) in *JNES* 58:1 (1999): 68.

<sup>12</sup> HJ Stoebe "Die Bedeutung des Wortes *häsäd* im AT", *VT* 2 (1952) 244-54; as cited in Robin Routledge, "*Hesed* as Obligation: A Re-Examination," *Tyndale Bulletin* 46.1 (1995): 179-96.

<sup>13</sup> Robin Routledge, "*Hesed* as Obligation: A Re-Examination," *Tyndale Bulletin* 46.1 (1995), 180.



(righteousness; Ps 33:5; 85:10-12; Hos 10:12), *rahāmim* (mercy: Ex 34:6; Neh 9:17), *'ahāb*<sup>TM</sup> (love: Deut 7:7-9; Jer 31:3), and *bērīt* (covenant: Deut 7:9; 1 Sam 20:8). Thus, it is almost impossible to define *hesed* by itself. It has to be understood within its web of interconnectedness with all these other terms. It is on this note that Heath observes that because it is not possible to translate it with a single word, "Usually a composite of English words is used: grace, mercy, compassion, steadfast love and so on. *hesed* is the disposition of one person toward another that surpasses ordinary kindness and friendship; it is the inclination of the heart to express 'amazing grace' to the one who is loved."<sup>14</sup> Baer and Gordon similarly note the hearty nature of *hesed* when they state: "It is commonly used of the attitudes and behaviour of humans toward one another, but more frequently (ratio 3:1) describes the disposition and beneficent actions of God toward the faithful, Israel his people, and humanity in general. The phrase 'the kindness of the LORD/God,' as it occurs in 1 Sam 20:14; 2 Sam 9:3, represents, at least formally, an intersection between these two planes of human and divine *hesed*."<sup>15</sup>

*Hesed* in the Bible, therefore, has two fundamental operational agents, namely, the divine and the human. With divine agency, it encompasses God's loyal and faithful commitment to showing mercy, grace, goodness, and love to his people that is manifested in his mighty acts of deliverance on their behalf and in his doing all that is necessary for their well-being. Indeed, the priority of divine initiative in showing *hesed* on account of God's innate compassionate loving heart is demonstrated by God being the agent in 75% of all appearances of *hesed* in the Bible.<sup>16</sup> Thus, *hesed* is not contingent on the merit of God's people and is even prior to any covenantal relationship. Indeed, it might be said that *hesed* is the ground upon which covenant is built and sustained (Jer 31:3; cf Deut 4:37; 7:6-8; 10:15), and therefore often goes beyond the boundaries of covenantal obligation. Writing on this, Elaine Padilla begins by setting out the operational pattern of ANE covenants, and notes: "In ancient times, a covenant conveyed the idea of a treaty in which there were two parties that were bound by it. If one of these parties failed to fulfil its obligations, the other party would be excused from fulfilling the contract."<sup>17</sup> Yet, as demonstrated by the book of Hosea, God's love superabundantly goes beyond covenant obligation because God keeps alive his unflinching loyal love (*hesed*) for his people, in spite of their covenant unfaithfulness (Hos 2:16-3:1; cf Neh 9:18-19, 31; Ps 106:43-46; Is 54:4-10; Jer 3:12; 31:20; Micah 7:18-20). Padilla further

<sup>14</sup> DOTP, 372.

<sup>15</sup> DOTTE, 211.

<sup>16</sup> Cf Long, *A Review of the Word Hesed in the Hebrew Bible*, 68.

<sup>17</sup> Elaine Padilla, "'The Love that Never Fails' – *Hesed* and Covenant in Hosea", *The Living Pulpit* (July-September 1995): 16.

observes: “Hosea portrays how the divine *hesed* – the unfailing love of God – goes beyond the norm and, in a way, contrary to the legal expectations.”<sup>18</sup>

The human agency with respect to *hesed* is a function of the response of the human heart to its benefaction from divine grace. God’s *hesed* is a well-spring of interminable loving-kindness. It is expected to flow out of anyone who has drunk of it for the benefit of the human community and its environment. This theme we explore further below.

### The Implications of *Hesed* in the Human Context

The often unsolicited divine *hesed* anticipates a corresponding response in its human beneficiaries. Such response is multi-dimensional: It is expected to affect human relations with God, relationship within the human community, and then human relations with the environment. The mutuality in the nature of *hesed* that many (e.g. Glueck) write about might be found not in the equality of the covenantal partners, but in the implicit reciprocity of loyalty and kindness. This expectation is well captured in the biblical words “To the graciously loving (*hAsid*) you will show yourself graciously loving (*tithasād*)” (2 Sam 22:26). It is in view of this that Baer and Gordon write, “Even if it is difficult to determine the precise source of this *hesed*, whether divine or human, the point of mutuality of response/behaviour remains clear: *hesed* is intended for those who know the Lord (Ps 36:10[11]), for those who fear him (103:11, 17), and for those who pray and love his precepts (119:149, 159).”<sup>19</sup>

Solomon, for example, in both of his prayers recorded in the Bible, portrayed the symmetry of this reciprocal *hesed* relationship. First, he reminds YHWH that he has manifested his *hesed* to his servant David, because David had proved himself as being in the right with YHWH (1 Kgs 3:6). We need to recall here God’s reminder of his many acts of loyal and gracious love to David, which included exalting the latter from being a shepherd to being a king; YHWH’s abiding protective presence, deliverance from and annihilation of all enemies; bestowal of a great name; and YHWH’s fulfilment through David of his promise to choose a place for his name, to secure Israel in the Promised Land, to give deliverance and rest from all enemies; and the bequest of an eternal Davidic dynasty (2 Sam 7:4-17). David’s immediate response is that of worship, adulation, and prayer (2 Sam 7:18-29). This was expected to undergird David’s life henceforth, which is why, at the Bathsheba debacle, YHWH reminisced about this kindness in his reproof of David (2 Sam 12:7-8). In this prayer, Solomon recalled David’s faithfulness and loyalty (*hesed*), on account of which he saw God’s further acts of loyal love to David, including Solomon’s own elevation to the throne. This whole pattern assumes the

<sup>18</sup> Padilla, “*Hesed* and Covenant in Hosea,” 16.

<sup>19</sup> DOTTE, 16.

form of a cycle of divine *hesed* generating human commitment of loyal love and faithfulness, which in turn makes room for a further demonstration of divine *hesed* and so on. This is reflected in Solomon's second prayer, in 1 Kgs 8:23 (cf Ex 20:6; 34:6-7; Deut 7:9; Ps 25:10).

The cyclical nature of *hesed* in the divine-human relationship is also evidently at work in human relationships. A good example of this is found in David's desire to deal kindly with (show *hesed* to) a newly crowned Hanun, son of Nahash, the Ammonite king. When David heard of Nahash's death and the ascendancy of his son, Hanun, he said, "I will show gracious loyal love ('*ē'seh-hesed*) to Hanun, just as his father showed gracious loyal love to me ('*āsā 'āhīw'immādī hesed*)" (2 Sam 10:2). The initial gracious act of loyal love on Nahash's part was now stimulating a desire to show a corresponding gracious act of loyal love from David to Nahash's son, which was truncated by the neophyte king's counsellors.

The overflow of *hesed* in the human community is not just restricted to a mere principle of reciprocal equivalency, but instead ought to operate on the principle of superabundance. According to the principle of superabundance, the persons who have shown *hesed* may in turn receive *hesed* beyond what they gave and from persons who never profited directly from the initial *hesed* shown by the current beneficiaries. A good example of this is found in the story of Ruth. The first mention of *hesed* in this riveting story occurs in Ruth 1:8, where Naomi prayed that YHWH would show loyal love (*hesed*) to the young widows, just as they had done to their late husbands and to her. She specifically prayed that the Lord would grant them security in the homes of new husbands. This motif would then become a dominant theme in the book. In the encounter of Ruth with Boaz, the manifestation of the superabundance principle came to full light. In analyzing this narrative, Russell Jay Hendell identifies in it five forms of *hesed* (what he calls acts of kindness-charity). These include "verbal kindness" (2:4, 8-12; 3:10-11; 4:11-13); "social kindness" (Ruth 3; Ruth 1:14-18; 2:11; 4:14-17); "vocational kindness" (Ruth 2:8-9; 15-16, 19-22); "reputational kindness" (Ruth 3:4; 4:10; 4:1-6); and "justice kindness" (Ruth 3:4; 4:10).<sup>20</sup> Instead of repeating Hendell's complete analysis here, I will just highlight elements of the superabundance principle of *hesed* in Boaz's vocational kindness to Ruth. Hendell observes that in Jewish teaching there is a "notable 'kindness-charity-ladder' in which providing a person with a means of livelihood is a higher level of kindness than giving gifts of charity".<sup>21</sup> In Boaz's encounter with Ruth, he acknowledges the *hesed* that Ruth had shown to Naomi since her bereavement, which included Ruth not abandoning Naomi, but instead she forsook her own parents and people, she came to dwell with a people foreign to her – a

<sup>20</sup> Russell Jay Hendell, "Ruth: The Legal Code for the Laws of Kindness" *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 36:4 (2008): 254-60.

<sup>21</sup> Hendell, "Ruth: The Legal Code for the Laws of Kindness," 255.

people who were even forbidden from welcoming her (Ruth 2:11; cf Deut 23:23). Thus Boaz, who had not personally profited from the *hesed* that Ruth showed to Naomi, proceeded to offer Ruth vocational kindness, providing for her not just a gift of grain for that day but a perpetual place for gleaning (Ruth 2:8-9).

Boaz, not simply content to provide work opportunity for Ruth, was determined to ensure that she had a conducive working environment. His action shows that he was acutely aware that the quality of the work environment carries equal weight in the assessment of the worth of a job. On this, Hendell observes: "It follows, that kindness requires not only providing a job, but providing a dignified job environment."<sup>22</sup> It is this dignified work environment that Boaz offers Ruth by:

1. Inviting Ruth to glean perpetually in his own field;
2. Telling her to stay close to the young women working for him – to ensure she is not subjected to sexual harassment by the male workers;<sup>23</sup>
3. Charging the young men not to harass Ruth;
4. Telling her to feed and drink from their food and water sources; and
5. Instructing the young men to allow her to harvest even from the standing crop and to drop harvested sheaves for her to retrieve (Ruth 2:8-9, 14-16).

Clearly, Boaz went beyond the ordinary and broke the conventions of the day to ensure that Ruth and Naomi's needs were met in a dignified way.

Speaking about *hesed* in this manner does not eliminate its mutuality and reciprocity, which is also well represented in the Bible. Among the many examples of this are the deal between Joshua's spies and Rahab (Jos 2:12-14); the deal between the spies of the Joseph tribe and the man from Bethel (Judges 1:24-26); the failure of the Israelite to show *hesed* to the family of Gideon (Judges 8:35, as is documented in Judges 9); Saul's kindness to the Kenites in view of their own *hesed* to the Israelites in the Exodus era; and Jonathan's plea for *hesed* from David for his family in view of the *hesed* he had shown David (1 Sam 20:13-17). This goes to show that God values faithfulness to established social and contractual obligations and holds people accountable for them (cf Amos 1:9-10).

On the spiritual plane, the experience of divine *hesed* ought to result in testimony within the covenant community to God's covenantal loyal love, which could take the forms of worship, praise and thanksgiving (Ps 48:1-10; 63:1-7) as well as proclamation of his goodness, in the worship

<sup>22</sup> Hendell, "Ruth: The Legal Code for the Laws of Kindness," 256-57.

<sup>23</sup> It is interesting that in reporting her day's experience to Naomi, Ruth subverts Boaz's word: whereas Boaz said stay close to my young women, Ruth reports that he told her to stay close to his young men. At this, Naomi unwittingly repeats what Boaz had told Ruth, to stay close to the young women (Ruth 2:19-22). It shows that Naomi, like Boaz, was concerned that Ruth would have a conducive work environment.

assembly, so others also would come to know of it (Ps 40:1-5, 9-10; Is 63:7). God's goodness is intended to reveal him to humankind, and so those who experienced it have an implicit duty to bear witness to it so as to make him known (Ps 40:1-3), and to cause his people to place their trust in him (Ps 22:22-24; 34:1-4; 71:8, 15-24; 105:3-6).

### ***Hesed* and Reconciliation in Missions**

The mission of the church is to follow *missio Dei*. Since the Fall, humanity has been hiding from God (Gen 3:9-10), or, perhaps, God has been hidden from humanity, on account of the severance of the relationship between God and humanity due to sin (Is 59:1-15; Micah 3:4). One of the greatest aspects of *magnalia Dei* is God's self-disclosure to humankind. This is not an end in itself, but a means of reconciling humanity to God for human redemption. Thus, it becomes imperative for those who have tasted of God's *hesed* to both testify to it in the congregation of the faithful and to bear witness to it in declaring God's redemptive grace among the nations. There are various approaches to carrying out the witness-bearing among the nations.

The first of these is what I call "logomorphic proclamation",<sup>24</sup> which is the centre to which all witness-bearing must gravitate. It consists of the oral declaration of God's redemptive work. The entire Bible is filled with both the summons to engage in, and exemplify, logomorphic proclamation of *magnalia Dei*, as can be seen in Ps 96:1-3; 105:1-2; 138:2; 89:1-2; Ps 67:1-4; 98:1-3; Isa 12:4-6; Dan 6:26-27; Matt 3:1-12; 4:17; 10:7; Acts 1-4; 13; 17. Even though logomorphic witness has of late fallen into disrepute, especially in the post-modern Western world, it cannot be dispensed with. The church must find creative ways of removing the offences of logomorphic approaches of past generations without removing the offence innate in the gospel.

Second is what I call "*hesed* witness-bearing". Having tasted of the redeeming grace of God, we ought to allow it to become an up-welling fountain that overflows in kindness and compassionate deeds of charity that touch lives in ways that provide further opportunity for logomorphic witness (John 7:37-39; Matt 5:16; Isa 58:6-12). The outworking of *hesed* witness-bearing operates on the principle of superabundance, reaching out in loving-kindness to a needy world. As seen in the example of Boaz above, its mode of operation is based on neither repaying a debt of kindness nor anticipating recompense from its recipient. It is not limited to charitable giving (mere philanthropy), which only addresses the symptoms of social disjunctions that bring impoverishment and suffering. It attacks the problems at their roots. Instead of just giving people hand-outs for daily survival, people are handed the means of livelihood. The church must move

<sup>24</sup> This term has the basic idea of proclamation in word form.

from mere charitable giving to seeking the economic empowerment of the poor: she must seek to break the cycle of dependence, and work toward the economic independence of the people she serves. This does not mean that charity and philanthropy have to be dispensed with altogether. These ought to be the first steps of the people-helping work of the church; they are needed to address immediate and basic human needs that people face (e.g. homelessness, hunger, disease, nakedness, etc.). However, we must aim at moving beyond remedial work to truly enduring transformation of lives that would have eternal ramifications. In other words, the church needs to redirect her efforts and resources from a predominant focus on tertiary prevention of poverty to secondary and, especially, primary prevention approaches.

Thirdly, to have enjoyed divine *hesed* is an invitation to cross-bearing witness. This is a call for the church to be Christlike, i.e. to step outside of its comfort zone, to stand with the oppressed and suffering, and to work for their liberation (as Christ stepped out of his Father's presence to be with us) as a means of reconciling them with their communities and, ultimately, with God. To stand with the oppressed could include charitable work (e.g. providing temporary shelter for displaced people). Cross-bearing witness could also involve advocacy; as Scripture demands (e.g. see 1 Sam 19:4-7; Prov 31:8-9; Isa 1:17), we must use our platforms appropriately to speak for those who have no voice in society. As the events of 1 Samuel 19–20 show, the best form of advocacy is one where there is collaborative effort between the advocate and the oppressed. Collaborative work between the advocates and oppressed might include crucial information-sharing and joint strategizing for common ends (cf 1 Sam 19:2-3; 20:1-4). Just like Jonathan, those who choose to take this path will have to be ready for the spears that may be hurled at them (1 Sam 20:33); but this is the way of the Cross – it is the way of honour. Cross-bearing witness could also involve working to remove societal structures of oppression. This often involves working for the legislative and judicial overturning of the oppressive structures in place that tend to inhibit the liberation and/or progress of the oppressed. It may entail a drive towards judicial reforms through legislative endeavours to bring about a just judicial system (Ex 18:14-22; Deut 1:16-17; 16:18-20) and/or spirited legal battles to overturn unjust laws or executive actions (cf Est 8:2-16 [contra. Est 3:10-13]; Ps 82:2-3; Isa 10:1-2; Jer 22:3, 15-16). And finally, standing with the oppressed in cross-bearing witness may mean engaging in rescue operations in order to set free the captives, say, of human trafficking and sex slavery (Job 29:7-17; Ps 82:4; Prov 24:11-12; John 8:2-10).

Fourthly, bringing God's *hesed* into the human community involves working for healing in broken communal relationships. As conflict, strife and violence, and their concomitant hatred and animosity, become endemic in contemporary societies, those whose lives have been touched by God's unfailing gracious love are needed as God's instruments of peace and love.

Frequently the causes of these conflicts (such as competition for power and control of resources) lie beyond the control of the average Christian or even the church. Yet, underlying it all is our common humanity and the commonality of our needs. The Christian, who chooses to engage in this endeavour, necessarily has to explore his community to know what the common needs are, and the avenues for getting the warring communities to begin dialoguing. The example of seeking communal and relational healing through acts of mercy in my own city of Jos will serve to illustrate this point.

For about a decade now, Jos, Plateau State of Nigeria, has been plagued with violent ethno-religious conflicts. Communities that once lived happily together have become sharply divided and bitterly embroiled in fratricidal tussles. Yet, in this tense situation, God still has his instruments of peace. Below I will narrate just one aspect of the rich ministry of Dr Neung Sung Lee around Jos.

Dr Lee, a South Korean, has been ministering in Nigeria for the past twenty-two years, in diverse ways, including capacity building for indigenous missionaries and in gospel outreach. Over the last seven years, he has been developing the Rhizha Retreat Centre and Prayer Mountain, near Jos. The land for the project was acquired in an area rife with bloody ethno-religious (Hausa-Fulani Muslim versus indigenous Christian) conflicts. Dr Lee quickly realized the great opportunity for ministry this location offers. Because he believes that the greatest protective fence around the centre is people, not walls, he set about developing relationships through service to the local communities – addressing the felt needs of both the Muslim and Christian communities around the centre.

However, beyond just the safety of the Rhizha Centre, Dr Lee felt the need to wage peace and work toward reconciliation and healing between the feuding communities. Because he has the skills to locate and channel natural spring water for domestic use, he identified lack of clean water as the common need across the ethnic and religious divides. He then began employing this as a way of forging co-operation between these communities that had been torn apart by vicious violence. In the villages inhabited by Muslims and Christians, both communities have found mutual security in working together, realizing that the fear of being poisoned by the other community is removed if they share a common reservoir at the watershed as well as a common overhead tank and common public taps from which they both drink.

In the joint water project, Dr Lee supplies the technical expertise and some materials, and the communities provide much of the needed labour, some materials, and meals for the workforce. To replicate this pattern of work elsewhere, developing trust is key. One has to learn tolerance, learn to reach out to the other side with love, so as to make the gospel visible to those who are in darkness. Dr Lee believes that Christians ought not to wait for all conditions to be conducive before shining their light. It is only where

there is darkness that light is needed, and where there is hatred that love can be shown.<sup>25</sup>

Finally, God's children must be like him. They, like him, must also bring their Father's *hesed* to all of creation. Indeed, creation was subjected to decay against its will, and so it has been waiting eagerly for the manifestation of God's children so it too will experience the liberty that God's *hesed* brings (Rom 8:19-22; cf Gen 3:17-19). In the place of animosity between humanity and creation, implicit in the Adamic curse, God promises peace and harmony (Hos 2:18; Job 5:23; Isa 11:6; 65:25). In energy generation, for example, God discourages the destruction of the environment for fuel but teaches recycling and, by implication, the use of renewable sources of energy (Ezek 39:9-10). Indeed, the tenor of Ezekiel 39:9-10 comports well with the drive toward turning nuclear power to energy generation rather than military usage. In the use of natural resources, YHWH insists on sustainability (Deut 22:6-7; 20:19-20). As God promises (in Hosea's prophecy) the renewal of his *hesed* to his people (note that several of the key terms associated with *hesed* are mentioned, cf Hos 2:19-20), so he shows how his renewal of mercy to his people will have implications on the environment as well (Hos 2:21-22). All of these eventuate towards humanity's enjoyment of the natural environment for sustenance, pleasure, and communal recreation (Gen 2:8, 16-17; 1 Kgs 4:25; Ezek 34:25; Micah 4:4; Zech 3:10; 8:12).

### Conclusion

Much as information and communication technology (ICT) and social networking media are fostering a tendency toward a global culture, especially among the younger generations, they also in some regards create a heightened awareness of differences, and serve as ready tools for spreading hate and violence. It will take those who have truly been transformed by God's unfailing loyal love to overlook past injustice suffered and reach out to touch and transform other lives from the superabundance principle of God's love. Such overflow of gracious loving-kindness will issue in exuberant worship of God; testimony to his goodness amongst believers; and witness to a needy world by words and deeds of charity-kindness, standing with the poor and oppressed, actively seeking healing in broken communal relationships, and the care of the natural environment. These constitute the mission of the church today.

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<sup>25</sup> Based on an oral interview I conducted with Dr Lee in April 2012.



# RECONCILIATION AS RECONSTRUCTION OF A WOUNDED AND UNJUST SOCIETY

Rose Dowsett

## Introduction

How does God's word help us to understand the nature of true reconciliation? For reconciliation to be deep and lasting, it is important for us to grasp God's analysis of the problem and remedy. Without it, our attempts will not be worthless, but will not address the deepest issues, and reconciliation is likely to be fragile, vulnerable and superficial.

So what are the foundations we need to have in place? This paper attempts to explore some of them. Then there are reflections on three spheres of human relationships that are too often marred by fractures: across genders and within families; across social divides; and across ethnic and religious divides.

## Starting at the Beginning

Reconciliation begins in the heart of God. At the very beginning of time, at Creation, there was perfect harmony between God and human beings, and between all the different elements of the created world. This is the clear picture of Genesis 1 and 2, and however poetic the language we should not lose sight of that perfection. God could say with delight that all that was made was "good, very good". It was his pleasure to walk in perfect communion with his creatures. To human beings, uniquely made in his own image, he gave the task of stewarding – caretaking on his behalf – this wonderful world.

No wonder that there is a deep-seated awareness in the human psyche that the world as we know it is not as it should be, that something has gone terribly wrong. How much more does the triune God himself know that his creation is far from what he first made in all its perfection.

At the other end of God's Word, St John's sublime visions recorded in the book of Revelation describe a perfected and renewed world, restored to harmony between the nations, and between every part of the created universe. At the heart of it all is the throne of God and of the Lamb. From the throne flows the water of life and nearby stand the trees of life, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations. And, writes John, "Blessed are

those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city” (Rev 22:1-2, 14). The work of Jesus Christ, supremely through his death as the Lamb of God and his resurrection, is the gateway to the presence of God, face-to-face, and in reconciled mutual joy.

This, too, is poetry, describing the indescribable, that which we can only imagine and have not yet seen with our eyes or experienced in our lives. Yet, within that poetry is eternal truth which resonates with the longing of our hearts. The suffering, war-torn world we know is not the last word. It is right that we should long for a world where justice prevails, where there is no more hunger and sickness and want, where people live at peace. This is God’s vision, too. The triune God who conceived and birthed Creation is committed to its absolute re-creation.

Does that mean that we write off this world as beyond redemption, and simply wait till such time as we “die and go to heaven”? By no means! To be sure, it will only be in the final consummation that every last vestige of sin and fallenness, with all their destruction, is swept away. But that does not mean that we simply sit back and wait. On the contrary, God loves this world, flawed and fallen though it is, and we must love it, too. Throughout all of history, God has constantly made initiatives to draw people back into relationship with himself, and to hold us accountable for what we do with his world. From Genesis 3 onwards, he seeks out the sinner, in grace and longing. His desire for restored relationships embraces not just people but the whole of creation: “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them” (2 Cor 5:19) and “God was pleased to have all his fulness dwell in him [Jesus Christ], and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross” (Col 1:19-20). As the one sinned against, it is God himself who takes the initiative to achieve reconciliation.

That is why we need to recognise that reconciliation begins in the heart of God. It will come to its triumphant final fulfilment in the new heavens and new earth to which we look forward in faith. In the meantime, how should we reflect God’s heart?

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### **The Unregenerate Human Condition**

We need to begin where God begins, with a true and honest grasp of the reason why reconciliation is necessary. It is not very fashionable these days, in the West at least, to speak of “sin”, certainly not to speak of sin as a fundamental and universal condition of the human heart. Yet both Old and New Testaments, from Genesis 3 onwards, consistently show this to be the reality. No other explanation is radical or deep enough, and no other explanation makes sense of the biblical teaching about the person and work of Christ. If we do not believe God’s diagnosis, we shall not accept his

remedy. Whether we read Genesis 3 literally or symbolically, here is teaching that human disobedience, and rebellion against the absolute authority of God, led to consequences of cosmic significance that have left all relationships in every sphere of creation out of order. The biblical description of our natural (i.e. unregenerate) relationship with God is one not simply of being less friendly than it should be but of his being actually at enmity with us. This is true of all humankind, not just some segments of it. That is stark and shocking, but it is the truth. Old and New Testaments bear witness: see for instance Isaiah 53:5-6, Psalm 51:5, John 1:29, Romans 3:22-26. It shows how crucial it is for us to face the awfulness of sin if we are to begin to grasp the reconciling ministry of Christ. God is love, but he hates sin. Biblically, sin is not some minor problem that can be overlooked or brushed away, or that doesn't really matter. In God's eyes, sin is intolerable.

The Lord Jesus Christ's life was not simply an example of a good life, though it was that; he is the one and only God-given solution to deal with the problem of our alienation from our Creator. Further, not only is Jesus the Prince of Peace, making enemies friends, he is also the one by whom and through whom people can be at peace within themselves, with their families and neighbours, with those different from themselves, and with the natural world. It is when we are reconciled to God through the Cross of Christ – vertical reconciliation – that we can move to deep-level reconciliation with others – horizontal reconciliation. As the Lord's Prayer reminds us, there is an intrinsic connection between being forgiven and being able to forgive others. And, in a fallen world of fractured relationships, forgiveness given and received is essential if there is to be healing and wholeness. Forgiveness liberates. Repentance and forgiveness opens the door to living differently, and to a future that is not chained by the past. We cannot rewrite history, whether personal or communal, but the reconciling grace of God offers the real possibility of putting that past behind us, and writing a different and better story in the present and the future.

Neither vertical nor horizontal reconciliation is automatically ours. Both Old and New Testaments record many incidents of those who rejected the proffered love of God, as well as many of those who responded in repentance and faith. Further, it is because true reconciliation has to be anchored in reconciliation with the God who made us and to whom we belong, that Christian evangelism must be an essential part of effective initiatives in reconciliation. This is not to say that no other approaches, by or amongst those of other faiths or none, have any value. It is simply to insist that full reconciliation cannot be separated from reconciliation with God, or from repentance and forgiveness. The gospel of Christ is urgent for all people, and unique in what it can accomplish.

It is important to have our foundations in place before addressing solutions, or at least our role within them.

### **The Church as Embodiment and Agent of Reconciliation**

God, who knows us intimately and by name, begins his reconciling work by reaching out to individuals. The Scriptures are full of examples. In the Old Testament, we read the accounts of Noah and Abraham, Moses and Jonah, Ruth and Naomi, and so many more, and identify with them because they are real flesh and blood people, not some undifferentiated humanity in the mass. Over and over again in these narratives of God's people of faith, God takes the initiative. Similarly, the Gospels record many personal encounters with Jesus, as he reaches out to people in grace and challenge. Acts and the Epistles likewise name names. These are identified individuals, diverse in circumstances, character and story, but sharing a common encounter with the living God.

But these individuals are not simply individuals. Drawn into the community of faith, they become members of God's family, reconciled to the Father by the work of the Son and reborn through the life-creating ministry of the Spirit. To this community is entrusted the message of reconciliation. This is not to be in words only, although it must include articulation of the message, but also in life and deed and character, demonstrating in visible form what reconciliation is and its consequences and demands.

After Pentecost, this community is the church. The church is not a social club. Sadly, many people, even some within our churches, certainly many outside, treat the church as little more than that: a gathering of people who happen to share some beliefs and behaviours in common, often with rather less passion and commitment than members of a football team (and their supporters). It is not that the church has no social dimension and responsibility. On the contrary, these are hugely important, both within and beyond the church. It is simply that this is not enough. One of the great mysteries of our faith is that the church is the body of Christ: the visible, pulsing organism called to incarnate the life of Christ in our present world. This essence of being, this incorporation into Christ's body, precedes all that flows from it: how we relate to God, to ourselves, to our brothers and sisters in Christ, and to the world, human and natural, beyond. The church, then, is to live out the life of God, in whose image we are created and being re-created, in his world.

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What does that look like? If we are to reflect – be the image of – God, then because he is love, we must love. Because he is truth, we must seek to understand and to live by that truth, and to challenge untruth wherever it is found. Because he is the just Judge, who cares passionately about justice, we too must be passionate about justice and angry in the face of injustice. Because he is Creator, we will be creative. Because he is Sustainer, we will care about all that brings health and life to our world, its peoples and its environment. Because he is holy, we will turn away from all that offends him and embrace all that delights him. Because he is the one true God, and the one and only Saviour, we will bring the Good News of Jesus by word

and life to the whole world. Because he is Healer, we will seek to bring healing to a wounded world.

All of these are the calling of the church together. Yet we cannot hide behind a vague “other” beyond ourselves as individuals. We are intimately part of the Body, therefore we are all equally bound up in obligation as well as privilege, even though our precise roles will differ, just as the different parts of the human body have different functions. As individuals as well as Christian communities, we are to live out the life of God.

Does that mean that the church as we know it today is the exemplar of that life, and specifically of reconciliation? Sadly, in the “now but not yet” tension in which we live, we struggle to reflect the loveliness of God, and there is too often a disconnect between what we profess (and indeed what we are called to) and the way we live. This is not a new problem. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus urged: “If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift” (Matt 5:23-4). Unresolved alienation from family or neighbour makes our worship unacceptable to God, because failure to be reconciled with others is an indication that we do not properly understand the grace of God in forgiving us.

Paul and Barnabas had a “sharp disagreement” as to whether or not John Mark was to be trusted on another missionary journey (Acts 15:36-41). There is no record of when or if Paul and Barnabas made their peace with one another, but at some point Paul must have been reconciled with Mark, because in his final imprisonment in Rome he could write to Timothy and ask him: “Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry” (2 Tim 4:11). Perhaps this personal experience of painful alienation from one who had previously been a dear friend, mentor and colleague, gives poignant depth to Paul’s plea that two women, Euodia and Syntyche, who had “contended at my side in the cause of the gospel” but who now apparently were at loggerheads with one another, should come “to agree with each other in the Lord” (Phil 4:2-3). When he hears that fellow-believers in Corinth are taking one another to court over disputes, he rebukes them strongly; he urges them at the very least to engage in mediation within the church community rather than undermining the credibility of the gospel through going to unbelieving judges (1 Cor 6:1-11).

The Christian community is called to demonstrate reconciliation at work. That work is demanding and difficult.

### **All One in Christ Jesus?**

Reconciliation is counter-cultural in every society in the world, even in those that pride themselves on being communitarian rather than individualistic. In some cultures, many of the fractures and tensions are

visible and open, as is the case in my own setting of the United Kingdom. In some cultures, where social harmony is a much vaunted value, as for instance in Thailand, fractures may be less visible, but a smiling face may hide a murderous heart, and every now and again antagonisms just below the surface erupt into violence. Authoritarian regimes such as Saudi Arabia, or allegedly democratic regimes in North America or Europe, equally struggle to keep their populations peaceful, and in different ways achieve it at least partially through power and control, including through military and police intervention. Political systems of any stripe do not deliver reconciliation between disparate parts of a population – different ethnic groups, rich and poor, the powerful and the powerless, different religious groups. At best, they may encourage some form of pluralist multiculturalism, and some measure of social stability, even some level of justice and well-being for the majority, but they do not deliver harmony, respect or love for one another across divides at any significantly deep level. Scratch the surface, and deep divisions, resentments, hostilities and grudges, appear. This is observable in communities of every religious belief and none. None is immune.

The New Testament has a great deal to say about breaking down barriers and building healthy, truly reconciled communities. The world of our Lord and the apostles was awash with law, both Jewish and Roman, in attempts to keep the peace. But, as the apostle Paul describes so powerfully in the early chapters of his epistle to the Romans, keeping the law – however scrupulously – on its own could bring neither peace with God nor harmony with others. For that, there has to be a deep transformation of the heart, based on new life in Christ. In turn, that new life has to be worked out in progressive transformation by the Spirit, as the disciple grows in repentance, faith and obedience. Then God's instructions become liberating rather than enslaving. Absence of war is not the same as reconciliation.

This transformed way of life is to be lived out in every dimension, personal, communal, social. It is subversive because it is counter-cultural. At the micro level, it is to transform relations between men and women, and within families. On a wider canvas, it is to transform social relationships, between rich and poor, between slave and free, between neighbours. Wider still, it is to break down ethnic barriers.

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### *Reconciliation across genders and within families*

Church history has sadly often masked quite how radical Jesus' treatment of women was, in a context where women had few rights if any and were at the mercy of every male whim. Jesus by contrast encourages Mary of Bethany to be taught by him on terms equal to any male disciple, instead of being limited to a domestic and subservient role. He shows the unfairness of punishing a woman taken in adultery while the man or men involved go free. He heals a woman with a gynaecological problem, and refuses to

endorse the practice of regarding her as unclean or that he has somehow been contaminated by her touch. He commends the faith of the woman who anoints him: she believes his insistence that he must be crucified, even though the disciples do not because their preferred agenda cannot absorb such an outcome. He entrusts to Mary that first astonishing revelation of himself following his resurrection, and sends her to announce it.

In all these and many other situations, Jesus not only affirms the individual involved, but also points the way to reconciliation between the genders, with prejudice and injustice swept away. This is profoundly counter-cultural, and vested interests of power were infuriated by him for it. Paul builds on this when he teaches that in Christ there is neither male nor female (Gal. 3:28), that is, both are of equal dignity and value in God's eyes. Both Paul and Peter develop the implications of this as they teach on marriage and family life, to be marked by mutual submission instead of domination of one by the other (Eph 5:21), sacrificial love instead of exertion of power (Eph 5:25), respect (Eph 5:33, 1 Pet 3:7), and focus on godliness rather than external beauty (1 Pet 3: 3-4). Within such a pattern, men and women can serve alongside one another in ministry, as the story of Priscilla and Aquila recorded in Acts 18 describes.

This is a very different mutuality and teamwork from that so often espoused by the radical feminist movement, which has often been confrontational between the genders, and been marked by a desire to assert rather than to serve, to gain power rather than to establish patterns of interdependence where each seeks to serve the best interests of the other. At the same time, the modern feminist movement has helped highlight areas of inequality and injustice that most urgently needed to be addressed. Within the church, it has contributed to the greater freedom for women in many parts of the world to use their gifts more fully, for the glory of God and the cause of the gospel, than was previously often the case.

It remains true, of course, that there are cultures and situations where women are exploited and systemically abused. This is contrary to God's design for shalom and well-being between men and women, and the Christian community should be at the forefront of advocacy to seek change in law and practice, to seek justice, and to care for those who suffer, wherever in the world it is needed. This will include fighting against prostitution and the sex trade in all its forms, and the often complex factors behind it. It will include positive advocacy and action to bring education and healthcare to women and girls, at least equally with men and boys. It may include setting up refuges for abused women; legislating against forced marriages (arranged marriages, with mutual consent, are different); campaigning against selective female abortion or infanticide, and female circumcision; punishing rapists.

Historically, the church has not always had a good record in these areas, although over the past century the modern missionary movement and the churches have become increasingly aware and active in seeking justice for

women and children in society way beyond the Christian community. Where abuse in any form remains within the church, it is a scandal. But by the grace of God the church has the resources to see deep level reconciliation among its people, as the Spirit transforms from the inside outwards in the lives of believers. For the wider world, the church may provide an example, and it may be a catalyst and advocate in seeking greater justice, and in seeking peace between warring parties. But it is doubtful whether truly deep reconciliation can be achieved outside of Christ.

The church is also called to model strong, stable and loving marriages, within which children can be raised. In much of the world, family breakdown is endemic, and sadly the church is not immune. There are many Christian initiatives to support and strengthen marriages, to mediate where there is conflict, and to care for children who are always wounded by parental discord. But there remain in almost every part of the world appalling numbers of children who are being wounded and damaged, neglected and abandoned, exploited or abused. Wounded children usually grow up to be wounded adults. Here is an urgent area for the church to seek to bring love and healing.

### *Reconciliation across social divides*

What about reconciliation across social differences? The Apostle James is outraged that the churches to whom he writes should even consider favouritism on the grounds of wealth and outward appearance (James 2:1-4), sure indicators of difference in social standing. One of Jesus' most condemnatory parables is in the story of Dives and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). Paul encourages Philemon to welcome his runaway but now converted slave, Onesimus, as a brother in Christ; and Paul himself, as a Roman citizen and Jew of high birth, can write warmly of Onesimus as his "son ... who is my heart ... a dear brother" (Philemon 10,12,16). It is hard to believe the proud pre-conversion Saul could have put privilege and pedigree behind him in this way. But, by contrast, he can say that in Christ there is neither slave nor free (Gal.3:28).

In today's world church, there are huge disparities between those situated in very wealthy societies and those in the poorest of the poor societies. Within some societies, there are shining examples of rich and poor worshipping together in one united fellowship, and with mutual respect; but equally there are too many examples of Christians being segregated along economic and social lines, reflecting instead of subverting the ways in which the wider society operates. It is not wicked to be rich, nor virtuous to be poor, contrary to Marxist teachings (though some Marxist leaders have managed to become exceedingly rich whilst their people have remained in acute poverty). However, a local congregation should be troubled if it does not embrace the social diversity of its setting,



or if influence in the church is controlled by those who are wealthiest or with highest professional status. Wealthy and poor alike are called by Christ to be generous, reflecting the prodigal generosity of God himself, and to express the loving care for one another that is a hallmark of discipleship. Gifting rather than social status should be the grounds on which men and women are appointed to roles in the church, including leadership and every form of service. Some Christians may conclude that the Lord is calling them to copy the post-Pentecost church in Jerusalem, and to live with “all things in common” and in community.

What of the church’s role in relation to wider society? Again, there will be a different quality to the level of reconciliation that can be achieved, outside of Christ, but that does not mean that nothing valuable can be gained. So, Christians have a responsibility to seek justice for all in the workplace, whether as employers or employees or simply as citizens. We should expose exploitation in whatever form it manifests itself – locally, nationally or globally. We should constantly challenge a world system where some can be obscenely and greedily wealthy while too many are too poor to feed their children. Some rich people are great philanthropists and do much good, but it’s hard to justify the staggering salaries now common in the entertainment world, among footballers, top-rank CEOs and bankers, for instance, and appalling when dictators divert the income from national resources for their own profligate aggrandisement. Seeking justice sometimes involves confrontation of evil, and condemnation of it, not simply mediation between different parties. Neither unchecked capitalism, nor unchecked socialism, can bring justice, and certainly not reconciliation, simply because of the fallenness of unregenerate human nature. Can the church model something radically different?

### *Reconciliation across ethnic and religious divides*

And then there is the issue of ethnic division. The Lord Jesus reached over ethnic barriers to minister to a Samaritan woman, a Syro-Phoenician woman, a Roman centurion, and many others. In this he was simply living out the Abrahamic covenant that the very reason for the establishing of God’s people was to bless the nations (Gen. 12:2-3). Peter’s prejudices had to be overturned in his encounter with Cornelius, and the Council of Jerusalem had to make a momentous decision as to God’s love for the Gentiles as well as for the Jews (Acts 10–11). It was hard to live that out – and today it equally is difficult for those of different ethnic backgrounds, languages and cultures, to break down barriers and be truly united. It is easy enough to come together for a conference, a task force or committee, but very much harder to establish, for instance, a truly multi-ethnic congregation where that would reflect the make-up of the local population.

In Europe (and elsewhere) immigration and people movements have led to a huge variety of ethnic groups living alongside one another. This

process was greatly accelerated in the last years of the twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first century. Sometimes those groups cluster together, sometimes they are more dispersed, but the host population is frequently inhospitable and suspicious. Ethnic difference divides rather than complements. Because the church is global, it should be uniquely equipped to demonstrate ethnic harmony within its ranks. In practice, what often happens is that congregations are formed along ethnic lines, and even within the same city may have little to do with one another, and little interest beyond their own community. This may also be exacerbated by denominational differences.

While there are understandable reasons why people like to meet in their own familiar language and culture groups, even in Christian communities, and perhaps especially where migration has been forced rather than voluntary, this may be a denial of the gospel, where barriers along racial lines are intended to fade away. Certainly, in a world where ethnically based conflict is widespread, leading to war, ethnic cleansing, barbaric cruelty and violence, the whole Christian community needs to take far more seriously the fundamental nature of the church as a reconciled multi-ethnic family. It is important to recognise that the Christian's core identity is that he or she is "in Christ", the child of the heavenly Father, and the home of the Spirit. This identity demands higher loyalty than any other, including national or ethnic, and is a bridge to healing across difference. This may prove to be one of the great challenges of the coming decades, as nations fragment along ethnic lines, and the pattern of the world is one of bitter confrontation between groups.

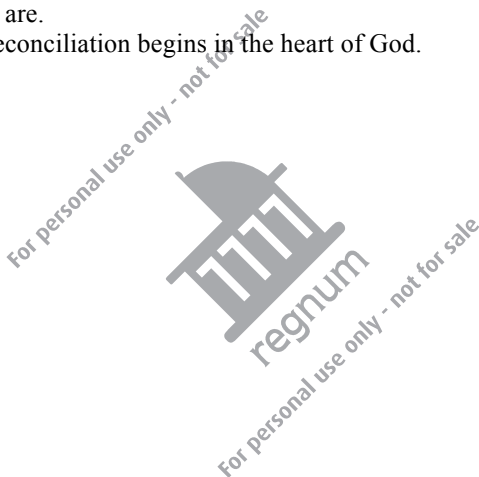
Such fragmentation and hostility is often compounded by religious difference, either between different factions and sects of the same religion, or between different religions, especially when identity and/or truth claims are bound up with religious faith. On the one hand, the Christian is not at liberty to water down the absolute truth claims that are at the core of biblical faith and of historic Christianity. All religions are not the same, and the historic and biblical claim is that Jesus Christ uniquely is Saviour and God. This has always led to confrontation and division as well as to reconciliation, as people have decided to accept or reject this truth. Jesus himself said that "I did not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matt. 10:34) and that response to him could tear families apart. Our right desire for peace and harmony should not blind us to this painful reality, and to seek peace at all costs can make the price too high, that of betraying the truth. On the other hand, it is important that Christians live as peaceably as possible with those of other faiths, looking for wise and courteous ways of exploring differences, and of sharing the gospel by word and life, affirming all that is good in another faith and, wherever possible, celebrating cultures that are different from our own. Further, Christians should seek to build bridges of understanding between different religious communities, and in

the face of secularism or Marxism or humanism to seek to explain the nature of faith and religion generically, not just of the gospel.

**And finally ...**

Between Creation and the final consummation of all things, we live in a world that is marred and distorted and wounded by human fallenness and the cosmic impact that that has had and currently still has. In its profoundest sense, according to the Scriptures, reconciliation is only possible through the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The church's high calling is to display that within its own body, but also to communicate urgently to a hurting world all that God has done, through the speaking and living of the gospel, pointing to the great healer and reconciler, and as those in God's image, to reflect those great divine initiatives in all that we say and do and are.

Truly, reconciliation begins in the heart of God.



# DIAKONIA IN CONTEXT: TRANSFORMATION, RECONCILIATION AND EMPOWERMENT

Kjell Nordstokke

## Introduction

Reconciliation has emerged as a core challenge and task for Christian mission in our time. This is clearly documented in this book. It is noteworthy that the theme of reconciliation is affirmed as central across confessional and theological positions, especially in recent ecumenical events and movements. Certainly, this is motivated by the significance of the theme in the New Testament and in Christian teaching. At the same time, it is evident that this also is due to a shared understanding of how mission work should be shaped in today's world.

The different chapters of this book show that reconciliation can be understood from many angles, which also implies different versions of conceptualizing it as concrete task and action. My entry point for reflecting on reconciliation is the understanding and practice of *diakonia*. The aim of this chapter is to describe reconciliation as a basic direction of diaconal work, and therefore as an integral part of Christian mission. My main point of reference will be the document *Diakonia in Context*, published by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in 2009.<sup>1</sup> As this document was formally received by the LWF Council, it has been granted a sort of semi-official status within The Lutheran Communion that counts 145 member-churches worldwide with altogether around 70 million members

In the first part of this chapter I shall present how reconciliation is conceived in *Diakonia in Context*. Next I shall elaborate further on this understanding relating to diaconal praxis and to some topics that appear to be crucial when engaged in processes of reconciliation.

A note of clarification: from the perspective of diaconal practice, reconciliation as a task may be performed at different levels, local or national, responding to situations of conflict, discrimination and use of violence. It encompasses a wide variety of action, from counselling families in conflict and addressing sensitive issues like xenophobia and racism, to intervention in order to establish peace and justice in countries

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<sup>1</sup> Lutheran World Federation, *Diakonia in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment. An LWF Contribution to the Understanding and Practice of Diakonia* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 2009).

that have suffered from politically motivated violence. The fact that religious conflicts are emerging in many parts of the world makes it evident that promoting mutual respect and understanding between people of different faiths must be considered a prime task in which churches should be involved through reconciliatory practices.

In this chapter the main focus is on the public role of being an agent of reconciliation at national or international levels, and on what it takes to carry out this task.<sup>2</sup> It is however important to note that there are links between diaconal work at the local congregational level and diaconal initiatives for reconciliation in the public space. My claim is that these links are fundamental in the sense that they foster attitudes of confidence and affirm moral authority. At the same time, they contribute to the development of diaconal competence and assets, to be used in reconciliation work at all levels.

Another introductory note on how churches use the term *diakonia*: Although this concept is gaining position in ecumenical circles and is commonly presented as the “responsible service of the gospel by deeds and by words performed by Christians in response to the needs of people”,<sup>3</sup> many churches have not yet included it in their vernacular. Instead, they use concepts such as “caring ministry”, “social ministry”, “social work” or even “development work”. Theologically, *diakonia* may be interpreted in different ways, and evidently any definition of the concept is influenced by tradition, which also is the case for the Lutheran churches where since the early 1830s this term has been used for church-based action in the area of health and social work. *Diakonia in Context* presents a rather open definition of *diakonia*, lifting up some fundamental assumptions: “One is that diakonia is a theological concept that points to the very identity and mission of the Church. Another is its practical implication in the sense that diakonia is a call to action, as a response to challenges of human suffering, injustice and care for creation” (EWF 2009:8).<sup>4</sup>

It should be noted that the term *diakonia* is absent in most ecumenical documents on reconciliation, even when the substance of *diakonia* is clearly present. Neither the Lausanne III document from Cape Town *A Confession of Faith and a Call to Action* from 2010, nor the Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus* of Pope Benedict XVI from 2011 refer to *diakonia* or related terms. The WCC document *Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation* from 2005 mentions *diakonia* once, in a rather superficial

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<sup>2</sup> Cynthia D Moe-Lobeda, *Public Church: For the Life of the World* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Nicholas Lossky, et al, *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2002), 305.

<sup>4</sup> *Diakonia in Context*, 8. For further discussion on *diakonia* as theory and praxis, see Kjell Nordstokke, *Liberation Diakonia* (Trondheim: Tapir, 2011).

way, merely as translation of “service”.<sup>5</sup> Although the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18) is frequently referred to in these documents, it is not mentioned that the Greek word for ministry here is *διακονία*, nor is this reflected theologically.

### *Diakonia in Context*

*Diakonia in Context* was produced as a follow-up to the LWF mission document, *Mission in Context*, which was received by the LWF Council in 2004 and published the following year.<sup>6</sup> Both documents strongly emphasize that mission is holistic and encompass proclamation, service (or *diakonia*) and advocacy.<sup>7</sup> As to the question of how to hold together the different dimensions, they also concur in highlighting three key concepts: transformation, reconciliation and empowerment.<sup>8</sup> All of them refer to practices that integrate a broad spectrum of seeing, judging and acting, and are thus open for holistic approaches to mission. At the same time, they point to “the eschatological reality of the in-breaking of God’s reign in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, anticipating its final fulfilment as the basis for transformation, reconciliation, and empowerment”.<sup>9</sup> In other words, the term “reconciliation” is from the very beginning viewed as powerful in terms of enhancing a holistic and integrated understanding of mission and of renewing methods of missional practice.

It should, however, be noted that although *Mission in Context* presents reconciliation as a key term, less than one page is used to elaborate on it.<sup>10</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:19 is the only biblical reference used: “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself . . . and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.” Instead of referring to the previous verse that introduces the term “ministry of reconciliation”, the expression “message of reconciliation” is in focus. This may convey a notion that reconciliation is a spoken message to be announced, and less something to do. But this does not seem to be the intention; by “message” a link is established to the fundamental aspect of reconciliation: “restoring the relationship between God and human beings”. This message is to be proclaimed and witnessed “through Christian living and *diakonia*”.

The main approach to the understanding of reconciliation in *Mission in Context*, however, is theological. In assuming responsibility for

<sup>5</sup> “*You Are the Light of the World*”: *Statements on Mission by the WCC 1980-2005* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2005), 117.

<sup>6</sup> Lutheran World Federation, *Mission in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment. An LWF Contribution to the Understanding and Practice of Mission* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> *Mission in Context*, 7; *Diakonia in Context*, 9.

<sup>8</sup> *Mission in Context*, 6; *Diakonia in Context*, 9.

<sup>9</sup> *Mission in Context*, 7.

<sup>10</sup> *Mission in Context*, 34-35.

reconciliation, the church takes its inspiration from Christ, “walking the way of the Cross”. Less is said about the contexts in which the church is expected to act as reconciler, or how such work should be undertaken. “The international sphere” is briefly mentioned, and there is a statement that “liberation and reconciliation go together” since they “require the implementation of restorative justice at the national and international levels, to allow victims of oppression and injustice to regain their human dignity”. The focus in this paragraph remains, however, theological – as is clearly stated in the concluding sentence: “Through this liberating reconciliation and reconciling liberation, the church initiates a process of transformation, anticipating the final reconciliation of all things in God’s eschatological reign.”

As *Mission in Context* did not go into a broader presentation of *diakonia*, but mainly stated its importance as an integral part of the church’s mission, the initiative was taken to produce *Diakonia in Context* to give a broader account of the theology of *diakonia* and also introduce principles and areas of diaconal action. In the course of 2006 to 2009 the LWF organized a number of workshops with the aim of bringing together experiences and insight from member-churches in their local contexts.<sup>11</sup> It became evident that all churches in one way or another are involved in diaconal service, whether this activity is named *diakonia* or not. The gift of faith will always motivate believers and congregations to engage in action when confronted by situations of need, suffering and injustice. There is a rich variety of forms of action and methods of organization, reflecting different contexts and church traditions; even so, all experiences testify to the fact that *diakonia* is an integral part of being the church in mission.

The LWF Diakonia Programme was brought to a conclusion through a global consultation held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in October 2008. In the message from this meeting, it is stated that in its objectives, *diakonia*:

- Seeks to uphold human dignity;
- Seeks to restore broken relationships and promote healing and reconciliation to communities;
- Cares for the integrity of creation;
- Denounces injustice but advocates peace and justice in keeping with its prophetic vocation; provides services to people in need;
- Seeks transformation for everyone involved.<sup>12</sup>

This way of describing the objectives of *diakonia* clearly indicates the centrality of reconciliation in all forms of diaconal activity. As *Diakonia in*

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<sup>11</sup> As Director of the LWF Department for Mission and Development from 2005 to 2009, I was responsible for organizing this process, and also for producing *Diakonia in Context*.

<sup>12</sup> Kjell Nordstokke (ed), *Serving the Whole Person. The Practice and Understanding of Diakonia within the Lutheran Communion*, Documentation 54, December 2009 (Minneapolis, MN: Lutheran University Press), 24.

*Context* states, together with transformation and empowerment, it is one of the basic directions of diaconal work.<sup>13</sup>

Also in *Diakonia in Context*, the concept of reconciliation seems to be treated rather briefly if we limit our focus to the sub-chapter entitled “Reconciliation”.<sup>14</sup> A closer look however shows that the concept is repeatedly referred to all through the document and functions as a key term for understanding *diakonia* both from a theological perspective and in relation to the context in which diaconal work is done.

The basic theological understanding of reconciliation is the same as in the mission document, emphasizing its nature at divine initiative and gracious gift:

“For Christians, reconciliation is God’s merciful gift grounded in the message that God has reconciled the world in Jesus Christ. This gift is a promise for a broken world, and *diakonia* seeks to witness to this promise through initiatives of furthering peace and reconciliation. As people of God equipped for mission, the Church is called to participate in God’s reconciling mission, beseeching people on behalf of Christ to be reconciled with God (2 Corinthians 5:19) and one another. Reconciliation first of all refers to God’s action, through which human beings have their relation to God restored. At the same time, restoration implies being transformed and empowered for ‘the ministry (Greek: *diakonia*) of reconciliation’. The concept of ‘*diakonia*’ clearly reminds us that the *diakonia* of Jesus, his way of unconditional presence among the poor, his prophetic defense of the excluded, his acts of healing, and last but not least, his announcement of forgiveness and new life under the promise of a new age to come, is the way for the Church to follow in its mission of reconciliation.”<sup>15</sup>

The first words in the quoted passage recognize that reconciliation does not belong to Christians only. Other worldviews, faiths and, above all, human experiences may motivate people to be engaged in processes of reconciliation, and thus contribute to a broader understanding of what we are striving for. There is no reason why Christians should become exclusive or arrogant, thinking that they are better qualified than others for the task of promoting reconciliation. Also, when sharing this task with people of other faiths, Christians must be aware of their distinct identity, how central the ministry of reconciliation is in their confession of Christ as Lord and Saviour, and consequently as an integral dimension of the mission that God has given the church.

Secondly, the memory of the mission of Jesus qualifies the way reconciliation is perceived by Christians: as unconditional presence among the poor, as prophetic defence of the excluded, as acts of healing, and as announcement of forgiveness and new life. The document reflects this as a

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<sup>13</sup> *Diakonia in Context*, 43.

<sup>14</sup> *Diakonia in Context*, 44-45.

<sup>15</sup> *Diakonia in Context*, 44.



diaconal perspective, as an imperative for conscious social intervention in order to promote processes of restoring justice and renewed relationships.

In this perspective, reconciliation always goes together with transformation and empowerment. It is only possible to speak about reconciliation if questions are raised whether situations of fear, injustice and marginalization have been overcome and people can testify that their lives have been transformed, and they themselves have been empowered to tell the truth of their history and where the process of reconciliation has brought them.

This relational or comprehensive understanding of reconciliation indicates that the concept should not be limited to a theological interpretation, but rather be seen in an interdisciplinary perspective. The text does not express this view explicitly, although it is elsewhere stated that diaconal praxis and consequently theoretical reflection must be interdisciplinary.<sup>16</sup> Reconciliation requires that the truth is revealed, and in complex situations of violence and oppression theology alone cannot provide the needed knowledge of what has happened and how to interpret opportunities for action. Various disciplines, from both social and human sciences, can contribute a better diagnosis of a conflict and its suffering. No discipline is able on its own to present a full picture of what is true, but when brought together, forms of insight may convey a more comprehensive understanding of complex conflicts and why different claims of truth should be listened to.

“In situations of violence and oppression, victims are not allowed to tell their stories, and real reconciliation cannot happen if the truth about the past is not revealed. When amnesty was declared in El Salvador after the years of brutal violation of human rights, it was on the condition that those held responsible for torture should go free. Thus the oppressor’s narrative was upheld as the official one, the one everybody is supposed to believe. How differently this was handled in South Africa after apartheid was abolished, and President Mandela appointed a Truth and Reconciliation Commission which was given the task of telling the true story of past years, for the sake for reconciliation and healing of wounds.”<sup>17</sup>

Engagement for reconciliation cannot ignore the question of power structures and political realities; this is another reason why it is impossible to limit reconciliation to theological discourses and to the ecclesial room. For the church, this calls for a readiness to move outside its own epistemological “box” and assume a role in the public sphere, communicating its reconciling mission among the plurality of worldviews and interpretations that make up society today, without claiming a hegemonic position, but acting as one among others for the well-being of all.

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<sup>16</sup> *Diakonia in Context*, 60 and 75.

<sup>17</sup> *Diakonia in Context*, 45.

Some may think that such a public task is too demanding, and would therefore prefer that the church stick to its religious role, withdrawing from reconciliation in its horizontal dimension, so to say, and instead concentrating on reconciliation in its vertical dimension, focusing on individuals' relationship to God, and possibly on reconciliation within the churches. In the perspective of *Diakonia in Context* such a conclusion would be a betrayal of the church's mandate to see its mission conditioned and challenged by the context in which the church is located, motivated by the example of Jesus Christ and the way his ministry was incarnated in real life.<sup>18</sup> Reconciliation both in its vertical and horizontal dimension continues to be a prime diaconal task and is as such an integral part of the mission of the church!

This clearly stated, the document also indicates certain guiding principles for *diakonia* when involved in the practice of promoting reconciliation.

“Truth is not always allowed to be told; it requires an environment of safety and mutual respect. In some cases, confidentiality has to be a part of that environment, as it also may happen that the truth may be abused for the sake of increasing hate and violence. This has often been the case of women telling the truth. On the other hand, their stories as voices of the vulnerable and silenced must be given special attention. Their stories may turn out to be the most powerful energizing processes of reconciliation.”<sup>19</sup>

As much as these observations point at elements that must be given attention in processes of reconciliation, they also hint at specific church-related assets that may add quality to diaconal work for reconciliation, such as safe space, mutual respect and confidentiality. In many contexts the church will be expected to offer such qualities and, in fact, examples can be given where the church possessing such assets has been able to contribute to a successful practice of reconciliation. How are such assets brought about, and how are they fostered in the life of the church? In another passage, under the theme *The Diakonia of the Table*, the document refers to hospitality as a hallmark of diaconal practice motivated by the example of Jesus and the biblical narratives on hospitality.<sup>20</sup> It is here emphasized that diaconal hospitality includes shelter to the homeless, orphans and widows, even persecuted people that are offered asylum. This is followed by a comment on sharing as diaconal dimension of table communion that may turn out to be “a privileged space” for reconciliation. The table allows people to meet face-to-face, with names and identities, with their stories and anxieties. The spirit of sharing constitutes new relations that more easily permit forgiveness and new beginnings. Because Christians

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<sup>18</sup> *Diakonia in Context*, 12.

<sup>19</sup> *Diakonia in Context*, 45.

<sup>20</sup> *Diakonia in Context*, 32-33.

themselves experience reconciliation at the Lord's Table, it motivates them for the church's ministry of reconciliation.

The main point here is that reconciliation is more than a theological term; it expresses the profound nature of being church and its diaconal lifestyle. From this perspective the church can be expected to offer spaces of hospitality and mutual sharing with a potential for transformation in the direction of reconciliation. This offer should be balanced by the acknowledgment that processes of reconciliation most often are very difficult: they are resisted and they require patience. Impatience may make some think that shortcuts can be made, for instance by scaling down the issue of justice and by not taking seriously questions of retribution and restoration when this is considered necessary. Another shortcut would be to understand reconciliation as a sort of repair of what went wrong, or just to minimize the negative consequences of a conflict. *Diakonia in Context* claims that reconciliation is only achieved when something new has been established: "It is in line with the Christian concept of reconciliation that it never takes people back to where they were before. Reconciliation is more than the removal of suffering for the victim and conversion for the oppressor. Reconciliation takes people to a new place; it empowers them for renewed relations and responsibilities."<sup>21</sup>

The patient commitment to processes of transformation, reconciliation and empowerment is inherent to the diaconal task of being a bridge-builder or a go-between. "A go-between needs the capacity to listen to different versions of a story, and to see why such differences emerge. Then there is necessity of really going between, of building bridges of understanding and acceptance. Again, this is related to communion building, of identifying processes of reconciliation and of inclusion."<sup>22</sup> Here, reconciliation work is clearly portrayed as social intervention, as capacity to communicate, and finding new ways together.

The document gives some examples of reconciliation work, both inside and outside the church. One is when the church leaders in Madagascar facilitated dialogue between the political leaders during the crisis in 2002, another when churches in the former German Democratic Republic provided an open space for people to meet and express their hope for a new time. The examples illustrate the potential of local churches to act in the public arena promoting peace and reconciliation, and to perform their ministry according to their distinct identity as churches and the mission given to them.

Summarizing this presentation of *Diakonia in Context*, we may say that the document aims at holding together a theological reflection on reconciliation and the understanding that reconciliatory initiatives must be contextual and reflect the social reality in which they are located. It may,

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<sup>21</sup> *Diakonia in Context*, 45.

<sup>22</sup> *Diakonia in Context*, 47.

however, be argued that churches are portrayed in a rather idealistic manner in *Diakonia in Context*; reality shows that many churches are not involved in reconciliation work, nor do they see the link between mission and *diakonia* in the way it is presented here. Further reflection is therefore needed, especially when it comes to grounding the distinctiveness of diaconal approaches to reconciliation, both in relation to theological reflection and to a context-conscious praxis. The following section is an attempt to elaborate on this issue.

### **Christian/Diaconal Assets in Reconciliation Work**

As already stated, diaconal work is interdisciplinary, also when engaged in reconciliation. It requires both theological reflection on reconciliation and contextual analysis of the reality in need of reconciliation, which consequently is a basic task when building diaconal capacity for reconciliation work.

One entry point in this endeavour is the broad consensus that reconciliation is an integral part of the church's mission. Reconciliation is understood to be a permanent task, not only in special cases of conflict, and conditioned by occasional factors. The ministry of reconciliation is on the one hand motivated by the fundamental experience of being reconciled by God in Jesus Christ, a message that clearly counts among the most precious gifts in the life of the church. On the other hand, this gift motivates and empowers for holistic mission, of which *diakonia* is an integral part. As God has reconciled the world in Christ, so also the people of God are called to participate in God's mission of reconciliation and healing in the world. Reconciliation can therefore not be limited to the vertical dimension of our relationship to God, nor can it be restricted to internal church-related issues and conflicts. The ministry of reconciliation is an imperative to embark on courageous mission and to assume demanding tasks in the midst of human conflict and suffering.

For Christians the concept of reconciliation encompasses the notions of being a gift and of being a task. It expresses a link between what we are and what we do as churches. A crucial question is then how this link is constructed and how it will orient the ministry of reconciliation. As Robert J. Schreiter has observed, there are different Christian understandings of reconciliation which in turn may lead to different concepts of what is meant by working for reconciliation. For Protestants,

“there is an emphasis on reconciliation as the result of Christ's atoning death and the justification by faith (...) this position has the advantage of seeing reconciliation in continuity with the saving acts of God through history, especially a theology of covenant. The Catholic emphasis would be slightly different, focusing on the love of God poured out upon us as a result of the

reconciliation God has effected in Christ. Here the emphasis is on the new creation.”<sup>23</sup>

According to Schreiter, the classic location for the first position is Romans 5:6-11, for the second it is 2 Corinthians 5:17-20. The fact that both *Mission in Context* and *Diakonia in Context* build their reflections on reconciliation on the passage from 2 Corinthians may indicate that the distinction between Protestants and Catholics is not that sharp; it may also be that ecumenical relationships have fostered an exchange of traditions and a broadening of views when reflecting on themes such as reconciliation.

Nevertheless, the two understandings continue to give distinct perspectives on how reconciliation is performed. When reconciliation is primarily understood as atonement, the religious or even cultic perspective easily becomes the more dominant, with the consequence that more attention is given to church-related rites and concepts, as for instance confession and forgiveness. Understanding reconciliation as an expression of the new creation in Christ opens for a wider range of perspectives and for human life as a multi-faceted reality. It may also be that the first understanding is more individually oriented; how is the sinner to be reconciled with God? The second reflects different kinds of relationship, including the one between humans. How can the promise of new creation in Christ be experienced in situations of people being marginalized and made victims of injustice and violence?

The link between reconciliation as gift and as task can, in other words, either be described in narrow theological terms, apparently restricted to the ecclesial space, or it can be presented in broader terms, including insights from different perspectives, and located in the socio-political realm. Diaconal praxis will normally opt for the second model, claiming that this is in accordance with the church's vocation to be incarnated in human reality and above all in situations of need, injustice and suffering. The real question is, however, whether the two models mutually exclude one another, or whether the real potential of the church consists in linking the two, and how this can be expressed in diaconal approaches in processes of reconciliation. Is this what gives the church a unique ability to be present and act in the public arena, and at the same time offer distinct space and practices of reconciliation?

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This brings us to the question regarding the specific Christian contribution to the practice of reconciliation and how this shapes diaconal work. We have already stated that reconciliation is a gift to the church. Does this imply that the church possesses certain assets that qualify for this task? Are processes of reconciliation more likely to succeed if churches are involved?

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<sup>23</sup> Robert J Schreiter, *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality and Strategies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 14.

It is impossible to make general statements here. But it does make sense to list several assets that may make a difference when churches involve themselves in reconciliation work. In recent years, scholars have given attention to the importance of what is named “religious health assets” that in different ways add quality to ordinary professional health work.<sup>24</sup> Churches bring with them traditions, practices and spaces that add dimensions to the work of medical professionals. We may here distinguish between tangible and intangible assets; to the first belong activities, facilities and human resources, to the second belong behaviours, attitudes, and values that express a Christian worldview and lifestyle. Both may provide patients with surroundings that mitigates feelings of helplessness and fear, and instead promotes healing in its widest sense.

In a similar way, one may talk about religious or, better, diaconal assets, in reconciliation work. What follows is a list of some of these assets; the first four may be considered intangible, the four last as tangible assets:

1. Familiarity with reconciliation as a theme, with the notion that this concept is crucial in Christian faith.
2. Narratives of reconciliation in the Bible.
3. The biblical understanding of human being that reconciles the concept of being created in the image of God with acknowledging evil forces in humans and in society.
4. A shared system of basic values to be used in reconciliation work as guiding principles. Among them truth as a liberating word, and justice as a way of restoring and building relations that affirm dignity and security.
5. Traditions and practices of hospitality, and of providing safe space, that allow the presence of what has been silenced and marginalized.
6. Experiences of reconciliation in the form of sacramental practice or other rites that announce forgiveness of sins and restoration of relationships.
7. Ability to go between, risking new paths for the sake of reconciliation.
8. Experiences of reconciliation work from recent times and in different social and political contexts.

The intangible assets contribute to the formation of the distinct nature of diaconal identity; they motivate for reconciliatory action and promote human dignity. They enhance a spirituality that gives importance to justice and peace; they foster confidence in peacemaking as a meaningful action; they value seemingly insignificant initiatives as important in the perspective of God’s grace and love. The tangible assets point to the rich tradition of reconciliatory action and resources that are already at hand.

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<sup>24</sup> Gary R Gunderson and James R Cochrane, *Religion and the Health of the Public. Shifting the Paradigm* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 44-58.

It must be admitted that these assets are not always seen, nor are their potential recognized. It is also true that they do not always motivate or empower the church for the ministry of reconciliation or for diaconal action. There may be various reasons for this. In some cases, churches are themselves part of the problem and share the responsibility of developments that cause human conflict and suffering. The fact that many churches supported apartheid is one sad example of this reality.<sup>25</sup>

In other cases, social and political heritage may weaken the credibility of the churches as promoters of reconciling processes. Majority churches that for generations have been condoning unjust and discriminating practices in relation to religious and ethnic minorities will not easily be entrusted a leading role in proposing new forms of living together. Nevertheless, in such cases the churches are also challenged to embark on processes of reconciliation knowing that this is a demanding task. My own church, the Church of Norway, experienced this when the initiative was taken to achieve reconciliation in relation to the Roma people that for generations had been persecuted with oppressive government measures. Diaconal institutions were also involved; in spite of all good intentions, they contributed to government policy, for instance by separating children from their parents for the purpose of “normal” education. The process of reconciliation turned out to have serious setbacks. When brought to the Church of Norway General Synod in 1998, it caused anger and frustration among the Roma; they felt that the Church of Norway was half-hearted when presenting the case and asking for forgiveness. Fortunately, the dialogue was continued, allowing for a positive outcome of the process at the General Synod two years later.<sup>26</sup>

It must therefore be emphasized that reconciliation is not an easy task. Realities and deep suffering may be ignored if reconciliation is conceived as a pious response to the exhortation of forgiving those who have done wrong. In such cases, reconciliation can be perverted into a strategy of covering injustice and impunity. Christians may be trapped into being accessories to such strategies if they limit their concern to the religious dimensions of reconciliation.

The real causes behind conflicting situations cannot be dealt with only from a theological perspective, but should be linked to social and human

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<sup>25</sup> It is surprising that the message from the Lausanne III meeting in Cape Town 2010, when mentioning “the past years of suffering under apartheid”, makes no concrete reference to the role of churches and their need of being involved in processes of reconciliation. Instead, thanks are expressed “for the progress of the gospel and the sovereign righteousness of God at work in recent history, while wrestling still with the ongoing legacy of evil and injustice. Such is the double witness and role of the Church in every place”.

<sup>26</sup> World Council of Churches, “Being church and overcoming racism: It’s time for transformative justice”, Document PLEN 4, Central Committee, Geneva, 26 August-3 September 2002.

sciences. Only then can conditions for reconciling efforts be properly handled. The diaconal perspective on reconciliation would therefore stress the importance of an inter-disciplinary approach and of identifying distinct phases in reconciliation processes. In many ways, this corresponds to the six aspects of the reconciliation and healing processes listed in the World Council of Churches document *Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation*: truth, memory, repentance, justice, forgiveness and love.<sup>27</sup> As Schreiter affirms, there are phases when reconciliation cannot afford to be abstract.<sup>28</sup> It implies making concrete steps, each of them in due course, of sharing memories and recognizing the truth, of confession and repentance, of restoring what has been broken, of healing wounds, and of constructing new ways of relating to each other. It is not possible to oblige or force people to reconcile; reconciliation comes as a fruit of what has been achieved by those involved throughout the whole process.

In the language of *diakonia*, the concept of “go-between” expresses the importance of moving from one position to another in this process.<sup>29</sup> It refers to a kind of mobility in relation to points of view, but also to social locations, to people’s versions of what has happened, and even dreams of what may become true. It implies the kind of impartiality that risks being with everyone involved, and at the same time the sort of commitment that questions and challenges, envisaging restored justice and renewed relationships. *Diakonia in Context* interprets this role in the light of the classical Greek use of the word *diakonia* that “points to the mission of a go-between, a messenger, or even an ambassador who has been mandated to restore relations, to heal and to reconcile”.<sup>30</sup>

Such processes are strenuous, they require patience. Patience implies passion. For Christians that passion is revealed in Christ’s passionate ministry of reconciliation. Reconciliation is indeed a demanding task, but it requires an honest reflection on what it takes to be involved in such work. In addition, it should motivate churches and church-related institutions to take initiatives in order to equip Christians for such tasks. Programmes for building capacities for reconciliation should be established at different levels; they should be included in training of pastors, deacons and other church workers. Exchange of best practices is one concrete and effective way of learning. In many countries, Truth and Reconciliation Commissions have been established, often with churches playing an important role. Many have learned from such experiences, as for instance from post-apartheid South Africa, and developed new insights to be shared with others.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup> WCC, “*You Are the Light of the World*”, 107-13.

<sup>28</sup> Schreiter, *The Ministry of Reconciliation*, 12.

<sup>29</sup> Nordstokke, *Liberating Diakonia*, 46.

<sup>30</sup> *Diakonia in Context*, 46.

<sup>31</sup> An excellent example is John W de Gruchy who introduces the theme “The Art of Reconciliation” in his book *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 147-80.



Another example is the creation of trauma healing centres in the aftermath of civil wars. They represent powerful stories of reconciliation that inspire and empower others to take similar initiatives.

This indicates that reconciliation work may also require professional skills and abilities. Diaconal training should include such competence. This is due to the understanding of reconciliation work as a complex social intervention that must be systemic in the sense that it seeks to bring together concepts, experiences and insights from a wide range of perspectives.

At the same time, and in all dimensions of reconciliation work, the diaconal approach is empowered and oriented by the spirituality of reconciliation: through a faith that recognizes the image of God and dignity in every human being, through a hope that stubbornly claims that the future is possible, seeing signs of God's kingdom when brokenness is restored, and through a love that moves and empowers people to promote truth, tell their stories, confess, forgive and construct new relationships and visions.



# LIBERATION THEOLOGY AND RECONCILIATION: A BRIDGE TOO FAR?

Reginald Nel

Liberation Theology has often been accused of standing in the way of mission or of reconciliation. Defining it as a “break” with the accepted paradigms in theology and mission seemingly implies a separation, an apartheid. Can such a Liberation Theology, like South African Black Theology, then contribute at all to something by the name of Mission as Reconciliation?

This remains an important question. Teaching missiology, at a South African university, and specifically an undergraduate course on anti-racism and reconciliation, to many budding pastors and lay leaders from various parts of Africa, but also myself being a part-time pastor in a black township, confirms this. This question then, goes to the heart of discerning a missional church, where theology and ecclesiology cannot be severed from social reality. It builds on a heritage embodied in the political transition in South Africa from apartheid towards what became known as the “Rainbow Nation”<sup>1</sup> in the 1990s, where the biblical notion of reconciliation became central to these public processes. It was in this context, where well-known Christian pastors like the late Rev. Dr Beyers Naudé from the Dutch Reformed Church and Emeritus Archbishop Desmond Tutu from the Anglican Church, played key roles. Successive leaders in the ecumenical structures, but also lay members of various congregations, later became either members of the new Government of National Unity or high-profile officials in the public sector<sup>2</sup>.

These processes are however not simply the consequence of the personal charisma of individuals, or a “miracle”<sup>3</sup> descending on us from heaven.

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<sup>1</sup> See Jurgens Hendriks, “A Rainbow over the Laager: The Dutch Reformed Church Crossing the Apartheid Boundary”, *Missionalia*, 27:3 (1999), 330-41, who explains the term. “Rainbow nation” was popularized by the then Archbishop of Cape Town, Desmond M Tutu, to denote multiculturalism and the vision of one reconciled nation, with many peoples drawn together in a splendid array of colour and hope.

<sup>2</sup> The church which I belong to, the United Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA), for example has already had at least two members becoming the National Commissioners of Police in the last decade.

<sup>3</sup> See Mamphela Ramphele, *Laying Ghosts to Rest: Dilemmas of the Transformation in South Africa* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2008), 28-45, for an

Whilst one does receive God's moments of grace with a deep sense of gratitude, and humbly witnesses to it as central to our missional calling today, I would also argue that this particular heritage of public witness, and therefore also reconciliation, had a period of gestation within specific socio-theological developments under apartheid. The various expressions of Liberation Theology, in particular South African Black Theology,<sup>4</sup> as an expression of African theology fermenting in southern Africa, and also the responses to it, played a key role – and this needs to be revisited critically, in order to have a well-rounded and deep understanding of the role of the notion of reconciliation in this transition,<sup>5</sup> and also today. To take this conversation further, my contribution here wants to suggest the name of another bridge-builder, as a critical conversation partner with these theologies, i.e. the South African missionary-missologist David Bosch.<sup>6</sup> It is within this specific tension that these bridge-building leaders were formed. The question is what we can learn from it in order not only to shape a new generation of leaders, but also to impact church and society.

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important analysis of what she tellingly calls “*A miracle that never was: living with ordinariness*”.

<sup>4</sup> One needs to note in the southern African context the influence also of what became known as Kairos Theology and Feminist Theology. See “The Kairos Theologians”, *The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Churches*. (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1986); Albert Nolan, *God in South Africa: The Challenge of the Gospel* (Cape Town: David Phillip, 1988); Albert Nolan, “Kairos theology”, in John W de Gruchy and Charles Villa-Vicencio (eds), *Doing Theology in Context: South African Perspectives* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1994); Roxanne Jordan, “Black Feminist Theology in South Africa”, in Simon Maimela and Dwight Hopkins (eds), *We are One Voice: Black Theology in the USA and South Africa* (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1989), 51-59; Mercy A Oduyoye, “Feminist theology in an African perspective”, in R Gibellini, *Paths of African Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: 1994), 166-181, for an introduction. However, to keep this contribution within a manageable size, but also as an expression of my own starting point and experience, I highlight here the South African expression of Black Theology, or simply South African Black Theology. In the course of this chapter, the relations amongst this variety of expressions, as it relates to the central theme of Mission as Reconciliation, will emerge.

<sup>5</sup> See John de Gruchy, James Cochrane and Stephen Martin, “Faith, Struggle and Reconciliation”, in John de Gruchy, James Cochrane and Stephen Martin (eds), *Facing the Truth: South African Faith Communities and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (Cape Town: David Phillip, 1999), 1-14. They show the deep ecumenical heritage of reflections on reconciliation, since the release of the document called *The Message to the People of South Africa* (1968). It is however of interest that they are careful not to mention the role of South African Black Theology in this regard. I come back later to the tendency to ironically see this expression as not relevant for a quest for reconciliation.

<sup>6</sup> See Klippies Kritzinger and Willem Saayman, *David J. Bosch: Prophetic integrity, cruciform praxis*. (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2011).

In this chapter then, I *first* revisit this particular legacy, missiologically, in particular how this revisiting contributes to Mission as Reconciliation, globally. As indicated already, this is however not simply another historical overview of this key paradigm shift or even the transition in South Africa. It is critical, here, in the light of (or perhaps in the shadow of!) the ongoing pernicious outbursts of violence in our southern African context;<sup>7</sup> to *secondly* continue the pilgrimage of liberation, and also discernment, today. One does not need to labour again the point that post-colonial<sup>8</sup> states in Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and also South Africa, are well-known globally for being plagued by political and social violence. At least in my country, the most recent of what became known in the media as “xenophobic” attacks, “service delivery protests” in various black townships, and also sporadic racist attacks<sup>9</sup> from white youngsters on blacks, are chilling symptoms of a deeper challenge. We must still probe deeper into this reality, to understand and be able to discern God’s mission for a time such as this, and the role that Mission as Reconciliation can play within a broader definition of missional church. I do this, therefore, in the shadow of these challenges to the miracle of the Rainbow Nation. This contribution then concludes as I weave in insights emerging from what became known as the Confession of Belhar, emerging from the southern African context, by identifying *lastly* critical co-ordinates in forming bridge-builders in what I would suggest is the creative tension between Liberation Theology and reconciliation.

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<sup>7</sup> Whilst I refer here to the southern African context, at the time of writing the rest of our continent was in a period of coming to grips with the recent “Arab Spring”, and also intensely violent conflict in Mali and in the Horn of Africa. Globally, the Edinburgh study process has highlighted new outbreaks of xenophobia and nationalist political formations and violence, all in a context of migration. This is the neighbourhood in which this contribution is birthed, but the focus for me will remain the southern African context.

<sup>8</sup> Here I make the distinction between “post-colonial”, which indicates a historical period after the overthrow of classic colonialism in various African countries, and on the other hand, “postcolonial”, which refers to a particular philosophical and ideological tradition, since the advent of colonialism, which is expressed in various forms as an attempt to subvert and overcome the silencing, and therefore the exploitation, of the colonial “other”.

<sup>9</sup> Some of these attacks by young people were fatal, like the cases of the so-called “Waterfloop-4”, the “Skierlik” shooting, and the “Boeremag” attacks on Soweto railway lines, whilst others are via social media platforms, like Facebook, Youtube and various blogging sites. Social commentators also indicate criminal violence often framed loosely as “gangsterism” or “farm killings”, as pointers to the unfinished business of reconciliation in South Africa.

## Understanding Liberation Theologies, as a Break...

Liberation theologies and the kind of praxis ensuing didn't come about simplistically to be a nasty, mindless attack on sincere fellow Christians, or to maintain existing gender, racist, classist or even theological separations. When liberation theologies presented a break with the prevailing paradigm in theology and mission, it was an attempt to position theology back in the context of the faith community, struggling to embody and articulate the gospel of the Kingdom of God, historically. Whilst it was indeed a break *away*, it was also a break *towards*. This is where the metaphor of bridge becomes relevant. With regard to the South African situation, one can identify at least two major types of proposals from which liberation theologies break away, namely: a) The detached academic theological models (also for reconciliation), and b) The spiritual, evangelism proposal, ultimately aiming to save black Africa supposedly from its inherent violent tendencies and heathenism. Cases in point are the pastoral care proposal developed by Daniel Louw<sup>10</sup> in the late 1980s in South Africa, and the proposal by African Enterprise leader, Michael Cassidy.<sup>11</sup> It seems to me that the particular expression of reconciliation, in the words of The Kairos Document (TKD), as "church theology"<sup>12</sup> emerged in the tension between these types of "academic" and "spiritual" models. The cases referred to here serve only as theoretical models to indicate key co-ordinates and to give perspective on the emergence and contestations that liberation theologies had encountered. This was the context in which liberation theologies contested for a specific space, and also outcome, i.e. total liberation. In order, then, to give this perspective on their unique contribution, but also its creative theological tensions under apartheid, I now briefly turn to these proposals.

Daniel Louw, a member of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) and a professor teaching its ministerial students in Pastoral Care at the Theological Seminary in Stellenbosch at the time, presents a very detailed proposal which starts with an affirmation of the urgency of reconciliation in

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<sup>10</sup> *Versoening in Geweld: 'n Pleidooi om vrede in Suider-Afrika* ["Reconciliation in Violence: A Plea for Peace in Southern Africa"] (Cape Town: NG Kerk-Uitgewers, 1987).

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<sup>11</sup> *The Passing Summer: A South African Pilgrimage of Love*. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1989).

<sup>12</sup> I do not dwell on the expression of what *The Kairos Document* calls "State Theology", as its support of the apartheid system and its military action was self-evident. The *Faith Communities and Apartheid* report by the Research Institute on Christianity in South Africa (RICSAs), in Cochrane, de Gruchy and Martin (eds), *Facing the Truth*, 15-77, indicates this theology to be represented by the Dutch Reformed Church, "Right-wing Christian groups" like the Christian League and others, but also powerful pro-state lobbies within various churches. See also Roger A Arendse, "Right-wing Christian Groups", in Cochrane, de Gruchy and Martin (eds), *Facing the Truth*, 91-100.

the heyday of apartheid and the successive waves of protests from communities. He states, “Seldom in the history of South Africa was there a time when the meaning of the concept “reconciliation” gained such an urgent actuality, as in the current political crisis.”<sup>13</sup> He then goes on, correctly in my view, to ask the pertinent question whether the church can do something in this situation, especially where violence has become a way of life. For him, this role is about preaching and living the message of reconciliation. It is evident that he does understand the contestations for the meaning of concepts like “reconciliation” and “violence”, but also the ambiguous history of the church, in his case the white Dutch Reformed Church (DRC). He states:

“For many black Christians the concept ‘reconciliation’ in the mouth of especially the three Afrikaans churches, is redundant. A colonial remnant which refers to a spent, western Christendom. In their experience and milieu, reconciliation is a soothing technique, in the hands of a number of power obsessed racists.”<sup>14</sup>

He then asks the question, “Can the church still establish reconciliation within the DR Church family?” Broadly, his answer to this question is carved out as he first presents a biblical exposition of the meaning of reconciliation, and secondly a contextual analysis and an application of the biblical principles to the conflicting parties, at the end.

One has to give Louw credit for the in-depth contextual analysis and model he presents here with almost clinical precision. His proposal is concrete in terms of the steps to be taken by a pastor in facilitating what he would call the *concretization* and *actualisation* of the biblical message of salvation. However, the challenge is that he does not recognise the possibility, as raised by liberation theologies, that he might be part of the problem, or that his proposal might be viewed as aggravating an unequal situation, unless he is self-consciously and self-critically frank about his own involvement in the situation. His work has been followed up by his student Christo Thesnaar at Stellenbosch, who became deeply involved in the “healing of the memories” process in South Africa since the late 1990s, with well-known facilitators like Father Michael Lapsley. Yet it has also been challenged by the proposals from Botman,<sup>15</sup> who argued for a deeper self-critical engagement of the public processes for pastoral care on healing and reconciliation. The questions and challenges by liberation theologies remain whether and how Louw himself and “the church” that he refers to have any relationship to the “violent political crisis” or what he calls the

<sup>13</sup> This is my own translation, on the basis of the original Afrikaans text, of Louw, *Versoening in Geweld*, 7.

<sup>14</sup> Louw, *Versoening in Geweld*, 7.

<sup>15</sup> H Russel Botman, “Pastoral Care and Counselling in Truth and Reconciliation: Types and Forms of Pastoral Work”, in H Russel Botman and Robin M Petersen (eds), *To Remember and to Heal: Theological and Psychological Reflections on Truth and Reconciliation* (Cape Town: Human and Rousseau, 1997), 154-62.

“hatred and bitterness, turning into semi-revolutionary actions and terrorist violence”,<sup>16</sup> in his time. It seems as if Louw, with clean hands, remains standing outside of (or hovering above) this mess.

Michael Cassidy is unashamedly an evangelist – he wants to save Africa. His story with the pilgrimage of reconciliation is interspersed with testimony’s of “how the Holy Spirit” came and changed lives – including his own – with a fellow evangelist from Uganda, Festo Kivengere. As a brilliant organiser he played key roles in the various PACLA, SACLA and NIR processes and worked closely with David Bosch on these. Writing up his testimonies and reflections on his ministry in South Africa in *The Passing Summer* is for him very personal. He states, “Reflecting on how to tackle this volume, I concluded there was only one contribution I could bring, and only one story and one struggle I would meaningfully write about – and that was my own.”<sup>17</sup> Cassidy, as indicated, is deeply aware of and involved in the social realities within South Africa and the rest of the continent and therefore speaks of reconciliation and how he framed it, “Reaching for Reconciliation”, from this perspective. He speaks of being “gripped” by reconciliation and it being “grim” because “So many white Christians see reconciliation as political and therefore to be shunned, and most black Christians see reconciliation as cheap and therefore to be ignored.”<sup>18</sup>

In addressing this grim reality, for Cassidy it means reconciliation starts with “making the vertical primary”. He is clear in his mind, There’s no way round the primacy of the vertical (our relationship with God) over the horizontal (our relationship with others). We must start here, with each of us being personally reconciled to God, born again of his Spirit and filled with his Life and Calvary-love, and then preach it ... So the vertical is where it all starts; it cannot and must never be forgotten. This in turn makes evangelism always crucial.<sup>19</sup>

This first assertion is part of ten points that Cassidy makes about reconciliation. He makes no attempt at an integration of the ten points, but frames it as a “pilgrimage”. Building on the primacy of “vertical reconciliation”, he further asserts that reconciliation means “testing where I am with God by where I am with my brothers and sisters”; reconciliation involves a pilgrimage to Calvary; reconciliation involves the prerequisite of contact; it means embracing the whole body of Christ and the unity already there; reconciliation requires hearing each other; reconciliation involves forgiveness, which includes the demands of forgiveness and Jesus’ example; reconciliation imperatives must drive us to our knees;

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<sup>16</sup> Louw, *Versoening in Geweld*, 7.

<sup>17</sup> Cassidy, *The Passing Summer*, xvi.

<sup>18</sup> Cassidy, *The Passing Summer*, 261.

<sup>19</sup> Cassidy, *The Passing Summer*, 262.

reconciliation is generally impossible without cost and confrontation; and lastly in alienated societies reconciliation has to find its way into structures.<sup>20</sup> One can say that, for Cassidy, reconciliation is built on a sure foundation: it means certain things, involves and requires certain actions, and lastly, leads to structures. In practice however, it happens that he highlights evangelism campaigns and conferences, whilst leaving the structural questions to the (Christian) politicians. Admittedly, he is deeply aware of his own sin, but the overall trajectory here remains deeply personal and vertical. He states,

“... reconciliation is not an easy way out. Anger, bitterness, verbal vendetta and personal distance are much easier. They are also much more delicious because they feed the old nature and its self-importance so exquisitely.

“But to see that God’s way up is down, and to climb down from self-righteousness to assume blame and responsibility is to struggle desperately with the inner constraints of one’s own sinful and proud heart. This is what makes the first steps of reconciliation so hard – it involves dealing with one’s own heart before that of one’s adversary.”<sup>21</sup>

Fundamentally, reconciliation takes place within one’s own heart, which on a second level has implications for the relationships between individual Christians, within the various factions and groupings. This leads then to changed individuals within the public sphere, who work towards new structures. The evangelical emphasis on a deep commitment to the gospel is however also noticeable within Liberation Theology, especially in its break with a situation where ministry praxis became separated from a detached science of theology under the impact of modernism and the liberal theological tradition. Liberation theologies, in contrast to “academic theology”, consciously start with a commitment as the first act of theology. This commitment, in contrast to an exclusive personalised, individual interpretation, is however a specific one – i.e. a commitment towards *total* liberation – and the locus, in the words of Gustavo Gutierrez at the first meeting of The Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT), of “the common people seeking to be agents of their history and expressing their faith and hope in the poor Christ through their efforts for liberation”.<sup>22</sup>

As indicated, this was not the case in most of what went through as theology at the time when Liberation Theology and its understanding of reconciliation erupted. Bosch also addressed this issue, when he introduced

<sup>20</sup> Cassidy, *The Passing Summer*, 261-86.

<sup>21</sup> Cassidy, *The Passing Summer*, 265.

<sup>22</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez, “Two Theological Perspectives: Liberation Theology and Progressivist Theology”, in Sergio Torres and Virginia Fabella (eds), *The Emergent Gospel: Theology from the Developing World* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1977), 242.



Mission as Theology<sup>23</sup> as one of the dimensions of his “emerging, ecumenical, missionary paradigm”. Here, he repositions theology within the framework of mission. He shows how the initial understanding of this missionary framework and context for theology in the early church was abandoned when western Europe became “christianized” and Christianity became the official religion in the Roman Empire.<sup>24</sup> For Bosch, pre-modern, Enlightenment (modern), and also late modern eras consolidated an imperial theological edifice, which purported to be benignly universal; yet it maintained colonial, European, or better, white hegemony. Theology was not so innocent. In some ways Bosch endorsed this legacy, but he was also a forerunner in the transforming of missiology, as a missionary theology. Jesse Mugambi<sup>25</sup> also laments this imperial missionary agenda as one of the focal points of theological discourse that still haunts the landscape of theology on the continent of Africa in the twentieth century. In proposing Mission as Theology, it therefore followed for Bosch that “just as the church ceases to be church if it is not missionary”, theology ceases to be theology if it loses its missionary character.<sup>26</sup> Further, he confessed that gradually he realised “it was impossible to distinguish between African theology and African missiology, that African theology was, to a significant extent, missiological through and through”<sup>27</sup>. It is this missionary thrust of the various expressions of African theology which, in my view, includes South African Black Theology,<sup>28</sup> that we need to hear. In the South African context, then, it was specifically this version of Liberation Theology, which engaged the blind spots in the existing models for reconciliation, including the academic pastoral model and the spiritual evangelistic models. Not surprisingly, Bosch’s student and successor, Kritzinger’s ground-breaking research, captured in his thesis under the title *Black Theology – Challenge to Mission* (1988), discusses, amongst others, the relationship between Black Theology and reconciliation. He is, in my view, amongst the first theologians (if not *the* first) to speak consciously of

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<sup>23</sup> David J Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 489-98.

<sup>24</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 489.

<sup>25</sup> Jesse NK Mugambi, “Between past and future in African Christian theology”, in Ernst M Conradie (ed), *African Christian Theologies in Transformation* (Stellenbosch: EFSA, 2004), 152-53.

<sup>26</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 494.

<sup>27</sup> David J Bosch, *Believing in the future: Towards a missiology of Western culture* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1995), 27.

<sup>28</sup> See Allan A Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence: A Socio-Ethical Study on Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1977), 14; Mokgethi Mothlabi, *African/Black Theology in South Africa: Looking Back, Moving On*. (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2008), 42-49; Nolan, *God in South Africa* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 2; who speaks of a “prophetic gospel” emerging from the missionary church.

Mission as Reconciliation,<sup>29</sup> perhaps under the influence of Bosch, but notably in the context of a missiological dialogue with Black Theology (!).

Whilst we have to keep in mind the complexities and shifts<sup>30</sup> within South African Black Theology, hereafter simply called SABT, Kritzinger starts this section in his thesis with an important statement, which is self-evident for the time and immediately frames the issues which all forms of SABT seeks to address. He states, “South African society is riddled with conflict and alienation. This is due to the cultural, racist, colonialist, capitalist and sexist dimensions of oppression ...”<sup>31</sup> It is in this context that he posits that SABT’s deepest intention or, better, missionary thrust, is to mobilise black people to overcome this. Esau Jacobs<sup>32</sup> writes in the same vein that the emerging of SABT is a major breakthrough in the rediscovery of the core of the gospel, namely, the message of salvation and liberation of people.<sup>33</sup> Black theologians themselves trace the roots deep into the first missionary encounters, between black and whites, and the rich tradition of black and slave spirituality, expressed in song, dance, preaching and various acts of resistance.<sup>34</sup> For proponents of SABT, it is from this experience that reconciliation needs to be framed. Boesak states,

“Oppression of Blacks in this country has been going on for more than 300 years. In the course of those years, humiliation and degradation have left their mark on the souls of millions. Self-hatred and dejection have become the hereditary burden of countless generations. Many have died; many more will die. Distrust, suspicion, hatred have become part of our lives. Therefore, reconciliation is essential. But it will be costly.”<sup>35</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Johannes NJ Kritzinger, *Black Theology: Challenge to Mission* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, 1988), 217. See also Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion, and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abington, 1996); Robert J Schreiter, *Reconciliation: Mission and ministry in a changing social order* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992); Robert J Schreiter, “Reconciliation as a New Paradigm of Mission ...”, in Jacques Matthey, *Come Holy Spirit, heal and reconcile! Report of the WCC Conference on World Mission and Evangelism*, Athens, May 2005. (Geneva: WCC Publications), 213-19.

<sup>30</sup> See Takatso A Mofokeng, *The Crucified amongst Crossbearers: Towards a Black Christology* (Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij JH Kok, 1983), 1ff.

<sup>31</sup> Kritzinger, *Black Theology: Challenge to Mission*, 217.

<sup>32</sup> Esau Jacobs, “Swart teologie – missionêre implikasies?” [“Black Theology-missionary implications?”], in Jannie du Preez, Martin Pauw and Phil J Robinson (eds), *Sendinggenade: Sendingwetenskaplike opstelle aangebied aan Prof WJ van der Merwe by geleentheid van sy tagtigste verjaarsdag* (Bloemfontein: NG Sendinguitgewers, 1987). 164-80.

<sup>33</sup> Jacobs, *Swart teologie – missionêre implikasies?* 164.

<sup>34</sup> Jacobs, *Swart teologie – missionêre implikasies?* 165; Allan A Boesak, *Black and Reformed: Apartheid, Liberation and the Calvinist Tradition* (Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1984), 23; Mthlabi, *African/Black Theology in South Africa*, 22-30.

<sup>35</sup> Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, 32.

However, Kritzinger points out that they've often been accused, especially by white liberals, of being opposed to reconciliation and of fostering separation instead. For him however, and correctly so, it is not that SABT is against reconciliation, i.e. a break away, but against a particular expression, which they would call *cheap* reconciliation. Whilst reconciliation is viewed as an essential part of the church's mission, i.e. a bridge, the particular understanding of it, however, differs substantially from that of most white theologians. Hence we need to delve into this understanding and the role of the "break" or withdrawal and confrontation.

For Black theologians, this withdrawal away from cheap reconciliation, as expressed in so-called "multiracial" or "integrated", yet white-controlled organisations, is a critical strategy, in line with the philosophy of Black Consciousness.<sup>36</sup> In a context where white racism continues to humiliate and dehumanise black selfhood by denying black history and the black experience, this strategy, they argue, *empowers* black people to be reconciled to themselves, first, as God's black children<sup>37</sup>. Terms like black and white, whilst having a particular root in the context of racism, are however reframed here, not primarily in ethnic terms, but as denoting a particular class position, within an oppressive social structure – it has symbolic power. Reconciliation between black and white becomes only possible, when black people can enter into this relationship, affirming themselves first, and then asserting themselves, as equals. In essence, this means that withdrawal is a temporary strategy towards the ultimate vision of reconciliation, now not between black and white people – or as Black theologians, in line with the liberation tradition, would also say, between the "oppressed" and "oppressors" – but between human beings, liberated towards justice. I come back to this focus later. Proponents of SABT reject the notion, so often found in anxious calls for reconciliation, that these two

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<sup>36</sup> See Steve Biko, *I write what I like* (London: Bowerdean Press, 1978), 74-75 for an exposition of the philosophy of Black Consciousness. Biko was one of the key thinkers within the Black Consciousness movement and the early expressions of Black Theology in South Africa. He argued that integration between those who have a superiority complex and inferiority complex, in a context where political, economic, cultural and spiritual exclusion and oppression is created and maintained structurally, was impossible. Hence the need for strategic withdrawal and building of solidarity and a new consciousness, amongst the oppressed, as they struggle towards liberation for all. See also Achille Mbembe, Biko's testament of hope, in Chris van Wyk (ed), *We write what we like* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2007), 137; Mothlabi, *African/Black Theology in South Africa*, 3-4; Xolela Mangcu, *To the Brink: The State of Democracy in South Africa* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2008), 3-4; Mandla Seleokane, "The Development of Black Consciousness as a cultural and political movement (1967-2007)", in Cornel W du Toit (ed), *The Legacy of Stephen Bantu Biko: Theological Challenges* (Pretoria: Thabang Printers, 2008), 15-56.

<sup>37</sup> Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 92-93; Kritzinger, *Black Theology – Challenge to Mission*, 218.

categories can be integrated into harmonious community. This cannot happen. It will inevitably lead to the domination of the powerful and the continuation of an exploitative, abusive situation, and must be dismissed completely. This total rejection of “reconciliation on white terms” simply means therefore that the oppressed cannot reconcile themselves into accepting and assimilating into the structures of oppression. The abusive system must first be smashed, through a radical revolution. As a Liberation Theology, a strategic withdrawal represents the antithetical stage of the revolutionary dialectic. The thesis here is white racism, the antithesis is Black Consciousness and the synthesis is a “true humanity”.<sup>38</sup> This is a necessary prerequisite to empower black people to make their own creative contribution to the shaping of a new, reconciled South African community – the intention is not separatist, but liberationist.

In a second focus, the break also means *confrontation* with the truth. Reconciliation, as one can see in the earlier quote by Boesak, is not cheap or superficial. Boesak is clear: it cannot simply be a polite gesture to “let bygones be bygones” or “to close the books on the past”, as if nothing happened. It is a conscious, frank co-operative exchange and deep examination of the roots of the conflict.<sup>39</sup> Black theologians would argue that before you can even talk about reconciliation, you must recognise that there is already alienation. This alienation is not because of Black Theology, but because of the inherently unjust, racist system. SABB is therefore unashamedly a conflict-oriented theology – whilst it is also anti-imperialist, its fundamental thrust is anti-racist. This means biblically affirming the violent reality and pain of the Cross which comes before the resurrection. Mofokeng’s dissertation is aptly entitled “The crucified Christ amongst cross-bearers” (1983). This is however not a sadistic obsession with pain for the sake of pain; the aim (as in any medical procedure) is a healing and wholeness.<sup>40</sup> Kritzinger states,

“To achieve fundamental change in personal relationships as well as in societal structures implies pain, since it can only be achieved through honest confrontation between equals, who take seriously whatever separates them.”<sup>41</sup>

It is in this context that he then speaks of Black solidarity, as the collective power to confront the white community with the need for social

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<sup>38</sup> Kritzinger, *Black Theology: Challenge to Mission*, 217, refers here to the important article by Biko, called *Black Consciousness and the Quest for a True Humanity*, in Biko, *I write what I like*, 96-108, where Biko makes it clear that the ultimate aim of this philosophy and strategy is a new common humanity, liberating also the oppressors. See also Johannes NJ Kritzinger, “Liberating Whiteness: Engaging with the anti-racist dialectics of Steve Biko”, in du Toit, *The Legacy of Stephen Bantu Biko*, 89-113.

<sup>39</sup> Kritzinger, *Black Theology: Challenge to Mission*, 220.

<sup>40</sup> See Mamphela Ramphele, in Alex Boraine and Janet Levy (eds), *The Healing of a Nation* (Cape Town: Clyson Printers, 1995), 33-36.

<sup>41</sup> Kritzinger, *Black Theology: Challenge to Mission*, 221.

justice, without which reconciliation is impossible. Confrontation is thus not intended to humiliate or destroy white people, but rather to liberate them also, but in this case from their lifestyle of oppression and exploitation. This brings us to Kritzinger's last focus on justice.

Reconciliation is not something which happens only between isolated individuals. It is also a social and political event – it aims at *justice*. As indicated under the empowering thrust of the break, we asserted that before true reconciliation can become a reality, the structures of injustice personally, and also in society, need to be removed. Therefore, a message of unity or reconciliation, separated from the demands of justice, is a message that protects the dominant groups and their power and makes the people at the bottom submissive.<sup>42</sup> It represents the “ideological appropriation” of reconciliation by the liberal capitalist system, to conceal the brutal fact of class and imperialist exploitation and conflict. SABT fundamentally rejects such an interpretation of reconciliation as being harmful, as covering up of the painful realities. This ahistorical and abstract notion of reconciliation is exposed and rejected, since such a view embodies the interests of the dominant. This thinking also influenced the formulation of The Kairos Document (TKD) critique of what is called “Church Theology”. For them, there can be no true reconciliation and no genuine peace without justice, while any form of peace or reconciliation that allows the sin of injustice and oppression to continue is a false peace and counterfeit reconciliation.<sup>43</sup> TKD however also came under fire from proponents of SABT. Kritzinger shows that Itumeleng Mosala accuses TKD of “biblical hermeneutical bankruptcy”, since it uses the same hermeneutical paradigm as the theologies it is castigating, and therefore it accepts a division between reconciliation and liberation. This, for Mosala, is an adoption of a ruling-class definition of reconciliation as the harmonisation of attitude between persons, especially blacks and whites. This harmonisation takes a secondary place in his understanding of reconciliation. The first thrust of reconciliation, and for Mosala a biblical reconciliation, is the reversal of alienation. But for him the alienation is not from white people in the first instance – it is from the land, the cattle and labour, which is objectified in industrial machines and technological instrumentation. “Our reconciliation with white people will follow from our reconciliation with our fundamental means of livelihood.”<sup>44</sup> Here reconciliation is material. The two notions of reconciliation and liberation are in fact synonymous and inseparable, understood as the fundamental, but more importantly concrete comprehensive transformation of all oppressive and exploitative structures. Mosala draws here on the Old Testament

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<sup>42</sup> LJ Sebidi in Kritzinger, *Black Theology: Challenge to Mission*, 221-22.

<sup>43</sup> The Kairos Theologians, *The Kairos Document*, 9.

<sup>44</sup> Mosala, in Kritzinger, *Black Theology: Challenge to Mission*, 224.

theology of Jubilee<sup>45</sup> to interpret reconciliation as *restoration* and *restitution*, a process of socio-economic and political reconciliation.

In this context (and, I would suggest, in response to it) the missiology of Bosch is introduced as presenting an important bridge between the challenge of liberation theologies and the aforementioned models for reconciliation, through his own deep dialogue and relationships with its proponents. As a missionary missiologist, he did not simply engage his dialogue partners through their publications, but consciously nurtured deep relationships, and therefore honest confrontations and creative tensions. It is therefore no surprise that teaching mission in South African institutions has been shaped by this enduring legacy of Bosch. In dialogue and building bridges, in the creative tension of theological divides, what emerged and what he taught was a multi-dimensional framework for understanding mission. We build consciously, yet critically, on it. For him this means that mission is not to be divided into parts, primary and secondary levels, or core and peripheral components. With the notion of “mission as ...” he introduced the possibility of seeing the one mission of God through these different dimensions.<sup>46</sup> Bosch states:

“The elements discussed below should by no means be seen as so many distinct and isolated components of a new model; they are all intimately related. This means that in discussing a specific element each other element is always somewhere in the background. The emphasis throughout should therefore be on the wholeness and indivisibility of the paradigm, rather than on its separated ingredients. As we focus our torchlight on one element at a time, all the other elements will also be present and visible just outside the center of the beam of light.”<sup>47</sup>

Critics of Bosch are of course correct to point out that Mission as Reconciliation is not mentioned explicitly in his world-renowned work, *Transforming Mission*. Yet Klippië Kritzinger and Willem Saayman, his former colleagues and close friends, argue<sup>48</sup> that we need to look broader, in some of his other publications,<sup>49</sup> which indicates that he did not view the thirteen components as an exhaustive list but, more importantly, that the

<sup>45</sup> See also Molefe Tsele, “Kairos and Jubilee”, in H Russel Botman and Robin M Petersen (eds), *To remember and to Heal*, 70-78, but also, A Leslie Milton, “Be Reconciled to God!” (2 Cor 5:20): Biblical Theology and Social Praxis”, in Mongezi Guma and Leslie Milton (eds), *An African Challenge to the Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Cape Town: Salty Print, 1997), 97-107, as he engages Mosala’s argument.

<sup>46</sup> See Johannes NJ Kritzinger. “Using Archives missiologically. A perspective from South Africa”, in Huub Lems (ed), *Mission History Mission Archives*. (Amersfoort: Wilco, 2011), 18-42.

<sup>47</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 368.

<sup>48</sup> Kritzinger and Saayman, *David J. Bosch*, 96-101, 138, 142.

<sup>49</sup> David J Bosch. “Processes of reconciliation and demands of obedience: twelve theses”, in Klaus Nürnberger and J Cooke, *The cost of reconciliation in South Africa today* (NIR Reader 1) (Cape Town: Methodist Book House), 98-112.

context influenced the question: which dimension might come inside “the center of the beam of light”. It remains also important, as indicated earlier, to see how he lived what he taught. Even though Bosch remained a faithful member of the much-hated Dutch Reformed Church and an influential professor at a university, they point to his practical, but also vulnerable witness and leadership role, in particular at the first Pan African Christian Leadership Assembly (PACLA) in Nairobi, in the organisation of the South African Christian Leadership Assembly (SACLA) in 1979 and, from 1985, with Cassidy, the National Initiative for Reconciliation (NIR). These are perhaps some of his and his wife Annemie’s<sup>50</sup> most important contributions to the South African community of the time. Indeed, one cannot introduce this notion of Mission as Reconciliation without first taking into account the historical legacy of mission and the missionary itself. This starting point places the notion of Mission as Reconciliation within an authentic and therefore proper framework, whilst a detached or worse, aloof, exposition might airbrush out the particularities, the unique mix and also deep contradictions of particular contributions. Teaching Mission as Reconciliation needs to take into account, as a fundamental starting point, the history, interests and collusions of the teacher or teaching institution, as any model for reconciliation is embedded within a particular structure, and might therefore also serve particular interests, which needs to be acknowledged upfront. If not, it might be seen to be serving only the interests of the powerful, irrespective of the thoroughness or sincerity it might display. It is with this rich heritage that we therefore turn our attention to the way reconciliation has unfolded in post-colonial South Africa – as we continue on our pilgrimage of discerning the contestations, and also the signals of hope.

### **Reconciliation in Post-Colonial South Africa**

It was assumed and hoped that the political independence sweeping over our continent, including my country South Africa, framed as the much longed-for and struggled-for “liberation” from colonial powers, would bring revival of inclusive and life-giving African notions of communalism and respect for life and authority, as a critical precondition for reconciliation. The “new South Africa” government aimed to deal with the challenge of reconciliation, through the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act in July 1995, which prescribed the establishment, work

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<sup>50</sup> Cassidy, *The Passing Summer*, 271-72, retells the moving testimony of David Bosch, the only South African speaker to read a plenary paper at the Pan African Christian Leadership Assembly (PACLA) meeting in Nairobi in December 1976, as he shared how they (he and Annemie) encountered black ministry colleagues and how her “spiritual gift of tears watered the church in Africa.” This, to a large degree, led to SACLA in July 1979, in Pretoria. Annemie Bosch herself shares this testimony in Kritzing and Saayman, *David J Bosch*, 33-35.

and scope of what became known as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).<sup>51</sup> This Act aimed at dealing with the apartheid legacy of the past by investigating the nature, causes and extent of what the Act terms gross violations of human rights. Public space was created for the victims to speak out on the violations that they suffered. It further provided for the granting of amnesty to the perpetrators on condition that they made full disclosure of all the facts, i.e. told the truth. The Amnesty committee had the power to grant amnesty to the perpetrators, if it could be proven that their acts were done with a clear political motive behind them, whilst a third committee, the Rehabilitation and Reparations Committee, would make recommendations to parliament as to the appropriate measures required to deal with the needs of the victims of these human rights violations. The TRC process, along with the development of new national symbols and various other laws, therefore aimed at dealing with the situation of a nation separated, alienated and outraged against itself. This need for a truth and reconciliation process was critical in ensuring a sustainable peaceful democratic transformation.

Whilst various publications<sup>52</sup> dealt with the challenge of reconciliation within South Africa from a missiological perspective, it is Tinyiko Maluleke, initially perhaps more than others, who continues the aforementioned liberation heritage, as he proposes and presents a deeper missiological analysis of the aforementioned political developments. He relates these processes to the silencing of the voices of the black poor and oppressed, and challenges the notion that the ideals of this legislation, with its mechanisms, adequately addressed the needs and aspirations of the black poor in South Africa and beyond. Did these political processes deal with the wounds that were inflicted upon the oppressed peoples in South Africa and the broader southern Africa region as indicated by SABB, and therefore did the dawn of the Rainbow Nation epitomise the liberation as struggled for? Under the title, *Dealing lightly with the wounds of my people: The TRC process in theological perspective*,<sup>53</sup> he correctly points to the limited scope of this legislation and commission in that it focused on a particular understanding or model of reconciliation. Hence my agreement with

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<sup>51</sup> See amongst others, de Gruchy, Cochrane and Martin, *Facing the Truth*, 1-4; Borraine and Levy, *The Healing of a Nation*, xiii-xxiv, 2-8; Botman and Petersen, *To Remember and to Heal*, 7-14. Fanie du Toit and Erik Doxtader (eds), *In The Balance: South Africans debate reconciliation* (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2010), ix-xiv, 1-7.

<sup>52</sup> See Nico A Botha, "Reconciliation as Narrative: Witnessing against a too easy and a too difficult reconciliation", *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 29:3 (2008), 659; Nico N Koopman (2007) "Reconciliation and the Confession of Belhar (1986): Some challenges for the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa", *Dutch Reformed Theological Journal*, 48:1 & 2 (2007), 96-106.

<sup>53</sup> Tinyiko S Maluleke, "Dealing lightly with the wounds of my people: The TRC process in theological perspective", *Missionalia*, 25:3 (1997), 324-43.



Maluleke that this process was in fact only symbolic, and it failed to deal adequately with the material conditions and the legacy of 300 years of colonialism, patriarchy and oppressive policies. This conclusion is confirmed with Maluleke highlighting the reality of the silence and absence of the voices of the black poor and marginalized sectors in these high-profile processes, and his call for interpreting and articulating of what he calls “the eloquence with which the increasingly poor and increasingly marginalized people of this country are silent”.<sup>54</sup> Maluleke continues to outline the state of the discourse on reconciliation as a SABT reading of the TRC model of reconciliation, and identifies<sup>55</sup> at least six strands of contesting black voices, namely: 1) The rejection of “superficial integrationist reconciliation”, which was “operationalized through the creation of several multi- or non-racial groups, ideologies and theologies” in a “sporadic”, temporary and palliative integration of “non-whites” and “white liberals”; 2) The critique of “third way” reconciliation, where “multiracial” or integrated groups sought to constitute a “reconciled alternative community which transcended and thereby undermined social divisions”; 3) The response to a contrasting of reconciliation with revolution and liberation, where black people continue to be seen as inferior – as only equal human beings can be reconciled. In this context, Maluleke quotes Mofokeng who insists that “there is no possibility of reconciliation between black and white people ... until the oppressive structures and institutions, be they black or white, are transformed”;<sup>56</sup> 4) Reconciliation as espoused by TKD, where a distinction is made between “true reconciliation” and what one could call a “counterfeit reconciliation”, which allows the “sins of injustice and oppression to continue”. This view has however also been challenged as a “ruling class definition of reconciliation”. He then also refers fifthly to gender reconciliation and lastly, in appropriating the Marxist interpretation of alienation, he notes the attempt to transcend “race-bound and people-bound reconciliation”. Here, reconciliation (and alienation!) is defined in terms of the material means of livelihood, i.e. transcending the alienation from land, cattle labour, from black history, culture and religious traditions,<sup>57</sup> in line with the critique in particular from Mofokeng and Mosala. Maluleke then examined how the political transitions – through the CODESA negotiations and settlements, international experiments and notions of human rights with

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<sup>54</sup> Maluleke, *Dealing lightly with the wounds of my people*, 331. See also Botha, *Reconciliation as Narrative*, 666-67, who shows how the actual practices of TRC-type reconciliation, actually aimed at a particular, almost fabricated, outcome, and as such silencing and suffocating, what he calls “reconciliation as narrative”.

<sup>55</sup> Tinyiko S Maluleke, “The Truth and Reconciliation Discourse: A Black Theological Evaluation”, in Cochrane, de Gruchy and Martin, *Facing the Truth*, 101-03.

<sup>56</sup> Mofokeng, in Maluleke, *The Truth and Reconciliation Discourse*, 102.

<sup>57</sup> Maluleke, *The Truth and Reconciliation Discourse*, 103.

respect to the South as well as TRC-like commissions in other countries – influenced and determined the way the South African project was structured.<sup>58</sup> He concludes by acknowledging the positive role and impact that the TRC made, and also by pointing to the sober realisation and challenge, namely, the reality of the non-violent resistance to these processes, through the absence of the voice and struggles of the black poor and black women. This silence alludes to the possibility that the church and her prophetic voice were absent, and the possibility that she has failed her calling in this particular context of Mission as Reconciliation. Within this context he correctly argues that the rising tide of new theologies and the “TRC industry” actually masked this resistance through the silence of the prophetic tradition. It seems that indeed the wounds of colonial systemic violence inflicted upon generations of black people have not been healed – and perhaps this explains the ongoing violence. Indeed, this is confirmed by the reality that whilst South Africans often vent bitter anger, whether it be at refugees and migrant labourers from various other southern Africa countries like Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo, in particular or simply at each other, it is important to note that the spate of horrific attacks are targeted against *black* nationals. This outburst laid bare the ongoing reality of a deep divide also amongst black Africans, where seemingly colonial imaginations rooted in skin colour remain a key identity marker, determining access to livelihood and dignity. Blackness just isn’t what it used to be.<sup>59</sup> In response to these, Mngxitama therefore argues that the ongoing bitter violence is, in fact, not caused by xenophobia, but by “negrophobia”<sup>60</sup> – the unresolved questions raised by Maluleke, Botha and others, which continue to haunt the Rainbow Nation. A deeper, connected vision is needed – rooted in the faith commitments emerging within the aforementioned tensions. It is indeed in this space that the formation of a deeply rooted communion becomes possible.

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<sup>58</sup> Maluleke, *The Truth and Reconciliation Discourse*, 111-113.

<sup>59</sup> This statement is taken and re-appropriated from the publication by Melissa Steyn, *Whiteness just isn't what it used to be: White identity in a changing South Africa* (Albany: State University of New York, 2001). Whilst white identity reconstruction has been to seen to be the most problematic, the problematisation and reconstruction of black identities now seems to come to the fore sharply, amongst others, in the violence that erupted. Andile Mngxitama states this irony poignantly: “The state, led by black Africans, regularly sends out the message that black Africans are undesirables”, in “We are not all like that: Race, Class and Nation after Apartheid”, in Shireen Hassim, Tawana Kupe and Eric Worby (eds), *Go home or die here: Violence, xenophobia and the reinvention of difference in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2008), 291.

<sup>60</sup> Mngxitama, *We are not all like that*, 197.

### Building Bridges...

Indeed, the persistent grim realities continue to cut to the heart of Mission as Reconciliation where personal reconciliation to a new liberated selfhood is in tension with confrontation with the truth of the continued injustice and the building of the dreams of a just communion. Addressing this interconnected reality from the Christian tradition is clearly articulated in the Confession of Belhar,<sup>61</sup> as a confession bridging the past, present and future, and simultaneously the personal, spiritual truth-telling, with the building of a just communion. Indeed, it confesses:

“We believe that God has entrusted the church with the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ; that the church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, that the church is called blessed because it is a peacemaker, that the church is witness both by word and by deed to the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells.”

And:

“That God’s life-giving Word and Spirit has conquered the powers of sin and death, and therefore also of irreconciliation and hatred, bitterness and enmity, that God’s life-giving Word and Spirit will enable the church to live in a new obedience which can open new possibilities for life for society and the world.”

These perspectives, as articulated as a confession, do not come in isolation. The notions of unity, reconciliation, justice and obedience are different dimensions, articulating the heart of God for his world, but came as a particular response to the challenges raised by SABT. It articulates the key imperatives of the personal, spiritual self-liberation from sin, articulated through the confession of faith, but then also the confrontation with the truth of God’s radical intervention in conquering the powers, and also the empowerment to continue to imagine and work towards caring justice, because “God is in a special way” standing on the side of justice, the wronged and needy. This integration does not ease out the tensions, but aims at transcending the breaking apart towards the building of a new vision which functions as a bridge.

In the light of this, and in discerning missional ecclesial identity on the basis of co-ordinates emerging from the Confession of Belhar, James Buys<sup>62</sup> proposes the following key co-ordinates, which refine SABT’s

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<sup>61</sup> *The Confession of Belhar 1986*. (Belhar: LUS Publishers) was adopted by the then Dutch Reformed Mission Church in 1986, in the midst of the struggle against apartheid and colonialism in South Africa, and has subsequently also been adopted by the United Protestant Church in Belgium. Other reformed churches like the Christian Reformed Church in America, the Reformed Church in America, and the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America are also considering adopting it.

<sup>62</sup> James Buys, “A new ecumenical vision for a community of life in Africa”, *Reformed World*, 56:4 (2006), 374-90.

perspectives, namely, an ‘ubuntu-ified’, solidarity-based socio-economy, democratic governance, and also solidarity-based consumption. Our conversations and reflections, over the current discourses and shifts in the context, challenge faith communities to become critically aware of these and the vision for community of life in Africa, but, I believe, also globally. The implications for Mission as Reconciliation are as follows.

A solidarity, equality-based *koinonia* has to be explored where we become communities where there is an acknowledgement of these tensions and differences, and also equality – and as a result of that, *reconciled* difference. This difference is not primarily based on race, but on different and differing emerging identifications taking into account various elements from concrete history and biography, and also future visions and choices for equality and justice. It is at these crossroads where there is space for exploring what it means to be bridge-building Christians in a new way, yet being true to uniting, reconciling, just and obedient Christian identities. Reconciliation in this context implies unity, justice and, therefore, *costly* obedience, for those voices and concerns that have not been heard. This is not simply a matter of conflict management or pragmatics; it’s a matter of faith.

As a *liturgical community*, an emerging missional ecclesiology, challenged by Mission as Reconciliation, will further envision worship and witness that ritually face up to the realities of our past and how it shapes and continues to shape our praxis, and also opening up the possibilities of repenting from the sin of new divisions which still manifest themselves in our current situation, institutions and practices. This is a church that is a remembering community in her liturgical space where memories are redeemed, and also which keeps reading the new signs of the times. In this process this church, in her teaching, her *diakonia*, and also how she takes form, will not simply gloss over *difference and inequality*, or deny them, but provide the space to confess and overcome them. The evolving class inequalities cannot be downplayed. How to deal with this new reality calls for new forms or new visions of institution-building, rooted in solidarity-based economies and governance.

Different *gifts* will therefore also be allowed to grow and mature, enriching the body. Mission as Reconciliation in a future church will depend on the embrace of a variety of readings of the word of God, a multi-dimensional perspective on the reading of biblical texts where dialogue and listening become key gifts within this church. This implies the affirmation of these different readings as a creative tension; readings that affirm the diversity, which do not further division, but rather the appreciation of the various gifts of God. Through these multiple readings, this missional church develops an identity and ethos of *dealing with difference and power* through the embodiment of reconciliation and justice within the church, and also society; from the bottom up where there are no more “know-all tutors” or “perpetual teachers”, but fellow sisters and brothers.

Keeping these challenges in relation to each other is where leaders – as bridge-builders or, better, as signals of Jesus Christ as the ultimate Bridge – are formed. These new tensions sometimes come to us as surprises, other times as that awkward moment. Yet, we need to discern those moments of grace again and again as a struggle for the authentic historical faith that continues. We cannot be content with quick-fix techniques. This is a spiritual pilgrimage of the Cross and the Resurrection. Indeed, as Boesak suggests, “Our work towards genuine reconciliation has just begun, and by divine irony it is revealed in both systematic distortions, the cries of the poor and the conversion of Adrian Vlok. A new door for reconciliation has been opened. We have an opportunity to do it right.”<sup>63</sup>



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<sup>63</sup> Boesak, *Running with Horses*, 283.

# MOTHERING WAYS AND RECONCILIATION

Monica Jyotsna Melanchthon

“There is no way to peace; peace is the way,” A.J. Muste.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has,” Margaret Mead.

## Rachel Weeps

Rachel weeps:

As little boys hold guns and go to war,  
Not in a game where the dead rise again and go home for sandwiches and  
cake,  
But in a deadly reality where the young are sacrificed  
On the altar of adult power and prejudice.

Rachel weeps:

As stick-thin children with swollen tummies and huge eyes,  
Filled not even with pain  
But with the resignation of those without hope die,  
While others throw away  
The excess food they cannot stuff into their mouths

Rachel weeps:

As a child peeps out from behind the sofa  
Fearful heavy blows,  
Of harsh words tearing her apart,  
Of the sexual violation which robs her of herself,  
While others,  
Well-cared for and loved  
Preserve their rightful innocence and peace

Rachel weeps for all her children

And we weep with her  
Lord, hear our lamentation.  
Hear our prayer.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> By Priscilla White, Birmingham, England, *Lifting Women's Voices: Prayers to Change the World*, Margaret Rose, et al (eds) (New York, Harrisburg, Denver: Morehouse Publishing, 2009), 39-40.

Rachel is first introduced in Genesis 29 as a woman shepherdess whose life and future is determined by two men, namely, Jacob and Laban. She waits seven years to become the wife of the patriarch Jacob and, being barren, she waits again another seven years to bear children. She pleads with God to give her children (Gen 30:1) and against all odds she finds motherhood, but eventually it is motherhood that finally robs her of life (Gen 35:16-20). Rachel is remembered through her children and grandchildren and their descendants. But she is remembered again, surprisingly so, in the aftermath of the destruction of Jerusalem, when a sizeable portion of the land's inhabitants had been taken into exile. The people and the land were in pain and all they could do was shed tears in lamentation to God. In this context, Rachel is uplifted again by the prophet Jeremiah, himself a descendant of Rachel, a Benjaminite from the village of Anathoth. She is introduced as the personification of all Israel's mothers, who weeps over the graves of her children.<sup>2</sup> E. Burrows calls attention to a Semitic belief that mothers who died in childbirth became weeping ghosts.<sup>3</sup> It is uncertain whether this was behind Jeremiah's choosing her over Sarah or Rebecca. But Jeremiah immortalizes her as a mother who weeps for her children and pleads with God on their behalf:

"Thus says the Lord:

A voice is heard in Ramah,

Lamentation and bitter weeping.

Rachel is weeping for her children;

She refuses to be comforted for her children,

Because they are no more" (Jer 31:15).

She weeps and refuses to be comforted (Jer 31:15) and the prophet offers a word of comfort and hope:

"Thus says the Lord:

Keep your voice from weeping,

And your eyes from tears ...

There is hope for your future, says the Lord:

Your children shall come back to their own country" (Jer 31:16-17).

The return from exile will occur "not through any merit of the exiles, rather only because of the emotion-filled plea of their all deserving mother Rachel ... God has heard, and only because it is Rachel pleading".<sup>4</sup> God recognizes and heeds her crying and her tears and consoles her with a word, an unreserved and unconditional promise offered without explanation.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Terence E Fretheim, *Jeremiah: Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2002), 434.

<sup>3</sup> "Cuneiform and Old Testament: Three Notes", *Journal of Theological Studies*, 28 (1927), 185, as cited by Fred Strickert, *Rachel Weeping: Jews, Christians, and Muslims at the Fortress Tomb* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007), 14, n. 27.

<sup>4</sup> Strickert, *Rachel Weeping*, 15.

<sup>5</sup> Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 434.

According to Strickert, later traditions have amended this text of Jeremiah's and so the Targum Jonathan replaces the weeping figure of Rachel with Jerusalem, akin to the weeping mother figure in Lamentations; while the mystical traditions identified Rachel with the indwelling of God, the *shekinah*, "the spirit of God", the collective soul of the nation that weeps over her children as they go into exile.<sup>6</sup> "The ways of power and strength, of exclusivity and manipulation, have all failed. Instead, Rachel's faithfulness and patient waiting has become a model for all."<sup>7</sup>

The text has been attended to by women scholars as well who see Rachel as the mother figure weeping and inconsolable; but they have also been drawn to the image of God as parent. Israel was a child of God and, in this text, the metaphor of parenthood takes a distinctly maternal cast as God shows motherly compassion for the child (Jer 31:20-22). The text presents a multiplicity of voices all addressing intense suffering brought on by the destruction and the exile. Besides Rachel's voice – grief-stricken, weeping, and powerless – there is also the voice of Ephraim the child – obedient, disobedient, repentant – aware that suffering and exile are justified and a deserved penalty. Her tears and lament stir and move the inner parts (the womb) of the Divine which trembles (yearns) for the child Ephraim, and result in the third voice, the voice of Mother God who declares compassion and salvation for Israel.

"Parallels between Rachel and Yahweh occur in each of its three sections ... Yet there is a difference. The human mother refuses consolation; the divine mother changes grief into consolation. As a result the poem has moved from the desolate lamentation of Rachel to the redemptive compassion of God."<sup>8</sup>

The grief and suffering of the people is surrounded by mothering ways/maternal thinking, which are first initiated by Rachel. The Lord offers a word of hope: "For I, the LORD, promise to bring about something new on the earth, something as unique as a woman protecting a man (NET)!" As is evident from the varied ways in which it has been translated,<sup>9</sup> this line has puzzled commentators who either neglect it on the grounds that its meaning is uncertain, unsure and incomprehensible,<sup>10</sup> or see it as "a simple

<sup>6</sup> Strickert, *Rachel Weeping*, 21, 31-32.

<sup>7</sup> Strickert, *Rachel Weeping*, 15. Copyrighted Material

<sup>8</sup> Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1978), 45.

<sup>9</sup> "For the LORD has created a new thing on the earth: a woman encompasses a man" (NRSV); "For the LORD hath created a new thing in the earth: a woman shall court a man" (JPS); "For the LORD has created a new thing on the earth: a woman protects a man" (RSV).

<sup>10</sup> "The wiser course for the exegete is to admit ignorance and acknowledge that ancient texts occasionally do baffle the modern exegete. Jer 31:22b is one such baffling text ... In the final analysis, I must admit that I do not know what verse 22b means", Robert P Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 604-05. Cf also, Kathleen O'Connor: "Its meaning for the



role reversal of power in which a woman takes on the power of a man”.<sup>11</sup> The vocabulary is strong. Tribble finds clues to the meaning of this line in Genesis 1:27 in which זָכָר (*zakar*) the male and נְקֵבָה (*n<sup>e</sup>qēbā*) or “female” are created in the divine image (Gen 1:27), both of which are all-encompassing terms referring to the entire species of male and female.<sup>12</sup> In verse 21 Jeremiah uses בְּתוּלָה (*b<sup>e</sup>tūlā*), a virgin or young woman, who is instructed homeward, but in verse 22 he uses *n<sup>e</sup>qēbā*, derived from the verb meaning “pierce, bore or penetrate”. And the *n<sup>e</sup>qēbā* surrounds not the *zakar*<sup>13</sup> or male of Genesis 1:27 but the גִּבּוֹר *geber*, the young and strong man, the virile and powerful man, with strong military connotations.<sup>14</sup> There are two contrary images of a woman here.<sup>15</sup> The woman, not the young, innocent, vulnerable and inexperienced daughter – the (*b<sup>e</sup>tūlā*) – but the experienced *n<sup>e</sup>qēbā* will encompass or surround the strong man.

“As an inclusive and concluding referent, the *n<sup>e</sup>qēbā* encompasses poetically all the specific female images of the poem ... Accordingly, female surrounding man is Rachel the mother embracing her sons with tears and with speech.”<sup>16</sup>

The central paradigm of hope in this text is the mother.<sup>17</sup> The female imagery surrounds Ephraim; the female surrounds the warrior; the words of a mother embrace her son.<sup>18</sup> It is a text which maintains that “the surprising new role of women symbolizes a changed order of relationships in a reconstituted and joyous society”<sup>19</sup> The line therefore goes beyond a simple role reversal and offers a vision, a hope in the transformation and

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poem is not clear ... refers to future sexual relationships in which women will be active agents in the procreation of a restored people. Perhaps ... women will be capable of protecting warriors ... it anticipates role reversals of a different sort.” In “Jeremiah” in *The Women's Bible Commentary*, Carol A Newsom and Sharon H Ringe (eds) (London/Louisville, KY: SPCK/Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 176.

<sup>11</sup> Cf William L. Holladay, “Jeremiah and Women’s Liberation”, *Andover Newton Quarterly*, 12:4 (March 1972): 213-33;

<sup>12</sup> Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 48.

<sup>13</sup> Understood as “male offspring”.

<sup>14</sup> From the verb meaning “prevail, be mighty, have strength, be great”. Distinguished from women, children and non-combatants whom he is to defend; used primarily in poetic texts. Cf the Hebrew Lexicon by Brown Driver Briggs.

<sup>15</sup> Cf JA Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 576, who, on the basis of Jeremiah 30:5-7, makes a distinction between daughter Zion and warriors who become women, effeminate. “Israel is then both feminine and effeminate.”

<sup>16</sup> Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 48-49.

<sup>17</sup> Rita Nakashima Brock, “A New Thing in the Land: The Female Surrounds the Warrior”, in Cynthia L Rigby (ed), *Power, Powerlessness, and the Divine: New Inquiries in Bible and Theology* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1997), 157.

<sup>18</sup> Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 45.

<sup>19</sup> Kathleen O’Connor, “Jeremiah”, 176.

defeat of traditional values of control, power and conquest. This word of hope is offered in the midst of conflict, of despair and utter hopelessness.

### **Mothering and Motherhood**

“Being a mother is an attitude, not a biological relation.” (Robert A. Heinlein, *Have Space Suit – Will Travel*)

As mothers, women have acquired the skills of persuasive counsel and diplomacy within the context of the family, since as mothers they would have to mediate and bring peace between children in their games of war and destruction. At the very outset, it should be said that attitudes to mothering have been ambivalent and conflictual, and it should be emphasized that women’s lives should not or cannot be defined primarily in terms of motherhood. The concept and the role of “motherhood” is therefore not without its share of problems and misunderstandings. Having said that, many feminists have emphasized the importance of “motherhood” or “mothering ways” as being essential in societal relations. Adrienne Rich in *Of Women Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*<sup>20</sup> differentiates between mothering and motherhood. She sees “motherhood” as an oppressive, patriarchal institution, different from “mothering” and “women’s maternal bodies”. She maintains that, inherent in women’s bodies and to the mothering experience, is a radical and transformative potential, and so “the repossession by women of our bodies will bring far more essential change to human society than the seizing of the means of production by workers”.<sup>21</sup>

Women as mothers do have an impact on the cognitive, the psychic, and the social, and they are capable of polarizing and creating unequal gender identities.<sup>22</sup> Sara Ruddick combined these mothering themes with her notions of “maternal thinking” and “maternal practices”, describing women’s deep commitment to the mothering experience, often despite constraining and oppressive conditions.<sup>23</sup> Some features of the mothering experience, she argued, are nearly constant, like maternal concern with preservation, growth and the acceptability of the child. In the interests of preserving fragile life, fostering growth and welcoming change, maternal practices tend towards humility, humour, realism, respect for persons and responsiveness to growth.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Adrienne Rich, *Of Women Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (London: Virago, 1976).

<sup>21</sup> Adrienne Rich, *Of Women Born*, 285.

<sup>22</sup> Nancy Chodorow, *Reproduction of Mothering* (London: University of California Press, 1978).

<sup>23</sup> Sara Ruddick, “Maternal Thinking”, *Feminist Studies* 6 (2) (Summer 1980), 342-67.

<sup>24</sup> Sara Ruddick, “Maternal Thinking”, 63.

Ruddick has been criticized on the grounds that her concept of motherhood ignores a mother's sexuality, aggression, and the need and desire for an autonomous life.

“Important things like rage, frustration, aggression, sexuality, irrational intense love and hate, re-experiencing one's own childhood. Blurring of body boundaries, conflicts of demands of a child, one's mate, other children and other work are missing.”<sup>25</sup>

But Ruddick's work succeeded in calling attention to and celebrating motherhood. She developed and expanded her thoughts on the subject of motherhood in her book, *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace*,<sup>26</sup> and laid the groundwork for a feminist approach to understanding and analysing the practices and intellectual disciplines involved in rearing children. Her approach to child-rearing shifts the focus away from motherhood as a social institution or biological imperative toward the day-to-day activities of raising and educating a child. This work, she argued, shapes the parent as much as the child, giving rise to specific cognitive capacities and values – qualities of intellect and soul. Some people think their way into ways of acting, while possibly more act their way into new ways of thinking. Women derive their ways of behaving from “doing, acting” which informs and shapes their “thinking”. From these premises she developed the argument that mothers, by virtue of their maternal work, cannot tolerate violence, whether in social settings like the playground or the workplace, or as an instrument of state policy. They are, by life experience, trained to resist militarism and war.

“Mothers are seen as keepers of the culture, the nation and the future. Women are responsible for cultural and community continuity and they watch over present and future generations. There is an authority that comes with this role, which translates into political responsibility where women work in balance with men. This is exemplified in nations that have clan mothers or in more informal governance structures where grandmothers are recognized as authority figures.”<sup>27</sup>

This affirmation of women's maternalistic subjectivity had led to the psychological research of Carol Gilligan, acclaimed for its emphasis on women's separate styles of moral reasoning, and other work stressing the basic cognitive differences between women and men, alongside emphasis on women's separate “ways of knowing”. Gilligan stressed the importance of caring and the need for the reintegration of the emotional and the rational.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Jane Flax, “Theorizing Motherhood”, *Women's Review of Books* 1/9 (1984), 13.

<sup>26</sup> (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1989, 1995).

<sup>27</sup> Kim Anderson, *Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood* (Toronto: Second Story Press, 2000), 104.

<sup>28</sup> Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (London: Harvard University Press, 1982).

Rita Nakashima Brock engages in a detailed analysis of Ruddick's concept of *Maternal Thinking* and has applied insights to a "paradigm of taking responsibility".<sup>29</sup> In her attempt to identify "sources of personal agency for change and personal accountability", she attends to both Jeremiah 31 that offers an alternative model of power, and to Ruddick's concept of "maternal thinking" in which women are seen as individuals standing in between power and powerlessness, and so in a position to envision new ways of creating community and recognizing values that engender life both in community and the earth. I cite here a very insightful paragraph from her chapter.

Maternal thinking opens doors for examining the multiple voices that allow us both to identify with those who are vulnerable and to accept responsibility for our power. This multiple consciousness happens because those who mother sit on the fulcrum of power and powerlessness, of domination and silence, of hope and despair and of abuse and empowerment. The ambiguities of maternal thinking allow for greater honesty and accountability, as well as for the dynamic dialectical processes of creative disruption and recreation. They lead us to relational and dynamic understandings of power and its uses, even as they acknowledge that many human relationships involve unequal forms of power.<sup>30</sup>

There is no doubt that the feminist focus on the significance, rather than simply the burden of motherhood, did serve to inspire and strengthen many women. Those active in political struggles, especially in the women's peace movement, often invoked motherhood to combine and celebrate women's pacific and nurturing goals. Type "mothers for peace" in any search engine and see the number of groups that are identified under this title.

### **Mothers/Women at the Forefront of Movements for Peace and Reconciliation**

"On 2 November 2000 [when the Al-Aqsa Intifada was in full flight], one ... essentialist call for demonstration stated that "Women make peace, generals do not ... Listen to the voice of feminine wisdom, because the era of the generals is over!" Ronit Lentin, *If I forget thee ...*<sup>31</sup>

Amongst the many groups and movements seeking to foster reconciliation and peace are groups of mothers. Women and mothers are peacemakers at the grassroots, testing and trying their peacemaking skills and playing a proactive role in their communities. Peace and reconciliation is not a by-product but rather a central ideal and intention for these women. The following are some examples:

<sup>29</sup> Rita Nakashima Brock, "A New Thing in the Land", 137-59.

<sup>30</sup> Brock, "A New Thing in the Land", 155.

<sup>31</sup> In Nahla Abdo and Ronit Lentin (eds), *Women and the Politics of Military Confrontation: Palestinian and Israeli Gendered Narratives of Dislocation* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002), 297.

*Meira Paibi* (“Torch Bearers” or “Mothers’ Front”) of Manipur: people from the state of Manipur, NE India, have long campaigned for the repeal of the *Armed Forces Special Powers Act* (AFSPA), which provided troops with extraordinary powers during counter-insurgency operations. Demanding that the act be scrapped, human rights activist Irom Chanu Sharmila has been on hunger strike for nearly eleven years. Her protest began after the paramilitary Assam Rifles gunned down ten civilians on November 2, 2000. She remains in judicially ordered custody, force-fed through a nasal tube. Thangjam Manorama Devi, a 32-year-old resident of the state of Manipur, was arrested by the Assam Rifles on the night between July 10 and 11, 2004. At 5:30 am on the morning of the 11th, her body was found about four kilometres from her home. She had been shot through the lower half of her body, raising suspicion that bullets had been used to hide evidence of rape. The security forces therefore behave as though they were “judge, jury, and executioner – and have become comfortable in adopting this role.”<sup>32</sup>

After Manorama’s killing, on July 12, 2004, several civil society groups called a 48-hour protest strike. Thirty-two organizations formed a network called *Apunba Lup* in a campaign to repeal the AFSPA. But the most heart-wrenching protest was by a group of Manipuri women between the ages of 45 and 73, members of the *Meira Paibi*<sup>33</sup> who, on July 15, 2004 in front of the Assam Rifles camp in the state capital, Imphal, stripped naked wrapped in a banner that said, “Indian Army Rape Us”. Forced to respond, the state government ordered a judicial enquiry, and although a report was submitted, no action has yet been taken. The central government then ordered an enquiry of its own and it seems that the committee ordered a repeal of the AFSPA but no action has yet been taken.

L. Gyaneshori was one of the women who took part in the protest; she told *Human Rights Watch* that:

“Manorama’s killing broke our hearts. We had campaigned for the arrest memo to protect people from torture after arrest. Yet, it did not stop the soldiers from raping and killing her. They mutilated her body and shot her in the vagina. We mothers were weeping, ‘Now our daughters can be raped. They can be subjected to such cruelty. Every girl is at risk.’ We shed our clothes and stood before the army. We said, ‘We mothers have come. Drink our blood. Eat our flesh. Maybe, this way you can spare our daughters.’ But

<sup>32</sup> Human Rights Watch, “*These Fellows must be Eliminated!*”, 11. www.hrw.org

<sup>33</sup> One of two well-known women’s groups in Manipur, their concerns today centre on two issues: human rights violations by the armed forces and the increasing use of drugs – and subsequently the emergence of HIV/AIDS amongst the youth of Manipur. Any time they hear of a rape, torture, or a death or disappearance of a person, they gather in their hundreds and sometimes keep vigil all night. They cannot be easily deterred, as the government and the army have realized.

nothing has been done to punish those soldiers. The women of Manipur were disrobed by AFSPA. We are still naked.”<sup>34</sup>

*San Luis Obispo Mothers for Peace* is a non-profit organization concerned with the local dangers involving the Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant, and with the dangers of nuclear power, weapons and waste on national and global levels. Additionally, *Mothers for Peace* concerns itself with issues of peace, social justice and a safe environment.<sup>35</sup> Specifically, *Mothers for Peace* has been involved in litigation and public hearings involving the following issues: initial and subsequent licences, seismic safety, the County Emergency Response Plan, high-level radioactive waste storage, rate structure and deregulation, degradation of coastal waters, and plant security, among others.

The *Peace Mothers* (Turkish: *Bariş Anneleri*) is a women’s civil rights movement in Turkey which aims to promote peace between Turkey’s different ethnic groups through non-violent means. A member of the founding Assembly explained, “We had come together to say that the dirty war should come to an end and that there should be peace among Turks and Kurds.” In the words of Türkiye Bozkurt, “In 1999 we came together as mothers, whose children were either in the mountains, in prisons or had lost their lives in the war.”<sup>36</sup>

*Sudanese Mothers for Peace* is a non-religious, non-political, non-ethnic organisation. It is just a heart of the mothers for peace and against war. It calls for immediate stoppage of war and invites to peaceful solutions, reconciliation and rebuilding of good relationships in the community and creating a better future for the new generation.<sup>37</sup>

The *Mothers for Peace (MAP)*, a national movement for peace started as a campaign in 2003 in response to the bombing of Buliok – a major Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) Camp in Maguindanao – by the armed forces of the Philippines. The *Mothers for Peace* movement rests on three pillars: values, skills and food security. Values and the guiding principles of the movement are emphasized in sessions on personal peace and self-management.<sup>38</sup>

*Grandmothers for Peace*, a non-profit organization, was formed in May 1982 at the height of the Cold War. It is made up of activists – marching, protesting, visiting our elected officials, giving speeches to motivate others to action, publishing international newsletters and other materials, and even committing acts of civil disobedience when all else fails. “Stay at home” members help keep the work alive by writing and calling elected officials,

<sup>34</sup> Emphasis mine. *Human Rights Watch* interview with L Gyaneshori, President, *Thangmeiban Apunba Nupi Lup*, Imphal, February 26, 2008, as cited in *Human Rights Watch*, “*These Fellows must be Eliminated!*”, 31.

<sup>35</sup> [www.mothersforpeace.org](http://www.mothersforpeace.org)

<sup>36</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace\\_Mothers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace_Mothers)

<sup>37</sup> [www.sm4peace.org/home.html](http://www.sm4peace.org/home.html)

<sup>38</sup> [www.mindanaowomen.org/mcw/?page\\_id=9](http://www.mindanaowomen.org/mcw/?page_id=9)

circulating petitions, praying, guiding their grandchildren in the ways of non-violence, and helping to raise funds for Peace and Justice Scholarship Awards, plus other specific humanitarian efforts that are adopted. In most cultures around the world, grandmothers are revered as the “keepers of the peace”. “We are inspired and motivated by the facts but realize that in today’s dangerous world we can no longer keep or promote peace by sitting in our rocking chairs!”<sup>39</sup>

*Another Mother for Peace (AMP), Inc.* is a California non-profit corporation that seeks to “to educate women to take an active role in eliminating war as a means of solving disputes between nations, people and ideologies”. Founded in 1967 by a group of women strongly opposed to the war in Vietnam, they see their mission as creating a non-partisan, non-profit organization. Dedicated to the principle that war is obsolete, AMP encouraged its members to do Peace Homework by writing to elected government officials to express their desire for peace, that civilized methods must be creatively sought and implemented to resolve international differences.<sup>40</sup>

Inspired by earlier movements of women who demonstrated on the streets, making a public space for women to be heard – particularly *Black Sash* in South Africa and the *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* in Argentina, seeking the “disappeared” in the political repression of that country – is the *Women in Black*,<sup>41</sup> movement which is among the best-known of the women’s non-violent strategic action groups. It shares a genealogy with groups of women explicitly refusing violence, militarism and war, such as the *Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom* (formed in 1918), and the *Greenham Common Women’s Peace Camp* in the UK, and related groups around the world opposing the deployment of US missiles in the 1980s. *Women in Black* came into being in response to the outbreak of the Palestinian *intifada* in December 1987, when a women’s peace movement was formed to protest against military policy in the Occupied Territories. The women assembled every Friday afternoon at a central square in Jerusalem wearing black to mourn the victims of violence and occupation. Later, this form of demonstration spread to other locations in Israel. The movement has since become a worldwide phenomenon with groups in North America, Central and South America, Europe, Africa and the Asia-Pacific region.

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Late 2000 also saw the formation in Israel of the *Coalition of Women for a Just Peace*,<sup>42</sup> which brings together all the *Women in Black* vigils in Israel along with other women’s peace organizations. Dressed in black, these women have carried out direct action (such as placing a “closure” on the Israeli Defence Ministry by blocking traffic to it), in addition to holding

<sup>39</sup> [www.grandmothersforpeace.org/info/history](http://www.grandmothersforpeace.org/info/history)

<sup>40</sup> [www.anothermother.org/about](http://www.anothermother.org/about)

<sup>41</sup> [www.womeninblack.net/contact2.html](http://www.womeninblack.net/contact2.html)

<sup>42</sup> <http://coalitionofwomen.org>

mass *Women in Black* vigils twice a year, with thousands of women participating.<sup>43</sup>

### Mothering Ways and Reconciliation

“I have no leader or philosophy. Experience is my guide,” CK Janu, *adivasi* leader, Kerala, India.<sup>44</sup>

It would be really interesting to study these groups, their origins and histories, their aims and objectives, and their achievements. How effective have they been in their locations in fostering peace and reconciliation? But that is beyond the scope of this paper. And yet, I ask, why are there so many mothers’ groups involved in the righting of wrongs, protesting against injustice, human rights violations, and striving for peace and reconciliation? Why are they so particular about identifying themselves as “mothers”? These mothers are not seeking these ends – justice, peace, equality, reconciliation – for themselves alone or their children but for the benefit of the communities that they represent. But what is the source of their power? Where do they derive this drive and these convictions from? How do they determine or decide on which strategy to use? Answers to these questions and perhaps many more can only be gained through an in-depth analysis and study of these movements.

That reconciliation is both a process and a result at the centre of which is the creation of trust, tolerance, justice and peace has been said. The process and the outcomes are embedded in each other, and the steps taken toward a state of reconciliation must themselves reflect the qualities of relating – such as caring, mutual respect and honesty.<sup>45</sup> Reconciliation requires a sensitive and feeling-full understanding of suffering; that we use our knowledge and understanding in the service of our caring for others and

<sup>43</sup> Among the principles advocated by this Coalition are the full involvement of women in negotiations for peace; an end to occupation; establishment of the state of Palestine side-by-side with the state of Israel, based on the 1967 borders; recognition of Jerusalem as the shared capital of the two states; Israel to recognize its share of responsibility for the results of the 1948 war and find a just solution for the Palestinian refugees; opposition to the militarism that permeates Israeli society; equality, inclusion and justice for Palestinian citizens of Israel; equal rights for women and all residents of Israel; social and economic justice for Israel’s citizens, and integration in the region. Cf Gila Swirsky, “Feminist Peace Activism during the al-Aqsa Intifada”, in Nahla Abdo and Ronit Lentin (eds), *Women and the Politics of Military Confrontation: Palestinian and Israeli Gendered Narratives of Dislocation* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002), 237.

<sup>44</sup> Mukundan C Menon, “CK Janu: Experience is my guide”. <http://infochangeindia.org/other/changemaker/c-k-janu-experience-is-my-guide.html>

<sup>45</sup> Cynthia E Cohen, “A Poetics of Reconciliation: The Aesthetic Mediation of Conflict”, PhD dissertation submitted to the University of New Hampshire (December 1997), 38. Cf [www.brandeis.edu/ethics/peacebuildingarts/pdfs/poetics.pdf](http://www.brandeis.edu/ethics/peacebuildingarts/pdfs/poetics.pdf)



ourselves. This is the centrepiece of maternal thinking and mothering ways. “Reconciliation requires disputants to be sufficiently capable of experiencing, acknowledging and articulating feelings that their capacity for transformation ... is not impaired by emotional rigidity.”<sup>46</sup> Women employ experience, experience of romantic and maternal love, of tenderness and compassion. The tender love Jeremiah intuited came to focus in the lovely figure of an earthly mother, Rachel, and the divine mother, YHWH, was moved to her womb.

Reconciliation requires empathetic awareness. As Janu says, “Whenever any woman is facing a problem, each one of us should willingly empathise with her: ‘I am that woman!’ That attitude and feeling, ‘It happened to her, not to me’ doesn’t help us to further mature.”<sup>47</sup> Women belong to a diversity of groups, some dominant and others subjugated, and hold multiple positions, some powerful and others powerless. Hence women are always in the process of negotiating power while seeking to sustain relationships and connections.<sup>48</sup> Culturally, women have been conditioned to think relationally, to prize caring, and favour egalitarian models geared to sharing. They use experience to guide them into new ways of seeing, of being, of caring, and envisioning a new world. Their bodies and lives are storehouses of experience, mostly of agony, but out of this pain arises a strong yearning for relationship. In this yearning lies their power both personal and spiritual.

Another feature in the biblical text and among women is the capacity to mourn, to grieve, to lament and weep. The tears, the voices, the laments and the bodily presence of women – is power for a new just order. Courageous people do not flinch from bearing or exposing their pain in public. Lamenting in public, and protesting even at the cost of their bodies, exposing their pain in the most visible of forms – whether through the wearing of black or stripping naked, risking shame and censure – their lament forms are radical and confronting! Women mourn for their children but they mourn for their people as well and those involved in the conflict. They are aware that violence is not the path to take; there is no security in it; in fact, there is no security in the blood shed by the many innocent victims.

Reconciliation is possible when power is used for the other’s betterment. These mothers employ power, not the oppressive kind but “power-with” – a power that is channelled and used for the betterment of those in pain and suffering. It is power that is vested in bodies, in solidarity and community; it is a means to action; it is “power-with” and is related to knowledge, love, difference and embodiment. “Power is the reciprocal energy that engages us with one another and with God in such a way that power becomes

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<sup>46</sup> Cohen, “A Poetics of Reconciliation”, 81.

<sup>47</sup> Brigitte Schultze, “I am that Woman”. [http://montrealserai.com/\\_archives/2004\\_Volume\\_17/17\\_3/Article\\_5.htm](http://montrealserai.com/_archives/2004_Volume_17/17_3/Article_5.htm)

<sup>48</sup> Brock, “A New Thing in the Land”, 142.

synonymous with the vitality of living fully and freely.”<sup>49</sup> It is a power that “surrounds”, not overpowers; it is a power that is life-giving; it is power tapped from one’s grief, and it is a power that is compassionate; it is the power of repentance, of brokenness, and shame; it is the power that is capable of overcoming pain and suffering, of neutralizing death and violence, of transforming defiance and shame through actions that are risky, frightening and threatening.<sup>50</sup>

“I don’t think a woman who comes into power will harm society. Because what she learnt in the context of family she will not forget while being in power.”<sup>51</sup>

Jeremiah 31 is a lamentation in exile, but it is also a text of most intense affirmation of life. The women lament over the dead and the hurt, but their laments will not bring them back to life. The prayers and laments are uttered for the sake of the living, for the continuance of their life, for the redemption of the community’s soul – its humanity, as it were – and its ability to regain the power to feel, to weep, to care and to love.

In the face of the many conflicts and armed insurrections in the world, mass starvation, ecological destruction, rising consumerism, militarization, senseless terrorism, ethnic wars and conflicts, fear and suspicion, our imagination seems to fail us. It is hard to fully imagine and comprehend the extent of human suffering, and even harder to fathom the root causes, to repent and to strive for alternatives and different ways of fostering peace and reconciliation. It is the creation of a moral framework for their relationships by two contesting parties that requires imagination to generate a vision of new, more compassionate and just relationships, and also to generate innovative solutions to many intransigent and practical problems<sup>52</sup>. Imagination is therefore a key ingredient in reconciliation. We need to imagine a future before we can work for its realization.

“In order to resist ... failures of perspective and the abuses to which they can lead, imagination is indispensable, along with the attention it demands and the compassion it can generate. Without the ability to imagine oneself in the place of others, the Golden Rule loses all meaning and efforts to extend the scope of one’s perspective falter. By ‘imagining foreign states of mind’, as William James recommended, one can experience threats not only to oneself and those with whom one is personally linked but to all others as well, whether compatriots or adversaries. Imagination can likewise enable us to extend our perceived horizon not only in space – from ourselves toward the entire human species and all that is endangered along with it – but also in time. We can then try to envisage how present conflicts may affect beings not

<sup>49</sup> Denise Ackermann, *After the Locusts: Letters from a Landscape of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 74.

<sup>50</sup> Brock, “A New Thing in the Land”, 158.

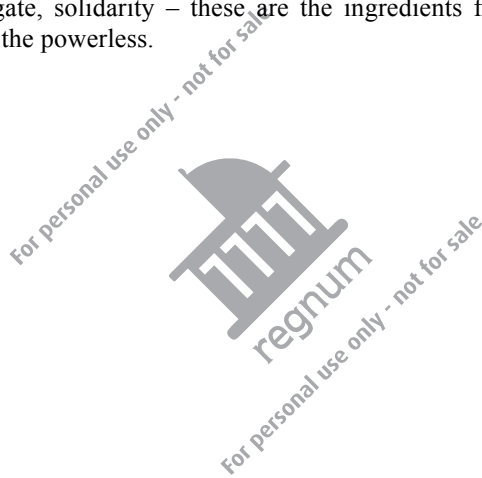
<sup>51</sup> Schultze, “I am that Woman”. [http://montrealserai.com/\\_archives/2004\\_Volume\\_17/17\\_3/Article\\_5.htm](http://montrealserai.com/_archives/2004_Volume_17/17_3/Article_5.htm)

<sup>52</sup> Cynthia E Cohen, *A Poetics of Reconciliation*.

yet even born, and consider our responsibility toward the past as well – what many have called our stewardship of resources that are not ours to use up or destroy at will.”<sup>53</sup>

Imagination is born out of hope, and hope emerges among the vulnerable and wounded.<sup>54</sup> Hope is not found in triumphal, nationalistic hegemony or the customary military pomp and circumstance – that is, in the garb of winners.<sup>55</sup> Hope is born when one is able to relinquish oppressive modes of power and orientation: “Surrender one’s old identity and accept one’s marginal status, then despair loses its grip, and hope is born.”<sup>56</sup>

In the consideration of the biblical text and knowledge derived from the functioning of women’s groups for peace and reconciliation, mutual caring, respect and relationality, the ability to feel, weep, lament, and risk oneself, courage, being guided by experience, empathetic awareness, imagination, hope and a relinquishment of modes of power and orientation that oppress and subjugate, solidarity – these are the ingredients for reconciliation as offered by the powerless.



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<sup>53</sup> Sissela Bok, *A Strategy for Peace: Human Values and the Threat of War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989), 27-28.

<sup>54</sup> Daniel L Christopher Smith, *A Biblical Theology of Exile*, OBT (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2002).

<sup>55</sup> Louis Stulman and Hyun Chul Paul Kim, *You are My People: An Introduction to Prophetic Literature* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 136-37.

<sup>56</sup> Louis Stulman and Hyun Chul Paul Kim, *You are My People*, 135-36.

# THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION FROM AN INTERFAITH PERSPECTIVE

Sebastian Kim

In any society, "... much of human life centres around other people. Our greatest joys, our deepest sorrows, and our most difficult problems relate, for the most part, to our interactions with others."<sup>1</sup> A society is held together by relationships determined by its social structure or social organization<sup>2</sup> and a religious community is also a society and can be analysed sociologically.<sup>3</sup> Relationship is of central importance to Christianity because of the personal nature of God which is shown in his initiative in reaching out to make a covenant relationship with humankind. The gospel of love cannot but have relationship at its heart. It is not too much to say that the Bible is a book about the reconciliation of relationships. Throughout the Scriptures, the concern of the biblical narrative is the reconciliation of relationships that are broken. The primary concern is to heal the relationship between humans and God, but this is integrally linked with the relationship of human beings to one another. We see human relationships challenged by internal and external conflict, by human sinfulness, and by people's immaturity. In particular, God, who has provided reconciliation through Christ, calls for reconciliation between individuals and between communities.

In any international or regional conflict situation, there is no simple explanation for the causes and process of the conflict – social, economic, territorial, political, ethnic and religious factors play an important role in any conflict to a greater or lesser extent. Religion is a contributing factor in many conflicts – past and present – for various reasons, and the critics of religion are right in pointing out that religious leaders and religious communities have contributed to some of the most devastating conflicts throughout history. In particular, religion has promoted the distinction between those who are in and out of their religious traditions: "too often,

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<sup>1</sup> Paul G Hiebert, *Cultural Anthropology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983), 140.

<sup>2</sup> William A Haviland, *Cultural Anthropology* (Florida: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1993), 50.

<sup>3</sup> As, for example, Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston, MS: Beacon Press, 1963), 60.

religion has promoted an ‘us versus them’ attitude as with the Greeks and the barbarians, the Jews and the *goyim*, the Muslims and the infidels, the Christians and the pagans, the true faith and the heretics, the good people (us) and the bad (them).<sup>4</sup> However, in spite of these negative effects of religions on the history of humanity, religion could and should be able to contribute either to the avoidance or to the solving of conflict situations by utilising the strengths and positive aspects of religion. Religion both unites and divides<sup>5</sup> and “promotes both intolerance and hatred ... as well as tolerance of the strongest type – the willingness to live with, explore, and honor difference”.<sup>6</sup>

In particular, religion offers a critical understanding of the process of reconciliation. Because religious traditions provide some of the fundamental explanations for and insights into human conflict, utilising these resources for peace is vital for reconciliation.<sup>7</sup> As Daniel Smith-Christopher has argued, “if religious values and symbolism are potential weapons (as well as essential to understanding a conflict), then surely the resources for reconciliation must also come from a more creative analysis of the religious cultural resources of the societies which are involved in the conflict itself?”<sup>8</sup> In the Christian tradition, for example, the concept of war and peace has been drawn out from both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. From this, the idea of “just war” was initiated by Augustine of Hippo, and then developed by Thomas Aquinas, and has been influential in the conduct and ethics of war, rightly or wrongly, in the West for centuries. At the same time, the pacifist tradition, following certain teachings of Jesus, has also made a significant impact on reconciliation movements both within and outside Christian traditions.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, religious traditions possess unique authority and capacity among the followers of their particular religion to deal with conflicts, particularly by preventing conflict and making for sustainable peace. An example of collective effort for peace is the World Council of Churches programme on the “Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation” (JPIC). This emphasised the positive employment of the “creative power” of God as empowerment for building communities of the poor and oppressed, and as

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<sup>4</sup> HO Thompson, *World Religions in War and Peace* (London: McFarland, 1988), xiv.

<sup>5</sup> EO Hanson, *Religion and Politics in the International System Today* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 315.

<sup>6</sup> H Coward and GS Smith (eds), *Religion and Peacebuilding* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2004), 2.

<sup>7</sup> P Schmidt-Leukei (ed), *War and Peace in World Religions: The Gerald Weisfeld Lectures 2003* (London: SCM Press, 1989), 3.

<sup>8</sup> DL Smith-Christopher (ed), *Subverting Hatred: The Challenge of Non-violence in Religious Traditions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998), 11.

<sup>9</sup> See LS Cahill, *Love Your Enemies: Discipleship, Pacifism, and Just War Theory* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1994).

the power of resistance for the sake of peace and justice. The JPIC project pledged that the community is the key aspect of this struggle for peace and justice since people gain inspiration from one another, share sufferings, and gain strength against any forms of oppression or conflict.<sup>10</sup> Another example is the efforts of WCC for peace and reconciliation in the Korean Peninsula in the early 1980s, which created an environment for a platform for peace-building among the two Koreas. The most significant direct dialogue was a meeting between representatives from the North and South Korean churches at a seminar on the “Christian perspectives on biblical and theological foundations for peace” in Glion, Switzerland in September 1986.<sup>11</sup> The meeting reached an emotional climax during the worship, when all the participants were encouraged to greet one another. The representatives of South and North first shook hands but soon embraced each other. By participating in the Eucharist together – the heart of Christ’s gospel of peace and reconciliation – they demonstrated the desire and hope of the people of divided Korea.

From an interfaith perspective, the ministry of reconciliation has been greatly enhanced by two major theological discourses of inculturation and dialogue, particularly articulated in an Indian context of communal conflicts and the problem of conversion.

### **Reconciliation through Inculturation and New View of Conversion**

The inculturation model can be traced back to the work of Roberto de Nobili, who first tried to relate the gospel to Hindu beliefs and practices in the seventeenth century.<sup>12</sup> In more recent times, Brahmabandhab Upadhyay (1861-1907) was an Indian Catholic convert who attempted to find a “meeting place” between Hinduism and Christianity, describing himself as a “Hindu-Catholic”, a concept he actively promoted through extensive writings. He based it on a Thomistic separation of body and soul such that “we are Hindus so far as our physical and mental constitution is concerned, but in regard to our immortal souls we are Catholic”.<sup>13</sup> Julius Lipner

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<sup>10</sup> FR Wilson (ed), *The San Antonio Report – Your Will be Done: Mission in Christ’s Way* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1990), 37-51.

<sup>11</sup> See Yi Man-yeol, *Korean Christianity and Unification Movement* (Seoul: Institute for Korean Church History, 2001), 382-88.

<sup>12</sup> Though the approach of de Nobili and his fellow Jesuits was suppressed by the hierarchy, William Burrows argues that this “radical inculturation paradigm” was continuous in Catholic missionary practice: William R Burrows, “A Seventh Paradigm? Catholics and Radical Inculturation” in Willem Saayman and Klippiess Kritzingler (eds), *Mission in Bold Humility: David Bosch’s Work Considered* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 121-38.

<sup>13</sup> Brahmabandhab Upadhyay, “Are We Hindus?” in Julius Lipner and George Gispert-Sauch (eds), *The Writings of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay I* (Bangalore: United Theological College, 1991), 24-25.

describes Upadhyay's contribution as ushering in "a new mode of thinking" which gave Indian Christians the "impetus to reassess their faith in a new light, to search for religious identity rooted in their native culture".<sup>14</sup>

At and around the Second Vatican Council, Karl Rahner's theology had a great impact on the Catholic approach to the salvation of people of other religions. Rahner emphasised the universality of God's grace such that every individual, regardless of religious background, would have an opportunity of "partaking in a genuine saving relationship to God", and this relationship would occur "within the religious and social realities offered to him in his particular historical situation".<sup>15</sup> He further argued that the non-Christian religions can be "a positive means of gaining the right relationship to God and thus for attaining salvation, a means which is therefore positively included in God's plan of salvation". He posited a "Christianity of an anonymous kind", of which the members may be called "anonymous Christians".<sup>16</sup> Rahner's theory of "anonymous Christianity" had many followers,<sup>17</sup> but at the same time it faced serious criticisms, which have been well rehearsed elsewhere.<sup>18</sup> However, it did allow the possibility of the salvation of individuals outside the Catholic church within the traditional Catholic theological framework, and therefore broke new ground in Catholic theology of religions.

Though Vatican II marked a significant change in Catholic ecclesiology when the church was defined as the People of God, the doctrine of the church in relation to people of other faiths and their salvation was ambiguous.<sup>19</sup> Regarding the conversion of people of other faiths, the Council affirmed that "it is through Christ's Catholic Church alone, which is the universal help towards salvation, that the fullness of the means of

<sup>14</sup> Julius Lipner, "A Case-Study in 'Hindu Catholicism': Brahmabandhab Upadhyay (1861-1907)", *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 72:1 (Jan 1988), 33-54. See also his in-depth study on Upadhyay – *Brahmabandhab Upadhyay: The Life and Thought of a Revolutionary* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>15</sup> In his lecture on "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions", delivered in 1961. Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations V* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1966), 115-34.

<sup>16</sup> Rahner, *Theological Investigations V*, 121-5; 131-3.

<sup>17</sup> See Paul Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1985), 120-44.

<sup>18</sup> See Küng, *On Being a Christian*, 97-104; H. Van Straelen, *The Catholic Encounter with World Religions* (London: Burns & Oates, 1966).

<sup>19</sup> For example, on the salvation of the people of other faiths, *Lumen Gentium (LG)* says, the church is "necessary for salvation: the one Christ is mediator and the way of salvation; he is present to us in his body which is the Church" – *LG* (14) – whereas, *Nostra Aetate (NA)* says, "The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions ... Yet she proclaims ... Christ who is the way, the truth and the life ... in him ... men find the fullness of their religious life," *NA* (2).

salvation can be obtained”,<sup>20</sup> therefore everyone “ought to be converted to Christ”.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, it opened up the possibility that those “outside” the church, who do not receive the gospel, are “related to the People of God in various ways” and “may achieve eternal salvation”.<sup>22</sup> So it appears that the statements of the Council represent both traditional and new thinking on conversion. Although, as Miikka Ruokanen rightly argues, the documents do not explicitly endorse the non-Christian religions as means to salvation, the affirmation of possibilities for salvation,<sup>23</sup> at least for individuals, without conversion to Christian faith, and the positive attitude toward the other religions, were a highly significant step.

In the open climate fostered by the Council, an attempt to deal with the problem of the relationship between Christianity and Hinduism was presented in the shape of Raymond Panikkar’s well-known work, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*. Panikkar was convinced that there must be a “meeting-place” between Christianity and Hinduism in the religious sphere. He then argued that this meeting place must be Christ, because Christ is the “ontological meeting-point of any religion” and the “only one mediator between God and the rest”. He concluded that “Christ is already there in Hinduism in so far as Hinduism is a true religion” and that the Christian mission was to unveil the “unknown Christ” in Hinduism. Hence conversion “does not mean ... a changing ‘over’ to another culture, another tradition or even ‘another’ religion, but a changing ‘in’, a changing into a new life, a new existence, a new creation, which is precisely the old one – and not another – but transformed, lifted up, risen again”.<sup>24</sup>

Although the work of Panikkar was in many ways in line with the new thinking of Vatican II and with Rahner’s theology, there was a significant difference in that Panikkar affirmed Hinduism itself as a way of salvation, which neither the Vatican documents nor Rahner did. Both Rahner and Panikkar attempted to bring Christianity and Hinduism (and other religions for Rahner) together in a normative salvation, though in different ways. For Rahner, salvation was through God’s grace offered to “anonymous Christians”, and for Panikkar, it was by acknowledging the “unknown

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<sup>20</sup> *Unitatis Redintegratio* (3).

<sup>21</sup> *Ad Gentes Divinitus* (7).

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<sup>22</sup> *Lumen Gentium* (16). See also David J Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 371-6; and Timothy E Yates, *Christian Mission in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 166-75.

<sup>23</sup> Miikka Ruokanen, *The Catholic Doctrine of Non-Christian Religions: According to the Second Vatican Council* (Leiden: EJ Brill, 1992). See the debate between Miikka Ruokanen, “Catholic Teaching on Non-Christian Religions at the Second Vatican Council”, and Paul Knitter, “Interpreting Silence: A Response to Miikka Ruokanen”, *IBMR* 14:2 (Apr 1990), 56-63.

<sup>24</sup> Raymond Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1964), 11-28 and 119-31.



Christ” within Hinduism. In Rahner’s theology of religions, the non-Christian religions were not really the focus of discussion, which was on individuals of other faiths; this led to Hans Küng’s criticism that he was reaffirming the doctrine of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* through the “back door”.<sup>25</sup> Panikkar, on the other hand, believed that Hinduism can be and should be a vehicle for salvation because of the presence of the “unknown Christ” within it, and this rendered conversion unnecessary. Christianity and the church were not his concern since it is Christ who mediates and brings salvation. However, although he may have appeared to solve the problem of conversion of Hindus, his approach was still based on the concept of Christ and relied on the acceptance by Hindus of the need for one mediator. Although Panikkar’s combination of Thomistic and *Vedantic* terminology very much impressed Boyd and others,<sup>26</sup> many critics saw him as still holding the superiority of Christianity over Hinduism,<sup>27</sup> which pleased neither those theologians who wanted to acknowledge the legitimacy of Hinduism on a par with Christianity, nor Hindus, who felt insulted. For some he was a follower of the “fulfilment” theory set down by J.N. Farquhar a half-century before,<sup>28</sup> while for others his approach lacked genuine “respect” for Hinduism and he was only trying to “interpret” it according to his own perspective.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, Panikkar’s acceptance of Hinduism as a legitimate way of salvation laid the groundwork for Catholic theologians in India to move from “Indian Christianity” to “Hindu Christianity”.<sup>30</sup>

The Indian attempt to place Christian theology in Hindu contexts as the ministry of reconciliation has been expressed in many ways, especially in the arts, due to how the Indian tradition views images and seeing as of vital importance to faith. Jyoti Sahi, a Christian artist, points out that Indians are interested in images “not just for what they are outside, but for the effect they have on the inner disposition for the believers”, and the “connection between inner and outer is vital for the Indian mode of realising faith”. He further argues:

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<sup>25</sup> Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian*, trans. Edward Quinn (London: Collins, 1977), 98.

<sup>26</sup> Robin Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology* revised edition (Delhi: ISPCK, 1975), 222-5.

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<sup>27</sup> Panikkar described Christianity as “a risen Hinduism” – *The Unknown Christ*, 17 – and Hinduism as “a vestibule of Christianity” with Christianity providing the “essential contents” to Hinduism – 19. Notice his revised edition (1981) in which he omitted these sentences – Raimundo Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany* revised edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1981).

<sup>28</sup> Eric J Sharpe, *Faith Meets Faith: Some Christian Attitudes to Hinduism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: SCM Press, 1977), 118-31.

<sup>29</sup> Küng, *On Being a Christian*, 98.

<sup>30</sup> Aloysius Pieris, “Inculturation in Non-Semitic Asia”, *The Month* 19:3 (Mar 1986), 83-7.

“Christianity, therefore, should act like a midwife, and constantly bring to birth in a society the new from the old in a spirit of love and beauty. Christ himself describes this process, using the metaphor of a woman giving birth to a child. In this birth process there is struggle and agony. But the climax of this process [Christ] is a new spirit of joy and celebration.”<sup>31</sup>

Theology of inculturation, along with theology of dialogue, has made significant impact on Christians who are struggling in the contexts of religiously pluralistic society. Radical rejection of religion and culture of wider society is no longer perceived as in line with the spirit of Christ whose ministry embodied reconciliation, and the active employment of inculturation has been a main agenda for mission practitioners and theologians.

### Reconciliation through Interfaith Dialogue

Dialogue can be defined as commitment to one's faith and openness to that of others with genuine respect. Dialogue involves a desire to understand those of another faith better and learn from one another, an attitude that leads to an ongoing reflection on one's own faith and practice. It is also for mutual knowledge and friendship that leads to the correction of prejudices toward others. It is a relatively recent paradigm in the field of theology and has especially come to the fore as discussion on religious pluralism has developed. The concept and practical methodology of dialogue are important subjects for discussion in theology as they need critical examination for the furtherance of Christian understanding of reconciliation.

The need for dialogue with the people of other faiths arises from the fact that increasingly we live in multi-religious societies and that the co-existence of different religious traditions is a reality one has to accept. People of different religious traditions face the common problems of contemporary society such as conflicts, injustice, spiritual deprivation, ecological crisis, moral and ethical dehumanisation; they also encounter the common challenge of secularism and modern and post-modern criticisms of religion. Dialogue is recognition of the need for religions to co-operate to face these difficulties. Furthermore, people of faith have a shared search for the answers to questions such as the meaning of life, salvation, religious truth, and life beyond the physical realm. Dialogue is also an attempt to help one another in our religious quests, while acknowledging that each religious tradition has its own historical development, takes different approaches to questions, and provides different answers.

Though the theoretical concept of dialogue has been developed in the field of systematic theology in the West, the philosophical and

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<sup>31</sup> Jyoti Sahi, *Stepping Stones: Reflections on the Theology of Indian Christian Culture* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1986), 27, 134.

experimental experience of dialogue has been articulated most clearly among Indian theologians. Due to the vast diversity of religious and cultural communities, one of the most difficult public issues in India has been the problem of communal conflicts. Through these experiences, Indian theologians have developed a pragmatic approach of living together along with a philosophical concept of finding truth and goodness in each other. They regard plurality as a blessing rather than an obstacle to harmony, and argue that active engagement in dialogue with others with respect is part and parcel of, if not essential to, any religious life.

Perhaps the most important contribution of Indian theological thinking to the global Christian community has been the active exploration of the concept of dialogue as the metaphor for theological discourse. This was taken up by E. Stanley Jones, a well-known Methodist missionary to India, as he explored the idea of a round table conference where people of different faiths could gather to share their own religious experiences without confronting each other or trying to persuade others to change their convictions. In his book, *The Christ of the Indian Road*, Jones stressed that Christians presented a Christ to India who is not a western import but who was there in India before them.<sup>32</sup> He said that the aim of his mission was “to produce Christlike character” not to westernise India, and he discerned a regeneration of Indian life through an, as yet unrecognised, experience of Christ. For him, dialogue with people of other faiths was a vital component of this discernment of Christ already present in India.

Stanley Samartha, who became the first director of the sub-unit on dialogue in the World Council of the Churches, articulated his theology of dialogue as an attempt to understand and express our own particularity, not just in terms of our own heritage but also in relation to the spiritual heritage of our neighbours of other faiths. His theology is based on his understanding of God’s covenant with his people and also Christ’s incarnation, both of which demonstrate the dialogical relationship between God and his people. A natural expansion of this understanding is that the relationship between different religious communities should be a form of mutual dialogue, and not at all confrontational.<sup>33</sup> Samartha draws his theology from the Indian multi-religious setting, from Indian philosophical approaches of finding truth by consensus, and from an attitude of acknowledging others as partners on the way rather than imposing one’s own truth claims on others. In his approach, mutual respect of one another’s convictions is of crucial importance in dialogue and this should take place in community, creating a “community of communities”. He saw dialogue among world religions as the demand of our age and an

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<sup>32</sup> E Stanley Jones, *The Christ of the Indian Road* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1925).

<sup>33</sup> Stanley J Samartha, *Courage for Dialogue: Ecumenical Issues in Inter-religious Relationships* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1981).

opportunity to work together to discover new dimensions of religious truths.

This idea of mutual search for the truth was taken up by the World Council of Churches and became a major plank of ecumenical mission theology, as explained in the document *Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies*.<sup>34</sup> This document sets clear aims and objectives of dialogue and gives some practical guidelines for Christians who are engaging in a multi-religious situation. It states that dialogue is the responsibility of Christians and should be carried on with the spirit of reconciliation and hope provided by Christ. It emphasises the vital importance of acknowledging that all communities seek a secure sense of identity, whilst realising that in this process a religious community may often become exclusive and absolutise its own religious and cultural identity. It also asserts that dialogue should be based on mutual trust and respect for the integrity of others, and therefore it is a vital part of Christian service in community as well as a means of living one's faith in Christ. *Ecumenical Considerations for Dialogue and Relations with People of Other Religions*<sup>35</sup> takes account of the recent development of fundamentalism, and reflects the rising concern for the relevance of dialogue in this context. It insists that the role of dialogue is not only to reconcile conflict between communities but also to prevent religion becoming the source of tension between communities in the first place. It also adds the importance of mutual empowerment in the common pursuit of the betterment of society, and encourages religious communities to critically examine their own conduct in relation to other communities.

However, while ecumenical sections of the Christian tradition view dialogue positively, more conservative sections raise cautions due to the ambiguity of the relationship between dialogue and evangelism. Evangelical perspectives on dialogue were well presented by John Stott in his book, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*.<sup>36</sup> He argues that dialogue is a vital aspect of Christian mission as long as, first, it is understood in line with the primary task of Christian witness to the people of other faiths; and second, in relation to the first, that it is understood that, because of Christian conviction, total openness to the other religions is incompatible with the Christian gospel. He also raises his objections to proclamation

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<sup>34</sup> *Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies* (1979). [www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/interreligious-trust-and-respect/guidelines-on-dialogue-with-people-of-living-faiths-and-ideologies.html](http://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/interreligious-trust-and-respect/guidelines-on-dialogue-with-people-of-living-faiths-and-ideologies.html)

<sup>35</sup> *Ecumenical Considerations for Dialogue and Relations with People of Other Religions* (2001). [www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/interreligious-trust-and-respect/ecumenical-considerations-for-dialogue-and-relations-with-people-of-other-religions.html](http://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/interreligious-trust-and-respect/ecumenical-considerations-for-dialogue-and-relations-with-people-of-other-religions.html)

<sup>36</sup> John Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1986).

being portrayed as the result of pride, and dialogue being portrayed as a humble approach, insisting that proclamation can be done with humility. He further questions whether one who holds strong convictions can approach others with an attitude of total openness without compromising one's own integrity as a Christian. Though he accepts the notion of Christ being present already, prior to the Christian message being proclaimed, he nevertheless insists that this needs to be explicitly acknowledged through the proclamation of Christ. Though he agrees on the importance of dialogue as a mark of authenticity, humility, integrity and sensitivity, and admires the work of E. Stanley Jones and Kenneth Cragg, for Stott it is in the context of Christian witness that dialogue should be understood.

In *Dialogue and Proclamation*,<sup>37</sup> a document issued by the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, Roman Catholic scholars discuss this same tension. The document starts by defining dialogue as an endeavour to create mutual understanding and enrichment in "obedience to truth and respect for freedom" which includes both witness and exploration of different religious convictions. It stresses the importance of a balanced approach to the issue, so that while both parties uphold the other's religious convictions and identity, partners in dialogue are open to learn and receive from others. It sees the relationship between dialogue and proclamation as interrelated and yet not interchangeable, and argues that dialogue should be engaged in with discernment regarding God's plan for people of other faiths. In particular, Peter Phan, in his discussion of the role of inter-religious dialogue for peace-building and reconciliation, stresses the importance of implementing fourfold activities in any interfaith dialogue: dialogue of life, action, theological exchange and religious experience, while he lays particular emphasis on the last aspect for peace-building. By providing examples of dialogue in action in some Asian countries, he argues that dialogue can provide an interfaith spirituality for peace-building by promoting knowledge of the truth (or "remembering truthfully") and practising justice, forgiveness and social reconstruction.<sup>38</sup>

The tension between dialogue and proclamation may be best described as "commitment to one's faith and openness to that of others". This is of crucial importance when it comes to the theology of religions, where the ecumenical and evangelical positions are widely different. David Bosch sees this tension in relation to the question of whether other religions are salvific or not. He parallels this by the paradox between the universal

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<sup>37</sup> *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991). [www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/interelg/documents/rc\\_pc\\_interelg\\_doc\\_19051991\\_dialogue-and-proclamatio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html).

<sup>38</sup> Peter Phan, "Peacebuilding and Reconciliation: Interfaith Dialogue and Catholic Spirituality" in Robert Schreier, Scott Appleby and Gerard Powers (eds), *Peacebuilding: Catholic Theology, Ethics, and Praxis* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2010), 332-365.

saving intention of God and the need for the Christian message being proclaimed. He believes dialogue cannot be conducted with a completely “open mind” because, in Christ, the way to salvation has been manifested for Christians. Therefore witnessing to this conviction is part and parcel of dialogue, not with the attitude of a judge or lawyer but of a witness in the spirit of a “bold humility”.<sup>39</sup> This is also further affirmed by Lesslie Newbigin who, though accepting the need of deeper and meaningful dialogue in relation to the common search for the truth, rejected the notion of other religions as vehicles of salvation or any denial of the uniqueness of God’s work in Jesus Christ, while insisting that dialogue needs to be conducted with humility and yet with “confidence in the Gospel”.<sup>40</sup>

More recently, reflection on dialogue has been focused on two areas: one is criticism of dialogue as an intellectual exercise in that it is done either at an academic level or in an artificial environment. It is argued that dialogue should also be regarded as a grassroots activity of ordinary people of various religious traditions. The WCC booklet, *My Neighbour’s Faith – and Mine: Theological Discoveries through Interfaith Dialogue*<sup>41</sup> is one example of how dialogue can be made relevant to ordinary Christians by suggesting practical ways to engage in dialogue with people of other faiths by reflecting on various religious texts and stories in the light of the Bible. This project needs to be an ongoing one in order that Christians of different theological orientations might use their own mode of dialogue rather than fit into a certain pattern of theological understanding. The second issue is the question of whether and how one can engage in dialogue with fundamentalist groups who either refuse dialogue with others, as they are deeply suspicious of its intention, or engage in dialogue with others only with a view to aggressively proselytising others into their particular mode of faith. Perhaps in this context, intra-religious dialogue is as urgent a need as inter-religious dialogue, in order that by the active exchange of views, a common Christian understanding of dialogue may be achieved. Religious fundamentalism is a religious matter and needs to be dealt with by religious means; in other words, it is the responsibility of religious communities to engage in dialogue with extreme views in their own communities in order to channel these into a collective and positive contribution to wider society.

The question of dialogue remains entwined with that of how we view others’ faiths. Engaging in dialogue with people of other faiths requires the theological presupposition that the culture and religion of the partners of dialogue have already been exposed to God’s presence. Dialogue takes

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<sup>39</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 474-89.

<sup>40</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (London: SPCK, 1989), 242-43.

<sup>41</sup> *My Neighbour’s Faith – and Mine: Theological Discoveries through Interfaith Dialogue* (1986). [www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/christian-identity-in-pluralistic-societies/study-guide-my-neighbours-faith-and-mine.html](http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/christian-identity-in-pluralistic-societies/study-guide-my-neighbours-faith-and-mine.html)

place on condition that both parties are willing to share with others and that there is reasonable common ground between the two. However, often differences are far greater than commonality and there is a limit to deeper and meaningful dialogue in the “religious” realm. Perhaps the way forward is to emphasize dialogue for participation in the public sphere – in other words, involvement in the socio-cultural, political and economic problems in society, bringing religious aspirations to secular contexts. Lesslie Newbigin is of the opinion that Christians should be willing to engage in projects in society which are in line with a Christian understanding of God’s purpose in history, and that true dialogue occurs in this “shared commitment” to the world.<sup>42</sup> Dialogue therefore can be more constructive when it leads to participation together in social struggles, when conversation is not limited to spiritual or religious issues. This is called *diapraxis*; it brings dialogue and praxis together, not only creating friendship across various barriers but also working together for the common good.<sup>43</sup> The secular approach to religion is to relegate it to a private and personal matter and expect religious communities to remain silent on public issues. In this context, religious communities can show a spirit of integrity by actively engaging in the public sphere and collectively struggling with common problems faced today.

Dialogue is a theological paradigm which has made a significant contribution to reconciliation of religious communities. The Christian message of “love your neighbour” demands that Christians constantly review our understanding of neighbour, and find ways and means to express our love and concern. Dialogue is an important theological tool to be employed in contemporary multi-religious societies. Calling for authentic dialogue is not an optional extra but a necessary concept to be explored creatively and yet critically by Christians who are engaged in the ministry of reconciliation.

### Conclusion

Ashis Nandy, in the context of the Indian politics of secularism in the midst of communal violence, has raised the question of religious tolerance and drawn attention to the impossibility of marginalising religion from society in India, suggesting that the solution ought to include exploration not only of “tolerance of religions but also tolerance that is religious”.<sup>44</sup> This idea of “tolerance that is religious” is of vital importance to our study of reconciliation between religious communities since they have all inherited

<sup>42</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 173-91.

<sup>43</sup> Lalsangkima Pachuau and Knud Jørgensen (eds), *Witnessing to Christ in a Pluralistic Age: Christian Mission Among Other Faiths* (Oxford: Regnum, 2011), 23-25.

<sup>44</sup> Ashis Nandy, “The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance”, *Alternatives* 13:2 (April 1988), 177-94.

rich sources of the notion of peace and reconciliation through their scriptures and traditions. Theologies of inculturation and dialogue are examples of theological attempts to draw religious resources from Christian traditions, and these have been powerful tools for the Christian community for meaningful engagement in the ministry of reconciliation in plural contexts.

Although I have discussed the more theoretical aspects of reconciliation from an interfaith perspective, there are numerous cases of sincere reconciling projects through the means of inculturation and dialogue. For example, in the area of inculturation, visual arts, music and dance have been powerful tools used by various religious traditions for reconciliation by providing insights not only to understand but also to accept and appreciate the other. Dialogue has been effective in multi-religious contexts in avoiding conflict or preventing its escalation, for example around the question of conversion. Without compromising one's own convictions, the openness towards the other, which is the basis for pursuing interfaith dialogue, has opened up channels of communication between religious communities. In interfaith contexts, both inculturation and dialogue have been important tools for bringing about reconciliation. These theological discourses provide helpful theoretical frameworks for the ministry of reconciliation in the context of religious pluralism.



**PART TWO**

**EXPERIENCES OF  
RECONCILIATION  
LOCALLY AND GLOBALLY**

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# THE EXPERIENCE OF RECONCILIATION IN THE ETHIOPIAN EVANGELICAL CHURCH MEKANE YESUS

Berhanu Ofga'a

## Introduction

This chapter deals with the miraculous experience of reconciliation in the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) through the special intervention of God. This experience of reconciliation had to do with the body of Christ having been split into two that existed as separate entities for a decade, but which were finally reconciled and reunited through God's intervention. Among the many factors that make this experience of reconciliation so special and unique are: first, the fact that most of the members of the reconciling committee were the frontrunners of the conflict, and second, the fact that this reconciliation was effected in an unusual way, through God's intervention.

This presentation begins with laying out a brief historical development of the cause of the conflict in the EECMY and its further escalation and repercussions – and how this conflict finally developed into a split of the church into two entities. The chapter further describes the various peace initiatives to mediate in this conflict. Such mediation efforts involved over 23 different groups from within the country and from overseas. All these efforts failed except the one conducted by the last group, composed of leaders from both sides who had been the frontrunners in the conflict. The paper specifically deals with the reconciliation initiative of this last group and how God healed the serious conflict of the EECMY by using the wounded parties. As a result, this last mediating group named itself “The wounded healers”.<sup>1</sup>

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## Brief History of the EECMY

The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus is an indigenous Lutheran Church established in 1959, as a result of over a century's labour of five western missions and notable national evangelical leaders.<sup>2</sup> During her journey of the last fifty years this church has demonstrated a spectacular

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<sup>1</sup> Diary of the last reconciling group.

<sup>2</sup> Fekadu Gurmessa, *Evangelical Faith Movement in Ethiopia*, translated and edited by Ezekiel Gebissa (Minneapolis, MN: Lutheran University Press, 2009), 13.

growth in all aspects, despite the years of severe persecution she underwent under the Marxist government of Ethiopia from 1974 to 1990. According to the 2011 statistical report, the church has just under six million members organized into 7,400 congregations and 3,005 mission stations.<sup>3</sup> This church is said to be the fastest-growing Lutheran church in the world.

### **The Cause and Development of the Conflict in the EECMY**

After the downfall of the Marxist government of Ethiopia in 1992, the church went through a serious internal conflict based on language issues associated with the change in the language policy of the government following the new political development. After several efforts of mediation, conducted at different levels, had failed, this conflict finally ended up in a split in the body of believers into two separate entities. The final split took place in the beginning of 2001.<sup>4</sup>

### **The New Language Policy of the Nation**

The development of this conflict was associated with the politics of the new government that came to power after the downfall of the Marxist government. The political ideology of the new government was based on ethnic federalism. Abate Nikodimos Alemayehu has analyzed the effects of ethnic federalism practised recently in Ethiopia in his masters degree thesis, *Ethnic Federalism in Ethiopia: Challenges and Opportunities*. According to Alemayehu, ethnic federalism was devised to alleviate the tension between ethnicities in a multicultural society.<sup>5</sup> When the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front took power after overthrowing the dictatorial egalitarian Marxist regime, they found ethnic federalism to be an appropriate system of government.<sup>6</sup>

This new development in the politics of the nation resulted in the change to the language policy. Teshome G. Wagaw, in a presentation to the University of Michigan, writes about the government language policy after the introduction of ethnic federalism.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> EECMY Statistics, October, 2011. Copyrighted Material

<sup>4</sup> Berhanu, Ofga'a, "Ethnic Homogeneity and Its Impact on Mission: The Organization of Ethiopian Evangelical Diaspora Congregations in the United States" (Doctoral thesis in missiology) (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary, 2009), 10.

<sup>5</sup> Abate Nikodimos Alemayehu, "Ethnic Federalism in Ethiopia: Challenges and Opportunities" (Lund: University of Lund Faculty of Law, 2004), 7.

<sup>6</sup> Alemayehu, "Ethnic Federalism in Ethiopia", 7.

<sup>7</sup> Wagaw, Teshome G, "Conflict of Ethnic Identity and the Language of Education Policy in Contemporary Ethiopia", *Northeast African Studies*, 6:3, 1999 (New Series). [http://muse.jhu.edu/login?uri=/journals/northeast\\_african\\_studies/v006/6.3wagaw.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/login?uri=/journals/northeast_african_studies/v006/6.3wagaw.html)

“The policy in its present form was proclaimed in 1991 after the present government drove out the former Marxist-Leninist military junta that had ruled the country for the preceding 20 years. The language policy, along with other human rights and ethnic-related policies, was incorporated into the new constitution that took effect in 1996. The language policy provides for Ethiopia’s more than 90 language groups to develop and use their respective languages in the courts, in governmental and other political entities, in cultural and business communications and in education. The policies do not, however, specify which, how many, or in what order the languages should enjoy priority in governmental support for further development, nor do they hint at any limits as to the number and extent of the languages. In the absence of such specifications, the presumption is that all of them should have the right to find the necessary resources.”<sup>8</sup>

As Wagaw states, this new policy of language was included in the new constitution of the nation that has been in effect since 1996. The language policy has, on the one hand, had a dramatic effect for it respects the equality of languages and enables the various ethnic groups in society to develop and practise their own ethnic languages. However, on the other hand, this policy has caused conflicts as it initiated rivalry among language groups.

### **How this New Language Policy Contributed to the Conflict in the Church**

As a result of the change in the language policy of the nation, a rivalry among language groups arose. One of such cases was the conflict that divided two congregations of the church situated in Addis Ababa, the capital city of the nation. The members of these congregations who were from the Oromo ethnic group demanded the right to worship in their own language with their own ethnic group. For the sake of clarity, we will deal with these two cases one by one.

The first claim for such services arose from the Gulele Bethel congregation that conducted its worship service in the Oromo language. This Gulele Bethel congregation used to serve members of the EECMY coming from the Oromia regions. This mission congregation filed its request to the Gulele Bethel congregation to host this service conducted in the Oromo language at the main church during one of its two services on Sunday, as the demand for such a service was increasing. The Gulele Bethel Mekane Yesus congregation was one of the mega-churches of the EECMY, conducting two Sunday services in the Amharic language. This claim sounded peculiar and strange to the majority of the members of the congregation, as they were accustomed to services conducted in one common and central language. Initially, attempts had been made to resolve this issue at the congregational level through a series of meetings between

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<sup>8</sup> Wagaw, “Conflict of Ethnic Identity”.

the leadership of the congregation and the representatives of the claimant group.<sup>9</sup>

The second conflict, of a similar but more complicated nature, developed at another mega-congregation of the EECMY in Addis Ababa, known as Entoto Congregation, in connection with a wedding ceremony that involved unchurched people. A couple celebrating their wedding requested the leadership of the congregation to conduct the wedding service in the Oromo language. This resulted in conflict as the request was not welcomed by the congregation since the language sounded foreign to them. This development instigated some Oromifa-speaking members of the Entoto Congregation to raise a claim for a separate service in the Oromo language. While this issue was under negotiation between the leaders of the congregation and the representatives of the claimant group, the matter went out of control. The conflict escalated since it became politicized as an issue of ethnic conflict. This conflict became a burning issue and was publicized in the media. This development fuelled the flames and worsened the conflict.<sup>10</sup>

As a result, concerns were raised from the synods, parishes and congregations of the EECMY. Though the mediation efforts, started at the congregational level were in progress, the complexity of the problem prevented a speedy resolution. Due to this and other strong pressures raised from the units of the church, the national office of the EECMY was compelled to take over the matter, thereby bypassing the normal channels of church structures.<sup>11</sup>

From here on it becomes rather complicated to follow the ins and outs of decisions by committees. As the leadership of the church directly involved in the resolution of this issue bypassed the chain of command, the matter was worsened and went beyond control. Neither the Synod nor the congregations could proceed with the resolution of the problem. As a result, the issue was reported to the 91<sup>st</sup> Executive Committee of the church and discussed seriously. It was resolved that the church officers and the officers of the Central Ethiopia Synod (CES) should jointly deal with the issue.<sup>12</sup> Based on the recommendation of this group, the 93<sup>rd</sup> Executive Committee of the EECMY discussed the matter again. According to the findings of this committee, as the mission of the church since its formation had been to teach the gospel in the language people understood, providing services in their own language for believers who requested them was not a problem. Accordingly the Executive Committee resolved to establish the following language policy:

1. That in congregations composed of people from different ethnic groups, the normal Sunday morning worship and Holy Communion

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<sup>9</sup> Ofga'a, 10.

<sup>10</sup> Ofga'a.

<sup>11</sup> Ofga'a.

<sup>12</sup> Minutes of the 91<sup>st</sup> Executive Committee of the EECMY.

- services be conducted jointly for all members of the congregation in one common language;
2. That separate services be arranged for those believers who request services in their own language;
  3. In congregations composed of members from different ethnic groups, at times of social occasions, like weddings and funerals, the service be conducted in the language of the wedding group, or the family in grief; and it be further resolved that all synods, parishes, presbyteries and congregations of the church be requested to implement this resolution.<sup>13</sup>

A circular letter was written to the synods, parishes, presbyteries and congregations asking them to implement this new language policy. The congregations in Addis Ababa where this issue was raised initially were requested to implement this decision. As a result, the CES was obliged to have this decision implemented in the two congregations. Thus the Synod made its best effort to have this policy decision of the church implemented at the two congregations. Nevertheless, the reaction in the two congregations, after discussion at their congregational meetings, was critical. Both of them challenged the policy decision of the church. Both congregations found this top-down policy decision of the church difficult to implement, as it did not take into account the realities of their situation. They therefore both decided by majority votes to file an appeal for reconsideration of the decision through the Synod. This appeal was reported to the 104<sup>th</sup> meeting of the church officers. The Executive Committee rejected the appeal and instead labelled the two congregations and the Synod as disobedient. As a result, the Committee resolved to remove the leaders of the synods from their position for their failure to implement the language policy of the church. The Committee further resolved to appoint a provisional committee for co-ordination of the congregations.<sup>14</sup> This new development resulted in another new conflict. According to the constitution of the EECMY, the Executive Committee has no authority to remove the leaders elected by the Synod convention and replace them by another committee. This was a blunt mistake of constitutional fallacy. Subsequently, strong opposition was raised from the congregations.<sup>15</sup> This new development further aggravated the issue adding much fuel to the conflict. There were also individuals who took advantage of this development for their own ulterior motives in the church's power struggle.

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<sup>13</sup> Minutes of the 93<sup>rd</sup> Executive Committee of the EECMY.

<sup>14</sup> Minutes of the 104<sup>th</sup> Executive Committee of the EECMY.

<sup>15</sup> Circular letter of the opposing group, dated Oct 21, 1998.

### First Initiative of Mediation

Several mediation attempts involving notable individuals from among the church members, some congregations of the church, overseas partners of the EECMY, and the Evangelical Churches Fellowship of Ethiopia, were conducted at various levels and times to resolve the problem. The last mediation initiative was made by the President of the nation whose father was one of the early pastors of the EECMY. The President dared to take such an initiative because of his close attachment to the church from the past.<sup>16</sup>

Sadly, all these efforts did not achieve the desired result; the complexity of the problem prevented a speedy resolution. As a result, the matter finally ended up with the split of the Body of Christ into two, in January 2001.

After the split, the national church, representing the larger body of believers, continued its service under its existing name while the other group, mainly consisting of most congregations in Addis Ababa, continued its separate services, after being organized under a new name *Addis Ababa and its Surrounding Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus*, which had been registered as an independent entity.

The following years were filled with much contest and court cases. The claims on ownership of property and disputes about the name of the church were the major reasons for the court cases. This continuous strife and dispute between the two churches over time had a devastating effect on the ministry of the churches. They were drifting away from their basic call, defaming one another and fighting against each other.

### Second Peace Initiative

Several peace initiatives were undertaken in those years. According to Itefa Gobena who was the President of the EECMY, more than 23 peace initiatives were undertaken by mediating groups within the country and overseas;<sup>17</sup> among these, the peace initiatives carried out by self-initiated individuals who were members of the EECMY reached a somewhat fruitful result. This group was composed of four members.<sup>18</sup> The group had conducted many mediation sessions among the conflicting groups at different levels. Spectacular outcomes had been achieved by this group in moving the conflicting groups towards agreement.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> [www.eecmy.org/?home=ibs&page=!news&newscategory=/&oldarticles=on&pagenr=4&article=32](http://www.eecmy.org/?home=ibs&page=!news&newscategory=/&oldarticles=on&pagenr=4&article=32)

<sup>17</sup> Letter from Itefa Gobena to Ato Asefa Kesito, Minister of Justice on the Peace initiative of the EECMY with her members, dated Sene 23, 2000.

<sup>18</sup> Letter from Fasil Nahum to the President of EECMY, dated Meskerem 12, 2000.

<sup>19</sup> Fasil Nahum to the President of EECMY.



Sadly, the initiative failed due to preconditions raised by the conflicting groups, mainly from the side of the EECMY.<sup>20</sup> After the failure of this initiative there was also a time when the Ministry of Justice requested the consent of the two churches to intervene. In response to this request, the two churches conceded, in writing, their willingness to accept intervention from the Ministry of Justice.<sup>21</sup> This peace initiative through the intervention of the Ministry of Justice also failed because of preconditions demanded by the EECMY.<sup>22</sup>

### **The Beginning of the Last Initiative of Reconciliation**

The last EECMY reconciliation effort was initiated by the members of the church in diaspora. This divine intervention occurred in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in the midst of the conversation of the members of the board of the EECMY diaspora in the north, with the Rev. Itefa Gobena, the President of the EECMY, when the conflict was at its climax. The members of this board included the former leaders of the EECMY from both conflicting groups: the former Presidents of the church, the Rev. Yadessa Daba, the Rev. Francis Stephanos, the former President of the Central Ethiopia Synod, the Rev. Berhanu Ofga'a, and Dr Eshetu Abate, the former principal of the Mekane Yesus Seminary. It was as the group started conversing about the conflict that an unexpected and sudden spontaneous experience of divine presence took place among these persons. This experience resulted in absolute metanoia, with people breaking into tears, hugging one another and forgiving each other. It was in the midst of this extraordinary spiritual movement, accompanied by a deep emotional experience, that the initiative of intervening in the reconciliation was born. As a result, a group of eight people, seven pastors and one layman was formed. This group named itself Ministers of Reconciliation and Reunification (MRU). After a time of prayer, planning and arrangement with the leadership of both conflicting parties, the MRU left the USA for Ethiopia on July 13, 2008 to carry out its purpose.

The ministry of reconciliation and unity had two phases. Phase One was a purely spiritual ministry. It was the ministry of healing the spiritual wounds through forgiving one another and repenting of past sins and misunderstandings. It was the ministry of accepting one another as Christ accepted the sinners (Col 3:15). Phase Two was discussing the issues that led to the conflict and resolving the problems through discussion.

Phase One of this ministry was the continuation of the extraordinary experience started in Minneapolis when the members of the reconciliation

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<sup>20</sup> Letter from Waksiyoum Edossa to the Ministry of Justice, dated Hamle 2000. Also letter of Fasil Nahum to the two churches, dated Sene 21, 2000.

<sup>21</sup> Letter from Itefa Gobena to Asefa Kesito, for the request of intervention of the Ministry of Justice, dated Hamle 6, 2000.

<sup>22</sup> Letter of Simegn Wube to the EECMY, dated 16 Hamle 2000.

team made peace among themselves, forgiving one another for the past damage and experiencing a divine healing. It was as a result of this development that the concerns of the group were put in writing and sent to the leaders of the two churches. Moreover, the spirit of forgiveness manifested during the visit of Kes Itefa Gobena had a dramatic effect on the formation of this group and the members' motivation.

### **The Uniqueness of this Last Initiative of Reconciliation**

This ministry of reconciliation was the first of its kind. Among the major reasons making this new initiative so unique were: firstly, the composition of the reconciling group; secondly, the nature of the ministry; thirdly, the methodology of the reconciliation; and fourthly, the tools of reconciliation employed.

The composition of the team was unique. Most of the members of the group were individuals who had been frontrunners in the conflict from both sides. They were members of the EECMY in diaspora in North America, who had been in the leadership of both conflicting parties. Culturally, it is unusual to mediate conflict by people involved in the conflict. This new initiative was the ministry of "The wounded healers". Normally mediation of conflict requires neutral parties. The approach of this new initiative followed, however, a biblical principle. In Scripture, and particularly according to the New Testament, the person who caused the break of relationship has to take the first initiative. The person who has wronged another had (Matt 5:24) had to go and reconcile with his brother, and the woman who had left her husband had to go back and be reconciled with him (1 Cor 7:11). The reconciliation and the restoration of the relationship between God and humanity follow this unique principle: God, the injured party, took the initiative (2 Cor 5:19). This is contrary to reality in the contemporary world. "The removal of alienation created by man's sin is the work of God. The Bible never portrays man as reconciling himself with God or God being influenced by man to reconciliation."<sup>24</sup> This biblical principle was the basis of the new reconciliation initiative of the EECMY. Consequently, the reconciling group was named the "The wounded healers". This means a healing effected by those who were wounded or the victims of the conflict. According to Scripture, Jesus Christ himself was a wounded healer (Isa 53:5-6; 1 Peter 2:24).

The second major reason that makes this initiative unique was the nature of the ministry. This initiative was a priestly ministry. Seven of the eight members of this team were ordained pastors. The priestly ministry is the ministry of reconciling humanity with God (2 Cor 5:18-19). The priestly ministry begins with reconciling individuals with God and then with one another. This initiative of reconciliation followed this Scriptural principle.

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<sup>24</sup> Illustrated Bible Dictionary, 1368.

The third major reason that makes this initiative of peace so unique was the methodology employed. The method applied was based on the biblical principle that says: “For there is no distinction; all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:23-24). As this text indicates, when God reconciled humanity to himself, he did not make any distinction among the sinners, whether among those who sinned much or those who sinned less. But it says that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”. Size did not matter. The bottom line is that all need the grace of God to be justified. In the same way, this reconciliation initiative did not make any distinction among the conflicting groups. It did not start with finding fault: “Who is right? Who is wrong?” According to this approach, both parties were wrong in their own context. Thus, the reconciliation initiative was a call to the grace of God that justifies the sinner.

The fourth major reason for the uniqueness of this peace initiative was the tools employed. These were the towel and water in a basin, when Jesus washed the feet of his disciples after the Last Supper (John 13:4-7). The implication of this demonstration was love and humility. Though this does not seem to make sense logically, it was the miracle of this peace initiative. The miracle of the success of this new peace initiative lies in these two things: the towel and the water in a basin. It was when the leaders of the parties in conflict started washing one another’s feet in humility that the dividing wall of hostility started tumbling down and the combating groups started forgiving one another with tears. This was how these conflicting parties were reconciled, forgiving each other and forgetting all the past damage and wounds.

This dramatic reconciliation of the two split churches resulted in a final reunification. Thereafter they were reunited and became one single national church again. Praise the Lord! They are no more two split groups, but one church!<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>[www.eecmy.org/?home=ibs&page=!news&newscategory=/&oldarticles=on&pag enr=4&article=32](http://www.eecmy.org/?home=ibs&page=!news&newscategory=/&oldarticles=on&pag enr=4&article=32)

# **MEDIATION BETWEEN ETHNIC GROUPS: THE RWANDA AND BURUNDI EXPERIENCE**

Emmanuel Z. Kopwe

## **Mission and Reconciliation – an Emerging Paradigm?<sup>1</sup>**

The church has been in ministry for over two thousand years, proclaiming the “good news of peace by Jesus Christ”.<sup>2</sup> The dynamics and focus of the Good News have been a generational issue. Each generation has had to identify and face up to the challenges and the core issues that were apparent and emerging. The Christian witness needed a validation in each era, making the mandate more relevant and holistic. So it seems, as the Athens document (Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation) puts it:

“Since the late 1980s new aspects emerged and mission has been increasingly connected with reconciliation and healing. The language of reconciliation has come to the fore in many different contexts and catches the imagination of people inside and outside the churches. In this situation we have come to discern anew that reconciliation is at the heart of Christian faith.”

With deep political and socio-economic changes at the global level, the patterns of life in the 1980s brought many challenges to many countries, particularly to the African continent. A wave of change was obvious. Many countries had had a considerable time of self-rule/independence from colonizers. Based on little education on governance, or maybe springing up from military coups, many leaders almost turned their countries into personal institutions. The waves of pressure and the clamour for change towards democracy, and the challenges of poverty, corruption, injustice, and scourges of epidemics, catapulted many countries into indescribable levels of instability. Many traditional African lifestyles re-emerged in the form of tribal, ethnic differences and wars. The continent of Africa epitomized the sector of the globe which seriously required reconciliation. While reconciliation was necessary in many parts of the world, the carnage, plunder, destruction, and loss of the value of life were, and perhaps continue to be, most obvious in Africa. The horrendous loss of life in Rwanda in 1994 was a nightmare of genocide beyond the expression of any words in human history. The dynamics of the same plight in the

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<sup>1</sup> Mission as ministry of reconciliation, Preparatory Paper No. 10 (Geneva: WCC, February 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Acts 10:36 (Revised Standard Vision): (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1965).

neighbouring country of Burundi ended up with a scenario of what I refer to as “slow genocide” in the same decade. It is prudent however to seek to understand the histories of these two countries in all eras: traditional society (the pre-colonial or chieftdom era), the post-independence era, and the democratic era. An understanding of the dynamics of life in these eras will help to show what the countries have gone through. While reconciliation has been a major need and generally more pronounced in Burundi and Rwanda, the events in the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo will continue to be the shame of the whole world. In this country alone it is estimated that around 4½ million people died during the same period. This remains a major loss of human life which the world was only minimally made aware of. The dynamics and basis of comparison may not balance the scales, but the root causes of the need for reconciliation are intrinsically the same. Ethnicity, tribalism, economic inequality and abject poverty are key elements if not the main ones. The degree of poverty and economic inequality in this country are an anomaly given the riches of the country.

So the Athens document is right in highlighting the emergence of the need for mission to focus on reconciliation. The talk on and about reconciliation during the 1980s and the 1990s was too loud if not nauseating to the point of losing its real meaning, particularly shortly after the genocide in Rwanda. One prominent diplomat when consulted in 1995 commented: “Reconciliation is a word so popular now, that we are wary of its use. It is so loosely spoken of, it has lost its meaning.” This concern was relevant as many multinational organizations, institutions and governments had started showing an interest in resolving the high tensions in Rwanda and Burundi before and after the genocide. The motivations differed greatly. Much of what was coming from the western world, particularly after the genocide, was misconstrued and continues to be misunderstood, and to be motivated by guilt generated by doing too little or nothing to prevent the genocide. Many churches and church organizations took action based on the obvious biblical mandate of being given, “... the ministry of reconciliation ...” and being entrusted with “... the message of reconciliation”.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Burundi and Rwanda Ethnic Peril**

“The first step in liquidating a people is to erase its memory,” Milan Kundera has said.<sup>4</sup> In traditional African society, the memory has been a key factor in showing the identity and uniqueness of families, communities, tribes, and even the nation. This is why we talk of an oral society. It is based on story-telling. This may also be true in many other cultures. Memory is the mental process which expresses the events, acts,

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<sup>3</sup> 2 Cor 5:18-19: Revised Standard Vision.

<sup>4</sup> Milan Kundera, “The Book of Laughter and Forgetting” (London: Penguin, 1983).

experiences, and impressions of things in the past. We all have our own memories – individually, as a community, tribe, or even as a nation. These memories can give insight as to the way in which we conduct our lives, the way in which we respond or behave, and the way we do certain things. Our memories identify our history. In the dialogue sessions in Arusha,<sup>5</sup> for the peace of Burundi, the two major ethnic groups took the longest time to agree on their past painful history. This is an area which may never be completely agreed upon. The major question was, “When did genocide take place?” In its most recent history, there were major massacres of Hutus in 1972. In 1993, after the assassination of President Melchior Ndadaye, there were many Tutsis who were massacred. In both instances, many fled into neighbouring countries and beyond. The Hutus claimed there was a genocide in 1972, showing disagreement about the claims of the Tutsis about what happened in 1993. In this sense the memories of both groups are selective, based on what is most meaningful to them. This is simply because the wounded memory of each group has significant importance for them. It affects the way they think and behave. This perspective is true for many generations before 1972 in Burundi. Stories creating prejudice, fear, hatred and violence have shaped and influenced not just the ethnic groups, but the nation too has been affected. They had acquired classifications which today we refer to as ethnic identities, namely: the Twa (the hunters, 1%), the Tutsi (the herders 14%), and the Hutu (the farmers 84%). What is worth noting is that these classifications are very complicated. They are more imagined than empirical. The reality is that society is homogeneous. People live together, have the same traditions and have the same language. With the drawing of lines throughout the continent during the “scramble for Africa”, by Otto von Bismarck and his cohorts at the Berlin Conference<sup>6</sup> in 1884, Africa was completely submerged under the control and influence of its greedy new European masters. The era of colonization has left a legacy not only of permanent geo-political damage on Africa, but also deep divides between people groups.

The bondage of past events will continue to torture people and influence the way governance is implemented. If we do not seek to heal the wounds of history, we allow peoples to continue to be stuck with the past. In a poem, Maya Angelou expresses this very clearly:

“History, despite its wrenching Copyrighted Material pain, cannot be un-lived, but faced with courage, need not be lived again.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Arusha Peace Accord in Tanzania. These were consultations and dialogue sessions for the peace of Burundi under the then Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere and, later on, under the then South African President Nelson Mandela.

<sup>6</sup> <http://wysinger.homestead.com/berlinconference.html>

<sup>7</sup> Maya Angelou, “On the Pulse of the Morning”, a poem read during the inauguration of US President Bill Clinton in 1993.

It requires courage to own up to history. Many people need to be helped to remember theirs. Part of this history may be so traumatic that people may shut themselves away from it and never want to remember. To be able to bring healing to the wounded person, we must help them come out of denial. The future of individuals, communities and even nations depends very much on dealing realistically with their past. And help is necessary to assist people to live their future without being under the influence of bad wounded memory. This is the process of providing healing of the wounded heart.

### **Intervention for Mediation**

The window of opportunity for intervention was basically based on, first, the homogeneity of society; secondly, the fact that these are very religious communities; and thirdly, through consultation among the different ethnic and religious leaders, the people had showed readiness to see an end to the wars and massacres of their loved ones in the country. In the process of dealing with the pain of the people, a number of actors were involved. On the local scene, individual church denominations (they co-operate within Christian Council of Burundi (CNEB)) and their foreign partners were very active in spite of the deep mire of pain and division; local organizations like Trauma Healing and Reconciliation Services (THARS) and World Outreach Initiatives (WOI) were in the forefront of seeking the healing of the nation. Many organizations from outside Burundi joined hands with local entities in search for solutions. One of these organizations was African Evangelistic Enterprise (AEE), working in partnership with the above-mentioned local entities. With due respect to all the others with equally important reconciliation endeavours, I should like to share the story of how AEE was involved.

African Evangelistic Enterprise<sup>8</sup> conducted a reconciliation mission in Kigali, Rwanda, in 1995. This mission targeted all strata of society and all ethnic groups. Burundi church leaders were invited to some of the events which resulted in what one would call a “Macedonian” call. The aim was to help defuse escalating ethnic tensions and the war which had started in Burundi after the assassination of a democratically elected president only three months after elections. Those invited to the mission in Kigali became our base for networking within the church leadership in Burundi. When we started to consult in 1996 we soon realized the church was very polarized.

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<sup>8</sup> African Evangelistic Enterprise is the organization which helped to bring about the historic peaceful elections in South Africa in 1994, after a series of reconciliatory dialogue encounters with the different political parties from 1992 onwards. The national office in Rwanda along with the regional office in Nairobi, Kenya, worked closely to carry out reconciliation work in Rwanda, and later the regional office continued to respond to the needs in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

One could literally go to either a Tutsi or a Hutu church! The majority of the church leaders in the country were Tutsi. This became very vivid in a workshop organized in Bujumbura in 1996 for church leaders. The Hutu leadership was in exile, and very conspicuously missing at the workshop. We insisted on the importance of the church having a prophetic voice in a society which was facing deep divisions. That voice however, we underlined, should be based on a visible unity among the leadership of different ethnic orientations. It became obvious that there was a need to rebuild the moral authority of the church. The leaders in Burundi requested an immediate follow-up of another forum with the church leaders in exile. This was a very good foundation for soliciting the readiness for dialogue with the leaders in exile. We were convinced that the resulting effect of a forum with all ethnic groups would produce a sustainable peace process. This forum took place in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1996. The tensions between these church leaders were very deep. It was obvious they were first Tutsis, Hutus, or Twas before they were Christians, never mind Burundians. We were forced to take the very risky step of literally closing them in a room and telling them to identify each other on the basis of, first, their faith and nationality, and secondly, as responsible for the future welfare of Burundi rather than being focused on their ethnicity. We left them for a couple of hours. When they called us back, they were agreed on sharing the same faith and that, as Burundians, they were ready to work together for the peace of their nation. Based on this agreement, these leaders worked out a common plan of action for the kind of change they wanted to see in their country. With this plan<sup>9</sup> each group was apportioned a responsibility, and they all signed and committed themselves to be responsible to one another.

Based on these agreements, the leaders in exile immediately started to connect with the rebels, while those inside the country started to network and consult with the army and politicians. A very significant ministry resulted among the Hutu rebels in exile. Many quiet behind-the-scenes consultations were carried out. They were done with a faith-based approach. The main focus was to challenge individual characters, show the significant value of life as a gift to all humanity, the right for all ethnic groups to belong to Burundi, and the value of dialogue. These consultations were significant in defusing tensions as the cease-fire negotiations<sup>10</sup> later started in Arusha, Tanzania. The forums with the rebel groups developed to a level of being transformed into political parties when Arusha peace agreements for transitional governments in Burundi were reached around 2003. The church consultations from within the country opened the way for

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<sup>9</sup> This plan was well documented and widely shared with all the pastors in the country and those in exile. It became a very good reference point for all future church-based activities.

<sup>10</sup> The East African regional countries had started peace negotiations in Arusha, Tanzania, between the different political parties in Burundi and exiled ones. See also footnote 5 on p 207.



ministry to the regular army. A significant ministry with army officers was key and very foundational to the process of peacemaking in the country. When the rebel soldiers were due to be integrated into the army, according to the Arusha Peace Accord, we received a special invitation to conduct reconciliation programmes before the integration. This process allowed for forums between the rebel soldiers and the regular soldiers to take place.

With these activities within the army and the country under transitional governments in preparation for the democratic process, it was relatively peaceful and safe to travel into the rest of Burundi. During all this time, the ministry targeted women's groups, youth, and the churches before broadening to the rest of the country. The relative security in the country allowed for a major ministry of trauma healing and reconciliation to all sectors of society. Through the ministry of "good governance", we were able to reach high-level officials from district level, the governors' level, and ministerial level. With this thematic approach of dealing with good governance within the ministry of Defence and National Security, we had forums with the top officials of the ministry and the army. As a result of all this activity, permission was granted to provide trauma healing and reconciliation to all the army camps within the country.

### Testimony of Change

In a country with such deep ethnic tensions, care needs to be taken to deal with the deep roots and causes of tensions. The prejudices and stereotypes in heterogeneous societies like those in Burundi and Rwanda are the main problems. The key is to address and challenge the conscience and character of all concerned. Short of this, the consequences are life-threatening, as Dr Martin Luther King Jr pointed out: "If we do not learn to live together as friends, we will die as foolish enemies." The work among the ethnic groups in Burundi produced significant results worthy of note:

"This lady who saw her parents and siblings burned alive, runs for her life, she loses her potential for education, finds herself in a refugee camp some years later. In the camp she meets a young man who also lost loved ones during the war. These two marry and start a family. Back in the country, life becomes literally hell on earth in the family. She fails to bear the inner pain, suffering, and bitterness she carries in her. She runs away from her children and husband. As she is running, she finds herself invited to this workshop dealing with trauma, healing of ethnic wounds, and reconciliation. At the mention of the need to forgive as one of the means to find healing, she breaks down in torrents of sobs and tears. Much later after she has been helped and shown what Jesus did for her on the cross, she did not only accept the invitation in Matthew 11:28-30, 'Come to me ...', she symbolically brought her troubles to the cross.<sup>11</sup> She was so transformed that a year or so later she

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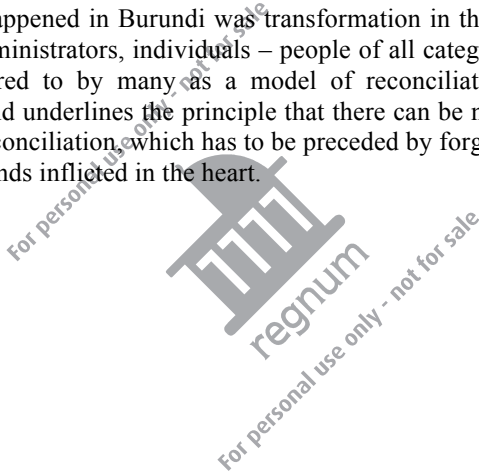
<sup>11</sup> The workshops of trauma healing and reconciliation lead individuals to literally write down their pain, prejudice, or anything which comes to memory that causes

has the freedom to go back to the village and seek to reconcile with her would-be enemies. This is what she told them: 'I come to ask you to forgive me. I have been very bitter and angry about you.' She continues to say, 'Can you find room in your hearts to make me one of your daughters?' This encounter generated not just tears to all but a reconciliation which has brought lasting peace.

"After a workshop with the top officials of the army, this army general has this to say: 'If what you have carried us through had been done before the war, there would have not been many lives lost.'

"In another workshop which targeted professionals, one of the judges had this to confess: 'I am sorry that I am learning this so late. I have judged many people based on my prejudices and my own woundedness.' He continued, 'Why has the church not been teaching these issues? The church needs to be healed of ethnic prejudices.' This is a major challenge which the church has taken seriously."

What happened in Burundi was transformation in the hearts of soldiers, judges, administrators, individuals – people of all categories. The army has been referred to by many as a model of reconciliation. This has been possible and underlines the principle that there can be no sustainable peace without reconciliation, which has to be preceded by forgiveness and healing of the wounds inflicted in the heart.



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pain. They also get to literally use nails and a hammer to nail what they wrote on a cross: normally two planks of wood joined together as a cross.

# TRUST, FAITH AND PEACE: A STORY ABOUT RECONCILIATION IN MALI

Kåre Lode

This is a true story, a personal story, but also a story of friendship, mutual trust, and close co-operation and of risk-taking together for peace. It is a story of lived life. It happened in Mali in West Africa in 1995-96 in the peace process of a rebellion that started in June 1990. However, the trust had been built over time by massive help from Christian NGOs to the victims of the drought in 1983-85, and through a solidarity work with all groups living in the south-eastern part of the Timbuktu region. The event had such an impact on peace and empowerment of the local communities that it had long-lasting consequences in the area and some striking results.

It is a story of how a missionary, and later secretary, of a mission in West Africa, became co-ordinator of a group that mobilised civil society for peace. The population and their leaders were Muslims. The thinking, analyses and local knowledge came mainly from the national members of the group of facilitators, and my role was to carry out things. Religion played a central role. I was openly Christian and they were Muslims.

However, we shared some important values on social justice: the right of people to take care of their own society and development, the importance of peace, the value of life, and the opening of wider horizons for all, in particular for women and children. This setting gave me a number of possibilities of witnessing to Christ in words and in deeds. This work was also a witness of trust in God.

It is a story of the Secretary General of the “Arab, Islamic Front for Azawad”<sup>1</sup> (FIAA) who spared our missionaries and their property because of our friendship; it is a story of the Secretary General of the “Popular Front of Liberation of Azawad” (FPLA) who became my best advisor.

It is a story where local knowledge was considered as important as our empirical knowledge, and the two sources of knowledge met each other in mutual respect and trust. Creativity was at its highest and the good solutions were located at the intersection of cultures, religions and different kinds of experience and knowledge.

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<sup>1</sup> Azawad was used as a common name for North Mali.

### **Building Trust: Learning West Africa**

I worked as missionary for the Norwegian Mission Society (NMS) in Cameroon from 1972 to 1985. The work took me to Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and the Central African Republic, always by car. It gave me an experience, sometimes the hard way, of a number of different cultures, of various practical problems, while I learned to depend on the services and goodwill from church people and village chiefs.

In 1980 and 1983 I drove from Cameroon to Mali and back again, in 1983 with a fellow missionary. We realised how open people in Mali were and we thought it would be a good place for NMS to start new mission outreach to the Fulani people.

The result was that NMS decided to obtain more information on the Mopti Region in Mali. My wife and I were asked to do this and we went there in August 1985 and left at the end of May 1986.

### **Harvesting where Others Had Sowed**

Mali had a drought in 1983-84. Most of the north, the west and central parts of the country needed help and received massive intervention from Christian NGOs: World Vision, World Relief, the Norwegian Strømme Foundation, Southern Baptists and Norwegian Church Aid (NCA).

In the entire area where we were working there was a very open and positive attitude towards Christians. The Governor of the Mopti Region once said, "We know what a Christian missionary is. You can go where you want and talk with people. Nobody will check on you. However, some development workers say that they are neutral. Of course nobody is neutral. We consider them diplomats, we follow up, we check until we are sure that they are OK."<sup>2</sup>

The local people and their leaders were grateful for the food they had received from the Christians. Some of them stressed that the Christians did not have any other condition for help than that you were hungry. The village chief of Boni said in the very first meeting we had with him, "I thank you for the food." My reaction was to answer, "It was not us who gave the food here, it was the Southern Baptists. I shall be happy to bring them your message." "You may tell it to anyone you want. Those who came here came because they were Christians. You are Christian. Now I have thanked you. The matter is finished." He became a very useful participant in the peace process in 1995-96.

I harvested the fruit of the work of fellow Christians in the area just before we arrived.

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<sup>2</sup> I do not have the notes from all the citations I use. It is always my translation from French to English, as correct as I remember it.

### **Respect, Power, Faith and Trust**

In 1987-88 I was director of a huge development project run by NCA aid in the Timbuktu region, north-east of the Mopti Region. This project was also perceived by the population as a work of the church.

The work started as a relief project in 1984. When the desperate situation was under control and people did not die of hunger any more, it became a food-for-work project where the creativity of the population was used to invent projects that the Norwegian staff thought were useful or at least acceptable. NCA carried out a research in the area in order to make it a long-term development project where the local population was invited to discuss the goals, the means and their contribution.

This change was very well received by the population. It had just been finished when I became director. In the eyes of the population, this was my idea because I got the job to carry it out. We recruited animators with a high educational level and with the will to share the conditions of the population. They mobilised the population in a long-lasting discussion on how they wanted their future to be.

At the time there were Norwegians at all levels of leadership. NCA asked me to replace them with Malians when a contract with a Norwegian came to an end. That was very popular, and again they thought that it was my idea. This measure increased considerably the efficiency of the project.

I appointed a Malian Arab who worked in our liaison office in Bamako: Sidi Mohamed Ould Zahaby. He was an amazing person. We immediately had an extraordinarily good relationship. I soon realised that he was better than me on a number of aspects. I decided to let him grow. Once he said to me that he and his family had had a negative opinion towards Christians – until they had met them. This was the beginning of a lifelong friendship. We have met a number of times. We met recently and I told him that when we worked together he had inspired me to develop skills that I did not know I had. He looked at me very surprised and said, “This is exactly as I feel towards you.” In fact, we realised that our co-operation in the project had led to major and positive changes in our personalities. In a way, we grew together.

Some people accused us for doing evangelism through the project. Sidi and other staff members said it was not a problem that I organised a service on Sundays with an attendance of about ten persons. It was my right, just as it was their right, to meet for worship and to tell others about our faith. In their eyes, however, direct evangelism would have made it appear that we applied religious conditions to our relief and development work. We did not do that, so we did not evangelise. Some people even wondered why we did not “try to convert” people. They indicated minor groups that were not Muslim, or just superficially Muslim, as a good place to start.

I became a person who was able to perform and who kept his word partly because that is my nature, and partly because some individuals needed such a person.

### Rebellion 1990-96

“Among you, whoever wants to be great must be your servant ...” (Matt 20:26a).

As of January 1989 I became Secretary of Mission in Cameroon and Mali in the Norwegian Missionary Society. In that capacity I went to Mali twice a year. In 1990 a rebellion started in the northern regions of Kidal, Gao and Timbuktu. Two of my best men in the NCA project got top positions in the rebellion. They fought for social justice and gave orders to their combatants: no looting, no harm to civilians, and no destruction of infrastructure. I met Sidi Mohamed twice during the rebellion. He had become Secretary General of FIAA. Once we happened to meet and had half an hour's talk at the roadside, protected by a dozen of his combatants. The other occasion was in Bamako. I understood that Sidi was there illegally. I knew how to contact him and we talked for an hour. He said that the situation was very dangerous, but no combatant under his command would touch the people “under your command” (the missionaries) or their belongings. A few days later they stole some four-wheel drive cars from an NGO in Douentza, but they did not touch the cars of the missionaries who lived two houses away. The friendship between the leader of the FIAA and the secretary for West Africa in the Norwegian Mission Society was outweighed other considerations.

In April 1995, Zeidan, who was Secretary General of the FPLA... dropped in where I was staying in Bamako. He said that he was in the midst of a very interesting peacemaking process. “We need you for ‘oiling the works’.” In August that same year I came to Mali and stayed till the end of March 1996 as a co-ordinator of the popular involvement in the peace process.<sup>3</sup> Zeidan became a member of the group of facilitators. Another important member was Ibrahim Ag-Youssouf. He said, “Kåre, you did a very good job as director of NCA. If you want to win this time, you have to go a step further. Please relinquish control and remain a resource person whose influence depends on his performance, not his money. If you trust the local leaders, they will trust you. They have a knowledge that you don't have and cannot get. You have a knowledge that they don't have. The solution of the problems is located at the intersection between these two knowledge traditions. You have to go the first step: give, and you shall receive and we shall win the peace.” I agreed to be a servant who maintained his position because he was relevant for all the actors.

The discussion to find a strategy lasted one month with up to thirty persons, but usually we were less than ten. The outcome was strategies of facilitating inter-community meetings with a contract that gave an outline of participation, problems to solve, what they should not discuss, and how to organise the follow-up, etc. I proposed to add: “May the All-powerful

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<sup>3</sup> Kåre Lode: *Synthèse du Processus des Rencontres Intercommunautaires du Nord du Mali (d'Août 1995 à Mars 1996)* (Stavanger: Misjonshøgskolens Forlag, 1995).

and All-merciful God bless the efforts of his humble servants.” It was accepted by all, but I was asked to add “Amen”, which I did. The contract was signed by the co-ordinator of the meeting and myself.

When we prepared a meeting, I usually prayed for those who were in charge, but sometimes another person prayed. Once the co-ordinator of a meeting asked me, “Could you ask your Christian friends in Mali and in Norway to pray for me on the day when we have our meeting, because this will be the most important day in my life?” The staff of the NMS prayed for him that day when they had lunch.

Once I asked one of the persons with whom I worked very closely, “Is it a problem that I am a leader of a Christian mission to the neighbouring area?” The answer was: “No, your position is an advantage, because you are considered to be a man of God. Therefore we can trust you more than others.”

Another time I needed urgently to talk with the Deputy Commissioner of the North. He had four persons there. I said that I needed to be alone with him. Moulaye Ould Mohamed remained. I knew him well. He was a businessman from the Timbuktu region. His presence was OK. The deputy said the three men who left came every day to collect money in order to pray for him. Moulaye said that religion was a matter of power and money; there was no more to it. The deputy did not agree: “Moulaye, World Vision is a church; they help people, and they don’t ask them for money; the same applies to NCA. They are doing an amazing job, in helping people.” “Kâre, is it a religious obligation for Christians to help others in order to be saved?” “No, we rather do it as an honour to God because we are saved, because Jesus paid for our trespasses when he died on the Cross.” Christian solidarity work had provided some interesting openings for our faith.

On January 13-14, 1996 an inter-community meeting took place in Anou Zigrène in Menaka, south-east of northern Mali. The co-ordinator for that meeting wanted to reduce considerably armed robberies in both directions over the border to Niger, in addition to finding a sustainable solution for internal problems on the Malian side. He invited military officers, customs officials, local leaders and whoever wanted to contribute to a solution from the Niger side. Some 400 persons came from Niger, in addition to 1,100 from Mali. All 1,500 participants were Muslims, with two exceptions: a pastor and his wife from Bamako who had started an evangelical mission in the area. In his opening speech, the co-ordinator of the meeting said that this was so important that we needed to ask God for guidance. He invited the pastor’s wife to pray and she did so. The meeting was a success. This was not a dialog between religions. It was just a sign that the Christians had their place in society. Some weeks later the co-ordinator sent me a personal letter in which he wrote at the end: “I am convinced that the reason for our success was the blessing that you wrote on the contract: ‘May the Almighty and All-merciful God bless the efforts of His humble servants. Amen.’ Now I will send the same blessing to you: May the Almighty and All-

merciful God bless all members of the Norwegian Church, give them wisdom and long life so they can continue to help others. Amen.”<sup>4</sup>

As a result of 37 successful meetings throughout northern Mali, economic and social life started again. The number of participants in a meeting varied from 200 to 1,500 with a total of some 20,000 resource persons. Usually the local imams gave a speech based on what the Koran says about how to seek a peaceful solution if you have a problem with a fellow Muslim, about forgiveness and reconciliation. One person said that on many occasions there had not been “dry eyes” after the imam’s presentation.

The main results were:

- A breath of forgiveness and reconciliation blew over northern Mali.
- The process had been a period of extraordinary empowerment for local communities.
- All weekly market places reopened after the inter-community meeting.
- The acceptance of marginal groups had become much easier.
- Armed robberies ceased for a shorter period.
- Combatants understood that it was time to demobilise.

The formal end of the rebellion took place in a ceremony organised by United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the Malian government and the rebel movements in Timbuktu on March 27, 1996 when 3,000 guns were burned in “The Flame of Peace”.

The strategy for involving the local communities was very innovative. Some 500 hundred copies of a booklet on the strategy that we used (Lode, 1995) were bought by UNDP and distributed within the UN, including a copy for the Secretary General of the UN, offered to him at a special ceremony at the UN headquarters. In the spring of 1997 the Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO), granted me a guest scholarship to present the experience of popular involvement and the value of trust.<sup>5</sup> I talked to a few people, none of whom thought in terms of religion when it comes to our co-operation. We were resource persons sharing a common vision of peace.

### **You Have the Capital of Trust**

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In April 1997 I was in Mali and I went to greet the Commissioner of the North. He wanted me to be international consultant to the government of Mali on building a culture of peace in northern Mali. He explained the idea. It was very interesting and to the point. The UNDP had funds for the financing. I asked, “If you have good ideas and UNDP has the money, what

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<sup>4</sup> I have misplaced the letter. However, I remember this part of it word for word.

<sup>5</sup> Lode, Kåre, *Civil Society Takes Responsibility – Popular Involvement in the Peace Process in Mali* (Oslo: International Peace Research Institute, PRIO Report 5:97, 1997), available at: [www.sik.no/uploads/Civil\\_Society\\_Takes\\_Responsibility.pdf](http://www.sik.no/uploads/Civil_Society_Takes_Responsibility.pdf)



would my contribution be useful for?” His answer was, “We have ideas, UNDP has the money, and you have the capital of trust. There is no alternative to your participation.” There and then I understood why I always won. My close friends knew that such a person could be useful. They had presented a very positive image of me. I had the honour when things went well and they took the blame when we made mistakes. A few months later that year I started in a six-year part-time position where I reported to the President of the Republic for 3½ years and then to the office of the Prime Minister for 2½ years as team leader of a group of six Malians, including Ibrahim Ag Youssof.

We also had the responsibility for local security in the border areas with Mauritania, Algeria and Niger. There was an allowance in the national budget for this work in addition to the support from UNDP. My consent as team leader was required when funds were used.

On a few occasions the President of the Republic called me for a very open discussion on certain matters. At the end of his last mandate, he issued a decree: on December 6, 2006 I became Chevalier de l’Ordre National du Mali.<sup>6</sup>

### Lasting Results

Sidi Mohamed got a job in the UN after the rebellion. He served in Haiti, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Somalia and Côte d’Ivoire where he reached the top as Director of the DDR/RR<sup>7</sup> department. In 2010 he became director of DDR/RR in Sudan. When Sudan split into two countries, he opted for South Sudan because, as he told me on the phone, “There are churches here. The churches provide two important advantages: they have a strong religious/moral message towards peace and reconciliation, and the church organization is the only administrative structure people in the south know of; there is no parallel in the north. I have very good relations with the church leaders. We shall manage together.”

The situation in northern Mali became more and more dangerous. The authorities organized a conference at the beginning of March 2011. It had some fifty participants and lasted three days. I was the only foreigner, but was part of the presidium and was moderator the third day. The last presenter that day was the president of the High Council of Islam in Mali. He concentrated on the role of the High Council in solving disputes and conflicts at all levels. “Often we find it useful to ask the Catholic and the Protestant churches to help us to find a solution. This close co-operation

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<sup>6</sup> December 6, 2006: Awarded the honour and medal as Chevalier de l’Ordre National du Mali for services to peace-building: Decree No. 01-595-P-RM dated December 21, 2001, signed by the President of the Republic.

<sup>7</sup> Demobilisation, Disarmament, Reinsertion, Reintegration, Rehabilitation.

with the Catholic and the Protestant churches is a treasure we have in Mali. Nobody will succeed in destroying this treasure.”

When the situation in the north degenerated into taking hostages, the Norwegian missionaries needed information about security and risks. They used to call me and I asked individuals and public servants whom I knew to obtain reliable information. By the end of 2011 the situation had changed dramatically and the missionaries went to Bamako on November 26, 2011. A few days later the Governor of the Mopti Region called me and begged me to ask the missionaries to return. He had made a plan for their security. The next day he intended to go to Bamako and ask the President of the Republic to endorse the plan. Then he would invite two missionaries and go through all aspects of the plan with them. The missionaries were definitely welcome to stay in the region. Unfortunately, a few days later Mopti was attacked by an armed group from the north and it was obvious to everybody that the situation was out of our hands.

The so-called Tuareg rebellion in 2012 was not a Tuareg rebellion. Quite a few people from northern Mali had left for Libya, some of them becoming soldiers. When the regime of Gaddafi came to an end, some of these soldiers were able to get hold of large quantities of sophisticated weaponry that they had brought to northern Mali where the Mouvement National de Libération de l'Azawad (MNLA) had proclaimed an independent Tuareg state, hoping to be able to mobilise the unrest among some Tuaregs that continued in some areas. However, the Tuaregs represent just some 15-20% of the inhabitants in the three northern provinces and they were not able to mobilise the population so had to negotiate with armed groups from Algeria that since 2003-2004 had moved to the northern part of the provinces of Kidal and Timbuktu. These groups claimed to have had a link to Al Qaeda and made an unholy alliance with the organisers of an increasing drug traffic from Mauritania to the Maghreb and Egypt, and with some salafist groups. They are also doing business taking western people as hostages to make money on their release.

In the early morning of July 10, 2012 the MNLA lost a battle in Ansongo, south of Gao and had ceased to exist.<sup>8</sup> On August 9, 2012 the President of the High Council of Islam in Mali was preparing to go to the north to negotiate with the leaders of the conglomerate of foreign Islamist groups to leave Mali, the alternative being a military intervention by forces from ECOWAS.<sup>9</sup> However, by the end of August 2012, when this paper was finished, there were a number of initiatives. Some had the aspect of intellectual analyses. The other approach was to go for risky initiatives to facilitate dialogue with the population, refugees and those still living in the north, about their common future. All persons I have seen mentioned so far

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<sup>8</sup> Information on email the same evening from a very well informed person from Timbuktu. I cannot disclose the name of my informant.

<sup>9</sup> Information on email on August 9, 2012 from a person close to the President of the High Council of Islam in Mali. I cannot disclose the name of my informant.

participated in the activities in which I was involved in the period 1995-2003. It seems that we developed together a strategy that is adaptable to the current situation in search of a common future based on traditional values in Mali: tolerance and openness towards minorities of all kinds.

### Lessons Learned

- Good deeds create openness and acceptance.
- Even though we avoided the combination of the work with evangelism, it is obvious that the help given by Christian organisations and individuals facilitated mission.
- Islam was an important source of reconciliation and peace.
- The meeting point of different cultures, different religions, different knowledge systems, different logical systems and different traditions in an atmosphere of mutual respect became a source of viable innovation.
- I have learned that my faith is a source of guidance and action in a difficult world, that a stranger is a friend you have not yet met, that an illiterate can have the knowledge and wisdom one needs to succeed.
- We won together but we remained different. I am still an evangelical missionary in my heart.

### Abbreviations

DDR/RR Demobilisation, Disarmament, Reinsertion, Reintegration, Rehabilitation  
DRC Democratic Republic of Congo  
ECOWAS Economic Community of West African States  
FIAA Front Islamique Arabe d'Azawad – Islamic Arab Front of Azawad  
FPLA Front Populaire de Libération de l'Asawad – Popular Front for the Liberation of Azawad  
MNLA Mouvement National de Libération de l'Azawad – National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad  
NCA Norwegian Church Aid  
NGO Non-Government Organisation  
NMS Norwegian Mission Society  
PRIO Peace Research Institute, Oslo  
UN United Nations  
UNDP United Nations Development Program

## AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE: ENVOY FOR PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

### Interview with Kjell Magne Bondevik

Kjell Magne Bondevik has been Prime Minister of Norway during two periods, first as the leader of a centre government (1997-2000) and then as a leader of a coalition government (2001-05). He was born in 1947, studied theology and was ordained in 1979. Almost his entire life has been in politics, as a member of parliament, as Deputy Minister at the Prime Minister's office, Minister of Church and Education, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and as Prime Minister. Within his own party, the Christian People's Party, he has held a number of positions, primarily as Vice Chairman (1975-83) and Chairman (1983-95).

Today he is the Director of the Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights. The Center was established in 2006. The Center has a staff of eight persons. The activities of the Center have since the beginning been linked to three main areas: human rights, democracy development, and inter-religious/inter-cultural dialogue. A primary focus has been to contribute to the prevention and solution of conflicts, and responsible governance in vulnerable states and fragile democracies. The Center works through contacts and dialogue with decision-makers, organisations and leaders in Norway and internationally.

Bondevik is interviewed by Knud Jørgensen.

*Where and how have you been engaged in efforts of reconciliation?*

I have been engaged in different types of reconciliation. One dimension is interreligious dialogue where a main purpose was to contribute to reconciliation. The first occasion I remember was in Bosnia-Herzegovina. When I was Prime Minister I was there for another meeting and I called upon all the religious leaders of Bosnia and they came – different Christian congregations, the Jewish community and Muslims. We then had a very interesting exchange of views with regard to the relations between religion and politics. That was then a very sensitive issue in Bosnia with all the different religious and ethnic groups.

We had in the framework of the Oslo Center for Peace a project with the former President of Iran, Muhammad Khatami, who is a dialogue-oriented man and a reformist, quite different from the current regime. He is also a Muslim theologian, and I am a Christian theologian, so that was a very interesting project since we both knew the political language and the religious language. We had a joke at that time: there were two countries in the world run by clergy, and they were Norway and Iran. We had a very

interesting project where we identified common values in Islam and in the West, and we identified our differences and the challenge of how to live peacefully with our differences.

I have for some time been engaged in efforts of reconciliation in Kenya, not so much in relation to the religious dimension, but more purely in regard to the political dimension, because they have had very high political tensions in that country, and even violent conflicts following the 2007 presidential election. We have been engaged in bringing the political leaders and parties together in order for reconciliation to take place, and we have worked especially with the coalition government. Now they are together, but some years ago they were fighting wildly and even violently against each other. So far the endeavour has been useful. We brought fourteen of these leaders to Norway for a week; they met leaders of the government here at the Oslo Center. That really served the process towards reconciliation. People say that they still are talking in Nairobi about the visit to Norway – here political leaders who had been very tough against each other were together for one week. This brought them together as human beings, and that has been very fruitful.

We are now carrying out a similar project in Somalia which is a failed state, as you know, where the political tensions are very high, and where there are also violent conflicts. The purpose of our project there was to bring different leaders together – the elders, the leaders of the different ethnic groups in Somalia, and the current political leadership, the transitional government.

I also remember back to when I was Minister of Foreign Affairs 1989-90. Then we were contacted by the Lutheran World Federation, headed at that time by Gunnar Stålsett, and Norwegian Church Aid in Guatemala headed by Petter Skauen. Norwegian Church Aid had contacts on both sides of the conflict, the guerrilla and the government, and they asked us and me as Minister of Foreign Affairs whether we could facilitate the first talks between the parties. I remember that very well: it was during spring when we met up in Holmekollen, above Oslo; that became the starting point. After that, the parties negotiated for six years. It was a great event in Oslo City Hall when six years later they signed the agreement.

I have also to some extent been involved in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; I have not played any key role, but I have from time to time met with leaders on both sides. Recently I met Prime Minister Fayyad and President Peres, and then I always convey some messages from one to the other.

*You mentioned a couple of common denominators – the common language and having people meet with one another. Can you say a little about whether there are any common methodologies, any particular means, that have been important in what you have done in reconciliation processes?*

The starting point is to build up trust and confidence between parties because without confidence you can do nothing. That is the starting point

for me. People who have been fighting against each other, often violently, do not trust each other. So I start by talking with them myself, not bringing them together as the first step. Hopefully, as a result of that, they trust me at least. They know that I talk to the other party as well, and they say: "When the other party trusts you, we are ready to meet them." Building up trust and confidence is the first thing. Normally, when I bring them together, we start very informally, not entering into a very tough agenda. More time for talking and chatting about daily life and so on. That is the beginning.

The second point is to ensure that they have ownership of the process, and that they have ownership of the agenda. We do not come as facilitators with an agenda and then impose it on them. That will not work. We have to discuss with them what the points of the agenda should be and what the points on the roadmap should be. They must agree, they must have the ownership. If they own the agenda and the process, it is much easier to reach a positive outcome. These are some of the important tools in a reconciliation process.

*When you run into problems – that it does not work, that the two parties are still far from one another – are there any tricks that you try to use?*

Then we must give them time. We shall not try to push them. So the main thing for me is to say OK, this is not working for the time being – let us think about it. Give them some time, some weeks, some months, and then I come back. Then maybe things have been calming down and it is easier to have a talk again – normally bilaterally, however, before we bring them together.

*Are there any values of particular importance in these processes of reconciliation?*

Yes, there are. I mentioned already confidence as a starting point. Secondly, let me mention truth. We must bring to the table the truth of what has happened, for instance in a conflict. That can be painful, but it is necessary, because if we try to hide the truth, it will not be a lasting or sustainable solution. The third value is forgiveness. In many of these situations they have to forgive each other, in order to be able to take the next step and to agree on something.

When we have based a process on these three main values – confidence, truth and forgiveness – we have come to a stage where we can start to discuss whether to reach a consensus or to reach a compromise. I distinguish between these two. Consensus is for me that you discuss a matter and maybe you gradually come to a common conclusion from different starting points. Compromise is that you agree to disagree, but by getting different topics "in the basket", you make compromises, saying to one party that you get this point, and to the other that you get the other point. We may dislike this point, but we can accept it if we get the other point. This has also been normal in Norwegian politics in all the coalition governments within which I have been serving. Another compromise may

say: “We want zero, he wants hundred, let us meet on fifty or something like that.” So compromise can be another important instrument.

And the last value I will mention is justice. After a conflict, if you achieve an agreement, the parties must view this as a just solution – also for me and for my party. If not, it will not be sustainable.

*We know these values from a Christian framework. Would you say that these values are also applicable across religious boundaries?*

Yes, in inter-religious dialogue, mainly with Muslims, I have identified some common values. Human dignity is more or less common even though we are implementing human rights differently. The idea of justice is common. The idea of peace is common. Another value which is common is respect for the holy, for the sacred. Also, forgiveness and truth are common values. Together, these values can make a solid platform for reconciliation.

*But you come out of a Christian context, you are a theologian. How does this background impact your understanding of these values and the way you handle them?*

Reconciliation is very relevant in our Christian faith because the core of our Christian faith is about reconciliation, between God and us as human beings. We are reconciled through Jesus Christ. That is why we can be reconciled to each other, as sinners. We know that it is also a commandment in our Christian faith that we shall be reconciled with our neighbours, even with our enemies. And we shall forgive each other. So the core values in our Christian faith are relevant for reconciliation processes in society and in a religious framework.

*Can you speak that sort of language when you are together with people of very different backgrounds?*

I can to some extent. It has been very interesting that, for instance, Muslim believers understand this language quite well. Some have said to me that, as a Christian, it must be very difficult for you to have a dialogue with Muslims because you have different faiths. My experience is the opposite. Muslim believers understand me. What is more difficult for them is to understand atheists and agnostics. But the Christian believer they understand very well.

*Could you pray with them?* Copyrighted Material

I have done so. I must admit that some years ago I was reluctant to do so because they have their faith and I have mine, but I have been invited to pray with Muslims in recent years, and I have accepted that and found it meaningful – because there is only one God, even though we disagree on the way to be reconciled to the one God.

*Obstacles – what would you see as some of the major obstacles in what you have experienced, on the way toward reconciliation?*

Based on my experience, I would say that one main obstacle is humiliation. If an individual or a group – an ethnic group, for instance – has the feeling

of being humiliated, it is very difficult. This I have discussed with the Jewish philosopher and Nobel laureate Eli Wiesel. He has the same view, and I have been inspired by him. Humiliation is a principle obstacle to reconciliation, for dialogue and for peace. Humiliation may have various reasons – for instance, if we are looked down upon and made second class people compared with the culture of others or the religion of others, that is a social humiliation. Another cause for feeling humiliated can be living under foreign occupation for a long time. Humiliation is a principle obstacle in any process of reconciliation.

Another obstacle can arise if a group has experienced a great degree of bloodshed at the hands of others; if their people have been killed in violent conflict; that can make for a very difficult starting point.

*You have mentioned forgiveness a couple of times. That played a role when Desmond Tutu started his work of reconciliation in South Africa. Is forgiveness possible? Can it solve a conflict?*

It can, but I think first you have to make a platform based on the other core values, particularly truth. Forgiveness in South Africa would never have been possible if they had not brought up the truth as they did. And they needed to build up confidence between the parties in South Africa. If not, it would not have been possible to forgive what happened during the apartheid period. I have discussed this with Desmond Tutu. You know he was the Chair of not only the “Reconciliation” Commission, but the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. These two values were closely linked to each other. He said that the truth was a precondition for reconciliation and for forgiveness.

Let us look at another country that is in the same situation to some extent, namely, Burma (or Myanmar). Aung San Suu Kyi has been under prison and house arrest for nearly fifteen years. Nelson Mandela was for 27 years. In a way she is Burma’s Nelson Mandela. I remember when I met Nelson Mandela in Norway in the spring of 1990 – I was Minister of Foreign Affairs. He visited Norway only a few months after his release after his 27 years in prison. I received him at Fornebu Airport, brought him to the hotel and talked to him for fifteen minutes in the car on the way. I expected to meet a man full of bitterness and hatred, but I did not. He was only talking about reconciliation and about building up again South Africa, together with the white population. This was before he was elected President. That was really impressive to me. He was filled with forgiveness. And of willingness for reconciliation.

I have recently talked with Aung San Suu Kyi – I was there last week – she has good reason for being filled with hatred and bitterness toward the military junta that imprisoned her for fifteen years, and that is responsible for her losing many years with her husband and her two sons. But she is not feeling bitter. She has reached out a hand to the military and asked for reconciliation. She has started a dialogue with the President. She wants to build up the country together with him. She said, “I am willing to give the



military a role in working for democracy.” That is promising. But of course, it depends on the response from the other side.

*Promising – does this mean that you believe that there are paths ahead toward reconciliation in a broken world?*

It is not only Burma that is promising today. Remember that over the last 20-25 years the number of what we may call more or less democratic countries has been more than doubled, from around 45 to more than a hundred. And many of these countries have seen processes of reconciliation on the road towards becoming democracies. We have seen it in some Asian countries, African countries and Latin American countries and, of course, in some of the countries in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. In some of these countries there was very rapid change from an authoritarian to a democratic society. In some of the others it took time to achieve reconciliation. So the history of the last 25 years has been a promising experience, showing us what is possible with reconciliation.

*We as Christians believe strongly in reconciliation. You have also been involved via the World Council of Churches in steps where reconciliation is essential. Do you see any unique contribution that we as Christians and as churches can make?*

First of all, remember what we already have touched upon, the core values of our Christian faith – forgiveness and reconciliation. Secondly, the Christian church in many countries is playing an important role. It has many members and can reach out at grassroots level. It is an important tool for reaching out with the message of truth, forgiveness and reconciliation. So the church can play an important role in civil society. Politicians depend on civil society to reach out to people and therefore need the church. We have experience of that in different countries, for instance in Poland where the Roman Catholic church played an important role together with Solidarity; in Kenya, where I have been working for the Oslo Center, the experience has been both positive and negative. At the start of the violent conflict following the presidential election in 2007, the churches played a negative role because church leaders became part of the conflict and stood up against others on the basis of ethnic diversity. Gradually they came together in the National Christian Council of Kenya and agreed that they must play another role, and they did. They had a national prayer day where they prayed for peace and reconciliation. This was a quite unique experience where the churches themselves changed during the conflict, from a negative to a positive role.

I am also thinking of another conflict, namely, in southern and northern Sudan which is tragic. We know the history behind it. There was violent conflict but they achieved a peace agreement in 2005. Now there are very high tensions and a real threat for a new and violent conflict. I hope and I pray that the churches – they are strong in the south; the north is more

dominated by the Muslims – can play a realistic role in reconciliation in order to avoid another violent conflict.



# THE LIBERIAN STORY: THE WAY TOWARDS NATIONAL HEALING AND RECONCILIATION

## Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is the 24th President of Liberia and the first elected female Head of State in Africa. Throughout her career she has demonstrated passionate commitment to hard work, integrity and good governance, advocating for the rights of women and the importance of education to provide a better future for her country and its people.

She successfully contested the 2005 presidential election, resulting in her historic inauguration, on January 16, 2006, as President of Liberia. She won re-election to office in November 2011, and was inaugurated to a second and final term of office on January 16, 2012.

After decades of fighting for freedom, justice and equality in Liberia, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has spent the past years rebuilding post-conflict Liberia.

She is the recipient of numerous prestigious awards. In 2011, President Sirleaf was among three women jointly awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace, honoured for their “non-violent struggle for the safety of women and for women’s rights to full participation in peace-building work”.

The following chapter is based on presidential speeches delivered in 2011 and 2012. Knud Jørgensen has done the editing.

### **More that Unites than Divides**

“In union strong success is sure, we cannot fail ... we will over all prevail.” We utter these words every time we sing our National Anthem – a song that proclaims our allegiance to this Land of Liberty, this Liberia. In it, we profess that we are a people united, regardless of tribe, clan, religion, gender or economic status. We bear witness that, as a people, we shall not stand for division and hatred.

We embrace these words, but must ask ourselves these questions: Is our union strong enough? Have we built a united society? The truth is that we have witnessed many divisions in our nation’s history, and it is in our power to heal them. We must build bridges, not walls.

Our nation was founded on principles of liberty and unity, but that beginning also sowed the seeds of conflict. Our history shows that Liberia was a nation divided from its inception, separating those who came to these

shores in search of liberty from the indigenous majority they met here. Political and economic power remained vastly disproportionate.

It was President William V.S. Tubman<sup>1</sup> who spearheaded a National Unification Policy to integrate the people of the Commonwealth of Liberia and the indigenous population, opening the way for the latter to participate in the political life of the country for the first time.

But the process which Tubman started was never completed, as political and economic power remained unequal and exclusive. Our country was plunged into almost two decades of darkness because the divisions between settler and indigenous populations had not been addressed satisfactorily. In that internecine war, we destroyed our heritage, our schools, our hospitals, our roads, and everything of value. We witnessed a period of mayhem brought about because of our divisions and because we had failed to heal them.

But let me ask this: Why did the war end? Why did we turn away from our hatred and disunity? I believe that the war ended because courageous people led the way towards peace. It ended because we were tired of war and division. It ended because, ultimately, we are all Liberians. We share a common bond that cannot be broken because of tribe, religion, ethnicity, status or other distinctions. We share a special connection that cannot be taken away or destroyed. The war ended because there is more that unites us than divides us.

The Truth and Reconciliation process, initiated in 2005 and restarted in 2011,<sup>2</sup> is at the heart of the effort to face our ugly past and heal the wounds. Whatever the controversies, whatever the debate about what people did, the people of this country and the thousands of victims of the conflict are crying out for a chance to reconcile and move on. We can only do this by addressing the rights of the victims – the hundreds of thousands of Liberians who lost their lives, their limbs, their family members, homes, and livelihoods. That is why I fully support the Peace Hut Program,<sup>3</sup> as

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<sup>1</sup> President William V.S. Tubman was elected in 1943 and served as President of Liberia from 1944 until his death on July 23, 1971. He ruled Liberia for 27 years (longer than any other president before or after him).

<sup>2</sup> The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Liberia was established in 2005 to investigate gross human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law as well as abuses that occurred, including massacres, sexual violations, murder, extra-judicial killings and economic crimes, such as the exploitation of natural or public resources to perpetuate armed conflicts, during the period January 1979 to October 14, 2003. The Truth and Reconciliation Process of Public Hearings started on January 8, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> The Palaver Hut Program, also called the Peace Hut Program, was recommended by the Truth and Reconciliation Program. The National Palaver Hut Program, common to rural communities around the country, is a conflict resolution mechanism whereby select members of integrity in the community adjudicate matters of grave concern to the community and seek to resolve disputes amongst or between individuals and communities. Decisions reached through Palaver Hut are

recommended by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, because that is where our people will find closure.

At the heart of our national agenda for peace is national reconciliation, which is critical for socio-economic development and progress, as well as for peace, security and stability. National reconciliation will be the catalyst for energizing our people into collective action for the greater common good and national cohesion.

We therefore need to learn to co-exist in peace and security, in a spirit of reconciliation and national unity. It will require the collective effort of all Liberians to continue rebuilding our country and to ensure that peace, stability and democracy continue to prevail. It is our fervent hope that this will be a time of true patriotism and reconciliation that will accentuate the positive things that unite us.

### **Together We Stand**

The theme “Together We Stand” is a statement that is so obvious, but one which we, as a people, have not always practised, leading to division and conflict. We know that there is strength and power in numbers – where everybody brings something to the national quilt – and that when we work together as one, we thrive and are unstoppable.

Liberia can now celebrate the deepening roots of democracy and the unhindered flow of freedoms – freedom of expression and of the press; freedom of worship, freedom of assembly, and of association. Today, we can celebrate progress – real and sustainable progress – displayed in the undisputed emergence of a new order of social, economic and political integration and transformation, by which people are enabled to reach across previous lines of divisions and inequalities in the body politic to foster a new and inspiring sense of common purpose and shared values, shared ownership of our country.

While we still have some way to go, we can today celebrate our right to be different without enduring previous stirrings of prejudice, marginalization or exclusion. We celebrate our difference in tribe, in gender, in religion and in association, knowing that we must no longer be accepted or left aside because of superficial difference, but that we must come together – we must stand together – as we ought to always do, in the pursuit of the causes of our nation. We must never forget that, notwithstanding our physical and other perceived differences, nationally and spiritually, we are indeed the same people.

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binding. This mechanism is adopted by the TRC to redress outstanding transitional grievances and create both the basis and opportunity to repair and restore broken relationships at community and national levels. The purpose of the Palaver Hut is also to afford anyone who has committed a wrong or crime, whether knowingly or unknowingly, against an individual or the state, to admit the wrongful act and seek pardon from the people of Liberia through the Palaver Hut.

We share the same values of citizenship. We are inspired by the same cravings of humanity; we extend from the same chain of history; and we yearn for the same future of peace, equality, opportunity, justice and prosperity.

At the end of the war, the major objective was the settling of tribal and ethnic quarrels. Today, we place emphasis on the values of patriotism, respect for authority, understanding and obeying the laws and traditions of our society.

### **National Healing and Reconciliation**

To guarantee our peace, we must do more to unite our people. Liberia is today a nation at peace, but not yet at peace with itself. Our journey of national healing is under way, but it is not complete. To claim the future, we must reflect and heal the past.

True reconciliation is a question of justice: justice in dealing with the past, justice in our processes of government and law, justice in our economic development. I believe that our reconciliation depends on the things I often have spoken about: empowering our youth, creating jobs and opportunity, and spreading development to all our people, so that progress belongs to everyone.

But we cannot move forward unless we address the wounds of the past. We will advance the Truth and Reconciliation process by implementing all practical recommendations. This will not be a hollow exercise, but the pursuit of genuine, meaningful closure with the past.

If this objective is to be achieved, it will require more effective leadership at the Independent National Commission on Human Rights (INCHR), which is poised to initiate the most important part of our reconciliation and healing process: the National Palaver Hut Program. Under this grassroots, locally led process, Palaver Huts in communities up and down the country will reverberate with a great National Dialogue. We will create a space where the truth is sacred, and renew our peace-building efforts to heal fractured communities. I am prepared to be the first to appear before it, to challenge untruths, to say what I have done and what I have not done, and to demonstrate that no one is above this process of healing and truth-telling.

We have furthermore launched a National Visioning process that imagines a new future for Liberia. Our country has come a long way as a nation and has endured many challenges. Our people have demonstrated immense resilience and resolve throughout the ages, but during the years of challenges and strife, the world changed. What was relevant 100 years ago is no longer relevant today. Ugly things happened to us as a people and a country; we must talk about them, and with that understanding we will forge a new collective vision for our country.

Through the visioning exercise, we will choose together a direction for our country. Before we do, we will answer five important questions: Where have we come from as a nation? Where are we today? Why are we here today? Where do we want to go? And how do we get there? We must do so in an open and inclusive way, in a dialogue that captures the hopes and dreams of everyone. I have therefore appointed a National Steering Committee, which will reflect regional, gender and generational constituencies, to carry out an inclusive consultation on our national vision.

All are invited to join the dialogue, and all voices are welcome. Let all come to the table, and let us all send a message: To those who would cling to the hatred of the past, you cannot succeed. If you sow the seeds of hatred and division, your bitter fruits will not nourish you, they will poison us all. But if you join the path of peace that our people have chosen, together we will find common ground, rediscover what unites us and build an inspiring vision for the future.

### **The Challenge of Hope**

Our country has turned the corner. Liberia is no longer a place of conflict, war and deprivation. We are no longer the country our citizens want to run away from, our international partners pitied, and our neighbours feared. We have earned our rightful place as a beacon of democracy – a country of hope and opportunity.

The cleavages that led to decades of war still run deep. But so too does the longing for reconciliation – a reconciliation defined not by political bargaining or by an artificial balance of power by tribe, region, religion or ethnicity but by the equality of opportunity and a better future for all Liberians.

True reconciliation means a process of national healing. It means learning the lessons of the past to perfect our democracy. But above all it means economic justice for our citizens and the spread of progress to all our people. It means creating jobs, opportunities and giving our young people the skills they need to prosper and create the life they choose.

### **The Youth of Liberia**

The youth of Liberia are our future. They are impatient. They are eager to make up for years of conflict and deprivation. They are anxious to know that their homeland offers grounds for hope. Let me say to them: We heard that message and it is our solemn obligation to ensure that their hope will not be in vain.

I believe that the achievements of the last six years, and the challenges of the next six, come down to hope. Hope is being restored to people from whom it was brutally ripped by war and chaos. Hope is making it possible for our people to imagine a future of security, of progress, and of

improvement for themselves, their families, and their society. Hope is fuelling the fires of ambition, and an ambitious people, secure in their homeland, capable of great things. But now we must follow through on the commitments we have made to our people, so that their hope is not in vain, so that their hope is real and they can actually taste the fruits of their hard work and dedication.

Securing a future of prosperity and democracy will require commitment and hard work from all. Liberia will not reach its potential unless each and every Liberian resolves to reach his own. We will rise or fall on the spirit of purpose and patriotism that we summon between us today.

The government should offer education to the youth worthy of our heritage, but it will be up to the youth to stay in school, to study hard, and to learn the skills required for success in this new technological world. The government should foster equality of opportunity so that youngsters can get a job, and to know the dignity of receiving an honest day's wage. But it will be up to the youth to work honestly and hard to realize those ambitions. The government should provide a system of justice that all of us can trust: law enforcement officials who act out of a sense of duty; judges who interpret and apply the laws fairly; administrators who live up to their oaths of office whatever the temptations may be. But it will be up to the youngsters and to me to demand transparency and accountability.

### **The Values of a Patriot**

I have called for a rededication to the enduring values set out in our Constitution, and consistent with our deepest gratitude for the gifts the Almighty has conferred on us as individuals and on our country. It is a rediscovery of what it means to be a Liberian – a proud citizen of a country that has suffered from wars but now is a dignified African nation with a simple dream of Liberty. The patriotism and resolve I have called for honours that dream.

Patriotism does not mean blind loyalty to power. Indeed, sometimes the highest demonstration of patriotism may well be seen when citizens peacefully and respectfully express their opposition to particular policies proposed by those elected to govern them.

Patriots freely and openly, and even passionately, disagree about what is best for the nation they love. Patriots compete for the support, and for the votes, of their fellow citizens. Patriots acknowledge that those who may not embrace their particular views are nonetheless acting out of their own understanding of what is best for their country.

Patriots believe that equality of opportunity applies to all citizens, regardless of tribe or ethnicity, regardless of geographic or economic status, and regardless of sex. The government remains particularly committed to achieving equality for women and girls in all areas of life: education, business, and in the family itself.



Patriots believe deeply in democratic processes and institutions, and when those processes and institutions waver or fail, patriots resolve to repair them. They believe in a democracy of policies and not personality, merit not money, action not words. They believe in the sacred right to free expression and the responsibility to exercise that right with care.

Liberians know all too well what can happen when the tenets of democracy and freedom are not jealously and vigorously defended, when the true love of country is abandoned for narrow interest. We have suffered the years of deprivation and terror, during which democratic principles were exiled from our shores. We have looked into the vacant eyes of a generation of young Liberians whose hope for the future was stolen.

We will never allow those mistakes to be repeated. We will never again shed the mantle of democracy, of freedom, of national unity, of patriotism.

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# INTERFAITH DIALOGUE AND ACTION FOR PEACE AND RECONCILIATION: TWO CASES FROM AFRICA

Stein Villumstad

In a number of contemporary conflicts throughout the world, whether international or domestic, religion is mentioned as one of the factors, varying from aggravating the conflict to being a source of reconciliation. Even in wars without religious overtones, religious leaders have involved themselves to various degrees.

The involvement of religious leaders and institutions is often related to the notion of reconciliation. In the context of this chapter, the term reconciliation will indicate the intention of re-connecting and involvement in dialogue and consultation *with the aim of re-establishing broken relationships*.

It has been argued that the concept of reconciliation is too Christian and theological to make sense across religious traditions and for those without religious beliefs. The following is a practical case that will attempt to show the relevance of reconciliation when it is closely linked to a variety of elements in defusing conflict and building peace at the conclusion of violent conflicts.

This chapter looks at two cases of reconciliation efforts through interfaith dialogue and action and reconciliation, based on the author's involvement with Norwegian Church Aid (NCA), together with Religions for Peace (RfP) in the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and the civil war in Sierra Leone.

The chapter attempts to show how religions may be constructively mobilised in peace and reconciliation efforts. Religious leaders of different traditions worked together, irrespective of their different doctrines and religious practices.

The two cases do not have obvious "perpetrators" or "victims", at least not in the eyes of the religious leaders involved in them. The question of "truth", as an important aspect of reconciliation, remained contested, at least in the Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict. While there was consensus around one level of "truth" – the suffering of innocent people – the difficult distinction between political "normalisation" and social and spiritual reconciliation complicated the search for truth. The two narratives will show that political processes are based on power-related negotiations, which hardly find room for notions like "the true search for truth, repentance, forgiveness and love" – important elements of reconciliation. Dialogue as part of reconciliation needs to be based on the true voices of estranged partners – regardless of

their power base – and truth, repentance, justice, forgiveness and love are intrinsic to true spiritual explorations. As indicated in the tentative conclusions of this chapter, religious leaders are well equipped to promote peace and reconciliation if they stay within their religious mandates and do not attempt to act as politicians.

While different in political and social contexts, the two cases show that reconciliation is no “quick fix” to end violent conflicts and heal societies victimized by these conflicts. In Sierra Leone the real reconciliation process gained momentum in the post-war situation, not least assisted by the national “Truth and Reconciliation Commission”. As will be shown in the Ethiopia-Eritrea case, a substantive reconciliation process was stalled due to the unresolved political conflict between the two countries; this prevented people from their respective societies to interact and explore reconciliatory actions. The religious leaders were able to initiate a promising process, but the political circumstances prevented the necessary ongoing, patient and fragile dialogue between people and societies that had been estranged by the war.

Finally, it is hoped that the two cases will show that differences in religions do not have to be obstacles to peace and reconciliation efforts. The two conflicts were not religious in nature, and religious leaders contributed to preventing religion from being abused and hijacked for sectarian and political agendas. Religious leaders explored concerns and values that were widely shared and deeply held across religious divides. They sought to identify joint actions based on these concerns and values. This should serve as encouragement for religious leaders and institutions to become involved in peace and reconciliation efforts.

## **Religious Leaders Challenged to Act**

### *Ethiopia/Eritrea*

“Religious fathers called upon the peoples of Ethiopia and Eritrea not to bear any resentment against one another as a result of the conflict that raged between the two countries. The Patriarch of the Eritrean Orthodox Church said there would not be war hereafter between the two countries ... At a press conference they gave at Bole International Airport, the religious fathers said they have conveyed a message of peace to the people of Eritrea to bury the past and work for a better future. The Ethiopian religious fathers who travelled to Asmara returned home February 14 after concluding their visit to that country.”<sup>1</sup>

“At a public gathering at the United Nations Conference Centre yesterday, the religious leaders of both countries have reiterated the importance of peace to the leaders and peoples of the two countries ... ‘My hope – my stubborn

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<sup>1</sup> *Addis Zemen*, newspaper, Addis Ababa, February 15, 2002.

optimism – is that with your spiritual and pastoral guidance, with your prayers and actions, lasting peace will return to the lands of Ethiopia and of Eritrea, and their people will once again enjoy a life of dignity and prosperity,’ ... [the special representative of the Secretary-General of the UN, Legwaila Joseph Legwaila] said.<sup>2</sup>

For the first time since the war between the two countries broke out in 1998, the Eritrean and Ethiopian people witnessed delegations publicly visiting each other in their respective capitals. The significance of the meetings was further underlined by the high level of leaders participating in these talks, with the massive popular support of their religious communities. The joint visits of the religious leaders of Ethiopia and Eritrea were the culmination of a process that experienced countless high and low points.

A significant breakthrough occurred more than two years earlier during a meeting. Twenty men in full religious ceremonial garb, across religious and national divides and tensions, spontaneously broke up the formal meeting. They rose, walked about in the room, hugging each other and sharing greetings of peace. This emotional and colourful episode took place in a secluded hotel in Norway in the early fall of 1999, and was sparked off by an historic agreement reached around the table.

After serious and difficult negotiations, starting almost a year earlier, the religious leaders of Ethiopia and Eritrea had finalised a joint appeal to the peoples of their countries. They asked them to work for peace within their respective religious traditions, to reach out in support of those who were suffering, and to open their hearts to forgive and thus to end hateful propaganda. The backdrop of the appeal was the war between the two countries which, in little more than a year, had killed thousands of people, displaced hundreds of thousands and caused serious humanitarian crises. In the same meeting, they prepared joint letters to their two governments, in which they respectfully urged them to make the utmost effort “to end the hostilities”, and asked for a meeting with their respective heads of government to share their reflections.

The religious leaders of the two countries had signed the same piece of paper for the first time. Religion united influential people in efforts to work for peace, despite the popular belief that it was a divisive element which aggravated conflicts. The signatories to the two documents were the Patriarchs of the Orthodox churches, the Archbishops of the Catholic churches, the Presidents of the Protestant churches and the Sheikhs of the Muslim councils.

The talks between the religious leaders of Ethiopia and Eritrea started in August 1998. NCA contacted the respective religious communities, shared its deep concern over the outbreak of the war a few months earlier, and offered to facilitate a process between them.

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<sup>2</sup> *Addis Zemen*, February 16, 2002.

Taking their local contexts into consideration, it was not a *fait accompli* that the religious leaders would come together as a group. Particularly in Ethiopia, there has been a history of some tension between religious and denominational institutions and communities. Internal conflicts inside some of the denominations, and between the countries within denominations, were characteristics of the context in which the process was to start up.

When the two delegations first met confidentially in Norway in November 1998, the atmosphere was tense and cautious. Politeness and superficial friendliness characterised the initial hours and days. They managed, however, to agree upon a platform of shared values and a commitment to peace that would guide their future dialogue. This kindled hope among the groups, and gave encouragement to the people in Ethiopia and Eritrea who were suffering from the war and were longing for peace. For most of the duration of the war, the religious leaders were the only significant groups from the respective countries who met face-to-face.

### *Sierra Leone*

On the other side of Africa, the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone (IRCSL) had taken courageous steps to end the extremely cruel and inhuman civil war in the country. Their actions brought them to the official negotiating table in Lomé in the spring of 1999, during which the government and the rebel movement tried to reach a peace accord.

The following incident illustrates the position of credibility and trust that the IRCSL had gained among the people of Sierra Leone. The talks in Lomé dragged along for an extended period, and the religious leaders decided to return to Sierra Leone until some new developments became evident in the negotiations. The decision was made mainly to save scarce economic resources and to respect their primary duties as religious leaders. Some of them, as reported by the respected Muslim leader, Haja Madi, were met with the following aggressive statement when they returned to Freetown: "Get yourself back to Lomé immediately, and do not return to Freetown until you have secured a peace agreement!"<sup>3</sup> The statement reflected an immense war fatigue, coupled with considerable expectations of and trust in the religious leaders.

The religious leaders, at certain moments during the internal conflict that started in 1991, had discussed what could be done. A more concerted effort was initiated when they, under the auspices of RfP, established the IRCSL.

Following the massacres in Freetown during December 1998, the IRCSL stepped up its activities. Contact with the government was initiated at the highest levels and the President was urged to search for a negotiated peace. Simultaneously, contact was made with the rebel movement, and the IRCSL managed to establish radio contact with them. The Council further

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<sup>3</sup> Oral communication with author, June 1999.

agreed to meet with rebel leaders in the bush. Medicines and some other essential humanitarian supplies were brought along to the bush meeting. In return, the religious leaders asked for genuine gestures that would prove the seriousness of the rebels' commitment to continue a negotiation process. As a result, more than fifty children held hostage by the rebels were released.

Although the main actors in the Lomé negotiations were the UN and the Economic Community of West African States under the leadership of the Togolese president, the parties to the conflict insisted that the religious leaders should also be included in the negotiations. Their moral strength and popular legitimacy were essential for the negotiations even to begin.

The main challenge for the IRCSL was to gain the acceptance of the rebel group, since the religious leaders were all based in government-controlled areas. Their basic religious values, principled positions and even-handed behaviour rather served to build the necessary trust with the rebels and helped to develop a relationship between these two groups.

It is well known that many questioned the peace accord, and that it did not hold. A new outbreak of tragic violence the following year introduced entirely new dynamics. The role of the IRCSL during the peace talks has however not been put into question. Its role remains important, in particular its attempts to work for reconciliation and the rehabilitation of the most vulnerable groups. The role of IRCSL in the ensuing Truth and Reconciliation Commission is also significant. The President of the IRCSL was appointed as the leader of this important mechanism of national reconciliation.

### **Religion not at the Heart of Conflict**

Religion is not at the heart of any of the conflicts in Ethiopia, Eritrea or Sierra Leone. This is not to say that there have not been tensions and conflicts within and between the religious communities. In all three countries, Islam and Christianity are the main religions, and the ones that were represented in both cases.

Sierra Leone is religiously comparatively harmonious. The number of intermarriages across religious divides is noteworthy.

Particularly in Ethiopia and Eritrea, there has been a constant need to build relations between the faiths, and thereby strengthen the group coherence in order to face the joint challenges posed by conflicts.

### *Specific potential and limitations*

The initial objective of the Ethiopian and Eritrean religious leaders was to stop the war between the two countries. This implied an assumption that the religious leaders had sufficient influence over the political actors. The dialogue between the two groups grinded to a halt when they were not able

to agree upon their own role as religious leaders in a political conflict. Their ability or willingness to separate their national loyalties from their religious common call for reconciliation was not sufficiently strong. The two groups eventually had to adjust their objective towards post-conflict reconciliation and reconstruction to move the dialogue forward.

Since the conflict between the two countries was basically of a political nature, there was a need to define the zones of operation for the religious leaders. In relating to their governments, they promoted general values, concerns and suggestions. The potential role of facilitating contacts between the two governments was not possible during the process. One episode will illustrate the different approaches to the conflict held by the religious leaders and the governments. In conversations that the author had with senior government officials on both sides, they made it clear that they were impressed with the actions taken by the religious leaders. These were beyond what they had expected when the dialogue started. On the other hand they “strongly disagreed” with the process: “... this is not time for normalisation.” This led to a discussion about the basic understanding of the reconciliation process. The arguments focused on whether there was a distinction between “normalisation” and “reconciliation”. The author claimed that “normalisation” could be seen as a political process between two nations, implying the restoration of formal communication, economic and political co-operation, and the exchange of services that characterize a normal relationship between two neighbouring countries. “Reconciliation”, as described in the introduction to this chapter, would be a process of reconnecting and consulting in order to re-establish dignity, respect, understanding and co-existence. Reconciliation is a process between individuals and communities, reaching into hearts and minds. This lack of distinction between the two terms created a tension between the political leadership and reconciliation efforts by the religious leaders.

The main challenge for religious leaders was to communicate with their respective communities and empower them to carry on the interfaith dialogue within their organisational environments down to local levels.

### **Need for a Common Platform: Religious Values and Human Rights**

In our cases, similar statements confirm their roles as religious leaders in the wider context of civil society. In the 1998 talks between religious leaders of Ethiopia and Eritrea, this was expressed as follows:

“We as religious leaders have a mandate, given to us by God and the believers, to speak up against all destructive acts that may threaten the lives and the well-being of our communities ... We as religious leaders ... accept the call to be peace-makers and the duty to encourage and support our governments in peace-making and reconciliation ...

“We ourselves continue to lift up the call for peace in our prayers and that we call upon our two peoples to pray to God for a lasting peace ...

”We encourage our peoples to stand together and to express their desire for the conflict to be resolved through dialogue.”<sup>4</sup>

The Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone declared:

“As a coalition of religious communities ... [we] will never be neutral in relationship to the profound moral teachings of its represented religious traditions. Each religious tradition ... calls its believers in its own way to be radically committed to the inherent dignity of all persons and to the establishment of a just society based on respect for truth and a commitment to the common good ... authentic Peace is both a gift from God and a divine mandate that summons men and women of good will.”<sup>5</sup>

In 2000, Ethiopian and Eritrean leaders reiterated:

“We jointly, in recognition of our religious differences, condemn all violence against fundamental human rights ... including the legitimate right to live in communities. [This was a hard-won consensus, since massive coercive deportations and relocations of people were practised by respective governments and initially accepted as necessary by some of the religious leaders]”<sup>6</sup>

In the action plans for both dialogue processes, religious prayers and ceremonies were included. In the reconciliation plan for Sierra Leone, ceremonies for the integration of demobilised soldiers were highlighted. Prayers and special religious occasions were initiated in Eritrea and Ethiopia. There is, however, obviously room for innovative suggestions to widen the choice of ceremonies and symbolic actions which might be used for different purposes. It might be an important space, or zone, to process traumas and negative emotions. Religious ceremonies have the ability to bridge the divide between individuals and the community, and as such may be an instrument for collective healing processes. Symbolic religious actions have been seen as meaningful also for those not belonging to the particular faith tradition in which these actions originate. The challenge in our cases has been to translate these initiatives of religious ceremonies and symbolic actions to the local communities and local houses of prayer.

The joint visits of the religious leaders of Ethiopia and Eritrea to respective capitals in February 2002 were the most significant actions in their process. It went beyond being symbolic and ceremonial. A well-publicised open letter to the religious leaders from the main opposition parties in Ethiopia illustrates this point:

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<sup>4</sup> From the initial “platform” agreed to by the religious leaders of Ethiopia and Eritrea in Oslo, November 8, 1998.

<sup>5</sup> *The role of the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone during the negotiations* [between the government of Sierra Leone and Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone], Lomé, May 1999.

<sup>6</sup> From *Statement of Shared Moral Commitment for Common Living of the Ethiopian and Eritrean Religious Leaders*, Oslo, July 21, 2000.



“In the past many years, you religious fathers have chosen to be silent while you saw with your own eyes and heard with your own ears when one, using one’s political and gun power, killed and imprisoned the other ... It is our ardent hope that, in the future, your eyes that have been opened to take note of the current matter would do the same with the issue of national reconciliation.”<sup>7</sup>

In the cases of Ethiopia, Eritrea and Sierra Leone, symbolic humanitarian assistance has played an important part in the translation of dialogue into action. Major humanitarian actions are undertaken by the UN agencies or by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) – including religion-based NGOs. The role of humanitarian actions undertaken by religious leaders has been of a symbolic and strategic nature. Selected assistance to demobilised soldiers and fighters, assistance in restoring houses of prayers in war-torn communities and in providing shelter for deported families are examples of these processes. Even these categories of actions may be approached from the cultural or symbolic perspective.

In both cases, there might be questions about evidence that the wider national and local leadership of the religious communities have true ownership of the dialogues and joint actions. In Sierra Leone, there was clear evidence that awareness-building workshops about the peace accord were conducted in many parts of the country. These sparked off some more substantial joint local actions related to the reintegration of child soldiers and refugees. In the cases of Ethiopia and Eritrea, it is unclear whether there are substantial contacts across denominations and religious groups beyond leaders. Few, but nevertheless significant, local committees or processes are functional so far as a result of the three cases.

### **Tentative and Preliminary Observations from the Two Examples.**

There are striking similarities and differences in the two cases. Although a much broader body of experience would be necessary to draw any final conclusions, it is tempting to make some observations that might be useful in similar processes:

- If religion is not at the heart of the conflict, tensions between the religious communities may be overcome in a common search for the greater good.
- A common platform of deeply held and widely shared values may serve as a strong instrument for joint action in situations of conflict.
- Religious communities in search of peace should not focus on theological dialogue, but use dialogue as a platform for joint action.
- Religious leaders seem to have best possibility for influencing the political and military conflicts by staying within their primary religious mandate. Their credibility and legitimacy seem to be

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<sup>7</sup> Goh, Ethiopian newspaper, February 16, 2002.

bolstered by coherent words and deeds within this mandate. Individual religious leaders may be respected politicians but, as a group, religious leaders seem not to have strong political credibility. Their ability to mobilise their respective faith communities for peace count for more than their ability to act as “diplomats” towards the parties to the conflict.

- Governments may overlook individual religious leaders and communities, but when they unite in the search for peace, governments are encouraged and pressed to take their initiatives seriously.
- Symbolic actions seem to be powerful entry-points to gain influence for religious leaders in their search for peace. Ceremonies for individual and collective confession, repentance and absolution are typical for religious institutions and give them credibility in reconciliation processes. Inclusive ceremonies that can be accepted by followers of respective religious traditions, and also by those without religious belief, are experienced as powerful elements of communal reconciliation processes.



# **THE JOURNEY FROM WAR TO PEACE IN BOSNIA: A CONTEXTUAL REFLECTION OF AN ACTIVE PARTICIPANT**

Peter Kuzmic

The perceptive and well informed Misha Glenny in his book *The Fall of Yugoslavia* (1992) called Bosnia-Herzegovina “The Paradise of the Damned”. I was deeply hurt by this description, for Bosnia was my first missionary calling. Can anybody save Bosnia? This question has hung over that war-besieged country since early 1992, when Serb artillery started shelling Sarajevo from the surrounding Olympian hills. The worst conflict in Europe since the end of the Second World War initially caused a flurry of sterile diplomatic activities resulting in countless cease-fires and peace agreements, which were signed and then broken. Disappointment with the international community, especially European countries and the United Nations, visibly grew to the point of utter resignation and appeals to the “Islamic brethren” for help. The mood was well illustrated by a cynical comment frequently heard in Sarajevo in 1993: “It is good there was no UN around in 1939 or we would all be speaking German today.” During those years of hopelessness and helpless desperation many victimized Bosnians wondered why there was not greater moral outrage from the civilized world watching on TV the strangulation of a most beautiful city, and the indiscriminate killing of countless civilians.

A peace-loving Sarajevo intellectual who became a refugee in my city asked me countless times what had happened to the Christian conscience of those who were in the position to stop the killing. He feared that the failure of the powerful West to stop the war, or at least press the UN to lift the unjust arms embargo, would inevitably lead to the undesired success of the more militant Islamic forces, which were eager to help. Already Mujahadeen volunteers were coming from radical Islamic nations to fight – not for a multi-ethnic and multi-religious Bosnia, but rather for the kind of Bosnia this man would not want to live in. He was an agnostic humanist who “admired Jesus”, but claimed to be, like the majority of his compatriots, a “cultural Muslim”. I will never forget the conversation in which we discussed the ambiguities of the uni-polar world and the role of the only remaining superpower, the United States of America. It was at that time that the famous commentator George Will described US policy

towards Bosnia as “morally complicit, politically impotent, and militarily inconsequential”. Knowing of my frequent teaching and ministerial engagements in America, my friend challenged me with a question I was unable to answer: “When will the Christian conscience of the most moral nation in the world awaken and make them come to our rescue?”

It was questions like these, along with the personal experience of the many painful consequences of the war, that caused me to become increasingly critical of the passivity of the powerful nations and their seemingly moral indifference in the face of evil. Along with many innocent children and elderly people, a friend of mine was killed on a street in Sarajevo while waiting with a plastic container for water. After that incident, I knew that I could no longer attempt to reconcile a pacifist attitude with my moral convictions. He was a retired university professor and a Greco-Latin scholar. At the time of his death, I was in the process of examining his manuscript translation of one of the works of Croat reformer and disciple of Martin Luther, Matthias Flacius Illyricus.

Since my early youth, both my heart and mind had leaned toward pacifist positions. Bosnia has changed all of that. I did not become a militarist, of course, and I continue to abhor all wars. In November 1991 the beautiful Croatian city of Vukovar was totally destroyed and its hospitable population massacred. All of this took place less than thirty kilometres from my home in the city of Osijek, which nearly suffered the fate of Vukovar as well. Once this destruction had been repeated throughout many places in Bosnia, I began to argue that the only way to stop Serbian aggression was to undertake a resolute military action – preferably NATO’s surgical air strikes against their military positions. “Take out their artillery and cut the supply lines over the Drina River (from Belgrade) and the war will soon be over!” I caught myself arguing – as if I were a military strategist and not a Christian minister. Brutality after brutality revealed that the only language these powerful and ruthless aggressors understand is the language of greater power.

As the President of the Protestant-Evangelical Council of Croatia and Bosnia (the only ecumenical body in these countries), and as a member of the regional Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, I pleaded in press interviews and elsewhere for active international involvement and moral leadership in resolving the Bosnian crisis before it was too late. I know that this course has perplexed some of my pacifist friends, and even angered a few of my ministerial colleagues in Serbia, but I assured them all that my actions were purely morally motivated, and were the only choice I had in order to live at peace with my own conscience. “Stop the killing so we can talk about peacemaking and reconciliation” was my constant plea.

I have never been driven by “tribal instincts” – as so many in the Balkans and other places in Eastern Europe seemed to be. I am a native Slovenian who has lived in both Serbia (Belgrade) and Bosnia (Banja-Luka and Sarajevo). As a citizen of Croatia, I have pastored and taught theology

for decades in that country, and also beyond. I am currently dividing my time between teaching in New England and Christian ministry in the turbulent Balkans, frequently commuting between Bosnia and Boston. My wife is Croatian, though her father is half-German and her mother an ethnic Czech. She came from Serbia where her father was pastoring when we met as theology students in Germany. We are, however, “not confused, just well mixed”, as Robert Frost once said of himself. I can say with a clear conscience that I have no ethnic “axe to grind”. My reflections and attitudes are the expression of my Christian convictions and cosmopolitan experience. In reflecting on the Bosnian disaster and its resolution, let me first attempt to describe briefly the somewhat broader contextual framework apart from which the war in former Yugoslavia cannot be understood.

### **Transitional Context**

To many of the countries of Eastern Europe and of the former Soviet Union, the amazing collapse of totalitarian communist regimes did not bring the “freedom, peace and prosperity” that they had anticipated. The initial euphoria, as well as unrealistic expectations about the imminent arrival of fully-fledged democracy and a thriving economy, had to give way to prolonged and painful periods of transition and many disappointments. During a revealing visit to Moscow while Boris Yeltsin was the President of Russia, I was told by a member of the Duma, “We do not have a democracy here; we are in a dangerous state of anarchy, which is creating space for another dictatorship.” When I asked him who actually ruled in Moscow, he shot back a one-word answer, “Mafia.”

There and elsewhere in the post-1989 period, the controlling communist ideology (singular) has all too often been replaced by uncontrollable and conflicting nationalist ideologies (plural) and movements. The forces that communism had suppressed began to explode. Nationalism and religion are two key actors in this painful drama. Nationalism and religion very often go hand-in-hand in terms of their powerful imposition on the landscape of post-communist societies, and also in their crusade of reclaiming a monopoly on the spiritual and moral life of their nations. This powerful synthesis of ethnicity, religion and culture became one of the most dangerous enemies of the progress and peaceful transformation of post-communist nations. In its regressive forms, it powerfully appealed to individuals and groups who had remained democratically and ecumenically illiterate. These anti-modern and irrational movements only serve to hinder the free development of democracy and the growth of genuinely free pluralistic societies.

The tragic events in former Yugoslavia were the most radical and violent expressions of these regressive processes. Yugoslavia was created at a conference table at the end of the First World War, initially as a kingdom of

Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, with a Serbian monarch. Later the name was changed to “The Land of South Slavic peoples” which, following the Second World War, became a socialist federation consisting of six republics and two autonomous provinces. Yugoslavia was sometimes referred to as the “India of Europe” because of its ethnic and religious complexity.

In addition to its five major Slavic nationalities – Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Macedonians and Montenegrins – it was also a home to several strong national minorities, of which two million Albanians in Kosovo comprised the largest segment. To this multi-ethnic picture, add diverse histories, two alphabets and three main religions, and you will understand the bewilderment and confusion of so many Western reporters and analysts who endeavoured to explain “who is who” and interpret the causes and effects of the latest series of Balkan wars.

### **No Reconciliation without Justice**

Imagine if the Nuremberg trials had never taken place. Would Germany be what it is today or would there be any possibility of the historic enmity between France and Germany turning into the Franco-German amity axis around which the European Union rotates today? The critical images of Nazi leaders being held accountable sent a lasting and worldwide message that persons responsible for crimes of genocide would not go unpunished and that blaming the whole nation would be counter-productive in the search for a sustainable peace and European co-operation. For the same reasons, it became essential to hold accountable those who had perpetrated genocide in Bosnia, especially in Srebrenica, a UN-protected “safe zone”, in which some 7,000 Bosnian men were slaughtered by Serbian forces under the leadership of General Ratko Mladić. Finally, in 1995, the NATO bombing campaign stopped the outright violence and the Dayton Peace Agreement assured the presence of large numbers of NATO-led peacekeeping forces, which replaced the lightly armed and largely ineffective UN forces (derogatorily called “war-keepers”) that were partly responsible for tragedies like Srebrenica. Since then, new outbreaks of violence have been prevented by the strong international military presence as a peacekeeping force, which came under the command of the European Union in 2004.

Once the priority task of stopping the violence was accomplished, the next step on the road to reconciliation was the establishment of an effective justice system. The leading perpetrators of war crimes had to be brought to justice in order to prevent the further collective, mutual demonization of the other nations. The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in Hague was established in 1993, but was ineffective until strengthened by the Dayton Accords two years later – which required that all parties co-operated with the War Crimes Tribunal. Several dozens

of Serbs, but also a number of Croats and Bosnians, were indicted and convicted of war crimes and crimes against humanity. As was true for the Germans at the end of the Second World War, to improve prospects for lasting peace and provide a climate for the victims to move towards forgiveness, the publicly televised trials of the Serbian nationalist President Slobodan Milosevic (who died in Hague before the verdict), his bellicose partner in organizing the ethnic cleansing, Vojislav Seselj, as well as the Bosnian Serb President Radovan Karadžić, and his chief executive, General Ratko Mladić (both claiming active Orthodox faith), are of crucial importance for the establishment of justice and for the catharsis of the Serbian national psyche. These cruel and arrogant former masters of human destinies are now forced to confront the evidence for their crimes against humanity and face the testimonies of their helpless victims. In the absence of “truth commissions” in Bosnia, these trials served to establish the truth of what actually happened, to focus the blame on the most responsible leaders of the perpetrators of evil, and frequently to function as a kind of psychotherapy for the victims. International justice, though slow, expensive and, at times, clumsy has helped to change the climate of inter-ethnic relations for the better. It has also resulted in significant symbolic acts such as recent public apologies to the Bosnian people by the Presidents of both Croatia and Serbia, and the parliament of Serbia adopting a declaration “condemning in strongest terms the crimes committed in July 1995 against the Bosnian population of Srebrenica”. Finding truth, establishing justice, and promoting reconciliation are all inseparable parts of the same mission to heal the wounds of war, build bridges of trust across the antagonistic chasms of suspicion and intolerance, and advance human well-being within peaceful and harmonious living in the post-communist and post-war Balkans. The search for enduring peace entails support for the ICTY along with fostering capacities for conducting and monitoring the domestic trials currently ongoing.

No side in the Bosnian war was innocent. Bosnian Muslims and Croats (Catholics) have also committed atrocities and practised ethnic cleansing. “All are sinful” – and there is no party to this war without guilt, but not all are equally guilty. This is why it is so important to review the genesis of the war and the goals for which it was fought. Unfortunately, the international community shares a considerable degree of responsibility for not stopping the carnage when it was still relatively easy to do so. How to intervene in a timely and effective way in order to prevent genocidal violence and mass atrocities is one lesson that the leading nations of the world have proved slow to learn. One is somewhat encouraged to see some progress after the Rwandan and Bosnian tragedies as evidenced in the UN 2005 initiative *The Responsibility to Protect* (R2P) on preventing and halting “Mass Atrocity Crime”, categorizing four crimes: genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing, which demand, when other means fail, resolute humanitarian (military) intervention by the international

community. In the Balkans we have a popular saying: “It is better and cheaper to prevent than to heal.” The Bosnian way to healing, reconciliation, and sustainable peace is indeed a painful, costly and multifaceted journey loaded with unpredictabilities, paradoxes and vulnerability; and, yet, the journey has no alternative.

### What has Bosnia Taught Us?

The prolonged anguish in Bosnia was to a great extent an expression of a vacuum in the arena of global leadership: leaders with moral conviction and the courage to act in a timely and strategic fashion. Problems were exacerbated by the ignorance of the relevant facts of the Balkans’ historical, ethnic and religious make-up, which reminds one of the famous quip by Churchill: “The Balkans produce more history than they are able to consume.” Commonly heard statements, among both the politicians and in the media, like “those people have been fighting for centuries and nobody can stop them”, are simply not true. Different ethnic groups have peacefully co-existed in Bosnia for ages, and those of us who lived for a while in pre-war Sarajevo remember it as a most beautiful place of multi-ethnic civility, a creative blending of cultures and tolerance. Warren Zimmermann, the last American ambassador to Yugoslavia, in a very perceptive analysis of the developments and personalities that led to the bloody dissolution of the country (Foreign Affairs, March/April 1995), states that “Bosnian history since the fifteenth-century Turkish occupation was no more bloody than the history of England or France”. He also speaks of “Sarajevo, which for centuries had been a moving symbol of the civility that comes from people of different ethnicities living in harmony”.

I have been closely involved in the ministry of reconciliation and in alleviating human suffering in my homeland, Croatia, and in Bosnia and Kosovo. I continue to serve in various advisory capacities as well as in several areas of “Track Two Diplomacy”. My primary motivation is Christian love, which does not permit me to be indifferent when encountering evil and the suffering of the innocent. In a rather desperate public gathering under the bombardment of my city of Osijek, I once defined our mission as the answer to the question of *how to decrease fear and increase hope*. In collaborating with many non-believing humanists as well as people of different religious persuasions, I often quote George Bernard Shaw, who perceptively wrote: “The worst sin towards our fellow creatures is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them: that is the essence of inhumanity.” A reader’s response to *Time* magazine’s coverage of the brutality in Central Africa made the same point: “Death in Rwanda, in harrowing proportions, came not only from massacres and cholera but also from apathy” (August 22, 1994).

I am an evangelist at heart. Bosnia has, however, taught me that evangelism without genuine concern for the homeless, suffering, and



hungry has more to do with religious propaganda than with the Good News of the Kingdom of God. Proclamation alone in contexts like Bosnia can certainly be counter-productive, for it creates the appearance of religious manipulation and the exploitation of human suffering. Bosnia has taught me and my colleagues that servants of Christ cannot be credible unless they are willing to become vulnerable: that the Good News of our Lord cannot be preached in antiseptic conditions, and that those who need it most have not only ears to hear the *kerygma* and souls worth saving, but also eyes with which they observe and minds that think, as well as bodies in need of healing and safety, and stomachs that need to be filled. Their receptivity to the word of God is greatly conditioned by their painful context, and the ability of both the message and the messenger to lovingly touch them at the point of their greatest need and serve them redemptively.

We have learned that grassroots initiatives and community-based approaches are essential to reconciliation processes and are frequently more effective, and certainly more credible, than top-down international and state-imposed programmes and mechanisms. We have observed that physical reconstruction and actions with strong symbolic meanings, like the admirable rebuilding of the ancient Mostar Bridge and the UN-sponsored *Open Cities* programme, intended to encourage the return of refugees and the IDPs (internally displaced persons), do not guarantee peaceful reintegration and inter-ethnic reconciliation. We have learned that stopping the cycles of violence and changing political and physical circumstances are not sufficient for constructive co-existence. Authentic reconciliation is more a matter of character and spirituality than technique and theory. Without forgiveness and mutual acceptance, there is no progress towards reconciliation, but only a potential return to other forms of discrimination at best, and repeated violence at worst. Donald Shriver's *An Ethic for Enemies: Forgiveness in Politics* (1995) and Desmond Tutu's *No Future without Forgiveness* (1999), both published after the worst of the wars in Croatia and Bosnia, have reinforced what we have discovered in practising the forgiving love of Jesus amidst most painful circumstances full of hatred and intolerance. For, without forgiveness, both victims and perpetrators remain hostages to their haunting past experiences and cannot be healed of their traumatic memories. In a Christlike manner, we must practise "embrace rather than exclusion" – as wonderfully argued by Miroslav Volf in his ground-breaking book *Exclusion and Embrace: Theological Reflections on Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation*. It is contextually relevant to mention that this award-winning study is based on Volf's lectures to the students at the Evandeoski Teoloski Fakultet while in a refugee situation away from the campus in his native town of Osijek, a city that was under siege and heavy bombardment. The principles taught and the experience of lovingly serving victims of the war have helped both faculty and students to engage in the admirable work of compassionate

ministries and reconciliation workshops all across former Yugoslavia and beyond.

We as Christians must constantly both pray and work for peace, justice, and reconciliation. We also need to pray that all the people, now living in seven new nation-states that are the result of the painful break-up of former Yugoslavia, regardless of their ethnicity, religion or social status, will have their basic human rights and dignity restored. Their personal safety, the well-being of their families, and the inviolability of their property should be assured. We Christians need to be at the forefront of the search for peace with justice, which will provide a just solution for all who have been forced to leave their homes. Their right to return to a peaceful and safe life in the place of their birth still remains an unfulfilled dream for many.

As Christians practising holistic mission, we must also continue to support the search for the thousands who are still missing, to ensure their decent burial and dignified closure for the bereaving families. Promoting inter-religious dialogue, ecumenical co-operation, respect for women, and care for the children, along with multicultural education, all remain a task of the integral mission of the followers of Christ. We should strive to be creative instruments of reconciliation and courageous defenders of life and family, demonstrating in humble service our love for all persons as our neighbours. God calls all of us to pray for these worthy goals and ministries, and for many of us to be active participants in the remaining task of rebuilding, reconciliation, and renewal.

# THE DRAMA OF RECONCILIATION IN THE POST-COMMUNIST HUNGARIAN LUTHERAN CHURCH

Tibor Fabiny

This paper has grown out of the post-communist contextual experience of Hungarian Lutheranism. Part 1 discusses the term “reconciliation” suggesting that the biblical term has to do with the climax of a theo-drama which calls for theatrical performance within the community of believers, i.e. the church. Part 2 tells the story of how the need for a theatre of reconciliation emerged in a minority church when the community was suddenly faced with the trauma of unveiling former secret agents within their midst, including their respected pastors, professors and even family members.<sup>1</sup> Progress has been made when not only grassroots movements but also the church leadership have taken up the task of promoting research into uncovering the dark side of their church’s history, something unprecedented among Hungarian churches. However, the scenario of reconciliation cannot be performed properly when – due to the change in church leadership, the issue is trivialized, when formerly complicit persons are awarded high state decorations, and those committed to the painful exploration of the past are demonized.

## 1. Reconciliation and its “Drama”

I will use reconciliation and atonement as synonyms following John W. de Gruchy:

“‘Reconciliation’ is one of the words used in English to describe this experience, though the word ‘atonement’ has often functioned as its equivalent in theological textbooks. But ‘at-one-ment’ is a peculiarly English construction coined to describe God and humanity through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.”<sup>2</sup>

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I am proposing to discuss these terms together as I believe the basis of the healing of all human conflicts is the climax of the drama of the

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<sup>1</sup> Tibor Fabiny, “Complicity and Perseverance: Hungarian Lutherans During and After Communism” in *Lutheran Forum*, 42:1, Spring 2008, 43-48. Reprinted in my *The Veil of God: The Testimony of Bishop Lajos Ordass in Communist Hungary* (Budapest: Center for Hermeneutical Research, 2008), 80-94. Some paragraphs from this publication are used in the present article.

<sup>2</sup> John W de Gruchy, *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 44-45.

atonement on the Cross of Jesus Christ. The word “atonement” was coined by William Tyndale (1484-1536), but later versions of the English Bible abandoned this original picturesque formula in favour of the Latinate “reconciliation”.

Agreeing with Kevin J. Vanhoozer that “drama and dogma” go hand-in-hand,<sup>3</sup> we have to recognize that the doctrine of atonement is the most dramatic of all Christian narratives and doctrines. It is indeed the climax of the grand “theo-drama”.

Drama, however, never exists in a vacuum. It comes to life only if it is performed. “The purpose of the doctrine of the atonement ... is to help us understand the theo-drama, to clarify our role in it, and to direct us to play our part as well.”<sup>4</sup> We come to understand the theo-drama only in the theatre of the church where we are also involved. Vanhoozer says, “[t]he church, as the theatre of the gospel, celebrates the person and work of Christ: God with us and for us ... Those who worship in spirit and truth become participants – communicants and celebrants – in the drama of redemption.”<sup>5</sup>

What does the performance of the atonement mean in the “theatre of the gospel”, i.e. the church? The church is a reconciliatory theatre that revolutionarily proclaims the script of the gospel and prophetically imitates the lives of her martyrs. “[T]he church is itself the end of the goal of theo-drama: the fulfilment of God’s covenant promise to make a people for himself and to be that people’s God ... When the church participates fittingly in the drama of redemption, then it assumes the role of corporate witness to the reality of the new creation wrought by the Father in Christ through the Spirit.”<sup>6</sup>

Christian dogma is substantially dramatic and Christian drama is substantially dogmatic. Drama reanimates dogma, and dogma is not only a proposition but ultimately and originally, a story told and re-enacted. In a world turned upside down, i.e. ruled by an enemy, the theatre of the gospel is necessarily subversive. “The church is a theatre of divine wisdom, a participatory performance of the doctrine of atonement, precisely when it is a theatre of ‘holy folly’.”<sup>7</sup>

In the life of the church, liturgy always re-enacts the story of our faith. The church is the only forum in this world where sinners and their victims can shake hands, where former enemies can be reconciled with each other – “where the mercy of God becomes concrete in the act of forgiveness and

<sup>3</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine, A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 392.

<sup>5</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 409.

<sup>6</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 434-5.

<sup>7</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 439.

the menace of human existence as well as the overall inertia towards death can be seen in the light of Easter”.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Performing the Drama of Reconciliation in the Life of the Lutheran Church in Hungary

It is important to see the Hungarian context of the emerging issue of reconciliation. Why and how has the issue of reconciliation entered on the theological horizon of a post-communist minority church? I hope to demonstrate how a minority church struggles, indeed “labours”, to be a church, to become what it is meant to be, a “theatre of reconciliation”.

This grim and dramatic story has to do with those people within the church who, as it has turned out, collaborated with the communist secret police. Some people say that, during the hurricane of East European communism (1945-90), practically everybody became “complicit” or “muddy”. But others argue, rightly I think, that it makes a difference whether your coat, your tongue or your heart became “muddy”.

Some clarification of the background is necessary. The transition from communism to democracy was the result of peaceful negotiations between the reform-communists and various branches of the opposition in 1989. Thank God that there was no bloodshed – but neither was there an elevating catharsis. In transferring power there was consensus between the last Mohicans of communism and the victorious parliamentary parties that there should be no “witch-hunting”. József Antall (1932-93), the first Prime Minister of the freely elected government, was given a list of those involved with the communist secret police by his predecessor. The Prime Minister disclosed the list only to a small circle in his government. The communist secret police was a very powerful and sophisticated system similar to the East German Stasi. In Hungary, as in some other former Eastern European countries, this collaboration remained hidden for more than fifteen years after the political changes. These lists have frequently been cards in fierce political power games. Hungary is an extremely divided nation between the political left and the political right. In fact, both parties have their own former secret agents, and therefore none of them really supported the uncovering of this past.

There were rumours about some former and present church leaders as well. The archives have, however, not been available to the public until quite recently.

In February 2005, there was an illegal internet list posted by a certain “expert” who identified several Roman Catholic, Reformed and Lutheran church leaders as agents. When two recently retired bishops were

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<sup>8</sup> Sándor Fazakas, *Emlékezés és megbékélés: A múlttal való szembesülés egyházi s teológiai kritériumai* [Remembering and Reconciliation: Church Criteria and Theological Aspects of Confronting the Past] (Budapest: Kálvin Kiadó, 2004), 159.

mentioned among the Lutheran secret agents, it created immediate excitement. Due to the initiative of her leadership, the Lutheran Church was the first to respond publicly to that list in Hungary. Their public statement created much respect for our small church in the secular media. The church leaders in that statement apologized for those who had been harmed by the agents' activity. As a courageous decision, the church set up a "Fact-Finding Committee" in May 2005<sup>9</sup> to research the archives and identify those who were involved.

Parallel to the official Fact-Finding Committee, a small renewal group of our church (EBBE) decided to launch a series of lectures in the spirit of the South African Truth and Reconciliation movement in the fall of 2005. The purpose of this group was not to hunt for individual cases but to clarify how the community of the church can and should confront this issue from the point of view of the Christian faith. The outcome of the series was a book entitled "Truth and Reconciliation"<sup>10</sup> in May 2006. The aim of "Truth and Reconciliation" was to provide forums for theological, historical and ethical clarification of this issue. The title was, of course, an allusion to the "Truth and Reconciliation" movement in the churches of South Africa after the apartheid system came to an end. The situation of our post-communist churches was in many ways similar, though not analogous, to that in South Africa, since our concern was not the uncovering of the collaboration of church leaders within an apartheid government, but the collaboration of our church leaders with the communist secret police. There was a serious demand for such research, as sixteen years after the political changes, this issue has not been clarified in Hungary as it has in former East Germany.

It has been repeatedly expressed that a word of apology is required from those involved so that the church can really become a theatre of reconciliation performing the grand drama of atonement.

Bonhoeffer says that confession of sins is necessary in the life of the individual. This is even more valid in the life of the community. In a lecture on Bonhoeffer's idea of community I called the issue of the agents "a *par excellence* community issue".<sup>11</sup> The church is a community of sinners where sinners are claimed to be saints because they live from the sanctity of

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<sup>9</sup> Katalin Mirák (ed), *Háló: Dokumentumok és tanulmányok a Magyarországi Evangélikus Egyház és az állambiztonság kapcsolatáról 1945-1990* [Net: Documents and Studies about the Connections of the Lutheran Church in Hungary and the Communist Secret Police between 1945-1990] (Budapest: Luther Kiadó, 2010), 7.

<sup>10</sup> Tibor Fabiny (ed), *Igazság és kiengesztelődés: Az egyházi közelmúlt feldolgozásának teológiai, történeti, etikai és gyakorlati kérdései* [Truth and Reconciliation: Theological, Historical, Ethical and Practical Aspects of Assessing the Recent Past of the Church] (Budapest: Evangélikus Belmissziói Baráti Egyesület, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> Tibor Fabiny, "A közösség mint pneumatikus valóság" ["Community as a Pneumatic Reality"], *Lelkipásztor* (2006), nos. 8-9, 285-92

their Saviour, Jesus Christ, who performed the great act of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18-21). Those who collaborated with the secret police during the communist period were thus expected to openly confess their activities in front of the community of believers since they had harmed the community, as well as from damaging themselves. Confession was expected not only *coram Deo* but *coram hominibus* so that forgiveness, the reconciling drama of our faith, could be manifest. Embracing the sinner and helping him or her to integrate into the community could manifest the power of forgiveness and the love of God.

However, the issue is delicate, as the former agents are today frequently highly respected notables in our church and they fear lest their public image be damaged. Therefore, they would prefer that this aspect of their past remain hidden and would rather not confess in public. Perhaps it is not only their shame and weakness but also the shame and weakness of the community that prevents such an act. The community has not lived up to its mission of being a real theatre of reconciliation. The community is not strong enough to uphold its divine, “pneumatic” potential, which would be able to welcome the sinner and restore him/her into the body of Christ.

The National Assembly of our church was held on May 19, 2006, where the Fact-Finding Committee gave the first official report of their work. It was said that within the Lutheran Church in Hungary there were some fifty agents with pseudonyms. They identified only four; three of them had already died, while the fourth was a retired bishop who had worked for several years for the Lutheran World Federation. Shortly thereafter, in a series of articles, the secular media identified all bishops as secret agents, along with several famous parish pastors and professors of theology.<sup>12</sup>

Addressing this issue through reconciliation was the theme of a nationwide gathering of the Lutheran Church in Hungary in Paks in June 2007 with the motto: “Peace Be with You”. Bishop János Ittész was invited to preach on 2 Cor 5:18-21. This was followed by a round-table discussion of Roman Catholic, Reformed, Lutheran and Methodist theologians where the speakers were invited to respond to questions concerning various theological and ethical aspects of reconciliation, including the issue of former agents. It became evident that the most committed and systematic exploration of the church leaders’ association with the communist secret police was begun only in the Lutheran church.

We understood that reconciliation should not be limited to former agents. Seven sections were devoted to practical aspects of reconciliation, such as reconciliation in the family, ecumenism or the reconciliation of the churches, reconciliation in a politically polarized Hungarian society, reconciliation among generations, reconciliation between Hungarian

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<sup>12</sup> Tamás Majsai, “Öt évtizeden át ügynökök az evangélikus egyház élén IV” [Agents in the Leadership of the Lutheran Church for Five Decades, Parts I-IV], *Élet és irodalom* 36-40 (September 8-October 6, 2006).

Lutherans at home and abroad, reconciliation with the ethnic (especially Roma) minority, and last but not least, “dialogue with Judaism”.<sup>13</sup> In the political dialogue, the representatives were the Rev. András Csepregi (then quasi State Secretary for Religious Affairs of the socialist-liberal government in 2006-10), and General Inspector Gergely Pröhle (the Number One layperson of the Lutheran Church in Hungary) – representing the conservative side. (Just to illustrate the changes: after eight years, the socialist-liberal coalition lost the elections in 2010 and now the Rev. András Csepregi is a pastor at a secondary school, and Mr Gergely Pröhle, still General Inspector, is now Deputy State-Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the new “Fidesz” government.) The question whether and how this two-day national assembly in 2007 has contributed to the re-enactment of the real drama of reconciliation, is still open.<sup>14</sup>

The work of the Fact-Finding Committee of the Hungarian Lutheran Church has been progressing and the first volume of the planned series was published in May 2010 with title *Háló*<sup>15</sup> (The Net). The volume contained only general studies concerning methodology of research and documents as well as reports of the Fact-Finding Committee between 2006 and 2010. The purpose was not to create sensation and therefore only three former church leaders could be identified by the careful readers.

The volume, however, quickly caused uproar mainly among the older generation. This also coincided with the election of the new Rector of the Lutheran Theological University who – after his election, when the facts came to light – had to admit that he had also been a collaborator. His former association with the communist secret police was the main topic both in the secular and church-related media for weeks. Among the many former agents there were only two (a Professor emeritus<sup>16</sup> from the Evangelical Lutheran Theological University) and a former District Dean<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> We could not, of course, say “reconciliation with Judaism” as our understanding of reconciliation is based on the atoning death of Jesus Christ on the cross in terms of 2 Cor 5:18-21, and this is not accepted by our elder brothers-in-faith.

<sup>14</sup> I even proposed this topic of reconciliation with our past to a gathering of Swedish and Hungarian Lutheran pastors in Vadstena, Sweden, in September 2007, but the local organizers insisted that reconciliation should refer to the reconciling with the “other” in a post-modern world, which meant the discussion was mainly limited to whether or not to endorse same-sex marriages in the church.

<sup>15</sup> Katalin Mirák (ed), *Háló: Dokumentumok és tanulmányok a Magyarországi Evangélikus Egyház és az állambiztonság kapcsolatáról 1945-1990* [Net: Documents and Studies about the Connections of the Lutheran Church in Hungary and the Communist Secret Police between 1945-90] (Budapest: Luther Kiadó, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> András Reuss, “Naivitas és bátorság, okosság és kereszt” [Naivety, Courage, Prudence and the Cross], *Credo*, XV. évf. 2009/1–2, 54–61.

<sup>17</sup> László Keveházi, “Hozzászólás a ‘Gyógyító beszélgetések múltunkról’ témához” [Remarks Concerning the Topic “Healing Conversations About the Past”], in *Keresztény Igazság* Az Ordass Lajos Baráti Kör negyedévi folyóirata. Új folyam 83.



who were willing to openly tell the story of their association with the communist secret police. Both articles were published by the Lutheran Quarterly *Credo*, which has been committed to such topics ever since the formation of a new editorial board in 2009.

Partly because of the heated controversies concerning the issue of agents in our church and, partly because of the lack of a proper church response, the Hungarian Lutheran Alliance organized another “grassroots” conference on the subject, entitled “Processing the Issues of the Former Agents in the Church in a Theological Perspective”. The Roman Catholic clergyman Gyula Szabó as well as the Reformed Professor of Theology, Dr Sándor Fazakas, were invited to give presentations about the processing of the agent issue within their respected churches. In Hungary, the Roman Catholic Church is the largest church body (with six million of a total of ten million inhabitants; by comparison, the Reformed Church has some 1.4 million members while the Lutherans have only 300,000 members). Both guests acknowledged that the Lutheran Church is far ahead of them in this work. The conference proceedings were published in June 2011.<sup>18</sup>

The establishment of the Fact-Finding Committee is undoubtedly associated with the name of Bishop Ittész János (1944-), an early opponent of the church leadership’s collaboration with the former communist regime.<sup>19</sup> With his episcopal activity (Bishop 2000-11, Presiding Bishop 2006-10), a radically new chapter in the history of the Hungarian Lutherans began. In 2005 it was mainly on the initiative of Bishop Ittész that the Fact-Finding Committee was set up by the Synod.

Following Bishop János Ittész’ retirement in 2011, promoting the progress of the work of the Fact-Finding Committee has not been at the top

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szám, 2009. ősz, 5-7; Mirák, Katalin, “Nem akarok sötétben maradni ...” Ön-és múltfeltárás: Keveházi László állambiztonsági kapcsolatairól – személyesen és általánosan” (“I do not want to stay in darkness ...” Self and Past-Exploration: László Keveházi’s Connections with the Secret Police – Personally and Generally), *Credo*. Evangélikus folyóirat, XVI. évf., 2010/1–2, 67–75.

<sup>18</sup> Tibor Fabiny (ed), *Hálóba kerítve: Konferencia az evangélikus lelkészek és az állambiztonság kapcsolatáról* [Drawn into the net: Conference on the Connections of Lutheran Pastors with the Secret Police] (Budapest: Luther Kiadó, Hermeneutikai Kutatóközpont, 2011).

<sup>19</sup> Bishop Zoltán Káldy (1919-86, President of the Lutheran World Federation 1984-86) – an agent himself since 1958 – refused to ordain Ittész following his graduation from the Lutheran Theological Seminary in 1967, because the young graduate refused to praise the Communist state in his farewell speech at the Seminary. Therefore, in the late 1960s Ittész was employed as a manual worker and had to complete a two years’ military service. He was nevertheless ordained by another bishop during Káldy’s absence in 1970. Then he served as a pastor of various congregations in western Hungary. It was a great surprise when Pastor Ittész, a prominent leader of the Lajos Ordass Friendly Circle, an opposition group to the church leadership during the political changes and after, became the first elected Bishop of the old/new Western (Trans-Danubian) Diocese in September 2000.

of the new leadership's agenda. In the Synod and in the Lutheran media, the new Presiding Bishop has frequently expressed his disagreement with exploring only this "dark side" of the life of the church, though at the end of 2011 he eventually agreed that the work of the Fact-Finding Committee should continue with "caution".<sup>20</sup>

There are several signs of this "caution". Two years have passed since the publication of the first volume of the *Halo* (The Net) series and the second one was still not out in August 2012. The argument frequently raised views such as: "Why point out only this one dirty spot in the history of some of our most respected elders who have contributed so much with their expertise to the life of our church?" This might have been the logic behind awarding a very prestigious state decoration by the Fidesz government to a well-known retired pastor for his "ministry, theological work, publication activity and exemplary life". No doubt, the nominee deserved credit for his intellectual achievements. However, the Fact-Finding Committee also uncovered records indicating his collaboration.

In my view, such public awards to those who have expressed strong reservations towards this reconciliation process, if supported by the church, led to a confusion of values among church members. If liaison with the former secret police has to remain a taboo, if the past can so easily be swept under the rug, if truth is not allowed to come to light, if real confession is discouraged rather than encouraged, then there is no real chance of forgiveness. If there is no remembering, only forgiveness, Bonhoeffer's "cheap grace" is again around the corner.

From the climax of our redemptive drama on the Cross we have learned that mercy and justice go together. The church itself, when dealing with her own sin, has to recognize both sides of this equation.

A chance for real reconciliation, catharsis or renewal can only take place when the church lives up to her mission to be a church, when she allows that the theatre of reconciliation to be at work in letting mercy and justice operate simultaneously, and not allowing one to annul the other. Then, and only then, will the church function according to her mandate.

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<sup>20</sup> [www.lutheran.hu:8086/portelok/lutheran/aktualis/gancs-peter-folytatodik-az-evangelikus-ugynoekmultat-vizsgalo-tenyfeltaras](http://www.lutheran.hu:8086/portelok/lutheran/aktualis/gancs-peter-folytatodik-az-evangelikus-ugynoekmultat-vizsgalo-tenyfeltaras)

# **GEORGIAN CASE OF RECONCILIATION AND DIAKONIA**

**Malkhaz Songulashvili**

At its National Council in 2006, the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia passed an amendment to its constitution which states “the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia is the Church for Georgia”. This amendment was the result of radical changes within the life of the church which inspired its current commitment to preach forgiveness and reconciliation to all in Georgia and to serve all those in need, regardless of their ethnic, religious, or social background.

## **Background History**

The Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia was founded in 1867 in Tbilisi, Georgia’s capital, at that time a provincial centre within the Russian Empire in the South Caucasus, known as the Trans-Caucasus. Georgia had been incorporated into the Russian Empire following the Giorgyevk Treaty, an agreement reached by Georgia and Russia – both Orthodox kingdoms – in 1783. The Treaty required Russia to defend Georgia against Muslim invasions, but King Irakly II of Georgia who signed the agreement did not realize what the consequences would be. In 1801 when King George XI of Georgia died, the Russian Empire violated the Giorgyevk Treaty, forced the Georgian royal family to abdicate, and ultimately abolished the East Georgian Kingdom of Kart-Kakheti. Soon after, the other Georgian political entities – the Kingdom of Imeretia, the Principalities of Guria, Samegrelo, and Svanety – were also occupied by Russia.

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## **The Georgian Orthodox Church**

By the early nineteenth century the Georgian Orthodox Church was in a parlous state, weakened by numerous invasions of Georgia. The British and Foreign Bible Society records have preserved a report which quotes the words of the Georgian Orthodox Archbishop Dositheos of Telavi:

“He spoke with deep concern of the state of education among the clergy, which in general consists in their being able to read the Church service; very few of them having an adequate knowledge of Holy Scriptures. Religion, he

said, was more cultivated among the females in Georgia than among the males; yea, than among the priests themselves.”<sup>1</sup>

Rather than being strengthened through Georgia’s incorporation into what was, after all, another Orthodox country, the church was in fact undermined by Russia. Its independence was abolished in 1810 and its hierarchy merged with that of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Russia’s Holy Synod, which governed the Russian Orthodox Church and was closely allied to the Russian government, appointed an Exarch to govern the Georgian Orthodox Church, who, apart from the first one, was always ethnically Russian and had no understanding of Georgian culture and spirituality. Gradually the Georgian language was eradicated from the liturgy, Georgian devotional art, icons, frescoes, and illuminations were replaced by Russian devotional art, and Russian became the language of theological instruction. The church and its clergy were thus alienated from the Georgian people.

### **Birth of the Evangelical Baptist Church**

In such a political setting the Baptist movement in Tbilisi was born. Through a German Baptist settler called Martin Kalwait who had come to Tbilisi in the early 1860s, eastern Christianity merged with the radical ideas of Europe’s Reformation. From the start, this new church was focused on mission and aimed to reach various ethnic and national groups. It had a sense of catholicity, of belonging to the wider body of Christ’s church, and a sense of international ministry. The German Baptist newspaper, *Missionblatt*, reported that as early as 1884 the Baptist Church in Tbilisi was supporting Christian work in Spain and China. Its preachers spread the newly acquired faith to other parts of the Russian Empire so that Tbilisi and Georgia came to be considered the cradle of the Russian Baptist movement.

After the Russian Revolution, Georgia became an independent nation for a few years. Although Lenin initially recognized its independence, along with that of some west European nations, Georgia was annexed by the Red Army in 1921 after fierce resistance in the suburbs of Tbilisi. Ironically, the capital fell thanks to a Georgian conspiracy. Stalin, a Georgian, did not wish his home country to remain outside the boundaries of the Soviet Union; this would have made him a foreigner in Moscow where he was soon to replace Lenin. Sergo Ordzhonikidze, also a Georgian, led the Red Army to his homeland and after Georgia’s surrender sent the following infamous telegram to the Kremlin: “25 February 1921. Tbilisi. To Lenin and Stalin. The Red Flag is flying over Tbilisi. Yours – Sergo.”

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<sup>1</sup> *Reports of the British and Foreign Bible Society with Extracts of Correspondence for the Years 1814-1815*, Vol. 3 (London: 1815), 319.

### **The Rev Ilia Kandelaki**

The independent Georgian Baptist Church was founded during the brief period of Georgian independence and was led by a man of vision, the Rev Ilia Kandelaki, a Georgian who was converted in 1913 and was baptized in Vilna (today's Vilnius), Lithuania. The first Georgian Baptist service was held on March 19, 1919. Ilia Kandelaki, who felt no antagonism towards the Georgian Orthodox Church and admired the spiritual and cultural legacy of Georgia, believed that the newly established Georgian Baptist congregation should serve all the people of Georgia and nurture a deep Christian faith. In his report to the 1926 Baptist Congress in the USSR, he bemoaned the religious situation in Georgia:

“... in the heart of the Georgian, religious feeling has been almost totally atrophied; but in our view this is not hopeless because religious feeling has not been stifled through natural evolution, but artificially suffocated from the outside. Before the Revolution, in order to avoid any kind of political threat from Georgia, the Russian tsarist government invested much effort and vigorous measures in weakening and russifying the Georgian nation. Much attention was given to the Georgian [Orthodox] Church, because, as I have already reported, for many centuries it was the main source of Georgian culture. For this reason the Georgian [Orthodox] Church was oppressed and Georgian priests who opposed the implementation of tsarist policy were exiled. Very often in Georgian villages Russian priests were appointed who did not speak any Georgian. Even the senior Bishop with the title of Exarch of Georgia had to be a Russian from European Russia. The principal of the Theological Seminary had to be a Russian Archimandrite from Russia, and the Georgian language was not taught to future Georgian priests in any teaching establishments. Subsequently even [ethnically] Georgian priests often became agents of russification. Thus was the Georgian [Orthodox] Church ravaged. Georgians first lost respect for the Church, and then all their religious feeling cooled and died. Now we can clearly apply to them the words of the song: ‘Your temple, once so beautiful, has been desecrated, the altar of the Lord is buried under a heap of ashes.’”<sup>2</sup>

Ilia Kandelaki was quite open about his wish that the Baptist Church become the church for all of Georgia and not just for the Baptist community at a time when (in 1926) non-Orthodox churches were still under the illusion that the Soviet regime was a God-given gift to the churches which had suffered persecution under the Russian Orthodox Church before the Russian Revolution. When Lenin died in 1924, non-Orthodox churches sincerely mourned his death: during my research in the Keston Archive I discovered a number of letters and telegrams from Baptist and other church leaders to the Kremlin, one of which read, “Dear Lenin, even though you did not believe in God, you were our brother”. Such

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<sup>2</sup> Ilia Kandelaki, “Preaching of the Gospel Among Georgians in ‘The 26<sup>th</sup> All-Union Congress of Baptists of the USSR: Protocols and Materials’”. Publication of the Federal Union of Baptists of the USSR (Moscow: 1927), 50.

people believed that the Soviet regime was their ally, and although before 1927 they saw how the Russian Orthodox Church and its clergy were persecuted by the Soviet regime, they did not realize that the same could happen to them.

At the 1926 Baptist Congress, Ilia Kandelaki spoke about his vision for Georgia and called everybody to support his cause:

“Today believers in Georgia are faced with a mountain of a task – to revive faith in God among the Georgian people and to call them to Christ. We are a small weak group and the task before us is immense. Humanly speaking it is ridiculous to think we can contribute to this mission, but that which is impossible for men is quite possible for God. Therefore we are firmly convinced that, with the Lord’s help and with your support, dear brothers and sisters, we will climb this mountain, and the Georgian people will not be excluded from the list of those who, clothed with white robes and with palms in their hands, will praise God before the throne of the Lamb.”<sup>3</sup>

Ilia Kandelaki was quoting here from the book of Revelation (7:9-12) and referring to the martyrs without realizing that a few months after publicising his vision for Georgia he would himself be martyred. He was killed on August 23, 1927 in east Georgia when he was returning from a preaching mission to the village of Kisiskhevi.

### **Soviet Persecution**

The Baptist press described Ilia Kandelaki’s assassination as “an assault by bandits on the life of a minister”. Soon, however, it became clear that his assassination marked the beginning of Soviet persecution against the non-Orthodox Churches which was to continue until the collapse of the Soviet Union. The USSR’s anti-religious policy varied during certain periods but in general it involved the closure of churches, the arrest and exile of clergy and active laity, infiltration of congregations, murder, humiliation and discrimination of various kinds.

The church’s main mission during those years was to survive the repressive regime and keep church life going, so it developed what the Rev Karl Heinz Walter of the European Baptist Federation has called “survival theology”.<sup>4</sup> It is self-evident that this theology would lead religious communities in general and the Baptist community in particular into isolation from the rest of the society. In such circumstances the mission and vision of the gospel was minimised; in other words, the church was driven into a ghetto and deprived of its right to serve the wider community, losing in the process many of the faculties that make up the essence of being a

<sup>3</sup> Kandelaki, “Preaching of the Gospel Among Georgians”, 49.

<sup>4</sup> Karl Heinz Walter, “The Future of Theological Education within the European Baptist Federation”. Paper presented at the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the International Theological Seminary, Prague, July 1999, 3.

church. Obviously, Ilia Kandelaki's vision for the church in Georgia had, for the time being, to be put on one side.

The collapse of the Soviet Union marked the beginning of a new era in the life of the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia. Georgia became independent again and with the joy of freedom the symbols of Soviet occupation were swept away: monuments of Lenin and other Soviet leaders were pulled down; their portraits and those of Marx and Engels were burned. That was the easiest part of the revolutionary changes of the early 1990s. However, a country's independence does not necessarily bring freedom of mind. The people of Georgia still had to learn how to live in this new world and how to use the new situation as the foundation upon which to build a civil society.

### **Georgian Orthodox-Baptist Relations**

The Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia, along with the majority Georgian Orthodox Church and other religious groups, could have contributed to the democratic development of the country. This sadly did not happen. Much to the disappointment of the Evangelical Baptist Church, the Georgian Orthodox Church got entrapped in religious nationalism and distanced herself both from the Baptists and other denominations. This was particularly painful for the Georgian Baptists because during Soviet times they and the Orthodox, faced with the same anti-religious policy, had developed exceptionally good relations and a great sense of fellowship.

For the Georgian Orthodox Church, the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia was the only ethnically Georgian church to which they could easily relate. A high point in Orthodox-Baptist relations occurred in the late 1970s when a theological dialogue was held during which the participants produced a fascinating document which to this day is a unique example of Orthodox-Baptist understanding. At the time both sides agreed that it would not be long before the two communities could participate in "common worship". In the introduction of this extraordinary document we read:

"With the blessing of Ilia II, Catholicos-Patriarch of Mtskheta-Tbilisi, head of the Georgian Orthodox Church and president of the WCC, on the one hand, and the leader of the Georgian Evangelical Christian Baptists, on the other hand, the foundation for regular dialogue has been laid. The aim of this dialogue is to bring Christian believers into closer spiritual and fraternal relations, to exchange opinions about the faith, and in consequence to introduce common worship for Christian believers in Georgia.

"Participating brothers in the dialogue from the Orthodox Church and from the Evangelical Christian Baptist Church assume that if Christ is their true Lord, all obstacles, however difficult and burdensome they may seem, will be overcome through divine love, patriotism, and unshakable faith. A step will

then be taken towards a common Christian faith and common Christian worship.”<sup>5</sup>

During the dialogue, as the resulting document testified, the participants discussed such subjects as baptism, the Eucharist, confession, the place of Mary, Christ’s mother, and the saints, the Holy Trinity, hierarchy, the Cross, symbolism, rituals and icons, and produced some fascinating conclusions and suggestions for both churches, some of which have been implemented by them.

Despite the achievements of this dialogue, relations between the two churches deteriorated when the Soviet Union collapsed and Orthodoxy became associated with Georgian nationalism. Religious nationalism within the state and the nationalistic impulses within the Georgian Orthodox Church combined to open the way for religious violence to erupt in the country. The Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia was excluded from national life, and for a number of years the state orchestrated extremist groups, led by Orthodox Archpriest Basil Mkalavishvili and the Society of the Cross, which organised campaigns against religious minorities. These extremist groups were banned in 2003 after the Rose Revolution when a new government came to power which was determined to stop religious violence. It successfully achieved this goal, although complete religious liberty has not yet been attained. Georgia still has a long way to go.

The renewed process of reconciliation with the Orthodox started with the Mkalavishvili case. Mkalavishvili had been responsible for burning Bibles and Christian books (including books the bishop of the Evangelical Baptist Church had written), for organizing raids on religious minorities in the country, and for beating up pastors and priests of non-Orthodox denominations. In 2003 he had even attacked the Cathedral after which the then President Shevardnadze came to the Cathedral in order to apologize for the religious violence.

After his arrest was made by Saakashvili’s government, Baptist Bishop was called to the court on November 11, 2004 to testify against Makalavishvili and nine of his followers who had been in jail since March. The bishop spoke for three hours in the courtroom, crowded with Mkalavishvili’s supporters, about the true values of Christianity, about the ecumenical movement and the importance of religious liberty for everybody. As the bishop later said, “Everybody was very nervous. They did not know what would be my concluding word.”<sup>6</sup>

At the end of his speech the judge asked the Bishop, “What do you wish to happen to them?” “I demand that these people be pardoned and released

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<sup>5</sup> “Dialogue between the Representatives of the Georgian Orthodox Church and the Evangelical Christian Baptist of Georgia”. Unpublished paper: Archives of the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia), 8.

<sup>6</sup> M Henderson, “A Miracle of Reconciliation in Georgia”. This article first appeared on the website [www.spiritrestoration.org](http://www.spiritrestoration.org) in December 2004.



from the prison,” he replied. Everybody was shocked by this reply. The defence lawyers could not believe their ears. “Do you really say that you want to forgive them everything, including the material loss?” “Yes,” he answered, saying that he desired an unconditional absolution. “I had to explain the nature of Christian love and forgiveness.” Since the defendant was not sure whether I understood his question correctly, I added: “I do not demand anything from them except the red wine which we will drink together when they are set free.”<sup>7</sup> As a sign of forgiveness and reconciliation, the Bishop offered his hand to the defendants through the bars of the steel cage, in which the prisoners were following the proceedings.<sup>8</sup>

Just a few days later on November 14, 2004 the Bishop celebrated the tenth anniversary of his episcopal ministry in the Cathedral of the Evangelical Baptist of Georgia in Tbilisi. Absolutely unexpectedly, a delegation of the ultra-fundamentalist group arrived in the Cathedral and offered gifts on behalf of Mkalavishvili: two small icons of Christ the Pantocrator, and that of the Incarnation, and a huge anniversary cake. Writing to his friends, the Bishop said, “I hope you agree that the cake was the best gift I received that day. I do thank the Lord for all the wonders of the life and for the miracle of reconciliation. I also thank you all for all your support and prayers in those days when we were persecuted by the renegade priest who has been turned into our friend. In the past we were praying that Mkalavishvili be arrested; now we are praying that he is released from the jail.”<sup>9</sup> This was the first, yet very graphic, way to promote reconciliation between the Orthodox and Evangelical Baptists of Georgia. Although there is still long way before full harmony is reached between the two communities, this and other precedents of reconciliation leave us with firm hope for the future.

### Georgia and Chechnya

The Evangelical Baptist Church gradually regained its vision of becoming the church for Georgia well before the Rose Revolution. This process was prompted by an historical event – the second Chechen war – which took place during the period of religious violence before the Georgian elections. In late 1999 many Chechen refugees started entering Georgia through the snowcapped mountain passes in the north. News about the refugees’ appalling situation reached Tbilisi in December, during Advent: the death of women and children was reported by the mass media but provoked little response from the Georgian public. This was not surprising since

<sup>7</sup> M Henderson, “A Miracle of Reconciliation”.

<sup>8</sup> W Polzer, “Georgia: Baptist Leader Makes Friends with his Foe: Former Orthodox Priest and Bishop Join Hands through Steel Bars”. *ASSIST News Service* (November 23, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> M Henderson, “A Miracle of Reconciliation.”

Chechens, like other North Caucasian Muslim tribes, had been the traditional enemies of Georgia.

Before Chechnya discovered that it had oil, it was very poor and often had to struggle to survive. In the late Middle Ages, like other North Caucasian tribes, it developed an economic system based on kidnapping: the Chechens would raid Christian villages in Georgia, kidnapping young men and women in order to sell them in the slave markets of Istanbul or to get ransom money from the families of those kidnapped. Understandably, the Chechens had long been hated by the Georgians.

Possibly an even stronger reason for this hatred was Chechnya's support for Abkhazia during the latter's civil war with Georgia after the collapse of the Soviet Union. During this war Chechens fought against the territorial integrity of Georgia and were particularly cruel towards Georgian civilians. Shocking reports of Chechen atrocities circulated: after the capture of a Georgian village in the Gagra district, all the inhabitants were herded onto the village green and beheaded by the Chechens, who then proceeded to play football with their heads.

Georgian Baptists also had a particular reason for hating the Chechens. The Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia kept in touch with the situation of its fellow Baptists in Grozny, the Chechen capital, and heard about the kidnapping of two young Baptist women from the Grozny church, neither of whom was ever found. Just as shocking was the discovery of the deputy Baptist minister's head in Grozny's market place.

### **Aid for Chechen Refugees**

On the second Sunday of Advent, Naira Gelashvili, a famous Georgian woman writer, came to the Baptist Cathedral in Tbilisi and asked to speak to the congregation about the Chechen refugees. She was well informed about the situation in the mountains and the refugee camps, and said: "I have visited all the churches in this city asking for help for the refugees but none of them were willing to help." After her appeal to the congregation I asked them for a response: what should they do about these refugees who happened to be their traditional enemies? There was silence. I could guess what they were thinking: that the Chechens had inflicted suffering and death on Georgians and now were getting their just deserts. But at the same time everybody felt that such an attitude was somehow wrong. Suddenly the silence was broken by an elderly lady who stood up and said: "Bishop, why don't we cancel Christmas and give the money we have raised to the Chechens!?"

Clearly we could not cancel Christmas, but nevertheless that Sunday something extraordinary began to happen in the life of the church for Georgia which led them to the involvement in the political, cultural, religious and social life of the country.

To affirm its new sense of identity, the church has consecrated a chapel, dedicated to St Luke, in its large multi-purpose social centre, Betheli. In the chapel's apse, on the right and left of Christ the Pantocrator, there are two frescoes. The one on the left depicts the return of the Prodigal Son – a symbol of humanity's reconciliation with the Father – while the one on the right depicts the story of the Good Samaritan – a symbol of care for people in need.

From that day onwards the entire community became involved in Chechen relief work, collecting warm clothing, vegetables, onions, potatoes, sweets ... all for their enemies! After delivering our first cargo of goods we realized that the refugees needed more than material help. We started to get emotionally involved with the lives and suffering of the Chechen people; the homes of Baptist clergy became places of refuge for Chechen refugees; Christians and Muslims would pray in separate rooms, and then in the evening they would come together for dinner and celebrate their common humanity.

At first the Chechens were suspicious: why were Christians helping them when even local Muslims in Georgia were reluctant to have any contact with them? Soon our initial formal relations with the Chechens developed into genuine friendship and partnership. With the help of Muslim clerics from the refugee camp, we set up a school for Chechen refugee children, and over a period of a year, well before any international aid agencies stepped in, about 1,100 children were fed every day in the school dining hall. The church also supplied all educational materials required and provided continuous care.

### **Russian Invasion of Georgia and Reconciliation with Russians**

The Russian invasion of Georgia in the summer of 2008 took the entire world by surprise. The largest country in the world, Russia, attacked one of the smallest countries in the world. Russia is 167 times bigger than Georgia. Georgia is located at the crossroads of civilization and has been invaded by many foreign forces over the centuries, due to its strategic geo-political location. The country endured 116 years of Russian domination until the Revolution in 1917. Soon after the Revolution the first Georgian republic was founded: in 1918 it was recognised by several nations including Soviet Russia. However, Georgian independence was short-lived. In 1921 Russia's Eleventh Army invaded Georgia and made it a part of the Soviet Union. After seventy years of Soviet rule Georgia regained its independence in 1991. Obviously Moscow could not easily accept Georgia's withdrawal from its sphere of influence. In the early 1990s Russia imposed on Georgia two civil wars in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. After the wars the Russians came to these two regions as "neutral peacekeepers". In those days they would not admit in any way that they were the main force confronting Georgia. The geo-political significance of

Georgia has recently been augmented by the pipeline constructed to provide Caspian Sea oil to Western nations. This is the only pipeline in the region not controlled by Russia, and the Russians obviously did not like having their monopoly on energy challenged.

Georgia made a decision to become a modern nation where human rights would be respected and liberal democratic values affirmed. This aspiration, from a Russian perspective, was considered to be infectious and therefore dangerous. Georgia's Rose Revolution in 2003 was followed by Ukraine's Orange Revolution. Both Georgia and Ukraine have been keen to become members of NATO. Around 70% of Georgians supported Georgia's membership of NATO in the referendum in January 2008. Both countries saw it as a matter of survival. The Russian authorities were just looking for a convenient opportunity to strike Georgia. August 2008 was chosen for the attack. The impetuous attack was stopped by international intervention from the west. Russian tanks were to stop forty kilometres from the capital city of Tbilisi.

Caught in the war and in a parallel tension with the Russian Baptists, Georgian Baptists had been well prepared for the crisis owing to their reconciliation experiences with Chechens and their fellow Georgian Orthodox. Relations between the two churches had been anything but friendly for a number of years, since the Georgian Evangelical Baptist Church had declared ecclesial independence from the Moscow-based All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians and Baptists, and had become a member of the European Baptist Federation. In search of a new identity, the Georgian Evangelical Baptists affirmed their commitment to their roots: eastern Orthodoxy, along with the legacy from the European Radical Reformation. Georgian Evangelical Baptist support for the Chechen refugees did not impress the Russian Baptists either. Soon after the invasion of Georgia, imperialist feelings among Russian Baptists were informally communicated by one of their leaders and sent by mistake to the Georgian EBC office. "Had Georgians not been absorbed by Russia, Malkhaz (the primate of the Georgian EBC) would now be a Muslim and would be writing his propaganda letters to Saudi Arabia."<sup>10</sup> The church leaders apologised for the insult and agreed to meet with the representatives of the Georgian EBC in a neutral territory, Lisbon, Portugal. Much to the astonishment of the Georgians, the Russian leader, Yuri Sipko, did not arrive at the meeting, but sent two other representatives instead. With the moderation of the Dr Neville Callam of the Baptist World Alliance, another meeting was arranged to take place in Kiev, Ukraine. In the meantime the Georgian leaders sent to Yuri Sipko an icon which was painted during the Russian invasion of Georgia. It was a sort of provocation from the Georgian side, because they knew only too well that the Russian leadership

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<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Malkhaz Songulashvili, "Let Peace Break out", in *The Tablet* (20:27 December 2008), 12.

had been very iconoclastic and critical of Georgian Evangelical Baptist veneration of icons. The icon was called “Christ the Prince of Peace”. If one takes a close look at the icon he or she will see Christ standing in the battlefield between Georgians and Russians. Instead of the book (the traditional way of painting icons in eastern tradition), Christ holds a white dove, showing that the gospel and peace should be considered synonymous. He is raising his hand in blessing both sides, indicating that in Christ there are no sides. He is surrounded by Russian and Georgian soldiers, civilians and pregnant women. At the same time, one can see Russian tanks, bombers, the skyline of the Kremlin and the burning Georgian city of Gori, while Georgian and Russian flags are flown as dark smoke with fire rising up.

At the Kiev meeting Yuri Sipko came, as did the Georgian Archbishop and another bishop, Merab Gaprindashvili. The meeting was moderated by the Rev Gregory Comendant of the Ukrainian Evangelical Christian Baptist Union and went extremely well. The Russian side agreed without any reservation upon every single point the Georgians suggested. The Kiev Declaration condemned the war between Georgia and Russia as “brutal and pointless” and called both Russian and Georgian authorities “to seek peaceful resolution of the conflict between the two countries.”<sup>11</sup> At this meeting, for the first time both sides agreed “to fully recognise each other’s Churches in their integrity and take bold steps to understand each other and respect each other’s experience.”<sup>12</sup> After the meeting Yuri Sipko told his Georgian counterpart: “You know, brother, when I saw the icon you sent, with the Lord and the battle and the Kremlin, I could not help bursting into tears. Thanks for sending it.”<sup>13</sup> They had nothing else to say to each other but gave each other a big fraternal hug. Sometime later the Georgian Archbishop in his article on this event wrote: “If we do not embrace reconciliation and dialogue, then what is the solution to all the fears and hatreds that stalk the world?”<sup>14</sup>

The icon, which is a representative of beauty, played a key role in the reconciliation.

### A New Mission Discovered

This encounter with our traditional enemies has certainly been one of the most important experiences for the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia. By helping and serving the Chechens, the church escaped from its isolation and acted as an agent for peace and reconciliation on behalf of Georgia and on behalf of all Christians. At the same time, the church has now taken

<sup>11</sup> Malkhaz Songulashvili, “Let Peace Break out,” 13.

<sup>12</sup> Malkhaz Songulashvili, “Let Peace Break out,” 13.

<sup>13</sup> Malkhaz Songulashvili, “Let Peace Break out,” 13.

<sup>14</sup> Malkhaz Songulashvili, “Let Peace Break out,” 13.

some bold steps towards being the Good Samaritan – a symbol of the church's commitment to serving all those in need.

Leaders of the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia now sometimes say that they have been converted to Christianity by the Muslim Chechens, because their encounter with them helped the entire Baptist community to see the gospel in all its fulness and to make the message of forgiveness, reconciliation, peace, and service of the poor an integral part of the church's ministry. The church realized that if it could serve the needs of the Chechens, it could also minister to everyone in Georgia who needed help and affirmation. This experience with the Chechen refugees also taught them how to forgive and how to promote reconciliation.

Recently after the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the consecration of Coventry Cathedral in England, which through the International Community of the Cross of Nails (ICCN) has become a global symbol of reconciliation, former Archbishop Rowan Williams had an encounter with international members of the ICCN. I was also part of the meeting representing the Peace Cathedral in Tbilisi, which had been a member of the community since 2006. In the meeting Rowan Williams recalled the words of his fellow Welsh national and poet Waldo Williams who defined forgiveness as "cutting your way through a bank of thorns to stand beside your enemy". The Georgian Evangelical Baptists have also learned that forgiveness and reconciliation are a process which requires a lot of work, "cutting your way", and also patience, humility and courage. Of course, "standing beside your enemy" does not mean that you like your enemy or his ideology or faith, or understand the way he is treating you. It simply means that you start seeing in your enemy, rival, foe, a fellow human being as fragile and insecure as yourself. It also means that we should overcome fear of the unknown to stand with the enemy.

When the Russians invaded my fair country, I was in Oxford on study leave. As soon as I heard of the war, I decided to go back to Georgia immediately. On my way to Georgia, I was tormented by a question: What should I tell my people as their bishop and the servant of God? One of the most important commandments in the Bible, in my view, is "Do not be afraid!" Fear is always taking up space in our hearts and minds that is meant for love. "Perfect love drives away fear", it is said, and we need always to remember this. Throughout my entire episcopal ministry I always thought that this was my main mission – to tell everybody, "Do not be afraid. Fear has no future! Love, forgiveness, reconciliation do!" Yet now I realised that I was not able to say this any more. How could I say this when I myself was afraid? I was afraid to lose my friends, relatives, students and parishioners. In my agony I saw on the screen of my mind the arch-enemy of Georgia, a modern-day Hitler, Mr Putin, who was responsible for invading my country. I looked at him and uttered quietly "Do not be afraid!" I kept repeating this phrase louder and louder until I was able to go closer and embrace him as a fellow human being. This experience did not

make me a fan of Putin or his ideology but I felt I was liberated from hatred and fear. Now I felt I could go back to Georgia with this important message. I could be true to my calling again.

None of us are perfect; we make mistakes, and we offend others, consciously or unconsciously. We make mistakes as children, as parents, as spouses, as priests and bishops, as politicians, as churches and as nations. This is all right; this is the reality of our brokenness. But we need to admit it, to repent, to change our minds. Without the radical change of mind and perceptions of our enemies, we will never achieve reconciliation and peace in this divided and bleeding world.



# RECONCILIATION IN EGYPT: THE ABSENT MINISTRY

Tharwat Wahba

When searching the internet for the word “reconciliation” in Egypt, one finds a sad situation. Tension between Christians and Muslims is high and the conflicts are rooted in the relationships between the two groups. The church has made many efforts that can be considered to be actions of reconciliation, although they do not carry that label. In this chapter, we will explore the interaction and the chances of reconciliation between Christianity and Islam in Egypt. The state of the church and its ministry to the Egyptian community, including Muslims, have played an important role in finding room for what could be a ministry of reconciliation. This will happen if both the church and community adjust their interaction to bring about this ministry.

## I. The Current Situation of Christians in Egypt

Throughout history, Christians and Muslims have had a tense relationship. The Christian community have found it hard being a religious minority under Muslim rulers. This feeling has continued to this day.<sup>1</sup> According to the latest census of 2009, Egypt has a population of about 80 million.

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<sup>1</sup> For more details on the historical background of the progress in the Egyptian churches and the relationship between Christianity and Islam throughout Egyptian history, see CH Roberts, *Manuscript, Society and Belief in Early Christian Egypt*. The Schweich lectures of the British Academy, 1977 (London: Oxford University Press, 1979). AN Salamah, *Tārīkh al-Kanīṣah al-Injīliyah fī Miṣr (1854-1980)* [History of the Evangelical Church in Egypt and Sudan] (Cairo: Dār al-Thaqāfah, 1982). AK Bowman, *Egypt after the Pharaohs: 332 BC-AD 642* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). TC Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind: Rediscovering the African Seedbed of Western Christianity*. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2007). A Murqus, *Come Across – and Help Us: The Story of the Coptic Church in Africa at the Present Time*. Memoir from Africa (Cairo: Coptic Bishopric of African Affairs, 1994). J Kamil, *Christianity in the Land of the Pharaohs: the Coptic Orthodox Church* (London: Routledge, 2002). B Watterson, *Coptic Egypt* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1988). R Etteldorf, *The Catholic Church in the Middle East* (New York: Macmillan, 1959). T Wahba, *The Practice of Mission in Egypt: A Historical Study of the Integration between the American Mission and the Evangelical Church of Egypt, 1854-1970*. PhD thesis (London: Brunel University, 2008).



However, it is hard to find exact numbers for many aspects of social, economic or religious life. The number of Christians in Egypt is particularly difficult to determine, and this causes tension between the government and Christians. According to the 1986 government census, which was the last to provide figures by religion, Christians made up 9.43% of the total population of 50.4 million (i.e. 4.75 million Christians).<sup>2</sup> This means that, based on the same percentage, the number of Christians today is about eight million. Egyptian Christians claim much higher percentages. Some Muslim sources continue to claim that there are only 4-5 million Christians.

It is thought that the Coptic Orthodox Church represents 90% of the Christian population, with all other Christian denominations making up the remaining 10%. The Evangelical (Presbyterian) Church is the second largest in church membership and the number of churches.<sup>3</sup>

There are about 3,000 church buildings in Egypt for all denominations, so based on the reckoning that each church can hold up to one thousand people, and with Christians now numbering about eight million, the capacity of all churches is no more than 2.5 to 3 million people.<sup>4</sup> This means that more than five million people have no place to worship. Both the lack of accurate statistics, and the known lack of buildings and clergy serving the Christian population, point to the complexity of the situation and the problems Christians face with both the government and wider Muslim society.

Before looking at Christian approaches to Muslims and the mission of the church to build an environment of reconciliation, we will explore the problems that face Christians and that have hindered them through the years in practising this.

## 2. Problems Facing Egyptian Christians

### 2.1 Discrimination and marginalization

Since the Arab conquest, issues of discrimination and marginalization have been matters of contention between Christians and Muslims in Egypt. After Islam became the majority religion, these problems increased. Today, Egyptian Christians complain that the Egyptian government applies discriminatory religious laws and practices concerning conversion,

<sup>2</sup> NL Bibawi, *Mashākil al-Aqbāt fī Miṣr wa-hulūluhā* [The Problems of the Copts and their Solutions] (Cairo: no publisher given, 2001), 94.

<sup>3</sup> N Abd Al-Fattah and D Rashdan (eds), *al-Hālah al-dīniyah fī Miṣr. al-adad al-thānī*. [The Religious State in Egypt, second issue] (Cairo: Markaz al-Dirāsāt al-Siyāsīyah wa-al-Istirāṭīyah bi-al-Ahrām, 1998), 106-07.

<sup>4</sup> SL Habib, *Contemporary Situation in the Egyptian Presbyterian Church*. (Master's thesis, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary: 2010), 69.

marriage, parenthood and education. They further contend that the government has effectively restricted Christians from senior government, political, military, or educational positions, and that there is increasing discrimination in the private sector.<sup>5</sup>

### 2.2 Church building permits

The decree of 1856 by Saied Pasha, then ruler of Egypt, put in place a system governing the relationship between church and state. This included a system for the application and granting of church building permissions. A 1934 Ministry of Interior Decree added a further ten conditions to this decree. These included the conditions that a church was not allowed to be built within 100 metres of a mosque; that the permission of a utility official must be given when the church building would be near that utility; and that there must be no objections to such construction by any Muslim neighbour.<sup>6</sup> It further decreed that the President of the country must also authorize the building of a church. While this law has recently been changed so that local governors can issue a decree for repairs, obtaining permission for repairs or for new construction often takes many years. Many see the changed law as a further hindrance because lower officials are more easily influenced by local extremist elements. Regardless, obtaining building permits for churches remains a major difficulty for most Christian denominations in Egypt.<sup>7</sup>

### 2.3 Representation in government and parliament

Although Christians were very involved in the liberation and nationalization of Egypt during the first half of the twentieth century, Egyptian Christians are marginalized in the political system. Of the 454 members of the People's Assembly, there are currently only six Christian members. Of these, only one was elected, while the President appointed the other five. Christians are likewise restricted in the upper levels of government.<sup>8</sup> By custom, the following positions are occupied only by Muslims: President, Prime Minister, Assistants for Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, and heads of the various branches of the Egyptian armed forces. The list also includes chair of the People's Assembly, governors (of 28 governors, only one is a Christian), as well as the heads of

<sup>5</sup> S Hassan, *Christians versus Muslims in Modern Egypt: the Century-long Struggle for Coptic Equality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 116-18.

<sup>6</sup> NL Bibawi, *Problems of the Copts*, 46-7.

<sup>7</sup> BJ Bailey and JM Bailey, *Who are the Christians in the Middle East?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 145.

<sup>8</sup> Bibawi, *Problems of the Copts*, 211.

all government service offices, chiefs of police, and presidents and deans of universities. Copts are also under-represented in ambassadorships abroad.<sup>9</sup>

#### 2.4 Violence against Christians

Egypt has witnessed a series of violent acts by Muslim extremists against Christians.<sup>10</sup> In recent years, the situation has worsened and the number of attacks has increased. A 1995 report on the religious situation in Egypt published by the official newspaper Al-Ahram described the development of radical Islamic groups and their activities, especially in Upper Egypt.<sup>11</sup> More than 182 violent events took place in 1995 between Muslim groups and Christians who were the victims.<sup>12</sup>

One of the worst events in recent history happened in Al Kosheh in 1999, where Muslims killed 21 Christians. Of the 93 men tried by the Court of Cassation, only two were found guilty. One was sentenced to fifteen years in prison and the other to a mere three years.<sup>13</sup> In many cases, the government pressures official religious leaders to seek to calm their people, without however ensuring any kind of justice for the oppressed. There was great hope that the situation will not be the same after the 25<sup>th</sup> January revolution and the Arab Spring in Egypt in 2011.

### 3. Egyptian Christians' Approaches to Muslims

Egyptian Christians have adopted a number of approaches in their relationship with Muslims. Some of these approaches are a natural part of daily life. Although the normal Christian deals in a friendly way with his neighbours since there are no differences between them, at times make separating day-to-day relationships from the general religious background. Naturally, Muslim citizens go to Christian clinics, schools, shops and companies, and the same applies in reverse. At the same time, most Christians have a variety of approaches to dealing with Muslims.

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<sup>9</sup> The word Copt is an ancient Greek word meaning Egyptian, but after the Arab conquest of Egypt the Arabs called Christians "Copts", and this is the name used for Christians in Egypt today – including Orthodox, Catholics and Evangelical Protestants.

<sup>10</sup> Ibrahim Sad Al-Den, *The Copts of Egypt* (London: The Khaldoun Center for Development Studies, 1996), 22.

<sup>11</sup> PE Makari, *Conflict and Cooperation: Christian-Muslim Relations in Contemporary Egypt*. Syracuse studies on peace and conflict resolution. (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2007), xvi.

<sup>12</sup> Abd Al-Fattah, *Religious State in Egypt*, 194-207.

<sup>13</sup> Habib, *Contemporary Situation in the EP Church*, 30.

### 3.1 Natural approaches

#### 3.1.1 ISOLATION

Historically, Egyptian Christians have largely withdrawn from public life. Having experienced discrimination and hostility for centuries from the dominant majority, Christians have developed what is termed a “battered minority syndrome”. In part, this includes a sense of inferiority and a heightened sensitivity to persecution and discrimination. The necessary outward acquiescence to orders that are enforced by the majority and the lack of participation in the political decision-making process are experienced as keenly humiliating.<sup>14</sup>

The majority of Egyptian Christians live with as little interaction with their Muslim neighbours as possible. Most find their identity in the church. They are satisfied with what they have inside the walls of the church; this is not only a place for worship but also the *locus* of their social life. Churches in general are centred on social activities such as trips, education and employment. The church provides a network resource for business endeavours and employment, and for finding a spouse. There are companies owned by Christians which employ only Christian workers. Such practices, together with the pressures of espousing different values than the majority, and the discrimination experienced at the hands of the Muslim majority, have spiralled into increasing isolation and the withdrawal of Christians from political, social and public life.<sup>15</sup>

#### 3.1.2 EMIGRATION

Another response to the situation is seen in the emigration of Copts to the West in search of new opportunities. Since 1965, hundreds of thousands of Copts have migrated to Canada, Australia, the USA and Europe. Compared with other Christian communities in the Middle East, Coptic emigration is limited; it has, however, added to the massive brain drain from Egypt, as well as creating a Coptic lobbying force in the USA and Europe.<sup>16</sup>

Egyptian Christians who live abroad play an important role in the political and economic support of their churches and families. They openly accuse the Egyptian government of intolerance towards Christians. Likewise, they have organized themselves into various organizations and exert pressure on the government to give more rights to Christians. Furthermore, they provide vital financial support to both families and churches back home.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Hassan, *Christians versus Muslims in Modern Egypt*, 197-8.

<sup>15</sup> Hassan, *Christians versus Muslims in Modern Egypt*, 197.

<sup>16</sup> Abd Al-Fattah, *Religious State in Egypt*, 284.

<sup>17</sup> *Religious State in Egypt*, 285-6.

### 3.1.3 CONVERSION OF CHRISTIANS

Through the centuries and under Muslim pressure, a huge number of Christians converted to Islam. As mentioned above, the tenth century witnessed the change in the demography of Egypt as the majority became Muslim. Poverty, the desire for economic gain, the longing to escape discrimination, and even the choice of marriage partner, have all motivated thousands of Christians to convert to Islam.<sup>18</sup>

One's religion is on the identification card of every citizen that makes the change of religion from Islam close to impossible. The ID cards lead Christians to be treated by officials as second-class citizens. At the same time, it is possibly much easier for Christians to convert to Islam than for a Muslim to convert to Christianity. The government and Muslim society in general supports in every way possible those who want to convert to Islam. Meanwhile, Muslims who convert to Christianity are denied all rights. Although there are no specific statistics on the number of converts to Islam, it was estimated in the past that there were a few thousand conversions every year. In recent years, this number has declined, as Christian leaders have intervened more actively, and the Christian community has provided more support to those facing pressures to convert.<sup>19</sup>

### 3.2 *Intentional interactions with Muslims: a holistic approach*

Active Christian churches and mission-oriented individuals have approached their Muslim neighbours in different ways. Depending on their theological perspective and the opportunities for ministry, these interactions can be either direct or indirect. Likewise, approaches can vary from tolerance and mutual respect involving dialogue, to the more confrontational tactic of polemics.

### 3.2.1 DIALOGUE

In Egypt, numerous dialogue programmes have been initiated between Christians and Muslims. All were instigated by Christians. The dialogue between Al-Azhar University and the Anglican Church is one of the most strategic dialogues that have run for many years, contributing to more understanding between some Christians and Muslims. The Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (CEOSS) has, over many years, held many meetings between Christian and Muslim scholars and leaders, resulting in numerous publications.<sup>20</sup> The Coptic Orthodox Church has also established its own forums for dialogue, where both church and Muslim leaders meet for official occasions like the breakfast (Iftar) during

<sup>18</sup> Hassan, *Christians versus Muslims in Modern Egypt*, 107.

<sup>19</sup> Hassan, *Christians versus Muslims in Modern Egypt*, 222.

<sup>20</sup> Abd Al-Fattah, *Religious State in Egypt*, 412.

Ramadan. Likewise, numerous international NGOs and church groups have sought to study Islam and foster dialogue between the two religions.<sup>21</sup>

While dialogue is important, there is also reason for concern. All dialogues have been initiated and financed by Christians. Furthermore, the dialogues tend to concentrate on issues where there is a common ground between the two religions, but fail to discuss controversial theological issues such as the nature of Jesus, the Trinity, and Mohamed as a prophet. Unfortunately, these dialogues take place mainly between elite scholars and leaders, with little or no impact among the common people or upon public debate.<sup>22</sup>

### 3.2.2 EVANGELISM

Evangelism is a call for the church all over the world. It is not against reconciliation: when the church proclaims the gospel, it proclaims the ministry of reconciliation between God and man, and between man and man. In Egypt, evangelism of Muslims takes many forms. Egyptian law forbids public evangelism outside the walls of the churches; this includes both public evangelistic meetings and the initiation of evangelistic conversations by Christians. The government tolerates Christian evangelism of other Christians, or of non-believers, whose political identity is that of Christian. However, any attempt to actively evangelize Muslims is illegal.<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, Christian churches, organizations and individuals seek to use any open door for evangelism. The Cairo Book Fair and both Islamic and Christian religious festivals provide excellent opportunities to make Christian literature and contact accessible to all Egyptians. Christian satellite channels such as Sat-7, Al-Hayat, Al-Karma and Miracle also have a strong impact upon both Christians and Muslims. It is hard to measure the results of this work, but the correspondence received by these channels suggests that they are indeed surprisingly successful.<sup>24</sup>

Besides public events and media initiatives, one-to-one evangelism and distribution of both the Bible and the *Jesus* film are among the most effective methods of evangelism. Again, it is impossible to measure the results of these evangelistic efforts. However, some estimate that the total of Muslim converts numbers in the hundreds of thousands in Egypt alone. This is even more striking when it is realized that a Muslim who converts to Christianity can face extreme reprisals from family, employers and friends – with no legal recourse. When their conversion becomes known,

<sup>21</sup> Abd Al-Fattah, *Religious State in Egypt*.

<sup>22</sup> DR Brewster, "Dialogue: Relevancy to Evangelism in North American Conference on Muslim Evangelization", in Don McCurry (ed), *The Gospel and Islam: a 1978 Compendium* (Monrovia, CA: Missions Advanced Research and Communication Center, 1979), 516-7.

<sup>23</sup> Wahba, *Practice of Mission in Egypt*, 103.

<sup>24</sup> Bibawi *Problems of the Copts*, 68.

many are forced to move or even emigrate. Sometimes reconciliation with God costs believers from Muslim background considerable sacrifices yet they pay them happily.

### 3.2.3 SOCIAL WORK

Taking a more holistic approach, many Christian organizations started with social ministries as a way to interact with Muslims. This method was first used by Western missions, including Church Mission Society (CMS) and American Presbyterian Mission. Schools, medical clinics, and literacy programmes were established, family awareness programmes begun, and micro-credit projects organized, in order to help and support needy Christians and Muslims.<sup>25</sup> The Presbyterian Church continues to use this same approach, as seen in its numerous schools and the multiplicity of the projects of CEOSS.<sup>26</sup> The Catholics were also pioneers in reaching out to Egyptian society through a wide range of organizations such as Caritas, schools, clinics and other special needs projects. Likewise, the Coptic Orthodox Church ministers to the needy, but most of its programmes target only their own people, while Presbyterians and Catholics reach out to both Christians and Muslims.<sup>27</sup>

In the recent past, and after the 25<sup>th</sup> January revolution, some Christians were actively involved in the social and political life of the country. The Kasr al-Dobara Evangelical Church in Tahrir Square opened its doors to angered and needy people. This church broke many years of fears and opened many doors for the Egyptian Christians to participate in the new democratic Egypt. There is a great hope that Egyptian Christians will not withdraw from the political and social life of their country but continue to act as citizens and not just as a religious minority.

These social work projects and interactions have played an important role in the country's socio-economic development and in promoting a more peaceful co-existence between the two faiths. Many Muslims appreciate Christians because they have received a high quality of service and ministry, despite their religious background. This kind of work is building a peaceful and tolerant relationship and providing a starting point for evangelism.

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### 3.2.4 POLEMICS

In recent years, with the advent of satellite channels and the internet, some Egyptian Christians have begun to use a polemical approach with Muslims. They attack the five pillars of Islam, as well as its Prophet, the Quran, the

<sup>25</sup> Wahba, *Practice of Mission in Egypt*, 21.

<sup>26</sup> Hassan, *Christians versus Muslims in Modern Egypt*, 91.

<sup>27</sup> Hassan, *Christians versus Muslims in Modern Egypt*, 159.

Hadith, and Islamic practices. These attacks range from pointing out contradictions and illogical tenets to ridiculing beliefs. This approach has gained popularity among the vast majority of Egyptian Christians because it allows them to express the pressure they themselves have suffered for fourteen centuries.<sup>28</sup> However, some Christian leaders fear that this exacerbates hostility between Christians and Muslims. They believe that this approach could make Muslims more aggressively defensive when they are evangelized, and point to the many Muslim scholars, writers and groups who have reacted against these polemical tactics and are seeking to mobilize Muslims against them. Some scholars see that this approach is not helping the ministry of reconciliation and may damage relationships. On the other hand, an unknown number of Muslims have sought answers to questions raised by these programmes, and some have indeed converted to Christianity.<sup>29</sup> There is a need for great wisdom in using this approach by the minority in relation to the majority religion.

#### 4. Conclusion

The majority of Christians in the Middle East now live in Egypt. In their long history with Islam, Egyptian Christians have kept their Christian faith and even contributed to global Christianity despite centuries of persecution and oppression.

It is to be hoped that Egyptian Christians can overcome the pressures which have kept them from proclaiming the gospel of reconciliation freely. They need to defeat the inner fears which bind them, so that they can contribute to the spread of the gospel and the message of reconciliation among others. There is no time in the modern Egyptian history more important than these days when the ministry of reconciliation is needed. The church could be the instrument to accomplish this among damaged relationships in Egyptian society. The challenge is great and the church needs to wake up and recognize its role and ministry. The church is the only body that can bring about reconciliation. This is God's call and he gives the church every means to play this role.

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<sup>28</sup> TM Johnson, KR Ross and SSK Lee, *Atlas of Global Christianity 1910-2010* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 122.

<sup>29</sup> Hassan, *Christians versus Muslims in Modern Egypt*, 222, 289.



# RECONCILIATION BETWEEN MESSIANIC JEWS AND CHRISTIAN PALESTINIANS

Bodil F. Skjøtt

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is long, complicated, painful, frustrating – and it is still ongoing. Few, if any, of us remember a time when the conflict was not there and too many of us have lost hope that it will ever be any different. When talking about the Middle East, what comes to mind are lost hopes and issues that seem unresolvable. As the Arab Spring unfolds, more tension and suppressed conflicts seem to surface and “spring” looks more like “winter”. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is often seen as the heart of the whole Middle East conflict. This is partly true, and partly it is an excuse not to correct other wrongs. Looking back over the conflict, what one sees is a long row of failed peace initiatives, with no hope in sight. In such a situation, where failed attempts and escalation of violence is all there seems to be, it is difficult to motivate either side to take initiatives towards peace and reconciliation, and even to dream about a time of less conflict, hate and fear and the shared existence of two peoples in the same piece of land.

But there is more to be said, and however small this is, it is important to tell the stories that the media fail to capture. Otherwise both sides are left with no hope but instead with more room for hate, fear and frustration expressed in even more violence and dehumanization of the other side. The work of Musalaha attempts to create and tell these stories of hope and the determination of people from the grassroots to include and embrace the other side – despite all odds. This chapter will focus on the work of Musalaha.

Before talking about what Musalaha is and does, two things should be noted:

1. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a conflict within a whole system of conflicts: the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Middle East conflict, the conflict between Islam and the West, and also the conflict between the three religions of the region: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. We are dealing with a “complex system of conflict complexes”.<sup>1</sup> Dealing with it cannot be done if we neglect the wider context. It also involves the roots of the conflict found in Europe and the rise of

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<sup>1</sup> A quote from Richard S Harvey’s presentation at “Christ at the Checkpoint” conference in Bethlehem, 2012; see <http://vimeo.com/38967441>

modern nationalism. It is influenced by our understanding of community, identity and, most importantly, communal identity.<sup>2</sup> It places the two communities in opposition to one another, at the same time as these issues are shared issues.

2. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is ongoing. When we talk about how to heal wounds and bring together people who have been hurt by the other, we are talking about groups that are *still* hurting each other. We deal with a situation where each day brings new wounds that also need to be healed. We are talking about reconciliation in the midst of a fight that is still going on. In such a situation it is understandable that people want to retreat and look for safety within their own zones of comfort away from the battle ground. Is it possible in such a situation to seek reconciliation without risking more pain? Will people take initiatives in spite of the pain? Or because of the pain – the pain of the Cross?

### What is Musalaha?

Musalaha, an Arabic word for forgiveness and reconciliation, is a Christian non-government organization that has existed for more than twenty years. Its office is located in Jerusalem and its activities are placed all over the region where it is possible for Israelis and Palestinians to meet physically, something that has become increasingly difficult due to the escalating level of tension of the political situation.<sup>3</sup> Musalaha promotes practical reconciliation at a grassroots level and is based on biblical foundations in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The conviction is that believers in the Messiah have a biblical mandate to take an active role in pursuing peace and break down the wall of hostility, living out the testimony of the reconciling power of the Cross (Ps 34:13; Matt 5:9, Eph 2:14-18). The work revolves around the desire to create a setting that allows believers in Jesus, from both sides of the conflict, to come together and meet in order to establish relationships where stereotypes can be challenged and broken down. It seeks to create an atmosphere which allows both sides to listen to and be heard by the other. Musalaha believes that such a space can provide a framework where obstacles for reconciliation between the two communities can be overcome.

Since its beginning, Musalaha has made use of the deserts that surround the region on all sides. Taking Israelis and Palestinians into the wilderness is using the biblical setting God has used throughout history to shape his

<sup>2</sup> Ambreen Tour Ben-Shmuel, "An Overview of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict", in Salim J Munayer and Lisa Loden (eds), *The Land Cries Out: Theology of the Land in the Israeli-Palestinian Context* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 1-39.

<sup>3</sup> For an introduction to the early years of the work of Musalaha, see Salim J Munayer (ed), *In the footsteps of our father Abraham* (Jerusalem: Art Plus, 2002), a collection of articles written by believers in Jesus from both sides of the conflict.

servants for the task he gave them. The desert is a unique place for an encounter with God and each other. Here everyone is a guest, the normal power balance is cancelled, and everybody is confronted with his or her common humanity. No matter who you are or what group you belong to, you have to adhere to the same rules for physical survival. The politicized process of dehumanization is reversed, because the desert surroundings put everyone on an equal footing and allow Israelis and Palestinians to be rehumanized in each other's eyes. Each year since its beginning Musalaha has taken groups of youths, young adults and also congregational leaders from both sides of the conflict into the desert in the belief that, in the rugged terrain of the Negev, the Jordan or the Sinai desert, stereotypes are challenged and relationships are being built. Each year about 1,000 Israeli and Palestinian believers are in touch with each other through the programmes of Musalaha in one way or another. The figure is small but considering the physical, emotional, social, political and theological barriers to be overcome in order for this to happen, it is worth noting. It gives hope and it challenges any excuses for reconciliation not being thought possible.

Reconciliation is not a single event. It is a process and it does not run along a straight line but rather in a circle where people go through stages.<sup>4</sup> This is even more so in a situation where conflict is still ongoing and even becoming increasingly violent. Musalaha is not seeking to bring people together who *have* hurt each other. The hurt is still happening. The biblical mandate for reconciliation, the Cross of Jesus Christ, is a past event. Reconciliation has been provided. God has provided the means for the family relationship to be restored – between him and his children. But the implications of this in the lives of believers need to be worked out in the present. It involves a difficult and painful process and it needs to take place in the midst of the conflict<sup>5</sup> with the risk of adding to the pain.

Musalaha has identified six stages that people go through on their journey towards reconciliation. A desert encounter provides the framework for the first step of this journey, but soon people discover that this can be an uncomfortable or even futile journey. To be able to identify the stages, or the signposts, provides orientation for those who dare set out on the journey of reconciliation. The stages are:

1. Establishing relationship – with focus on an interpersonal approach in order to establish friendship and trust.
2. Opening up – with renewed face-to-face meeting to deepen friendship and allow participants to demonstrate a commitment to

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<sup>4</sup> Ron Krybill, “The Cycle of Reconciliation”, in Salim J Munayer (ed), *Seeking and Pursuing Peace: The Process, the Pain and the Product* (Jerusalem: Yanetz Ltd., 1998), 73.

<sup>5</sup> Lisa Loden, “Towards Reconciliation – Messianic Jewish Believers and Palestinian Christians”, in Knut H Høyland and Jakob V Nielsen (eds), *Chosen to Follow – Jewish Believers in Jesus through History and Today* (Jerusalem: 2012).

reconciliation and also to see each other as Israelis and Palestinians in *intergroup* dynamics.

3. Withdrawal – because of difficult discussions, a sense of betrayal or a threat to one’s sense of identity, often due to theological disagreement with people from the other side.
4. Reclaiming identity – where each side has to challenge the perceptions of who they are, who the “victims” are and who the “aggressors” are. They must find a way to affirm their own identity but not at the expense of the other. Believers on each side need to emphasize their identity as children of God and members of the same body of Christ.
5. Committing and returning – where participants deepen their relationship and take greater risks for reconciliation and allow themselves to listen to the pain of the other side without feeling threatened by it.
6. Taking steps – where contributions to injustice are answered through actions for the sake of justice, and where working for transformation of the two societies through reconciliation becomes a powerful witness to a watching world.

### Identity: History and Narrative

The stages of reconciliation provide signposts on the way for people who commit themselves to the work of reconciliation. Being able to see and understand the reactions of others but also those of one’s own group, can prevent giving up when it becomes painful and threatening. Identifying the stages also underscores how important the question of identity is, and the different narratives people bring into the setting in which reconciliation has to be worked out. Although *Musalaha* works primarily with believers in Jesus within the two communities, the issue of identity is in no way to be overlooked; on the contrary, because Jewish believers in Jesus are a minority within their own Jewish community, their identity as Jews and Israelis is already being questioned. A shared faith with Palestinian believers on the other side provides no protection against terror, hate and demonization – not even from those with whom they have a shared faith. The same is true for Palestinian believers. They are also a minority within an overwhelming Muslim community, and cultivating friendship with the other side only adds to the exclusion and suspicion from their own group – and provides no protection for checkpoints, house demolitions, loss of belongings or dehumanization. A shared faith can provide a platform for the initial friendships, but without this – and the biblical mandate to seek and pursue peace – such friendships are almost impossible. But it does not erase the identity embodied in the collective narrative of each group. An initial friendship can overlook the differences in the way the other side presents the story of the conflict and tell his or her narrative.. But for true

and lasting relationships to develop, the differences need to be addressed. Without that, the faith community will remain a wounded and broken community torn apart by theological, political, cultural, social and geographical issues.

A shared faith in the reconciling power of the Cross and God's love for us "while we were enemies" (Rom 5:10) can motivate and challenge believers on each side to reach out, but it does bring believers into a communality of understanding and agreement. One does not cease to be Jewish or Palestinian, Israeli or Arab. Being a minority within one's own group only adds to this divide. Messianic believers especially have fought long to demonstrate their Jewish identity within a predominantly Gentile expression of faith in the Jewish Messiah.

Into this situation, where the issue of identity is so important, Musalaha has found it necessary and ground-breaking to use historical narratives as a tool for reconciliation to take place. It is vital that this is done on neutral ground and in a setting where both sides are guests and strangers and have had to leave their own comfort zone. A historical narrative is very sensitive and challenging due to its connection with identity. History and narrative are different but history is influenced by narrative. How often this is the case becomes evident when Israelis and Palestinians begin to tell their stories. Often the story of one side excludes the other, and the simple existence and definition of the identity of one group is a threat to the other and implies exclusion or denial of their historical narrative. Just listening to the narrative of the other side is painful and aggravates anger and a desire to deny the version of the story told by the other side. When Israelis present the Israeli narrative they are "the heroes", "the good guys" and "victims" of Palestinian aggression. And when Palestinians tell their narrative, the coin is flipped and they are the "victims" and the Israelis the "aggressors".

These are stories told by parents and by school teachers, and they are reinforced by the experience of both sides in everyday life. They have formed and confirmed the identity of both communities. Listening to the other side is a challenge and it is often painful. But part of reconciliation is just being able and willing to listen to the other side with an open mind and a desire to know why and what the other – who happens to be both my "enemy" and my "brother" – believes. To do so without having to agree, and then be willing to challenge one's own story and the conclusions drawn from that, calls into question things that are valued, but that may not be correct. Listening to the other side and seeing others being willing to challenge *their* identity creates respect and makes room for being vulnerable with one another. Being vulnerable and risking the pain is necessary, for without it reconciliation is not possible. It is the story of the Cross.

When Messianic Jewish believers tell their story, they will refer to theology and a reading of the Bible that says the land is theirs, given to them by God through an eternal promise. Palestinians will refer to their

forefathers and families who have been forced to leave their homes. They will refer to what the Bible says about justice and peace. Where a shared commitment to Scripture should unite, it becomes instead a source of division within the family of God. To make room for the other will entail calling into question my own understanding of who God is.

A question Musalaha seeks to ask through the historical narrative approach is how to bridge the gap between the two narratives and articulate a shared future. It requires from each side that they learn the other side's narrative of who they are and be willing to correct their own. It will allow for a narrowing of the gap. This is an essential step towards reconciliation. While the two sides might never agree on the past, understanding and accepting the other makes room for empathy and it becomes more difficult to hate. Reconciliation provides a place where the need for exposing what has happened can be replaced by a restored relationship and a vision for a common future together.

Musalaha is convinced that being willing to listen to the other side without getting defensive or aggressive is vital. It can only happen when a certain level of trust is built. It takes time and includes setbacks. But it has proved to be the framework where a critical approach to one's own narrative – including the theological and God-given conclusions – can be risked and where both sides can begin to envision a future that does not exclude, but rather include, the other.

### **Conclusion**

Musalaha has existed as an organization for more than twenty years. There are also other initiatives and structures seeking to bring believers on both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict together.<sup>6</sup> Others again have come and gone, finding it too hard or simply not possible. The last twenty years have seen an escalation of violence, making it almost impossible for people from both sides of the divide to meet physically or even begin a conversation. The security wall/fence is just one example among many of the issues making it difficult to meet. It is understandable why some people retrieve into their own comfort zone. They feel that engaging with the other side only increases the pain, the pain you feel and the pain you inflict on others. This also includes key leaders within the two faith communities. Disagreements have been allowed to dominate the discourse, prompting these leaders to withdraw from engaging with the other side and neglecting to encourage the next generation to become involved.

In the midst of such a situation it should be noted that Musalaha has continued its activities. It might not have grown significantly in numbers

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<sup>6</sup> “The Bible Land Team”, a structure where the three Bible societies in Israel-Palestine work together on common projects, is such an example.

but it has deepened and strengthened its work, both in its theological reflection and the tools that have been developed.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps one can say that it is motivated by pain. Not the pain each side endures as they leave their comfort zone and becomes involved with the “enemy” on the other side, but the pain of God, the pain of the Cross. It is motivated by the conviction that there is a third party involved in this – and any – conflict where relationships are broken and in need of restoration. Or should we say that there is a *first* party involved? The philosophy – or theology – of Musalaha is that believers on both sides need to find their first identity in the Messiah who made reconciliation with God possible. This cannot happen at the expense of the ethnic and national identity, but all that we are, have and hope for, needs to come under the Cross. Only there can believers be vulnerable enough to open up to a future hope of restored relationships and a common future. It takes as its starting point something that is “already” there: God’s reconciling love fulfilled on the Cross. From there it seeks to work out what is “not yet” there: the implications of the “already there” in the lives of believers in a painfully broken and divided world. The experience of Musalaha is that the message of the Cross is best lived out by both sides in a united witness to a fragmented and deeply divided, but watching, world. The reconciling love of God cannot be expressed while at the same time allowing hate, anger and dehumanization to continue. While working on their respective theologies of the land, of social justice and eschatology, both sides have to work on their theology of reconciliation and how to express this in a society desperately in need of hope.

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<sup>7</sup> *Musalaha: A Curriculum of Reconciliation* (Jerusalem: Musalaha Ministry of Reconciliation, 2011) is an indication of this.

# **SPIRITUALITY AND RECONCILIATION: CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY AS AN EXPRESSION OF A GOD THAT HAS EMPTIED HIMSELF**

Harold Segura

“In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus, who ... made himself nothing, by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.” Philippians 2:5-7.

“No Christian who desires to rejoice in his Lord can use power to coerce or dominate. For our King’s lordship consists only of teaching and the power of the Spirit.” Hans Denck

The ministry of reconciliation that brings peace is an indispensable dimension of Christian mission. This ministry involves a spirituality that configures Jesus’ key attitudes, mainly those having to do with his incarnation: the ability to lower himself, to empty himself (kenosis) and, from that position of weakness, to grant us his peace and his reconciliation. A weak spirituality (one emptied of all absolutistic claims and of the ambition for power) is a prerequisite for the fulfilment of the reconciling mission.

## **Christian Spirituality and Reconciliation**

Christian spirituality is, by essence and by definition, one of reconciliation. It embodies peace as a daily living principle, and peacemaking as a social and political vocation. In the words of Juan Driver, it is a spirituality rooted in God’s grace. He says,

“This spirituality is also expressed in hope, and consists of believing in something that seems impossible – the reconciliation of human beings among themselves and with God, in a radical life together that is characterized by justice and peace. This is why joy is a key trait of the messianic community, which trusts God’s power more than its own possibilities. This joyful hope grants the disciples of Jesus the necessary security and confidence to live, against the current, the values that are integral to the Kingdom of God. In

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<sup>1</sup> Hans Denck, *Sobre el verdadero amor*, in Walter Klaassen (ed), *Selecciones teológicas anabautistas* (Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1985), 232.



God's economy, no effort that corresponds to the Kingdom of God and its justice will ever be spoiled ...<sup>2</sup>

A peacemaking spirituality that witnesses to reconciliation, justice and hope, in the context of a community that shares its faith with radicalness, trusting God's power rather than its own strength – isn't this the best witness we could bear, as followers of Jesus, in this Latin America of ours that is so full of violence and spoil?

### The Weakness of an All-Powerful God

A propos of God's power, which is mentioned by Driver as the main content of radical faith, we should consider the intrinsic relationship between this power and the spirituality of reconciliation. We should not simply assume that we understand it in the same way, or that we have the same concept of what it means to declare that we believe in a God of all power. For instance, at various times and circumstances, God's power was used to legitimize the worst forms of absolutism or to foster an exclusive, intolerant spirituality. Thus, the dear abbot Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) was fully convinced that God's power belonged just as much to the church and its representatives, so he championed actions of horrendous intolerance towards those whom he and the church termed the enemies of Christ. If God's power was absolute, then the power of the church was also absolute, including the use of the sword against its opponents.

In the year 1130, in his *Praise for the New Templar Militia*, he equated this militia with the divine hosts. Its aim, he said, is "to exterminate the sons of infidelity ... waging war on two fronts at once – against flesh and blood and against the spiritual forces of evil". He was convinced that belief in God was a fact infused by God himself, and therefore unquestionable. And in this same work he quotes one of the Psalms as part of his argument for intolerance: "Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?" (Ps 139:21).

It is of key importance for us to reflect on the relationship between the way we conceive of God's power and our commitment to peace. This is what we will do in the following. I would start by asserting that peacemaking spirituality requires a reassessment of our doctrine of the Incarnation that, instead of stressing the image of the sovereign, absolute God, retrieves the image of the God who "emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant" (Phil 2:7). This God who becomes strong thanks to his own weakness is the origin and the model of our witness to peace and justice.

The gospel text that narrates the events of the so-called Palm Sunday says that, when the disciples went to look for the colt their master had

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<sup>2</sup> Juan Driver, *Convivencia radical. Espiritualidad para el siglo 21* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Kairós).

requested, a man asked, “Why are you untying the colt?” They replied, ‘The Lord needs it.’” (Luke 19:33). This image of Jesus who relies on a colt and who acknowledges his need of it communicates to us the weakness of the God who redeems us. In fact, what redeems us is not God’s arrogance (no arrogance redeems), but his simplicity and his lowliness placed at the service of our salvation.

### “Weak Thinking” according to Gianni Vattimo

This line of reasoning, expressed in a philosophical way, has already been developed several years ago by the renowned Italian thinker, Gianni Vattimo. Let us consider the relevance of some of his ideas for promoting a spirituality of reconciliation.

Vattimo, in the words of one of his presenters, “is the philosopher that has spent all his life fighting against the rigidity of objectivity and of the absolutes that enslave us”.<sup>3</sup> He is one of the best-known spokespersons of post-modernity and, as such, he asserts that in the contemporary era the absolute postulates of metaphysics have ceased to be accepted. In this post-modern age, the “meta-accounts” (Lyotard) and other “strong thoughts” have expired. So Vattimo, as a professing Catholic, states God’s *kenosis*<sup>4</sup> in Jesus Christ (Phil.2:5-11) and, on the basis of this image, opts for what he has termed “weak thinking”. The dissolution of metaphysics is not a negative fact; on the contrary, it allows us to rediscover the only possible way of speaking about God on the basis of his incarnation in Christ.

The Incarnation is, for Vattimo, the core of salvation history and the foundation both of our spirituality and of Christian values. On it, brotherhood, charity and the rejection of violence are based. In one of his works, he states:

“The only great paradox and scandal of Christian revelation is ... God’s incarnation, the *kenosis*, that is to say, having jeopardized all those characters that are transcendent, incomprehensible, mysterious and, I believe, also extravagant, which, on the contrary, so strongly drive the theoreticians of the leap of faith, in whose name, consequently, it is also easy to open the door to the defense of authoritarianism of the Church and of many of its dogmatic and moral positions linked to the absolutization of doctrines and situations that are historically contingent and that have often been de facto overcome.”<sup>5</sup>

In another of his more recent works, entitled “After Christianity” (in Italian, *Dopo la cristianità*), he develops more broadly his theological formulation of the Incarnation, saying:

<sup>3</sup> Piergiorgio Paterlini, *Analogías*, in Gianni Vattimo, *No ser Dios. Una autobiografía a cuatro manos* (Barcelona: Paidós, 2008), 13.

<sup>4</sup> A Greek term used in Philippians 2:7, that means “emptying”.

<sup>5</sup> Gianni Vattimo, *Creer que se cree* (Barcelona: Paidós, 1996), 62.

“Christ, in his incarnation, has also legitimized many natural signs of the divine. But these continue to be valid for us, precisely because they are the ways in which God descends from the heaven of transcendence, where the primitive mentality used to locate him, and carries out this step by virtue of which, as the Gospel says, men are no longer called servants, not even children ... but friends.”<sup>6</sup>

In other words, for Vattimo, absolute, strong and transcendent thinking is almost always associated with absolutistic, totalitarian and violent practices. It therefore becomes necessary to consider a *weak thinking* that, from the greatness of its lowliness, generates dialoguing, including peacemaking, practices. This is a change in the relationship between God and human beings – from the God that used to deal with us as servants, to the one that considers us his friends. “In clearer terms, the Christian heritage that resumes the weak thinking is also, and above all, the heritage of the Christian preconception of charity and its rejection of violence.”<sup>7</sup>

Vattimo’s main proposals concerning these topics related to faith and theology do not come only from an intellectual exercise, but from an experience of a re-encounter with faith. He thus wrote a text entitled “Belief” (in Italian, *Credere di credere*) (1996), in which he tells about this experience and confesses to having encountered religion once again (in his own words, a “non-religious Christianity”). And his circle of explanation of the faith evolves between the Christian heritage, the “weak” ontology, and the ethics of non-violence.

For our purposes, my proposal is for us to delve a little deeper into this relationship between weak thinking and the spirituality of reconciliation, as stated above. Weak thinking is, for this author, the way post-modernity is shaped. While modernity was characterized by, among other things, a thinking that spoke in the name of absolute truths, of unity and totality (in other words, a *strong thinking*, consistent with metaphysics), post-modernity instead is characterized by a *weak thinking*, which is post-metaphysical, which rejects absolute categories, which does not arrogantly propose unique truths, and which refutes totalitarian legitimizations. The subject of this thinking is weak because it does not seek to impose one’s own discourse, but negotiates one’s own viewpoint with the viewpoint of others.

Criticism of strong thinking is, among other things, a criticism of science, of technology, of political systems and of the great theological treatises, which, in the name of their unobjectionable truths, turned out to be, in practice, overbearing and intolerant. An example of this were monolithic policies, the vertical nature of parties, the pride of science and religious fanaticism. These absolute truths were stated from the perspective of white, western, heterosexual and middle-class men. This is a brief summary of what the Turinese philosopher explains.

<sup>6</sup> Gianni Vattimo, *Después de la cristiandad* (Barcelona: Paidós, 2002), 53.

<sup>7</sup> Vattimo, *Creer que se cree*, 45.

Vattimo's real concern is how to contribute to a culture of peace, a culture that rejects violence and, in this sense, picks up the best of the Christian heritage. In his words:

"In clearer terms, the Christian heritage that returns in weak thinking is also, and above all, the heritage of the Christian precept of charity and of rejection of violence. Once again, "circles": from weak ontology ... an ethics of non-violence is derived; but to weak ontology ... we are led because the Christian heritage of the rejection of violence is acting in us ..."<sup>8</sup>

And a few lines below, he completes the idea:

"... because we have been educated by Christian tradition to think about God, not as a master, but as a friend; to consider that the essential things have not been revealed to the wise but to the small, to believe that whoever does not forfeit his soul will not save it ... If I now say that, when thinking of the history of being as it is guided by the leading thread of the reduction of strong structures, I am oriented towards an ethics of non-violence ..."<sup>9</sup>

Vattimo's *weak thinking* is accompanied by other concepts that are equally relevant for Christian theology and spirituality, such as the one of secularization (a form of purified faith), salvation history (as a history of interpretation), incarnation (as an archetypal fact of secularization), biblical hermeneutics (as production of meaning), the Spirit (as the exquisitely hermeneutical Person), charity (as the key criterion to validate interpretation) and Church. Concerning the latter, he says something that is worth highlighting:

"The Church is certainly important as the vehicle of revelation, but above all as the community of believers who, in charity, listen to and freely interpret, helping and therefore correcting each other, the meaning of the Christian message."<sup>10</sup>

But our concern at this time, remains on *weak thinking* and its relation to compassionate ethics and spirituality. Vattimo's philosophical and theological insights are provocative and illuminate new possibilities for thinking of the faith in the post-modern scene. These insights should also be critically assessed in the light of our theological convictions; but that will have to be left for a different place and time.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Vattimo, *Creer que se cree*, 45. Copyrighted Material

<sup>9</sup> Vattimo, *Creer que se cree*, 46.

<sup>10</sup> Vattimo, *Después de la cristiandad*, 17.

<sup>11</sup> It will also be necessary to assess critically Vattimo's thinking. For this purpose, I would refer to Alberto Roldán, *La kenosis de Dios en la interpretación de Gianni Vattimo: hermenéutica después de la cristiandad*, Revista Kairós #35 (Guatemala: Seminario Teológico Centroamericano, 2004), 121-39. Nicolás Panotto, *Kenosis, cristianismo y la debilidad de la Historia como apertura de sentido socio-político en Gianni Vattimo: algunas notas críticas*, in <http://religioneincidenciapublica.wordpress.com/2011/12/22/kenosis-cristianismo-y-la-debilidad-de-la-historia-como-apertura-de-sentido-socio-politico-en-gianni-vattimo-algunas-notas-criticas/> Enrique Dussel, *De la posmodernidad a la transmodernidad*, Revista de filosofía A

### A Weak Spirituality?

We shall now consider Vattimo's claims in the context of the subject we have been developing – peacemaking spirituality. This spirituality, as I stated from the outset, demands that we retrieve the image of the self-emptying God (kenosis) who took the nature of a servant and, on the basis of his weakness, granted us his peace (Eph 2:17). In the gospel we find yet another expression of God's self-emptying when Jesus wrapped a towel around his waist in order to wash the disciples' feet (John 13:1-17). Jesus knew that "the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God" (John 13:3); yet, though he was aware of the power deriving from his filial relationship to the Father, did not cling to it.

It was precisely because Jesus knew that he had so much power and dominion that he decided to take on the condition of a servant in relating to his disciples. Eternal power became temporal service. Jesus believed that there is no need to renounce power (the Father had granted it to him), or to dilute it, or to ignore its existence, but to reorient its function so it would become power to serve. For him, true greatness lies in becoming small, just as he taught his disciples (Mark 10:43-44). And it is in this weakness (or smallness) that the secret of his redeeming peace is revealed. Perhaps we could coin here the phrase *weak spirituality* as a form of expressing that it is on the basis of weakness, lived in Jesus' way, that one can build peace and witness to the Kingdom, instead of seeking the shortcuts of arrogant power.

Speaking of a weak spirituality means, in the first place, that our way of following Jesus is marked by a humble willingness to dialogue, instead of a haughty assertion of the absolutes that distance us from those who think differently, from those who believe what we do not believe, and from those who have decided to live according to patterns of living that are not ours. We know well the ecclesiastical claim to know the truths and, from that dogmatic knowledge, to dictate the final norms for social life. A church like that confuses the difference between sin and crime, between faith as a proposal for personal life and faith as a pattern of life imposed by law. On the basis of this pretence, one does not promote peace. Quite the contrary: one incites excluding discriminations and marginalizes the possibilities of witnessing to a charity that welcomes and builds up. Let's go back to Vattimo, who says, concerning this mode of authoritarian preaching:

"We find here, once again, under various forms, the "scandal" of a Christian preaching that claims to be dictating the "truth" on "how things really are" in nature, in man, in society, in the family. That is to say, God as the foundation,

and the Church as the ultimate voice with authority to decide in the last instance.”<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, speaking about a weak spirituality<sup>13</sup> means to be willing, as individuals and as communities of faith, to live in a society in which the Christian religion is losing its prerogatives as an official religion and, in lieu of it, lay models of pluralistic social life are emerging. Living in laicism, the characteristic condition of the current cultural moment, requires a spirituality focused on the spirit of Jesus, who lived a *non-religious faith*, free from institutional labels and from the manipulation of power. In this respect, the voice of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German martyr, is fully relevant today, as he taught that Christians are “the community of the sons of the land”. As Eduardo Delas explains, Bonhoeffer

“... is not persuaded by a Christianity that talks too much about holy things and forgets the meaning and value of our profane, secular reality. It is necessary, he used to say, to protect Christian mysteries from profanation; one must learn to remain silent in the face of the mystery of pain and of the hidden God in the world. The fundamental thing is a Christianity that is able to give life in a world that has not been reduced to impotence in order for the religious element to triumph over it, but that has been recognized in its “coming of age” and in its own autonomy.”<sup>14</sup>

The spirituality of reconciliation also shares life in freedom in the midst of religious pluralism, interculturality and laicism; that is where it witnesses to a radical, dialoguing and compassionate way of living together, because the strength of its message is based on the greatness of its smallness and on its commitment to justice and to the reconciliation of the world (2 Cor 5:20). This spirituality relieves itself of its dogmatic weight in favour of options of practical morality; it is grounded on a firm theological reflection, but this firmness does not hinder it from listening to the diverse voices of truth; it walks with the assurance that Jesus is the source of life and announces his name with passion, but without imposing its discourse in order to proselytize; it cultivates piety, but without succumbing to the

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<sup>12</sup> Gianni Vattimo, *Adiós a la verdad* (Barcelona: Gedissa, 2010), 67.

<sup>13</sup> Speaking of weakness always involves risk, especially in a continent like Latin America, so full of women, children, Indians, black people, old people and sick people who are already weak, either because of their physical condition or because of social exclusion. What does it mean to speak of weakness among those who, in this sense, are already weak? Well, it means to remember that the gospel turns the scale of social assessment upside down – it calls the strong to weakness, and it invites the weak to become aware of their strength. It will be enough to read the Beatitudes (Matthew 5–6) to recall how Jesus empowers the weak and unmask the strong.

<sup>14</sup> Eduardo Delás Segura, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer, un teólogo a contratiempo. Comprender la iglesia desde Cristo* (Nashville, TN: Grupo Nelson, Biblioteca Teológica, 2011) (3<sup>rd</sup> ed), 30.

temptations of a spirituality that is devoid of ethical sense and of social outreach.

Let me close with one of the Latin American authors, the Nicaraguan Gioconda Belli. Her poem *One does not choose* says thus:

“One does not choose the country where one is to be born;  
 But one loves the country where one has been born.  
 One does not choose the time to come to the world,  
 But must leave footprints in one’s time.  
 No one can flee from his responsibility.  
 No one can cover his eyes, his ears,  
 Become dumb and cut off his own hands.  
 We all have a duty of love to fulfil,  
 A history to make,  
 A goal to achieve.  
 We didn’t choose the moment to come to the world –  
 We can now build the world  
 Where the seed we brought with us  
 Will spring up and grow.”<sup>15</sup>

“We all have a duty of love to fulfil”. Ours is to express the Lord’s love and thus to be witnesses of “the good news of peace through Jesus Christ” (Acts 10:36) – a gospel that manifests itself through gestures of reconciliation in a world that is fragmented in so many different ways.

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<sup>15</sup> Gioconda Belli, *Sobre la grama* (Bogotá: Editorial Norma, 2011), 121.

# THE COMMUNITY OF SANT'EGIDIO: A LAY MOVEMENT FOR PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

Claudio Mario Betti and Laurie Johnston

Peace and Reconciliation are two terms that have always been central in the life, experience and work of the Community of Sant'Egidio since its very beginning in 1968. From its early days as a group of teenagers coming together to read the gospel and dream together, to later years when the Community was able to help achieve concrete results for the war-weary people of Mozambique and many other places, Sant'Egidio has been committed to a tenacious and creative search for new ways to bring about reconciliation. This chapter will seek to describe the experiences of reconciliation that have emerged over these years in the lives of men and women in Rome and around the world.

The Community of Sant'Egidio was born in Rome in 1968 from the initiative of a high school student, Andrea Riccardi, who began to read the gospel with some classmates. In that year of great hopes, of utopian visions and political ideologies, Riccardi and others believed that if they wanted to change the world, they must begin with the gospel. Very quickly, the gospel led them to the world of the poor. In the slums of the capital of Italy, they discovered a reality of acute poverty: more than one hundred thousand people, mostly immigrants from southern Italy, surviving in shacks and makeshift abodes. This encounter with the "third world" in their own backyard is one which has profoundly shaped the members of Sant'Egidio ever since. After all, they were living in the days immediately following the Second Vatican Council, when John XXIII had spoken so powerfully of being a "Church of all, but especially the poor".

For Andrea Riccardi, in fact, the Council was a deep source of inspiration, with the belief that Christians could hasten the end of winter in the world: war, poverty, the division of the world into two blocs, colonialism, and pessimism in the face of change. It is not difficult to trace in the early history of the Community the desire to reconcile worlds that had always been separated, people who had always been divided. Yet in the midst of the idealism of the Council and of many people in 1968, Riccardi believed that followers of Christ must dream about a world of peace – but *dream in reality*.



To “dream in reality” means to allow oneself to be deeply shaped by the gospel, through a communal life of prayer, but to also live so fully in the world that one is never cut off from what is really going on, particularly in the lives of the poor. Sant'Egidio's intense commitment to the poor and to the resolution of conflicts could not exist without a strong spiritual identity, nourished by prayer and fraternity. Members of the Community share in a daily common prayer that is the foundation for all that they do. Without the “stubborn” desire to understand what the gospel means for one's personal life and for the lives of those who are around us, there would be no concern for the poor, and there would be no search for ways of peace in a world of conflict. Instead, there would be merely resignation to the world the way it is.

In the face of the many violent conflicts that exist today, one must be clear that reconciliation and peace, in their concrete form, are not easy to achieve. The world seems to speak a totally different language, and the experiences of reconciliation to which the Community of Sant'Egidio testifies are something that, if not rare, is certainly uncommon. Every man and woman who looks at the world realistically cannot refrain from asking himself or herself a question: What can I do? What can we do? What can a single person do? What can an organization, even a large one, do? In the midst of wars, the great poverty of many parts of the world, social conflicts, and widespread violence, we feel a weakness which seems to justify our attitude of helplessness.

There is no question that conflict and confrontation are very disorienting, and this disorientation is part of why conflicts feed off one another. Evil is, in fact, contagious. Faced with so much horror, we ask ourselves what can be done. In the midst of disorientation, we try to bring order through comprehensive interpretations, like that of the “clash of civilizations” or of ethnic warfare. Often we say that everything depends on external factors, as if this could allow us to exorcise evil, like something extraneous and foreign. Thus we say that war is caused by the arms trade (yet in Rwanda the genocide was carried out with traditional machetes), by the legacy of colonialism and its borders, or by trade in oil, diamonds, coltan, etc. Certainly, all of that has a role but it does not explain evil and the decision to act on it, nor does it explain what can be done in response. All too often these many rational-sounding explanations merely lead us to more immobility and resignation.

But this is what the Community Sant'Egidio has been fighting all through these 45 years of existence. This attitude of helplessness and resignation is probably the greatest challenge we all must face when we set out to work for reconciliation and peace. And yet over and over again, we find that we must not give up the dream that peace is possible. In the face of this contagion of evil, we must remember that good is also contagious. This is what the Community of Sant'Egidio has been trying to uphold all along: the belief that in the very heart of a people, in the heart of a nation,

in the depth of the soul of a man or a woman, there is a seed of peace and reconciliation.

This is not merely an idealistic hope; it is a conviction that arises from our faith in the reconciling power of Christ. This is a dream that is based in reality – the reality that in every situation, peace is a hidden possibility that awaits discovery. In its section on peace, the Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes* is very clear about the inevitability of war, saying that “Insofar as men are sinful, the threat of war hangs over them, and hang over them it will until the return of Christ.” And yet it then goes on to uphold the possibility of peace: “But insofar as men vanquish sin by a union of love, they will vanquish violence as well and make these words come true: ‘They shall turn their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into sickles. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more’ (Isaiah 2:4)” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 78).

What the Community of Sant’Egidio has found is that faith in the possibility of peace and reconciliation can in fact be a self-fulfilling prophecy. Very few of those who resort to violence will continue in that violence if they are able to see an alternative. When peace is seen as a real possibility, it is a very appealing thing. Even for those who remain fearful, bitter and angry, the hope of being released from the pain of those emotions is very attractive. This is why it is so important to avoid the type of oversimplifying discourse that promotes war and confrontation by cultivating enmity. Such discourse only encourages fear and the despising of the other, and leads to “preventive war”.

Particularly in the past ten years, the Community of Sant’Egidio has upheld the importance of this faith in the possibility of peace and reconciliation, and Andrea Riccardi published a book entitled “Preventive Peace”. In it, he explains that preventive peace is the beginning of reconciliation based on the understanding of the other and the refusal of any form of simplification. Preventive peace is a way to avoid being taken by fear. He cautions that fear too often dominates politics and leads people to despise those of another religion or ethnic group. In the confusion of a rapidly globalizing world, it is all too easy for us to cling to oversimplification and then become dominated by the political culture of fear-mongering.

How is it, then that a person and a community can choose to avoid this culture? Such a choice is not inevitable – humanity can choose to walk downwards. And the consequences of this walking downwards are evident. Even nations which are seemingly at peace and claim to support the rights of the poor can make choices to the contrary. Recently we have observed an economic crisis that is due mostly to the lack of any regulation and to the unrestrained, self-interested search for material gain. And as a consequence we observe an impressive growth of poverty, even in Europe and among people who had been living a dignified life. We see a loss of

ideals and an atmosphere that makes men and women of our time lonely and frail.

What makes it possible for a person to choose otherwise, to choose a different kind of life and culture? As the world becomes more advanced and complex, this is no small question. Henri Bergson, writing in *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, describes this world of powerful technology that we live in today as a large body:

“In this body, distended out of all proportion, the soul remains what it was, too small to fill it, too weak to guide it. Hence the gap between the two. Hence the tremendous social, political and international problems which are just so many definitions of this gap, and which provoke so many chaotic and ineffectual efforts to fill it. What we need are new reserves of potential energy – moral energy this time ... We must add that the body, now larger, calls for a bigger soul ...”<sup>1</sup>

What is lacking in our rich and developed world is that “bigger” soul, and without such a soul men and women are afraid. John Paul II was right when he began his pontificate asking us, first of all, not to be afraid. Reconciliation and peace can only be attained when we conquer fear, and in order to conquer fear we must look up and walk upwards.

The first step along this path of reconciliation, however, has always seemed to Sant'Egidio to be a step towards the poor person who is quite nearby. Our fear of the poor is perhaps the first fear to be overcome. It is clear to the members of Sant'Egidio that if they had not taken that first step into the periphery of Rome to meet the people there, then none of the work for peace and reconciliation would ever have taken place. Though Sant'Egidio's friendship with the poor has taken on a vast number of forms, it is that first moment of encounter, of crossing the normal divides in our daily lives, which is the moment of overcoming fear and being transformed.

Now that Sant'Egidio has about 60,000 members and is present in seventy different countries, the community's original commitment to the poor has dramatically increased and has come to include the homeless, the sick (especially AIDS victims), the immigrants, the Roma people, the disabled, the elderly, street children, and prisoners. And with this commitment has grown the Community's understanding that a Christian cannot be formed, and cannot live well, away from the poor, away from that contact with them that is vital. Too often we have confined the weak, the frail, the poor, too far away from spiritual life (almost as if they were a social issue) and we have professionalized contact with them. Dealing with the poor becomes a job for the social worker. There is room for specialized skills, of course, but that is merely one part of the issue. The poor are in the heart of the Christian experience, and without them the church is not the

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<sup>1</sup> Henri Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (Trans. Audra and Breteron. London: Macmillan, 1935), 268.

church. But it is also true that without the support of faith, one cannot remain for long near those who are weak, because it reminds us of our own fears.

The community has found, however, that when we follow the Lord into the world of the poor, we can in fact do many things. Very quickly we see that it is only our own complacency that had allowed us to see the poor as an unsolvable economic and sociological problem. When instead we approach them as we would a relative or friend in need, a beautiful friendship can be born. Familiarity and relationship must accompany Christian solidarity. The relationship with the poor is not an activity of the church, but a human relationship. Jesus says not only “you gave me food”, but also “I was sick and you visited me; in prison and you visited me” (Matt 25:36).

There is the reality of a human relationship: the poor want to talk, they ask for company, they ask to be listened to, and they seek friendship because they are exactly like us. Often they are humiliated by the experience of contempt for their weakness. But they have a rich inner world. There are great resources among the poor, often ripened in pain and loneliness. They are human resources and beauty that must be discovered with care and that must be brought to light. The weak are not, at first glance, beautiful, because they are sick, embrittled, intimidated by life, perhaps ill-dressed, or unable to manage themselves. We must have the courage to discover the beauty of the weak. Above all, this takes place in friendship, that attitude that values the human resources of the weak.

One challenge to this friendship is that the places of fragility are often far from our everyday life. A major disadvantage of those who are frail is that they are not easily heard by others; it is one more weakness. The weak are often distant, even geographically. Only a few news clips, some small signs of painful weakness reach us through the information channels. We think of the wars that we become accustomed to, as we did with the Iraq war. We think about Africa that represents a continent of fragility, that shows its pain when we feel the journey of despair of those who flee a world with the hope of reaching a place of well-being, such as Europe. Africa is, as a whole and in its many faces, the largest and most dramatic place of fragility of our time. The individual Christian, the community, the church, and politics itself, cannot ignore this land of fragility, which has also become a desert of despair.

The task of a Christian heart is remembering those who do not attract us, because they are weak, distant, and uninteresting for the media. Remembering them is an expression of the fact that they are not alone and forgotten. True solidarity, the kind that can create a space for peace and reconciliation, requires knowing people, even if it is from a distance. This means remembering those who live in countries of poverty and war. And there is also the world of those who are imprisoned, sentenced to death, in distant countries. Remembering them means that they exist and that they

are not forgotten, that we will not rest until they are in the hearts of many. For us, finding peace means not forgetting the one who is frail or voiceless.

Over and over again, Sant'Egidio has found a clear link between poverty and conflict. "War is the mother of every poverty," says Riccardi frequently, as a way to explain the source of the Community's commitment to peace. The quest for reconciliation is one which has arisen directly from the cries of the poor. This experience is not unique to Sant'Egidio; any community, any church, any religious institution, can always do *something* for peace, certainly by getting to know those who are suffering, and then getting to know even those who are fighting. One key resource in the work of Sant'Egidio is this most basic and fundamental one: knowing the people who are suffering and those who are fighting. In many situations our communities all over the world tell us about how strongly the people desire peace – especially the poor. Often people had been living together, having overcome divisions – until this state of reconciliation was violently disrupted. Far beyond any ideological, political or ethnic lines, we discover the value of peace in the words of the poor, in their suffering and their dreams. War is the mother of all poverties, and the poor know that, because they are the ones who cannot flee nor remove themselves from violence. In standing near the ones who are suffering and the ones who are fighting, one discovers the value of the miracle of peace. Sant'Egidio has found this request for a miracle in many places, particularly in an Africa without peace.

How to respond to these cries for peace, then? Andrea Riccardi says clearly, "Sant'Egidio doesn't do [traditional] diplomacy: our members are committed to the world of welcoming the marginalized, immigrants, in daily solidarity. But I believe that the daily lives of believers release energies of peace."<sup>2</sup> Another member of the Community, Mario Giro, explains this in a concrete way:

"An old woman barricades herself in a dilapidated building in the slums of an Italian city. She refuses to open her door. Her neighbours are convinced she's becoming a derelict. A member of the Sant'Egidio community knocks at her door and starts to speak to her. She replies in monosyllables. He leaves but comes back later to continue a dialogue that may go on for months, even a year, until she agrees to open the door and let him in and finally start getting some help. Using these skills in patient communication based on friendship, the community later made contact with a guerrilla chieftain hidden away for years in the heart of Africa, brought him out of his isolation and persuaded him to negotiate instead of fight."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> "Sant'Egidio non fa diplomazia: i nostri membri sono impegnati nel lavoro di accoglienza agli emarginati, agli stranieri, nella solidarietà quotidiana. Credo però che dalla vita quotidiana dei credenti scaturiscono energie di pace." *La Pace Preventiva* (San Paolo: Cinisello Balsamo, 2004), 138.

<sup>3</sup> Mario Giro, "Sant'Egidio's diplomacy of friendship." *UNESCO Courier*, January 2000, 33.

Those negotiations with the guerrillas of RENAMO<sup>4</sup> were controversial at the time – how could one possibly talk to a group accused of so many human rights violations? And yet here is where Sant’Egidio’s faith in the possibility of peace comes to the fore. This faith means not just hoping for peace in the abstract, but believing that in a given situation, through dialogue with specific people, peace is possible – because even the most violent guerrilla is capable of a change of heart. Just as the members of Sant’Egidio do not give up knocking on the door of an elderly woman who needs help, so also the Community does not give up on the violent guerrilla – or the death row inmate, for that matter. For each of these people, the gospel promises new life, and we have experienced the way that can come to life through an encounter of friendship and dialogue.

It is now twenty years since the signing of the peace agreement in Mozambique. After an effort of 27 months that involved the help of many people, the Community brought a lasting peace in this African country. It was a miracle that taught us that *anyone* can work for peace and can help reconcile people. It is a concrete answer to that sense of despair, to that pessimism that wants us to concentrate merely on ourselves. It is a clear manifestation that history is not only a game of conflicting forces that appear to prevent a better future. In history there are deep forces at work that, like earthquakes, with a small shift, can cause major upheavals in the crust of the earth. There are deep currents of life, love and faith. And above all, history is not a predictable straight line, but there are miracles: the unexpected is always possible, because this history is not abandoned to itself, but it is loved and inhabited by the deep current of the Spirit of love.

After that initial commitment to Mozambique, the Community of Sant’Egidio has been working on more than 30 different conflicts. And together with conflict between countries or between groups within a country, we must also add a phenomenon that has been growing steadily in these past years. There are situations of diffuse and widespread violence that plague a growing number of countries and that are a constant reminder that we must not give up the work in order to reduce the arena of violence. It is a form of violence that touches countries that are far from us like El Salvador, Congo, Mexico, Pakistan, the Sahel, the Philippines, Nigeria or Syria. But there is also violence that touches the peripheries of our European cities. In addition to this we are also witnessing the resurgence of anti-Semitism – long a concern of ours, since the Community has consistently kept alive the memory of the deportation of European Jews from Rome and other cities, holding marches and other events. The violence we experience today in its many forms is a result of the reduction of the openings for dialogue and friendship.

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<sup>4</sup> RENAMO is the Portuguese acronym for the Mozambique National Resistance, a conservative, anti-Marxist party that battled the Marxist FRELIMO party in a civil war following Mozambican independence in 1975. The Sant’Egidio Community was instrumental in bringing about an agreement between the two parties.

For this reason, Sant'Egidio has tried to promote a culture of peace and reconciliation, both at the international level and in local communities. This takes many forms, but one of the most important is our Schools of Peace. For children from all over the world, for street children or for youth who live in situations of difficulty, there is a network of "Schools of Peace" throughout the countries where the Community is present. They offer support to hundreds of thousands of school children and, above all, they offer an education for peace and co-existence. It is a way of forming peaceful new generations, especially in countries where widespread violence perpetrated by youth gangs – as in some countries of Central America – is emerging with the characteristics of civil war. Throughout the world the "Schools of Peace" reaffirm the value of the life of children in cultures where the child is not relevant at all, so irrelevant as to not deserve even to have his or her birth officially registered.

The experience of working for peace and of building places of reconciliation every day has revealed to the Community that Christians possess a power of peace. The schools of peace, where children learn to know and respect one another, are a powerful means to confront the culture of disrespect that nurtures so much hatred and so many divisions. Often, Christian and Muslim children mix at the schools of peace, and these schools take place in the buildings of parishes and *madrassas*.

How do we create these spaces for peace? To work for reconciliation, Christians must believe in the value of dialogue. The word, the encounter of one with the other – these have power, even if they seem weak and humble. As the apostle Paul says, "When I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor 12:10). Weak – yes, it is the truth that most of our Christian communities are not victors according to the logic of the market or of violence. The condition of the Christian is that we do not have powerful means but must nevertheless fight against a culture of contempt. Weakness is the human terrain on which strength through faith and the gift of God grow. There is a force that comes from weakness because it forces us to value trust, human relationship and dialogue. The power of weakness is one of the most precious legacies of the twentieth century, and is something we still need to acknowledge and accept. This legacy is not a new ideology or a conception of the world that is unilateral, triumphant, or arrogant, but it is the reality of a weak or humble force for peace in the midst of a large and complex world. This legacy comes to us from the martyrs of this past century from all around the world. This is the powerful legacy of the seminarians of Buta in Burundi, who did not allow themselves to be divided up between Hutu and Tutsi, and so were all killed. In memory of them, we must not be afraid of working for peace.

Yet we are sometimes afraid of our weakness. Isn't it too little to merely speak, meet, believe in dialogue? To have reconciliation after so much hate, doesn't one need something stronger? Our experience in the resolution of conflicts is that peace does indeed need a serious political effort, and peace

accords are important. In Mozambique and in other cases, we have understood that we must be attentive to the construction of a new pact, avoiding too much cleverness or compulsion. The mentality of a guerrilla or a warring faction, developed in isolation and in total opposition, is nurtured by indisputable certainties. To dialogue, to discuss, to accept other points of view – this is not a simple thing, especially if one is cut off from political circles. The more the isolation grows, the less one sees alternatives to armed battles. The problem is to move from the guerrilla mentality to a political culture: an investment in the future. Above all, what is necessary is to make this transition from the field of armed conflict to the political battlefield instead.

But after this, one also needs to enter deeply among the people, wounded by violence, to weave the fabric of reconciliation every day. After a political accord, there must be a true process of reconciliation in the depths of hearts and souls. Sant'Egidio did not abandon Mozambique after 1992, but began many communities there that are committed to the poor. And so the face of a people, disfigured by war and hatred, is changed. Since then, we have also undertaken to confront AIDS, a new war which threatens to destroy the peace that was regained.

To communicate reconciliation, one must believe in the possibility of dialogue. It is necessary to avoid opposition, the repetition of wrongs, and to focus completely on the future. Too often, history divides, with its focus on the memory of wrongdoing, of deaths, of violence. Often there is a temptation to make definitive judgments. We know that those who fight are guilty of obvious and unspeakable atrocities. Often both sides call for justice, while at the same time each fails to recognize any value in the other's demand for justice. But how can justice exist without some common frame of reference – a government or some other source of authority? Creating this shared frame of reference requires reconciliation. This is why John Paul II said, "There is no peace without justice; there is no justice without forgiveness" (Message for the World Day of Peace, 2002). And so the work for peace and reconciliation truly has a prophetic aspect.

Christianity is not a set of values, but the imitation of Jesus in our lives. The path of a Christian starts from the Cross, is enveloped in weakness and does not disdain that weakness either in oneself or in others. Our Christian communities can be the places of this weak force, which sustains the hope of the weak, weak as we all are, that weakness which is in every man and woman. We accept weakness when we do not feel alone, but supported, accompanied by the love of God that speaks to us: it is the faith, the trust that our life is not just a random fragile fragment, but it is loved by God. This awareness of our own weakness is a fertile soil for peace, because it is there that a strong alliance between the poor and the humble can begin.

This alliance with the "weak" of this world can lead to miracles of peace and reconciliation. From our first encounters with the poor people of the



abandoned peripheries of the city of Rome, to the negotiations for peace in the most difficult and intractable conflicts of the world, we have seen that reconciliation is possible. Yes, everything can change! The life of a street child can change; the life of a lonely old person can change; the smile on the face of a poor person on the street can return. We have seen people who have been at war for years witness the miracle of peace and reconciliation. It seems impossible but it happened, even after a million deaths, as in Mozambique.

The experiences of these past years in the Community of Sant'Egidio have led us to believe that peace and reconciliation are complex and that no one has a monopoly on the solution: reconciliation is a shared responsibility, and a very concrete one for Christians and for the church.

Hope in the possibility of peace must take a concrete path, and the commitment to reconciliation must become a daily activity. This commitment to peace constitutes the deepest expression of a choice not to withdraw within oneself or within one's own borders. It is the mission of liberating the world from the culture of contempt and hatred – culture that becomes policy and makes societies living hells. It is a call to reach out to the poor person who is nearby and the weak one who is far away, because there is no suffering that is irrelevant to a follower of Christ. Truly, the service of reconciliation is the true vocation of the Christian.



# TENSIONS AND RECONCILIATION BETWEEN THE AUTONOMOUS CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AND THE CHINA CHRISTIAN COUNCIL/THREE-SELF PATRIOTIC MOVEMENT

Kim-kwong Chan

In 1980 the Chinese Christian community emerged from the ruins of the Cultural Revolution, a body hitherto thought to be extinct in Chinese society, and soon developed into an amazing community catching the attention of the Christian world. It grew from an estimated three million believers in 1980, to several tens of millions within three decades – a ten to twenty-fold increase in a socio-political environment which is hostile to religion in general as the state orthodoxy is atheism, and Christianity in particular where Christianity is often associated with western imperialism that had devastated China. This vibrant community has been split into two major factions often opposing each other: those who register with the government under the political guidance of the civil authority, and those who do not register and operate independently of that authority. The ecclesial tensions are commonly known as Three-Self Church versus Family Church, or Official Church versus Underground Church. This inter-ecclesial tension between these two factions arises from historical animosity, theological differences, personality conflicts, and is often intensified by the Chinese government's policy on religious affairs.<sup>1</sup> However, in recent years there are signs of reconciliation in some areas between these two factions, which cast a ray of hope on the unity of the Christian community in China. This chapter will describe the cause of inter-ecclesial tensions in the Chinese Christian community from historical factors, the government's policy, and overseas Christian groups. It will then look into the current signs of reconciliation and the future ministry of ecclesial reconciliation.

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<sup>1</sup> A Hunter and KK Chan, *Protestantism in Contemporary China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 66-104.

### Inter-Ecclesial Tension

In the 1950s, the newly established People's Republic of China carried out a socialist transformation of Chinese society, including the nationalization of all private sectors and the de-westernisation of all institutions. The Chinese churches were to cut off links with the West and to join the only government-sanctioned Protestant organization: The Chinese Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement, commonly known as Three-Self Movement or TSPM. Those churches that joined this Movement were considered as patriotic, and were allowed to operate openly, but subject to strong political control by the government. They were called Three-Self Churches. Those that refused to join were subject to forced closure, their leaders were jailed and their activities were deemed illegal. Members of the Three-Self Churches were encouraged to report to the authority on fellow Christians who deviated from the government's political wishes, often resulting in long jail sentences of these Christians as Anti-revolutionaries.<sup>2</sup> Three-Self leaders justified their reporting of their fellow Christians as a purification process to cleanse the imperialistic toxin left behind by western missionaries. Those who refused to join the Three-Self Movement regarded those who did join as a "Judas" of the church, and they organized their religious activities at home or in clandestine settings. Animosity between these two groups escalated.

In the mid-1950s, all Protestant churches in China were united as one community under TSPM. From the late 1950s to the mid-1960s, the number of functioning TSPM churches was drastically reduced; and from 1966, even the then-tolerated TSPM churches were closed. Some Christians, especially from the non-Three-Self factions, carried on their clandestine Christian meetings, often in family households, retaining the most basic form of Christian activities such as prayer, Bible study and hymn singing. They were often referred to as house gatherings or House Churches. At the end of the Cultural Revolution in the late 1970s, some of these household gatherings became more visible.

In 1980 the government allowed the re-emergence of religions, and urged Christians to form a parallel organization to TSPM, called China Christian Council. The two organizations were named *Lianghui* or TSPM/CCC. The TSPM/CCC began to gain momentum in reopening churches and re-establishing seminaries and Bible schools, the reprinting of Bibles and hymnals, and establishing nationwide organizational structures with branches in almost all provinces, municipalities, prefectures and counties – all with the support from the government. It also established links with the global Christian community by joining the World Council of

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<sup>2</sup> Ms Lim Wei-Zi reported at a seminar given by Professor Ying Fook-Tsang of the Chinese University of Hong Kong on Christians who betrayed fellow Christians in China, in her article, "The Understanding of Being a Stooge During the Revolutionary Era", in [www.upwill.org/news/daily-news/8418-china](http://www.upwill.org/news/daily-news/8418-china), March 2012.

Churches (in 1993), being a part of the Global Christian Forum, and actively participating in ecumenical affairs. Since the 1980s, when there were just a handful of reopened churches, thirty years later the current membership in TSPM/CCC has grown to about twenty million.<sup>3</sup> The church hierarchy issues church polity and regulations, effectively connecting these thousands of TSPM/CCC churches into one large bloc of Christian community – perhaps the largest single bloc of Christians in China. These TSPM/CCC churches register with the government, receive guidance from the civil authority, and operate within the framework established by the authority. They stand for the theological conviction of obeying the civil authority since such authority is ordained by God.

However, many Christians who had survived the harsh suppression by the government opted not to join the newly re-constituted TSPM/CCC. They felt that if they could keep their faith even during the most difficult trials, why would they need to compromise their stance by falling under the wings of the TSPM/CCC that had once allied with the government to suppress them in the past? Furthermore, since they lived out their faith in households without the need to establish venues such as church buildings, there was really no need to change this ecclesial mode. They held to the theological stances of a clear separation between Church and State, and of obeying God over civil authority.

Some of these house gathering-based groups often formed alliances with many like-minded groups to establish their own regional and even national networks – some even with overseas links – for mutual support. They are commonly called House Churches, and ecclesologically speaking they should be referred to as “autonomous Christian communities” (ACC). They have grown in parallel with TSPM/CCC and their number is as high as, if not higher than, the number of TSPM/CCC Christians. Although strong in number, ACC, by the very nature of being autonomous groups, do not have a single umbrella structure to unite them; rather, there are tens of thousands of groups ranging from small household gatherings to sophisticated structures with a national network of millions of members. In general, they are antagonistic to TSPM/CCC as their leaders often recall the hurts and wounds they suffered from betrayal by TSPM/CCC leaders. They feel that they are the True Church of Christ and have paid a high cost to keep such faith, whereas the TSPM/CCC would be seen as heretical by having submitted not to God but to secular authorities. Sadly, during the past three decades of vibrant development of the Christian community in China, these two factions have shown strong hostility towards each other.

In China, religious activities are subject to government control. Organized religion has to register with the government and is also required to join government-sanctioned religious institutions. Those who refuse to

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<sup>3</sup> See the official website of TSPM/CCC: [www.ccctspm.org/quanguolianghui/lianghuijianjie.html](http://www.ccctspm.org/quanguolianghui/lianghuijianjie.html)

join, such as ACC, are considered illegal and are suppressed by the government. As TSPM/CCC and ACC are in rivalry with each other, often competing for followers, TSPM/CCC leaders are easily tempted to use secular force to suppress ACC. The government also encourages TSPM/CCC to report on ACC activities which often results in the termination of ACC activities and arrest of ACC members.

The government-recognized religious institutions, such as TSPM/CCC, have a monopoly over their respective religion. Officials of these recognized religious organizations are treated as government officials with special privileges and benefits. They are government-organized non-government organizations and, de facto, an extension of the government apparatus promoting government interests and values. Tension would arise should the government's policy be in conflict with the core value of such a religious group – for example, freedom of promoting religion in public which is prohibited by the authority, or singing atheistic (and patriotic) songs in religious gatherings. These conflicts of interest would further divide TSPM/CCC and ACC as TSPM/CCC would defend and justify the government's interests while ACC would act out of their conscience and might not always oblige with the government's policy.

If an ACC wants to register with the government, it has to be vetted by TSPM/CCC as a genuine Protestant group, and is often urged to join TSPM/CCC. Once an ACC joins the TSPM/CCC, it would lose its autonomy by submitting to the authority of TSPM/CCC. If it refuses to join, it would not have been vetted and could not register. Such government regulation can easily generate more animosity between these two factions as the TSPM/CCC side could use the government's registration as a lever to exert pressure on ACC to submit to its authority. Overall, the government's policy on religion highly favours the TSPM/CCC and, in effect, further widens the gap between TSPM/CCC and ACC.

International Christian groups, mission agencies and denominations often contribute to this inter-ecclesial tension by taking sides with either faction. Since the CCC is a member of the World Council of Churches (WCC), there is a tendency for the national councils of churches and the traditional denominations to relate to TSPM/CCC and often to endorse TSPM/CCC as the sole Christian representation in China, a stance that is often resented by ACC. Evangelical circles often take the side of ACC, especially the many Christian organizations and mission groups that have established ministerial co-operation with ACC in a clandestine manner. Both groups would promote their faction of Chinese Christians which has resulted in a confusing, if not conflicting, impression of the Chinese Christian community in China. The involvement of these overseas Christian groups often strengthen the entrenched positions of either TSPM/CCC or ACC, and brings the battle line of these two groups into

ecumenical circles.<sup>4</sup> The institutional interest of some overseas Christian groups seems to supersede the unity of the Chinese Christian Church.

### Signs of Reconciliation

There has been no specific mention of reconciliation between TSPM/CCC and ACC in either TSPM/CCC or ACC church agendas. It seems that both sides are still bitter and resentful to each other. However, during the past few years, there have been some hopeful signs of reconciliation. One of the most important factors has been the emergence of younger church leaders as the older ones have been gradually passing away. Currently, most TSPM/CCC leaders are in their forties and fifties, whereas ten years ago most of the leaders were in their seventies and even eighties. Similar phenomena can be observed among ACC leadership. Unlike their predecessors, the younger generation has virtually no experience of the bitter rivalry between TSPM and House Church leaders between the 1950s and the late 1970s. They have been brought up, especially in their Christian formation, during the 1980s and 1990s, when attention was focused on the pastoral needs of the rapidly growing church. Therefore, their memories<sup>5</sup> of past resentments between the two factions are not intense, which may give them more freedom to approach their rivals for pragmatic co-operation. The following are some signs of reconciliation.

#### *First: mutual recognition of sacraments*

Some ACCs exist in grey areas: they are neither on the list of TSPM/CCC, even though they have certain pastoral links with TSPM/CCC, nor are they antagonistic to TSPM/CCC; many of them that have come into being in recent years may not necessarily hold resentment vis-à-vis TSPM/CCC. In recent years, a team of TSPM/CCC pastors at a provincial capital told the author that not only did they have to take care of their TSPM/CCC churches and household gathering points, but at times they were called upon by ACCs to provide pastoral assistance, such as at weddings, funerals and baptisms.<sup>6</sup> It is interesting to note that in this region some members of ACC would seek baptism by TSPM/CCC pastors so that when the authority

<sup>4</sup> The Lausanne 2010 Conference is an example of such conflicts. The Conference organizer had first invited ACC to attend and upset the TSPM/CCC. It later invited TSPM/CCC but ACC did not like it. At the end, the Chinese Government, with help from the South African Embassy in China, managed to stop the invitees from leaving China.

<sup>5</sup> Memory is an important element in reconciliation: see "Mission as ministry of reconciliation", Preparatory paper 10, WCC Conference on World Mission and Evangelism, Athens, May 9-16, 2005, sections 42-46.

<sup>6</sup> Personal interview by the author, March 2012. Identity and location have been withheld for security reasons.

checked on them they could claim that they were legitimate TSPM/CCC members. Also, the TSPM/CCC churches would recognize ACC baptism and grant these ACC members TSPM/CCC membership. In such arrangements, ACC members can have weddings and funerals openly conducted in TSPM/CCC facilities. This arrangement implies a mutual recognition of sacraments<sup>7</sup> – an important theological step towards ecclesiastical unity. Such mutual recognition is, at least for now, not officially admitted by either side but is in fact practised in some areas.

*Second: bailing of members from other factions*

Another sign of reconciliation is the open protection extended by some TSPM/CCC members to ACC members. The Rev Joseph Guo Yuse, a prominent leader of Zhejiang Christian Council and the senior pastor of one of the mega-churches in China, has shared one of his experiences. There are many ACCs near Hangzhou (provincial capital of Zhejiang Province) and they often hold large evangelistic rallies. All these rallies are illegal. The government had heard of such a rally and the Public Security Bureau arrested the organizers and checked their backgrounds. They called the Rev Guo Yuse to verify whether these people had been officially sanctioned by TSPM/CCC. If so, they would let these people go; if not, they would be arrested and prosecuted. Hitherto, these ACC leaders had held an antagonistic stance towards TSPM/CCC. The Rev Guo Yuse visited them in the detention centre and told the government that these people were of the same spiritual family as himself and the government released them. The ACC people were deeply touched by the Rev Guo Yuse's help – that he was willing to “stick his neck out” for the ACCs. Eventually they developed a working relationship without submitting to each other, and both sides are aware that their main enemy is not each other but the strong anti-Christian forces within the government and in society.<sup>8</sup>

*Third: alternative ecclesial identity*

The Rev W had been a TSPM/CCC pastor in a certain province.<sup>9</sup> He could not accept the TSPM/CCC's restrictive order on limiting the church's

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<sup>7</sup> *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper 111 (World Council of Churches: 1982); see [www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/faith-and-order-commission/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/baptism-eucharist-and-ministry-faith-and-order-paper-no-111-the-lima-text](http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/faith-and-order-commission/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/baptism-eucharist-and-ministry-faith-and-order-paper-no-111-the-lima-text)

<sup>8</sup> The Revd Guo Yuse made this presentation on the October 19, 2011, at the First Chinese Religious Landscape and Analysis Seminar”, Renmin University, October 19-20, 2011, Beijing.

<sup>9</sup> Personal interview by the author, April 29, 2012. Identity and location have been withheld for security reasons.

practice of evangelism.<sup>10</sup> He and his co-workers, along with many followers, split from TSPM/CCC and formed their own ecclesial supporting network, encompassing both TSPM/CCC and ACC, and now extended to several provinces and running a few training centres to facilitate evangelism, church planting and pastoral training. When they ran training programmes, pastors from both ACC and TSPM/CCC participated. They identify themselves as neither TSPM/CCC nor ACC, but simply call themselves a Uniting Church Network. Also, the government regards them as a distinct group and has been talking with them about independent registration without any requirement to join TSPM/CCC. This new ecclesial identity provides a neutral ground for TSPM/CCC and ACC to co-operate for greater unity in forms of uniting ministry such as in training.

### *Future ministry of reconciliation*

The Christian community in China is one of the fastest-growing Christian groups in contemporary history.<sup>11</sup> Although large in number in absolute terms – estimates range from 23 million up to almost 100 million<sup>12</sup> – it is still a small minority in the context of a population of 1.3 billion. The inter-ecclesial tension has drained a large amount of church resources which otherwise could have been channelled into much-needed development of the church. The wounds and hurts among both factions from the past are gradually disappearing as the younger generation of church leaders is emerging with little memory of such events. The overwhelming pastoral needs of this rapidly growing Christian community makes church leaders adopt a pragmatic approach to ministry and provides more opportunities for co-operation between both factions, leading to improved relations. So long as the respective church leaders have pastoral hearts that place the pastoral needs of the faithful above their own institutional or personal power interests, this pastoral spirit can lead to more ecclesial unity than ecclesial tension.

The government's religious policy of binding religious groups into a unified administrative structure under government supervision runs contrary to Protestant ecclesiology which emphasizes diverse expressions

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<sup>10</sup> Different provincial administrations exercise varying degrees of restriction on religious propagation. This particular province is extremely harsh on Christians, and the leaders of the provincial TSPM/CCC are well known for their zealous imposition of the government's wishes on the church. Many TSPM/CCC churches have split off and formed their own ecclesial communities.

<sup>11</sup> Todd M Johnson and Kenneth R Ross, *Atlas of Global Christianity 1910-2010* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 138-141.

<sup>12</sup> See this research report by Lausanne Global Analysis (July 2011) which summarizes the different estimates, in Rodney Stark, Byron Johnson and Carson Mencken, "Number of Christian in China and India"; see [http://conversation.lausanne.org/en/conversations/detail/11971#article\\_page\\_1](http://conversation.lausanne.org/en/conversations/detail/11971#article_page_1)



and unity in spirit, but not in form. However, such policy can serve as a two-edged sword in reconciliation. On the one hand, it can draw both factions closer together to confront such pressure whilst retaining the diverse ecclesial identities, as in the case of TSPM/CCC being the protective shelter for ACCs. On the other hand, this policy can be a divisive tool to increase conflicts between these two factions by empowering one group to go against another. Therefore the critical factor is a spiritual one: whether or not the Chinese church leaders treasure church unity over their own institutional interests or personal gain.

The Christian community in China has suffered at the hands of various social and political powers, and has been further torn by different factions. It is time for Christians from different factions to build relations with each other and to co-operate for the development of Christian influence in China. The signs of reconciliation begin to surface in various forms. Overseas Christian groups can enhance this process by not taking sides with either faction, but rather helping them to work together. Finally, it is up to Christian leaders to give priority to church unity above their institutional development, a spiritual challenge that is confronting Christian leaders not only in China but Christian leaders everywhere.

China is heading towards the twenty-first century, and faces many structural challenges: rapid urbanization, political reform and liberalization, heightened nationalistic identity, wealth redistribution, more global connections, and the reconfiguration of the geo-political order with China as a great emerging power. The Christian community within this Chinese socio-political milieu will also emerge as a significant force within the global Christian community. Its sheer number of adherents would dwarf many current “Christian” nations; its silent yet powerful witness may suggest a different paradigm of Church growth; its laity-centred ecclesial model challenges our conventional clerical profession; its unique simple form of church activity and worship defines what is basic to our faith; its pilgrimage within a hostile environment reveals the power of the powerless; and its diverse forms of ecclesial expression echo the spirit of Protestantism in its essence. All these ecclesial aspirations can add richness to the global Christian community if unity is realized among Christians in China. The ministry of reconciliation is more important than ever for Christians in China as they witness the healing power of the gospel – not only to transform the torn Chinese Christian community into a unified community of love, but also to serve as a paradigm of social harmony for Chinese society as that society is itself fractured into many groups with opposing interests caused by rapid socio-economic developments. In this way, the ministry of reconciliation can really be a blessing to both the Christian community and, through the faithful, to the nation.

# FROM RECONCILIATION TO ADOPTION: A *TALANOA* FROM OCEANIA

Jione Havea

“‘Oku tangi e tu’a ke tau he to’a  
Kae to’ato’a toe tu’a pe.”<sup>1</sup>  
[Commoner seeks to fight as hero  
heroic yet remains a commoner.]

As a native of Tonga, an island group that James Cook called “Friendly Islands” on his first visit in 1773, the subject of “reconciliation” causes me to pause. If Tongans are friendly, we will not be in any strife and so we would have no need for reconciliation.<sup>2</sup> How then might a Tongan reflect and write on reconciliation if s/he comes from a people seen to have no need for reconciliation? The more i<sup>3</sup> wrestle with this question the stronger i become aware that the people of Tonga have not always been friendly. I come from a people who once were warriors. Our ancestors warred against and stole from our neighbours across the sea, especially in Fiji and Samoa. It was along this line that Hamilton, a surgeon on the ship Pandora, commented (in 1791), “The people of Nomuka [island in Tonga] are the most daring set of robbers in the South Seas and, with the greatest respect and submission to Capt. Cook, I think the name of Friendly Islands is a perfect misnomer.”<sup>4</sup> The natives of James Cook’s Friendly Islands have not always been friendly, so we [their descendants] do need to be reconciling. Reconciliation has in fact been happening for several generations, but reconciliation is something that can never be complete. Herein is the driving question for this reflection: Is reconciliation enough?

I come from among a people who, also, seem unwilling to break from the caste-like barriers in our communities. Our cultures suppress the

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<sup>1</sup> Lines from *Ko e Havea: Makasini a Koliji 2* (1875): 54, 59, 95 cited in Edward Winslow Gifford, *Tongan Place Names* (Honolulu: Bishop Museum, 1923), 16.

<sup>2</sup> There are exceptions, of course. My “we” is therefore a cautious generalization.

<sup>3</sup> I prefer the lower case “i” because i use the lower case with “you”, “she”, “they”, and “others”. I do not see the point in capitalizing the first person when s/he is because of everyone else.

<sup>4</sup> Cited in Kalafi Moala, *In Search of the Friendly Islands* (Auckland: Pacific Media Centre, Auckland University of Technology and Honolulu: Pasifika Foundation Press, 2009), 19.

so-called commoners, the ordinary people (*tu'a*),<sup>5</sup> or in the talk of modern days, the subalterns. Even as a hero, a commoner lives and dies as an underling. The people of the Friendly Islands are not all free from the bonds of our own culture and traditions, and this too influences how we understand and do reconciliation. Reconciliation is necessary for our relationships with our neighbours, and among ourselves as well.

Reconciliation is crucial for the upkeep of relational cultures, like the ones in Oceania (Pacific Islands, Aotearoa/New Zealand and Australia). This is not because relational cultures are prone to strife, or because the peoples of Oceania cannot cope with tensions, but because reconciliation is one of the strands woven into our ways of living. Reconciliation is not a process undertaken in order to resolve conflicts, violent or otherwise, but part of the way we live. This is evident in our languages and in our attitudes to time. This short reflection thus affirms that a lot of what makes culture has to do with language and the rhythms of living.

In this essay, i engage two manifestations of reconciliation: first, what i call culture of *tulou*; and second, islanders' attitudes to time (or more appropriately, "island time"). I will draw from my Tongan experience, which is part of, but not all there is to, the rich island cultures of Oceania.

I will argue that reconciliation is not enough for the people of Oceania. As a migrant to Australia who commits to the interests of First Peoples (Aborigines), i propose a shift from reconciliation (which is already on the agenda) to theologies of adoption (which is what Second Peoples can learn from First Peoples). I call for such a shift, but i cannot fully address what that might involve in a short essay like this one. This essay is therefore a *call for more than* reconciliation.

## Tulou

One of the words shared across several language groups in Oceania is *tulou*, a word one says before interrupting or infringing into the presence of another. I say *tulou* before i walk past (in front of or behind), before i reach across the presence of, and before i address a sensitive subject with another person/s. I say *tulou* out of respect to the other person/s, and in acknowledgement of my desire to remain in some kind of genial relationship with s/he (them) even after the infringement i am about to commit.

*Tulou* is similar to the English expressions "Pardon me" and "Excuse me", but it is more than simply *asking for permission*. When i say *tulou*, i *demand reconciliation (acceptance) prior to doing what i know will wrong the other/s*. With *tulou*, one respectfully transgresses other/s. *Tulou* does not neutralize the transgression but it makes one an acceptable transgressor

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<sup>5</sup> See Nāsili Vaka'uta, *Reading Ezra 9-10 Tu'a-wise: Rethinking Biblical Interpretation in Oceania*, IVBS 3 (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2011), esp. 5-20.

and it is seen as an act of reconciliation. In this way, reconciliation is not what i do *afterward* to compensate for a wrong i have committed, but what i do *beforehand* in order to maintain relationship in spite of the wrong i am about to commit. This is a different manner of thinking: reconciliation happens before, rather than after, the wrong. *Tulou* transforms reconciliation into an act of forgiving. More appropriately, reconciliation is an act of *fore-giving*, for it precedes one committing the wrong.

Knowing when to say *tulou* indicates someone who is respectful. To have respect for others is not about being polite and, from an islander perspective, this is an important distinction to make. This helps explain how James Cook misunderstood our ancestors, taking their respectfulness as if they were polite, and so he saw them as friendly, whereas their respectfulness had nothing to do with being pleasant. *Tulou* permits one to wrong another, respectfully. *Tulou* does not remove the wrongness of the wrongdoing, but reconciles the wrongdoer in advance. It is the island version of the R-E-S-P-E-C-T for which the queens of soul (Aretha Franklin et al) sing.

Outsiders who learn our languages often get the impression that we are a polite people, in part because almost every other sentence will include *tulou* types of expressions, which they take to mean “sorry” and “please”. Their perception is based on the assumption that in saying “sorry” or “please” one is *seeking permission*. That is part of the picture. But *tulou* is more than that. In saying *tulou* one also demands a priori reconciliation.

This is not to say that rituals of reconciliation do not take place after hurtful circumstances. Tongans have a ritual called *Hū lou-ifi*, which is when people who have broken a *tapu* (taboo) or committed some offence seek pardon from the king. The ritual involves wearing garlands made with the leaves of *ifi* tree (Polynesian or Tahitian chestnut) and coming with a presentation of *kava* and an apology to the king. In the apology, they admit to the wrong committed (like murdering an attendant of the queen in the 1950s, and torching one of the king’s estates in 2005) and accept the burden. Between common people, the ritual of reconciliation is not as elaborate. Presentation of *kava* and apology is necessary, but garlands of *ifi* leaves are not required. There is no special name for the ritual between commoners, but it too is more an act of repentance and of accepting responsibility than of restitution.

In the culture of *tulou*, reconciliation signifies something complex. It precedes the offence, and afterwards it is a ritual of repentance and of accepting responsibility (burden). Whether before or after, reconciliation is about upholding (rather than about compensating for) relationships.

### Chilling time

In general, islanders are laid back, sometimes so relaxed that some non-islanders might see us as lazy people. We are easy-going, living out the

“no worries” philosophy of *hakuna matata* (in *The Lion King*). We live in the ebbs and flows of island currents. There is no pressure to rush. We enjoy “spending time”, but others might see us as simply “wasting time”. To us, time is fluid and elastic rather than pre-set and rigid.<sup>6</sup> We “chill” (live and work in relaxed and relaxing manners) in ways that suggest that time “chills” (freezes, stops) also. We spend time, but time does not spend us.

Islanders’ understanding of time chills, even though our context is warm. The tides arrive and return according to the pulls of the currents, and we observe the seasons for planting and harvesting, on land and in the sea, closely. Most happenings of island life revolve around high and low tides, and in tune with the lunar cycles. No action by the islanders could cause delay to those, and we are timely in our responses to the motions of nature. This is to say that the chilling of time that I address here has to do with people rather than with nature. Put another way, time chills not because of our context but because of who we are. The counter-argument is also true. We chill because of our context, in which time chills.

A hidden dimension of viewing time as flexible is the strong (communalist rather than individualist) concerns of island people. We do not rush because we prefer everyone to be present, on the ground, there, before we decide, act and/or move.<sup>7</sup> The one who is usually late, like a bride on her wedding day, shows that the happening is not complete without her/his presence. We delay things because we want the presence of all who need to be present (there are not too many people on an island, and everyone counts), for to rush without their presence is to insult the relational make-up of our communities (cf Havea, 2003:159-60). The [default] option to delay makes time a hidden component of relationships, which in return manifest time. We measure time according to relationships, and we manage relationships according to our keeping of time. In this regard, time is divine-like. It is present and hidden, relational and temporal, experienced yet beyond control. These aspects make time “chilling” in another (scary) sense.

Islanders live as if we have all the time in the world, but we do not. We too live with the illusion that time is on our side, whereas time is elusive, fleeting, and unfinished. Time does not finish. Rather, time continues and extends. In this regard, time is like reconciliation. Both are ongoing, because neither can be completed. No act of reconciliation can fully satisfy.

Whereas *tulou* anticipates transgression, “chilling time” is in order to avoid offending relationships.<sup>8</sup> Both are pre-emptive, and both come under the shadows of reconciliation. As such, the ideas about reconciliation need

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<sup>6</sup> Many a time, conceiving time as flexible is an excuse for being late.

<sup>7</sup> We are not too different from the people in the wilderness, who waited for Miriam to return before they proceeded on their journey (Num 12:15-16).

<sup>8</sup> There is always the chance that in avoiding the offending of particular people, many others are insulted.

to be reconsidered, to be reconciled, so that those become, so to speak, islandized. That will require acts of reconciliation to be timely.

Islanders' attitude toward time is a reminder that reconciliation has more to do with relationships than with theories. Reconciliation is more to do with keeping relationships than with mending broken ones; it is anticipatory also and not just reactive. Reconciliation is in these regards chilling also.

### Talanoa

One of our chilling practices is *talanoa* (see Havea, 2010). This word, used in many of the native languages of south-western Oceania, has three meanings: story, telling, conversation. *Talanoa* is three in one. There is no story without telling, and telling (as in “telling off”)<sup>9</sup> is offensive without conversation, which happens because of stories and tellers. Obviously, *talanoa* involves spending time.

*Talanoa* is an active ingredient in island relationships, and in happenings that have the vibes of reconciliation. This reflection on, reconsideration and islandizing of, reconciliation needs *talanoa*. Unfortunately, because of the linear nature of the writing and publishing process, i can only share story (*talanoa*) and telling (*talanoa*) in this essay but i welcome conversation (*talanoa*) when opportunities manifest.<sup>10</sup>

As in most cases, this *talanoa* is a recollection. This *talanoa* is my telling (*talanoa*) about conversations (*talanoa*) after i presented “Natives, in transit” at “Story weaving: Colonial contexts and post-colonial theologies” conference at Whitley College, Melbourne (January 25, 2012). One of the arguments i made in that presentation (*talanoa*) is that the natives of Oceania, daughters and sons of voyaging ancestors, are not indigenous to the islands we call homeland. Our ancestors came from mythic lands. On our home islands, therefore, we the natives are people in transit.

After my presentation, a Samoan artist, Maryann Talia Pau, commented that she could design a T-shirt with the word NiT (for “Natives in Transit”). The design may never appear on fabric, but there is something empowering about someone thinking that it is feasible to wear an outfit showing that one is transitory, that one is not indigenous, that one is not fixed and unmoving.

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<sup>9</sup> I recently experienced this when the General Secretary (a white man) of the Synod where i work told me off (May 16, 2012) in the Atrium of the building where my office is located, in the hearing of some colleagues, and i was simply fulfilling my duties as Faculty Secretary. To be told off by a holder of authority, even if he is an ordained minister of the church, is offensive in *talanoa* circles.

<sup>10</sup> Links may easily be made between *talanoa* with narrative criticism and narrative theology, or with story-telling, but i cannot explore those in detail in this short reflection.

In a world where there is much struggle to belong and many claims of right and ownership, proud NiTs are there also.

At lunch that afternoon, Maratja Dhamarandji, an Aborigine from further north, who came with another elder to listen to my presentation instead of going to the talking circle session designed for Aborigines, asked if anyone had spoken to me about being adopted. Not knowing what was involved, i inquired further. Maratja explained that i needed to come to his home so that his wife can “suss” (examine, check) me out, then name me according to the way i walk, sit, talk, etc. “My wife is real good at sussing people out,” he explained. His question caught me by surprise, and it was only later that i saw the connection. To this Aborigine, someone who is proud of being a NiT is ready for adoption.

### Adoption

When i moved to Australia in August 2000, i was impressed with the amount of attention given to the subject of reconciliation in relation to the Aborigines, the First People of the land. People in politics, schools, churches and private domains were talking and writing about the need for reconciliation in Australia. One of the highlights of this important process is the “sorry” speech that Former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd delivered to Parliament on February 13, 2008.<sup>11</sup> Saying sorry is a necessary step on the path of reconciliation. But to say sorry without the spirit of tulou can be damaging. Something is lacking from the attention to reconciliation if saying sorry does not lead from repentance, and if attitudes, values and conducts, remain unchanged. Reconciliation requires accepting that one has been wrong, and transforming one’s heart and modes of operating. A question thus arises: Reconciliation, in whose interests?

The *talanoa* with Maryann and Maratja convinces me that theologies of apologies and of reconciliation are not all that Second Peoples need for our work on mending relationships with Aborigines. Reconciliation is not enough. We need theologies of adoption as well. It would help in this regard to submit ourselves to be sussed out by First Peoples, and to be made vulnerable by the chance that we can’t be forgiven and that we are not worthy of adoption. Whereas theologies of reconciliation are driven by the “white guilt” (cf Maddison, 2011: xv-xxi and xxxii-xlii) of the dominant society, theologies of adoption need to attend to the voices and interests of Aborigines. (What such theologies might look like is a task for another opportunity.)

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<sup>11</sup> The script of the speech is posted at [www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/02/13/1202760379056.html](http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/02/13/1202760379056.html) accessed May 20, 2012. A forthcoming book edited by Stephen Burns, Sef Carroll and Jione Havea, *Out of touch: The unfinished business of theology in Australia* (Palgrave), engages with this speech and other matters in relation to Australia’s First People.

Being an islander who migrated to Australia as a religious worker, I am interested in the prospect of theologies of adoption, for personal reasons. Such theologies will benefit NiTs like me! As the number of political refugees (so-called boat people) increases on the borders of Australia, and in anticipation of the impending movement of ecological refugees (especially from the lower-lying islands of Oceania), theologies of adoption will enable non-indigenous people to experience the blessings of what it means to belong. The gift of this is the chance for “latecomers” to become locals, without the need to be indigenous. The upshot of this, apparently, is that migrants (forced or by choice) and settlers will continually be reminded that we are “outsiders” to where we are. Theologies of adoption will therefore enable as well as de-stabilise belonging.

Apology, together with reconciliation, is owed to the stolen generations of Australia and beyond, and to the descendants of slaves and blackbirds, but those on their own are not enough. Adoption is also needed. To move towards adoption is a critical and responsible one step as far as Maratja, a blackfella, is concerned. This move requires that we interrogate the senses of adoption.

Adoption is usually associated with poverty and negligence. A common scenario is that a well-off benefactor adopts an orphan or child of poverty in order to save that vulnerable child from the jaws of despair. The attention given to orphans and widows in the bible (e.g. Ex 22:22, Deut 10:18; Psalm 10:14, 17-18) indicates that the argument given here, which favours a practice among Aborigines, is not strange to biblical cultures. The one who adopts is generous with her/his wealth; the one whom s/he adopts is desperate. In Maratja’s scenario, the key factor is not wealth but the qualities that the one who adopts sees in s/he who is adopted. It is not the desperation of the adopted, but her/his characteristics and how those are points for ongoing *talanoa*.



# TRIBAL CONFLICTS IN INDIA: THE CASE OF THE FORUM FOR NAGA RECONCILIATION

Kethoser (Aniu) Kevichusa

## Introduction

For over six decades, the Nagas have been embroiled in one of the world's longest, but least-known, violent conflicts. The Naga conflict originally began as a struggle for Naga independence, and initially displayed remarkable solidarity founded upon romantic idealism. It has, however, long since degenerated into a cycle of factional and inter-tribal feuds that has caught Naga society in a vortex of hatred, violence, and vengeance.<sup>1</sup> The Naga conflict(s) is also a classic case of tribal conflicts in India – conflicts that are drawn not simply along inter- or intra-tribal divides, but also along an array of deep-seated fault lines, and set around a conglomeration of extremely complicated issues. A distinct, if ironic, feature of the Naga conflict is the predominantly “Christian” context of Nagaland, where about 90% of the population are Christians, predominantly Baptists.

In recent years, however, “reconciliation” has come to be a significant concept and mainstay in the Naga political discourse and in the search for a resolution to the conflict. It has also captured the Naga imagination. This has happened primarily, though not solely, through the work of the “Forum for Naga Reconciliation” (FNR). In this chapter, I want focus on the work of FNR, in the hope that some helpful insights on reconciliation might thereby be gleaned, both for further theoretical explorations and practical appropriations elsewhere.

## The Naga Story: A Sketch

The Nagas are a hill people consisting of several tribes,<sup>2</sup> contiguously spread over India's north-eastern states of Nagaland, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, and parts of north-western Myanmar. While the Naga

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<sup>1</sup> This is *not* to say that there were no inter-tribal feuds before this; Nagas have traditionally been a feuding race.

<sup>2</sup> While there are sixteen officially recognised Naga tribes in the State of Nagaland, the actual number of Naga tribes spread across India and Myanmar is considerably higher. Because of the ill-defined umbrella term “Naga”, estimates of the number of Naga tribes range anywhere between 30 and 100.

story goes back many years, for the present purposes, August 14, 1947, the eve of the Indian independence, may be taken as a starting point. On this day, following the collapse of political negotiations with the incoming Government of India (GOI) regarding the future of the Nagas, the Naga National Council (NNC), the founding institution of the Naga nationalist movement, declared independence.

The GOI ignored the declaration. In response, the Nagas launched a campaign of civil non-co-operation. In 1955, Indian troops moved into the Naga areas and the NNC went “underground” and formed a “government” that came to be called the Federal Government of Nagaland (FGN) with its own “Naga army”. From what initially began as opportunistic guerrilla warfare between one of the world’s largest standing armies and a rag-tag band of guerrillas drawing their sustenance from public support, the conflict soon flared up and caught the whole Naga civilian population in its wake.

In 1963, as a pragmatic, if somewhat duplicitous, tactic of the GOI and certain Naga “underground” leaders, the state of Nagaland<sup>3</sup> was formed within the Union of India. Another major political development took place in 1975 when a treaty, the Shillong Accord, was signed between certain members of the underground and the GOI. The Accord included the unconditional acceptance of the Constitution of India. These developments confused the Naga public and fractured the Naga nationalist movement. In 1980, some key nationalist leaders broke away from the NNC and formed the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN).<sup>4</sup> In 1988, the NSCN further split into two groups. Following further fissures in the various groups, there are, in addition to the state government of Nagaland that functions under the purview of the Indian constitution, at least five major nationalist factions,<sup>5</sup> divided along ideological and tribal lines, each running its own parallel “government”. As a result, abductions, targeted killings of political enemies, rampant extortion, and all-out factional “showdowns” among these different armed groups have become common features in Nagaland today.

As mentioned earlier, Nagaland is also a predominantly Christian context. “Christianity” in Nagaland is not merely a set of private beliefs; it contributes significantly to the way Nagas interpret and respond to the world. The predominance of Christianity in Nagaland has important implications politically. The Naga nationalists often baptise their political aspirations and agendas in religious faith and language. For example, a

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<sup>3</sup> The present State of Nagaland covers approximately 16,500 square kilometres with a population of about two million. However, the Naga nationalist claim is that the actual Naga-inhabited area – “Greater Nagaland” or “Nagalim”, as they call it – is considerably larger.

<sup>4</sup> The NSCN now use “Nagalim” instead of “Nagaland”.

<sup>5</sup> The nationalist factions are also often called “political groups”. Here I use the terms interchangeably.

popular nationalist slogan and motto is “Nagaland for Christ”. The predominance of Christianity also means that its resources can be crucially tapped into in the search for peace and reconciliation. It was, for instance, the Peace Mission of the Nagaland Baptist Church Council (NBCC) that brokered the 1964 Cease Fire Agreement between the GOI and the FGN.

### The Forum for Naga Reconciliation

After decades of being caught in an endless spiral of violence and a seemingly hopeless stalemate, in February 2008 a full-time Christian prayer group known as Shisha Hoho called for a three-day Naga peace convention at Dimapur, the main commercial city of Nagaland. Very few responded to the call of the group and the convention was scantily attended. Nevertheless, during the convention, the idea of forming some kind of Naga forum for peace was floated. The Forum for Naga Reconciliation (FNR) was thus born on March 25, 2008. Four years on, it is widely acknowledged that FNR has had considerable success in drastically reducing violence, bringing about a semblance of social and political normalcy, and fostering a genuine sense of hope for Naga reconciliation. This is acknowledged from all quarters – the factions, civil society groups, tribal groups, church, mass media, the Nagaland government, the Indian government, and international agencies. During the four years of its existence, FNR has been able to persuade most of the major factions to engage in dialogue and negotiation aimed at reconciliation. One of the major outcomes of these engagements was the so-called “Covenant of Reconciliation”, jointly signed on June 13, 2009, by the leaders of three major factions. Part of the Covenant reads:

“Having been deeply convicted by God’s call in Christ, and the voice of the Naga people, we hereby solemnly commit before God to offer ourselves to Naga Reconciliation and Forgiveness based on the Historical and Political Rights of the Nagas. We resolve to continue to work together in this spirit of love, non-violence, peace and respect to resolve outstanding issues amongst us.”<sup>6</sup>

In September 2009, again under the aegis of FNR, the three major factions, made a declaration pledging “to cease all forms of offensive activities *in toto*”.<sup>7</sup> While there have been skirmishes every now and again, precariously threatening the fragile peace, the cease-fire among the groups has, on the whole, held out. On February 29, 2012, a major public gathering

<sup>6</sup> Wati Aier, “Naga Reconciliation: A Journey of Common Hope” (speech by the Rev. Dr Wati Aier, Convenor, FNR, during a public rally in Dimapur on March 6, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> The Telegraph Bureau, “Boost to Naga Reconciliation – Isak-Muivah, Khaplang and Fgn’s “Commitment” Breathes Life into Unity Drive”, *The Telegraph*, September 26, 2009.

– attended (according to some estimates) by about 50,000 people – passed a number of resolutions supporting the ongoing reconciliation process.<sup>8</sup>

Given the fact that previous Naga reconciliation initiatives had invariably proven to be either false starts or non-starters, the success of FNR is somewhat surprising. The question is: What are the reasons for FNR's success? In what follows, I want to outline some of the reasons for this, simultaneously highlighting some of its salient practices.<sup>9</sup>

After over sixty years of conflict, it can be said that Nagas – both the nationalists and the populace – are suffering from attrition and conflict fatigue. According to Naga Catholic priest and scholar, Fr Abraham Lotha, “There is a general feeling that we cannot afford to stay just like this and continue fighting or killing each other ... There is a general mood that we have to move on ... There is a certain level of impatience, especially with the undergrounds killing each other and even killing civilians.”<sup>10</sup> Related to this is the general realisation among the different factions that no one group is going to have a decisive victory over the others, and that any decisive victory, if ever, would merely be Pyrrhic. This has created the space for the language and relevance of forgiveness and reconciliation, which FNR has filled.

Conscious of the prevailing general mood, FNR has also sought to be as broad-based as possible. The Forum consists of representatives from various frontal organisations: Naga Hoho, Eastern Naga Peoples' Organisation (ENPO), Naga Students' Federation (NSF), Eastern Naga Students' Federation (ENSF), United Naga Council, Manipur (UNC), Naga Mothers' Association (NMA), Naga People's Movement for Human Rights (NPMHR), All Naga Students' Association, Manipur (ANSAM), Naga Women's Union, Manipur (NWUM), and church leaders. FNR has not only sought to bring all the various fighting factions into the reconciliation process, but has also included various tribal organisations, church bodies (such as the Nagaland Baptist Church Council, the Council of Naga Baptist Churches, the Catholic Church, and the Nagaland Christian Forum), and civil society groups in this process, both as facilitators and as observers. While FNR itself has no shortfall of well-qualified members, it has also taken soundings from the larger Naga intelligentsia. The Forum's continual updates on the state of the process and its appeals for public support through public consultations and mass media campaigns have also made it a mass movement.

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<sup>8</sup> Forum for Naga Reconciliation, “Naga Reconciliation Meeting: February 29, 2012, Dimapur, Nagaland” (Dimapur: Forum for Naga Reconciliation, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> I give a more detailed account and critique (and criticisms!) of FNR in my still-in-progress PhD thesis. The criticisms offered there do not, however, detract from FNR's overall achievements thus far, or undercut the comments made here.

<sup>10</sup> Abraham Lotha, “Personal Interview with Fr Abraham Lotha (December 23, 2009)”, (Kohima, 2009).

Besides being broad-based, FNR has also been resolute and relentless in its work. One of the reasons why reconciliation processes in Nagaland in the past have not been successful has to do with the fact that they have invariably been in fits and starts. Reconciliation work in the past was more short-termed and event-orientated than long-termed and process-orientated. Self-labelling the reconciliation project “A Journey of Common Hope”, FNR has now completed four years of sustained effort and engagement. Between March 2008 and February 2012, FNR facilitated or conducted six public gatherings (with up to 49 different groups represented in the gatherings and an estimated 50,000 people attending the largest gathering); 94 face-to-face meetings of the various faction leaders (these meetings were held both in Nagaland and in foreign countries); twelve face-to-face meetings of the highest-level faction leaders; eleven special events and programmes; and 278 meetings between FNR members and individual factions. These figures demonstrate the sheer relentlessness of FNR, and are all the more remarkable when one recognises that all the FNR members are voluntary workers, with no financial or material incentives whatsoever for their efforts.

The active support of international sympathisers has also been a factor in the success of FNR. Unlike many other long-running conflicts (such as, say, the Northern Ireland conflict) in the past, the Naga problem lacked the presence and effort of powerful international actors – whether third party nations, civil society groups, or influential personalities – to resolve the conflict. Apart from the Peace Mission of the 1960s and the one-off 1997 Atlanta peace convention under the aegis of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), there has been very little support from outside for Naga peace. This time, however, the consistent and sustained support and sponsorship of international groups, such as the American Baptists and the English Quakers, have proved invaluable for the reconciliation process. There have also been public letters of support for FNR from Nobel Peace laureates such as ex-President Jimmy Carter and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. The BWA not only passed an official resolution supporting the work of FNR, but also gave the FNR Convenor, the Rev. Dr Wati Aier, its prestigious BWA Denton and Janice Lotz Human Rights Award in 2011. Such international support, endorsement and appeal, coming from notable figures and institutions, have undoubtedly lent gravitas to FNR and its work, inclining the factions and the Naga populace also to take it seriously.

The leadership and personality of Wati Aier, the Convenor of FNR, is another important factor in FNR's success. According to Fr Abraham Lotha, there are a number of reasons why the personality of Wati is extremely important.<sup>11</sup> First of all, his independence and neutrality: “Dr Wati,” Lotha says, “is not associated with any of these groups and so he has no allegiance to them ... There is no question of his having to compromise

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<sup>11</sup> Lotha, “Personal Interview with Fr Abraham Lotha (December 23, 2009)”.

something, because he is not a stooge of, say, the NSCN-IM or NSCN-K.<sup>12</sup> So he is quite independent ... So the groups can trust him.” Second, with two earned doctorates, Aier also comes with intellectual and academic credentials. Since Wati is, according to Lotha, “quite well-spoken, articulate, and intelligent, so they think, ‘Here is somebody who is intelligent enough to understand, that you can also depend on.’ He has that respect. At least people know that he is not dumb.” Third, Wati also has strong religious credentials. Again, Lotha says:

“When people like him speak, it is not just from a secular perspective. He is also bringing in the Christian perspective ... Nagas always say, ‘Nagaland for Christ’, ‘We are Christians, we are Christians’, and here comes somebody who does not just claim he is a Christian, but is also a reverend; he also runs a theological seminary. So he must know what he is talking about. So they do respect him and that respect has gone a long way.”

Although Aier and many of his colleagues at FNR are qualified intellectuals, their approach has not been merely theoretical or academic. A unique feature of FNR is its employment of unconventional and untypical methods in going about the reconciliation process. FNR has so far organised twelve so-called “special programmes”; these events include football matches, special church services, joint social work and joint food and relief distribution. During one of the FNR meetings in Chiang Mai, Thailand, the idea of having a football match among the various groups came up. Since then, there have been more football matches in Nagaland. According to human rights activist and FNR member Neingulo Krome, the first football match in Chiang Mai “loosened” the participants involved in the talks: “From the third day [the day after the football match], you could see that the spirit, the whole atmosphere of the political talks was in a positive direction.”<sup>13</sup> The football matches also helped to make reconciliation more tangible to the participants. According to one of the facilitators, Daniel Buttry,<sup>14</sup> “All the factional representatives were on one side, all the tribal leaders on the other, with civil society folks mixed between the two teams. Even before half-time, participants were excited at how being on the same team, working for the same goal, made reconciliation tangible.”<sup>15</sup> The football matches in Nagaland, because they

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<sup>12</sup> Two factions of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland, an extremist organization advocating independence for Nagas living in India and Burma. (eds.)

<sup>13</sup> Neingulo Krome, “FNR: The Present Reconciliation Process (talk given at the Peace Capacity Building Training organised by NBCC, October 29-31, 2009)”, (Youth Oasis Centre, Dimapur, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Daniel Buttry is the Global Consultant for Peace and Justice in the International Ministries of the American Baptist Churches, and has also worked closely with the Naga reconciliation process.

<sup>15</sup> Daniel Buttry, “Naga Covenant of Reconciliation Signed”, *Dan’s Interactive Passport* <<http://dbuttry.blogspot.co.uk/2009/07/naga-covenant-of-reconciliation-signed.html>>2012 accessed on April 30, 2012.

were open to the general public, also helped in drawing the public into the reconciliation process. During one of the football match events, a choir consisting of children of those killed in the factional fights presented a special song, and a number of victim-widows presented bouquets to the players. In December 2009, FNR also organised an Advent Christmas service for all the different factions. During the service, faction leaders gave Christmas greetings, the factions' paramilitary cadres presented special songs and skits, and Christmas gifts were exchanged. FNR has also organised a few joint "social work" projects under the theme "Turning Swords into Ploughshares". On one occasion, faction cadres cleaned and beautified the Dimapur City Clock Tower. According to a news report:

"Sporting camouflage and white T-shirts with the words 'Reconciliation' inscribed on them, the cadres didn't wield guns this time but brushes and paint cans, to set an example of 'turning swords into ploughshares'. The agile cadres scaled the upper reaches of the tower and hoisted the white 'Reconciliation flag' on the pinnacle of the tower."<sup>16</sup>

If it has been unconventional in its practices, FNR has also been unabashed in its Christian basis and rhetoric. FNR is not sheepish about infusing its rhetoric and activities with explicitly Christian terms, symbols, and metaphors. It has often used church premises for its meetings, and their meetings are always punctuated with Christian devotions, hymns and prayers. During the football matches in Nagaland, the different groups rallied under a massive cross, held hands, and prayed together. The religious element also plays a significant part in all its closed-door deliberations. According to Krome:

"One of the significant things about the Chiang Mai<sup>17</sup> processes has been that every meeting would start with a morning devotion and every meeting would end with another devotion in the evening ... All the factions come and take part in these devotions. This has been one of the guiding principles of the Chiang Mai processes. I think this has helped the reconciliation process in more than one way."<sup>18</sup>

FNR's basis for Naga reconciliation has, however, not just been religious; it has also been resolutely political. Again and again, FNR emphasises the point that the basis of Naga reconciliation is "The Historical and Political Rights of the Nagas". At first blush, this basis of reconciliation appears curious: for, historically, it is the struggle for these so-called "historical and political rights" that is at the root of the Naga imbroglio, both at the Indo-Naga level, the inter-Naga-and-their-neighbours

<sup>16</sup> Morung Express News, "Naga Groups Affirm Unity, Shared Future", *The Morung Express*, December 17, 2009.

<sup>17</sup> Most of the FNR-facilitated inter-factional meetings abroad were held in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

<sup>18</sup> Neingulo Krome, "FNR: The Present Reconciliation Process (talk given at the Peace Capacity Building Training organised by NBCC, October 29-31, 2009)", (Youth Oasis Centre, Dimapur, 2009)".

level, and the intra-Naga level. It thus seems incongruous that this could be the basis of both conflict and of reconciliation. On further thought, however, it is not surprising that this basis has served as the rallying point for Naga reconciliation: for, rhetorically at least, all the Naga nationalist groups, without exception, claim to be fighting for what is perceived as the Naga right to independence. And apart from this clear basis, it is very unlikely that the different political groups would have agreed, as they did, to be part of the reconciliation process. This basis serves as a sort of guarantee that the Naga nationalist struggle will not be sacrificed on the altar of reconciliation. This basis of reconciliation is also, paradoxically, as vague as it is clear. It gives enough space for different interpretations as to what the historical and political rights of Nagas might actually be – from full independence from India, to “shared-sovereignty” with India, to greater autonomy within India, to the integration of all Naga-inhabited areas, to mere acknowledgement of Naga “uniqueness”, and so on.

For Nagas, reconciliation is an idea whose time has come. The formation of FNR was thus timely and providential. The Forum has given the Naga people a renewed sense of hope and Nagaland a modicum of normalcy. There is, of course, no gainsaying that the FNR journey has been arduous, and that there are still many sections of Naga society that remain doubtful of the process. The number of serious questions that remain unanswered is also as great as the number of sceptics who remain unconvinced. Indeed, some of the most contentious historical, political, geographical, racial and tribal issues that are at the heart of the Naga conflict remain unresolved. But the journey of Naga reconciliation has truly begun. Even if it does not reach its destination, for many, it is quite enough so long as the journey does not end.



# CONSPIRACY, TRUST AND HEALTHY SCEPTICISM: THE RECONCILING CHURCH IN HONG KONG POLITICS

Lap Yan Kung

Since the Chinese government resumed sovereignty over Hong Kong in 1997, both the Chinese government and the people of Hong Kong have been searching for the equilibrium of “one country, two systems”. The Chinese government is concerned more about how the focus on one country in the idea of “one country, two systems” is echoed in Hong Kong, while the people of Hong Kong focus on how the two systems implied in “one country, two systems” are respected. This basic difference can be a creative tension, provided that there are an appropriate political structure and a certain extent of trust between them.<sup>1</sup> An appropriate political structure is not only a matter of proceduralism as suggested by Jürgen Habermas,<sup>2</sup> but it is also a platform where people can work together pursuing the common good recommended by Alasdair McIntyre.<sup>3</sup> In addition, trust among people is the most basic feature of a community that can soften the conflict caused by difference and disagreement. Nevertheless, neither the current political structure nor the social capital in Hong Kong enhance social cohesion;<sup>4</sup> ironically, there is an emergence of conspiracy belief that seriously deteriorates the social co-operation. The purpose of this chapter is to analyse and examine the emergence of conspiracy belief and its effects on Hong Kong, and to reflect on the Christian role of reconciliation in Hong Kong politics (2 Cor 5:18-20). The significance of the church does not lie in its cultural and political power, but in the fact that the church is called to

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<sup>1</sup> Lap Yan Kung, “Politics and Religions in Hong Kong after 1997: Whether Tension or Equilibrium is Needed”, *Religion, State and Society*, 32 (2004):1, 21-36.

<sup>2</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action Vols. 1 & 2* (Boston, MS: Beacon, 1984, 1987).

<sup>3</sup> Alasdair McIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

<sup>4</sup> JWC Chan and E Chan, “Charting the State of Social Cohesion in Hong Kong”, *The China Quarterly*, 187 (2006), 635-58; Simon TM Chan, et al, “One Country, Two Cities: A Comparison of Perceived Cohesion in Guangzhou and Hong Kong”, in Mok Ka Ho and Ku Yuen Wen (eds), *Social Cohesion in Greater China* (London: World Scientific, 2010), 121-45.

the ministry of reconciliation. I am not so naïve to believe that the political world can be converted to be a world of trust and love, but I am convinced that a healthy scepticism in the political world could be and should be achieved.

### The Emergency of Conspiracy Belief

“One country, two systems” suggested by Deng Xiaoping (1904-97) is undoubtedly an innovative attempt to solve the dilemma between the China Mainland and Hong Kong due to their different political ideologies, socialism and capitalism. It originally was a politics of co-existence, but in reality, the implementation of “one country, two systems” has been far from satisfactory. On the one hand, the Chinese government is not satisfied with the growing Hong Kong consciousness, for this is interpreted as a sign of distancing Hong Kong from “one country”. On the other hand, there is an increasing protest in Hong Kong against the various ways of intervention of the Chinese government in Hong Kong’s socio-political life, for this damages the distinctiveness of “two systems”. Humorously enough, the leading travel book Lonely Planet features protests in Hong Kong as one of the tourist sights. My concern is whether their suspicions of one another as intrinsic to “one country, two systems” can be relatively healthily developed.

The first dilemma of “one country, two systems” is how “one country” is understood. The characteristic of Chinese politics is the Party State, but this is not shared by the people of Hong Kong. The people of Hong Kong do not find that there is a conflict between loving their country and disliking the communist government. In fact, the separation between the government and the nation is very common in democratic societies, for the government is always changing, but this is unacceptable in the logic of the Chinese government. The Party State considers that the fate of the Chinese Communist Party and the nation are identical. In order to legitimize its rule and consolidate different peoples, the Chinese government has developed and propagandized an ideology of patriotism as a kind of civil religion.<sup>5</sup> Within the discourse of patriotism, the interest and power of the Chinese communist government are legally protected, and those who protest against the Chinese government are against the interest of the nation.

The second dilemma of “one country, two systems” is how “two systems” are understood, interacted and sustained. The core issue is no longer a matter of ideological difference, namely, socialism and capitalism, but a matter of self-autonomy. Hong Kong is a Special Administrative Region and enjoys a high degree of self-autonomy guaranteed in the Basic

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<sup>5</sup> Gregory P Fairbrother, *Toward Critical Patriotism: Student Resistance to Political Education in Hong Kong and China* (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong Press, 2003), 53-74.

Law, but the Chinese government is hesitant to respect it. On the contrary, the Chinese government negatively interprets the request of the people of Hong Kong for democracy as either an attempt to be independent from China or a revolutionary view against the Chinese government. Due to the fact that the Chinese government is in a crisis of political legitimacy caused by its authoritarianism, any demand to have a high degree of self-autonomy for a region would easily be considered as separatism.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, Hong Kong is the only place under the sovereignty of the Chinese government where the Tiananmen Square Memorial Service has been held annually since 1990, while the event of the Tiananmen Square Massacre on June 4, 1989 is still a taboo in Chinese politics. This stresses the relationship between the Chinese government and the people of Hong Kong.

These two dilemmas of “one country, two systems” are not necessarily a bad thing, for humans live in the world of others’ words. Therefore, an open and equal inter-subjective dialogue is indispensable. “In and through dialogical tension they select heterogeneous languages and ideas in relation to understanding their partners in communication”.<sup>7</sup> Gordon Allport proposes that contact will be beneficial when certain conditions are met, namely, that contact should be between people of equal status, sharing a common goal, with the parties being interdependent and supported by laws and customs.<sup>8</sup> But the existing political structure in China – communist one-party rule – does not allow free and equal contact. In addition, patriotism promoted by the Chinese government is more a kind of political propaganda and political absorption than a matter of common goal. People like Liu Xiaobo and Ai Weiwei have suffered from defending the human rights of others.<sup>9</sup> This is the typical example of the lack of rule of law. All these hardly convince the people of Hong Kong that the Chinese government is a trustworthy government. The most recent event is that the Hong Kong government intends to introduce national education to students in Hong Kong, but the people of Hong Kong criticize it as educational brainwashing. As a result, more than 90,000 people joined the rally against the introduction of national education on July 29, 2012, and the Chinese

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<sup>6</sup> Peter Sandy-Thomas, *Legitimizing the Chinese Communist Party since Tiananmen* (New York: Routledge, 2011), Robert Weatherly, *Politics in China Since 1949: Legitimizing Authoritarian Rule*. (New York: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Ivana Markova and Alex Gillespie (eds), *Trust and Conflict: Representation, Culture and Dialogue* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 2.

<sup>8</sup> Gordon Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Cambridge, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1954).

<sup>9</sup> Liu Xiaobo (1955-), 2010 Nobel Peace Prize award, is sentenced to eleven years’ imprisonment on December 25, 2009 due to his participation in 08 Charter. The Chinese government considers this as an inciting subversion of state power. Ai Weiwei (1957-), a contemporary artist, is arrested and detained due to his investigation of the Sichuan schools corruption scandal following the Sichuan earthquake in 2008.

government continually declined the request of direct universal suffrage in the election of the members of the Legislative Council and the Chief Executive of Hong Kong until 2012, and this has further harmed relations between the China Mainland and Hong Kong. When trust cannot be built, conspiracy belief emerges.

The essence of conspiracy belief suggests that we should not believe in the face value of an action, for there is always a hidden plot that aims at disempowering us and depriving us of our interests. According to Fenster, there are three types of conspiracy belief, namely, *event conspiracies*, *systemic conspiracies* and *super conspiracies*. Systemic conspiracies are closely related to this study. “At this (systemic) level, the conspiracy is believed to have broad goals, usually conceived as securing control over a country, a region or even the entire world. While the goals are sweeping, the conspiratorial machinery is generally simple: a single, evil organization implements a plan to infiltrate and subvert existing institutions.”<sup>10</sup> Although the conspiracy theory has a tendency to reduce highly complex phenomena to simple causes, the issue is not whether the conspiracy theory is empirically sound, because it itself has been turned to a discourse and becomes the interpretation for understanding the reality. A typical example of systemic conspiracy was the Cold War mentality in the 1950s and onward. On the one hand, once distrust sets in, there is a need to check everything. But, because not everything can be cross-checked, the distrusted party is at a disadvantage. On the other hand, the conspiracy creates some kind of “semantic barriers” that resist alternatives and transformation. “Semantic barriers refer to the specific ways in which incoming meanings, or alterity, are neutralized and blocked, such that they do not destabilize existing meaning structures.”<sup>11</sup> There may have been some truth in the conspiracy, but when conspiracy belief dominates and penetrates everyday life, social solidarity is fragmented, social anxiety is intensified, and demonization becomes common practice. In the case of the China-Hong Kong relationship, the Chinese government is suspicious that the ground of the democratic movement in Hong Kong is an imperial invasion with the intention of overthrowing the Chinese government, while the people of Hong Kong are suspicious that the Chinese government intends to interfere in Hong Kong’s affairs in order to convert Hong Kong into one of the cities of the China mainland. The negative consequences of conspiracy theory are that first, authentic discussion gives way to speculation; second, social co-operation is further weakened, thus hindering social progress; third, there is a tendency to politicize everyday life. My concern is how to overcome the spread of conspiracy belief and move towards healthy scepticism. This is a political issue, but since the Christian

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<sup>10</sup> Mark Fenster, *Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in American Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 6.

<sup>11</sup> Ivana Markova and Alex Gillespie, *Trust and Conflict*, 212.

church is an agent in society and it is given a ministry of reconciliation, the church has no excuse not to be involved, no matter how little impact it may have.

### Reconciliation and Harmony

The Christian church is given a ministry of reconciliation. Reconciliation is involved in healing broken relationships. Our brokenness is the result of sin reflected in the relationship with God, nature, fellow humans and ourselves. It is those whom God reconciles (2 Cor 5:18), because God does not hold the faults of humanity against them (2 Cor 5:19). This is the universality of reconciliation, and no one is excluded. Reconciliation is always a pre-eminence of grace over justice. But Cecilia Clegg reminds us that reconciliation is not just the process of salvation, but it is also the *telos* of creation. With reference to the work of Miroslav Volf, she writes:

“If we now examine God’s act of creation through the metaphor of ‘embrace’, it is possible to say that in this continuous dance of creation God reaches out to reconcile the cosmos to Godself, waits, enfolds those who and that which responds, and releasing them reaches out once again. Within this framework, the event of the incarnation arrives as simultaneously God’s reaching out to reconcile the cosmos and the cosmos, through humanity’s conscious and unconscious being, and reaching back to be reconciled, to be both enfolded by and then released by God.

“Reconciliation, then, understood as the structures and processes necessary to bring all elements of the cosmos into positive life-giving relationship with God and one another, is indeed the *telos* of creation. It is at this point that the orders of creation and redemption overlap.”<sup>12</sup>

Reconciliation as the *telos* of creation reminds us that we do not have a choice of whether to be reconciled or not. Rather, a desire to be reconciled is an ongoing process of integrating aspects of the self. Sin is not necessary as the pre-condition of reconciliation, but rather both the incompleteness and transcendence of human conditions demand reconciliation. The call of Christians to the ministry of reconciliation is not about doing a task, but rather reconciliation is intrinsic to being a Christian, and even to being human. Apart from Clegg’s comment, John Webster notes that “there is a danger that dogmatic moral theology may be excessively preoccupied with the question of who does what – with identifying the precise demarcation between human and divine action.”<sup>13</sup> This dualism discourages Christians to think that they can play an active role in reconciliation. It is right that God bestows reconciliation, but it is the same God who invites Christians to participate in the realization of reconciliation. Christian ministry of

<sup>12</sup> Cecilia Clegg, “Between Embrace and Exclusion”, in David Tombs and Joseph Liechty (eds), *Explorations in Reconciliation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 129.

<sup>13</sup> John Webster, “The Ethics of Reconciliation”, in Colin E Gunton (ed), *The Theology of Reconciliation* (New York: T&T Clark, 2003), 111.

reconciliation is not a supplement to God's work, but is a reconciling life that participates in the narrative of the triune God's creative and re-creative work as Father, Son and Spirit. Therefore, reconciliation is a virtue rather than a strategy. Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz explains that reconciliation is a religious virtue because "Christians believe that this is the kind of behavior that Jesus demands from his followers". It is a specific form of love and grace, because "reconciliation is one of the means God uses to enable human beings not only to relate to the God-self, but to participate in divine nature itself". Reconciliation is a social virtue, because "it imposes the duty to overcome what separates human beings, what turns one against another, in order to be able to live the sociability that is an intrinsic characteristic of humanity."<sup>14</sup>

Apart from the common experience of Christians in different parts of the world where the church has tended to focus on the sacramental and personal aspects of reconciliation, the church in Hong Kong has to overcome a quasi-reconciliation represented by the ideology of harmony. Since the Chinese government introduced the ideology of harmonious society in 2005, harmony has become a common language in both China and Hong Kong. According to President Hu Jintao, a harmonious society is a society that is "democratic and ruled by law, fair and just, trustworthy and fraternal, full of vitality, stable and orderly, and maintains harmony between men and nature."<sup>15</sup> My concern is not how harmony is explained, but how it is practised. I find that the everyday use and practice of harmony are more or less subjected to the Chinese motto, *Yihe Weigui* (its literal translation is what is most valuable is harmony). First, it is a kind of harmony that does not welcome insistence, for insistence would only create conflicts and make conflicts irreconcilable. Insistence is condemned as displaying self-centredness and stubbornness, which makes harmony impossible. Accommodation, on the other hand, is interpreted as showing open-mindedness and a co-operative attitude. Accommodation is virtue, while insistence is vice. It is not the truth that matters, but harmony characterized by no conflict that matters. Second, though harmony is about relationship, it is basically hierarchical. Harmony is achieved by maintaining the existing order. In Confucian social order, the junior should respect the senior, children should listen to their parents and teachers, and people should submit to their emperor. When this social order is disrupted, harmony is disturbed and the whole of society suffers from it. Harmony is thus a tool for nothing other than to maintain a status quo that is favourable

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<sup>14</sup> Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, "Reconciliation: An Intrinsic Element of Justice", in David Tombs and Joseph Liechty (eds), *Explorations in Reconciliation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 76-8.

<sup>15</sup> Jintao Hu, "Zai Shengbuji Zhuyao Lingdao Ganbu Tigao Goujian Shenhuihui Hexie Shehui Nengli Yantao Shangde Jianghua." (Talk delivered to Provincial Main Leading Cadres in seminar about Enhancing the Capacity to Build a Socialist Harmonious Society), *Remin Ribao* (People's Daily), June 27, 2005.

to the government. Third, the use of violence is acceptable for achieving harmony. This was the government's argument for using violence to curb the democratic movement in 1989, and surprisingly, this attitude is sympathetically shared by many Chinese. The idea of harmonious society does not intend to promote rational communication and tolerance. Ironically, harmony justifies the use of force, the legitimacy of the Communist Party and the status quo.<sup>16</sup> A Christian ministry of reconciliation is very different from an ideology of harmonious society, for justice is an integral element of reconciliation, and difference is respected and allowed. Reconciliation is achieved through persuasion, not coercion. How would the church of Hong Kong practise the ministry of reconciliation in a social environment characterised by conspiracy theories?

### A Spirit of Healthy Scepticism

Taking both the advice of Christian realism suggested by Reinhold Niebuhr and the Hong Kong socio-political context into consideration, I am inclined to interpret the Christian ministry of reconciliation in politics as a matter of working for an environment for the emergence of healthy scepticism instead of supporting harmonious society represented by the Chinese government and other forms of utopia, because, like harmonious society, utopia is easily turned to an ideology. I would consider that an authentic and dynamic relationship of trust allows scepticism, but in a healthy way. The emergence of harmonious society, if there is any, has to arise from the everyday life of the people more than an ideology from the government. Like conspiracy theories, healthy scepticism questions not only the nature of specific truths but also the interest that guides human action. In politics, healthy scepticism is aware of the fact that power contaminates social organization, and that the lust for power masquerades as the desire for justice. But unlike conspiracy theories, healthy scepticism is based on evidence, willingness to dialogue, and a passion for the pursuit of common good. Basically, it is against a tendency to pursue a rigid form of categorization. Categorization is the basic capacity of humans to cope with the tremendous array of objects, people and all phenomena in the world in which we live, but Markova and Gillespie note that:

“While the capacity to categorize and treat different events and people ‘as if’ equivalent no doubt plays an essential role in coping with a tremendous variety of phenomena impinging on human minds, like any important idea, categorization can lead to simplification and reductionist views of complex symbolic and cultural process. Much research on trust and conflict in social psychology has been based on the assumption that categorization is the

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<sup>16</sup> Lap Yan Kung, “The Trinity, the Church and China’s Harmonious Society: A Politics of Persuasion”, *Studies in World Christianity*, 17:3 (2011), 237-57.

primary cognitive process that explains prejudice, racism and discrimination in intergroup relations.”<sup>17</sup>

Once categorization has been converted to the rigid representations of self and others, there is hardly transformation in contact, for authentic dialogue is no longer possible. In order to move from conspiracy theory to healthy scepticism, I would consider there are two important elements, namely, the moral agent and the social structures. We turn to evaluate how Hong Kong churches as moral agent practise the ministry of reconciliation.

In 1991, the Hong Kong Christian Council had launched a campaign called “I Love Hong Kong”. It was initiated by the churches, but not confined to them, for people from different faiths and non-faiths had joined. Its purpose was to generate an atmosphere that Hong Kong was not a borrowed place, but there were great stories in Hong Kong. After having experienced the Tiananmen Square Massacre on June 4, 1989, many people had no confidence in Hong Kong and intended to leave. The significance of the “I Love Hong Kong” campaign was to reassure those who chose to remain, and those who were not able to leave, that Hong Kong was their beloved place, and the people of the city were able to create a better Hong Kong. This has been a relatively successful campaign, for the message of loving Hong Kong has been widely spread and the theme of “I Love Hong Kong” has been adopted by the government and many non-government organizations. In 2001, the Hong Kong Christian Council had retrieved the spirit of “I Love Hong Kong” and renamed it as “From I Love Hong Kong to Re-make Hong Kong”. The problem of emigration was no longer a social issue. On the contrary, Hong Kong has suffered from the Asian financial crisis, and was at the crossroads. The core of the new campaign was to emphasize that the people of Hong Kong were the subject, not the object, and the future of Hong Kong lay with them. To a large extent the Hong Kong Christian Council has been sensitive to social change, and the credibility of the church has been recognized by the public. The church endeavours to enhance the self-confidence of the people of Hong Kong. Nevertheless, most churches are relatively conservative in social engagement, except the Catholic Church.<sup>18</sup> The ministry of reconciliation is largely confined to the personal dimension and charitable work, not the political dimension. My recent study on Hong Kong Protestant social engagement has shown that most churches feel more compassionate in expressing their views on moral issues, such as homosexuality and gambling, but not on political issues, such as democratization and social justice.<sup>19</sup> Since the political world is not autonomous and is dominated by

<sup>17</sup> Ivana Markova and Alex Gillespie, *Trust and Conflict*, 5-6.

<sup>18</sup> Lap Yan Kung, “Politics and Religions in Hong Kong after 1997: Whether Tension or Equilibrium is Needed”, *Religion, State and Society*, 32:1 (2004), 21-36.

<sup>19</sup> Lap Yan Kung, “Religious Role and Global Social Movement: Protestantism in Hong Kong”, *Journal of Religion and Culture of National Cheng Kung University*, 17 (2011), 179-940 (in Chinese).



the power of conspiracy theory, it needs God's redemption, and God's reconciliation does not exclude the political world.

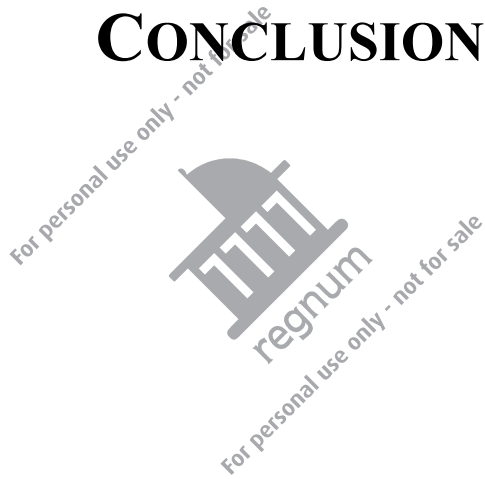
Unlike political institutions, the church is not bounded by political ideology, class, ethnics, gender and so on. However, this does not imply that the church should be neutral and impartial on all social issues, not only because God gives preference to the poor, but also because power has contaminated social relations. Therefore, social engagement cannot avoid confrontation. The reconciling mission of the church does not seek confrontation, but is not afraid of having confrontation, for confrontation may be needed to resist and unmask power in order to restore justice. The church should develop a more thoughtful theological discussion on confrontation and advocacy. In order not to fall into the cycle of hatred, violence and conspiracy theory, a healthy soil for confrontation is required. First, it requires a just social structure that allows for fair, equal and rational communication. Second, it requires moral agents, for it is their credibility and truthfulness that keeps scepticism healthy and makes trust possible. Third, there is a shared common good that brings different parties' work together. In what ways can the church nurture this soil and be nurtured?

First, the church should realize that striving for a democratic political structure and maintaining an independent judiciary are basic for the emergence of healthy scepticism. This is not about the politicization of the church but, ironically, this is the meaning of the ministry of reconciliation in the political sphere. We should not idealize the political world. Neither should we secularize the political world. Although a just political structure would not be able to create friendship, it allows different kinds of co-operation, even when there is no trust. Second, the church should seek every opportunity to develop different possible working relations with others, including the Chinese government, but with no sacrifice of its own integrity. Even though the church is one of the targets of the Chinese government for political absorption, this act can also be understood as an invitation to dialogue and encounter. The ministry of reconciliation frees the church from falling into some kind of dualism, and allows the church to open up to all peoples. Third, the church may not be able to perform as a platform for different parties coming to discuss openly, but the everyday life of the church is a witness to a social life characterized by respect of differences, not favouritism; persuasion, not coercion; friendship, not exclusion; justice, not indifference, which challenges the social life of the conspiracy theory. For both the Chinese government and those who hold conspiracy theory tightly, the first and second roles of the church are contradictory, but this is exactly what healthy scepticism is all about. The church does not have enemies, but rather is faithful to the call of the ministry of reconciliation.

## Conclusion

The Christian ministry of reconciliation should not be confined to sacramental and personal dimensions, while it has a political dimension. In the Hong Kong political context, this chapter illustrates that the Christian ministry of reconciliation is better interpreted as working for an environment that allows for the emergence of healthy scepticism rather than supporting the harmonious society proposed by the Chinese government. Healthy scepticism admits the ambiguity of politics expressed in “one country, two systems”, and that mutual suspicion is unavoidable. However, scepticism has to be converted into healthy scepticism. Otherwise, it allows the emergence of conspiracy theory that causes social co-operation to deteriorate. Apart from being a social agent, the church of Hong Kong, being called to the ministry of reconciliation, has an undisputable role to bring reconciliation to society in terms of healthy scepticism. It is about striving for a democratic political structure, breaking down the tendency of categorization, and living a social life marked by justice, love and respect. Even though Christians in Hong Kong are a minority (the official figure is about 10% of the population), effectiveness and efficiency should not be their consideration of the ministry of reconciliation, for in the final analysis it is God who reconciles.

# CONCLUSION



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# HOPE IN A FRAGILE WORLD: THE RECONCILING MISSION OF THE CHURCH

Knud Jørgensen

Mission as ministry of reconciliation takes place in a context of brokenness – the broken relationship between God and humanity, the distortion and destruction of the bond between humanity and the rest of creation, brokenness in the area of human relationships, and often brokenness within today's church.<sup>1</sup> The ministry of reconciliation will take many forms, but it will probably always encompass a ministry or function of being a “go-between” (just as John V. Taylor described the Holy Spirit as “the Go-Between-God”<sup>2</sup>), and a ministry embedded in a community where people may find space for joys and pains, for being vulnerable and for overcoming fear.

This book has brought together a truly ecumenical choir of voices sharing insights on reconciliation and telling stories about it. The multifaceted canvas presented does not lend itself to a succinct summary. Instead, I shall share six perspectives that have come to me as I have worked through the topics and chapters.

**1. To be or not to be:** There is a passage from 2 Cor 5:14-21 that keeps appearing in the many contributions, either through direct quotations and references, or indirectly, as a foundational framework for a ministry of reconciliation. It may be expressed by affirming that it is through the Cross of Christ that the new relationship between God and humanity is established (the so-called vertical dimension of reconciliation); or it may take the form of a call *to live into* God's story – that the church needs witnesses deeply rooted in Christ, rooted in the story of the new creation which is realized “in Christ”. There is a tune or melody in these two words “in Christ” which since my time as a young theology student in Copenhagen has touched the innermost part of my heart and which I later have come to understand as the basic core of reconciliation. Does not “in Christ” literally mean that which once took place “in Christ” is applicable to those who find themselves in him? The expression is found in a good number of Pauline texts which speak of being crucified, dead, buried, and

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<sup>1</sup> *Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation*, preparatory paper for WCC Conference in Athens, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> John V Taylor, *The Go-Between God* (London: CMS Press, 1972).

raised with Christ – even of having been made to sit with him in heaven and of appearing with him in glory. I do not agree with those who say that this expression denotes only a spiritual or symbolic communion with the ascended Christ or that it describes some sort of absorption with the deity. No, being in Christ has to do with my historical, concrete life – with my baptism, with Holy Communion. The way Paul talks about baptism in Romans 6 describes “in Christ” as being included in the historical death and resurrection of Christ himself. Therefore, and only therefore, am I a new creation. The background is the Adam-Christ parallel, and an understanding of Christ as a “corporate personality” (in the same way as Isaiah’s suffering servant was).

But the heart of the matter is something mind-boggling: what happened to Christ, happened to me. In baptism I have died to or for sin, and I have “put on Christ” (1 Cor 12:13). Or to phrase it in theological jargon: the redemptive-historical events of the Cross and Easter morning are appropriated sacramentally by believers. The new life I now live is Christ’s life since I have a share in the life that was raised from the grave on Easter morning.<sup>3</sup> When Christ was mocked, ridiculed and spat on, I was mocked, ridiculed and spat on. When Christ was crucified, I was crucified and died with him. When Christ was raised to life, I was raised to life. Paul understands this quite literally. Why is this so important to me? Because it is the story of how God *in Christ* reconciled me, and therefore, and only therefore, the story he has sent me as his ambassador to share with others: “Be reconciled with God!” – let God change you, as he changed me, from being an enemy into being his friend. I believe that this is what reconciliation basically means in Pauline theology: how the love of God in Jesus Christ turns enemies into friends, thereby creating peace.

The brothers and sisters in the East African Revival and my co-workers in the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus in my years as a missionary – and, more recently, my friends in the Chinese churches – have over the years kept repeating this, as this book does: it is impossible to remain faithful to the New Testament and not to recognize the centrality of Jesus’ giving himself up on the Cross, the “shedding of his blood”, the summons to have my clothes washed clean in the blood of the Lamb. Any talk about reconciliation without this at the centre ends up becoming moral codes or cheap therapy. This also means, as the chapters in this book make abundantly clear, that God takes our sins deadly seriously. Why else would he give up his only Son as a vicarious sacrifice if it had not been for the fact that sin, in God’s eyes, was intolerable? And therefore it is so urgent that we become messengers and ambassadors to all people. The message of reconciliation encourages me to recover the concept of sin in order to do justice to reality. John de Gruchy says that this is not a matter of “doom and

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<sup>3</sup> See on this Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 58ff.

gloom” to make us feel bad or depressed: “On the contrary, an understanding of our solidarity in sin (the proper meaning of ‘original sin’) is a necessary step along the road to reconciliation ... The doctrine of sin means that we are all in this mess together.”<sup>4</sup>

Therefore the Pauline pattern of indicative followed by imperative is so foundational: “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself”; therefore ... reconciliation begins with God, begins with giving praise to God – actually the purpose of mission is to give thanksgiving and praise to God. Newbigin talked about mission as “an acted-out doxology”. A radical Cross-centred reconciliation calls for radical obedient discipleship.

**2. Reconciliation embedded:** When we set out to plan and design this volume we were eager to find the answer to what the unique contribution of the church was towards reconciliation in society. In retrospect I think the question was naïve. We may highlight some general perspectives of possible “uniqueness”, such as trust, confidence, truth, memory, repentance, forgiveness, love, healing and justice. These key components of reconciliation have been well attested to in the chapters of this book. These perspectives are also general in the sense that several of them are pillars in other living faith traditions too. The search for uniqueness in a general sense, however, hides the basic fact that any model of reconciliation is embedded within a particular culture and structure. Awareness of this structure is essential for understanding what reconciliation in this case is all about. It is also important since the very structure that a model of reconciliation is part of, may serve the interests of only some (e.g. the powerful, the rich, the elite, etc.), as was the case with some of the reconciliation attempts in South Africa.

The many case studies in this volume have challenged me to see this in a sharper light. Here I have listened to stories and experiences of reconciliation locally, nationally, regionally and globally. They have taught me that reconciliation is an action, a praxis, a struggle, and a movement before it becomes a theory or a general principle. Reconciliation is never ahistorical. It can only be grasped and understood as a process in which we become engaged. That is why any discussion of reconciliation must be historically and contextually centred. The many case studies are reflections on what has happened or is happening on the ground, among people deeply engaged in the process. Reconciliation may only be grasped via these people telling their stories – stories that are contextual illustrations of the unique contributions made by churches, groups and individuals.

This book contains eighteen stories about reconciliation and, by the same token, eighteen unique models of reconciliation – stories about washing dirty feet, about truth-telling, about people burning their guns, about the need for replacing harmony with healthy scepticism, about

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<sup>4</sup> John W de Gruchy, *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 191-92.

nation-building and the formation of a national forum for reconciliation, about building communities of reconciliation, and about simply enabling factions and leaders to meet. I have come to realize that there is no one answer to our question of “unique contribution”; instead the many stories are exciting building blocks for hope in a fragile world.

**3. Reconciliation is concrete:** Reconciliation is about building bridges, about allowing conflicting stories to interact and collide in ways that create meeting space, build relationships and help restructure power relations. But for reconciliation to be genuine, it must be *tangible, visible* and *concrete*. There are concrete steps to be taken – leaving my gift at the altar as I hurry to be reconciled with my brother, stretching out a hand as a sign of forgiveness.

I vividly remember my old friend, Bishop Festo Kivengere from Uganda, telling us about how he was converted late one night: “You know, the first thing I had to do was to take my bicycle and ride forty kilometres through the night and on sandy roads to wake up an old teacher colleague that I had insulted some time ago with my arrogance. And then hurry back to be ready for my students in the morning.” “Living in the light”, he called it. Maybe the African context is more conducive than others to such concrete steps. Here the traditional practices of animal sacrifice and the veneration of ancestors still influence the way in which many African Christians today understand the biblical story of redemption. Take one of the stories in this book as an illustration of the concreteness of reconciliation: Berhanu Ofgala has told the story of the reconciliation initiative of a group of leaders, and how God healed the serious conflict of his church in Ethiopia by using this group of wounded men. As a result, this mediating group named itself “The wounded healers”. The turning point happened as the group started conversing about the conflict; then suddenly an unexpected and spontaneous experience of divine presence took place among them. This experience resulted in absolute *metanoia*, with people breaking into tears, hugging one another and forgiving each other. The second and concluding turning point was when the leaders of the conflicting parties washed one another’s feet in the midst of a solemn worship service of reconciliation. Here was a tangible demonstration of love and humility. Berhanu adds: “Though this does not seem to make sense logically, it was the miracle of this peace initiative. The miracle of the success lies in these two, the towel and water in a basin. It was when the leaders of the parties in conflict started washing one another’s feet in humility that the dividing wall of hostility started tumbling down and the combating groups started forgiving one another with tears.”

Or reiterate the story told in this book by Kåre Lode about reconciliation in Mali. As a consequence of many meetings and dialogues, a breath of forgiveness and reconciliation blew over northern Mali. All weekly market places reopened, armed robbery ceased for a shorter period, and combatants understood that it was the time to demobilise. The formal end of the



rebellion, Lode relates, took place in a ceremony organised by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the Malian government and the rebel movements in Timbuktu on March 27, 1996 when 3,000 guns were burned in “The Flame of Peace”.

One more African illustration of the concreteness of reconciliation: Liberian president Johnson Sirleaf tells in her chapter about how the Palaver Hut Program, also called the Peace Hut Program, was recommended by the Truth and Reconciliation Program. The national Palaver Hut Program, common to rural communities around the country, is a conflict resolution mechanism whereby select members of integrity in the community adjudicate in matters of grave concern to the community, and seek to resolve disputes amongst or between individuals and communities. Decisions reached through Palaver Hut are binding. This mechanism is meant to redress outstanding grievances and create both the basis and opportunity to repair and restore broken relationships at community and national levels.

These stories illustrate what Tibor Fabiny is looking for when he talks about reconciliation and its drama (see the chapter on *The Drama of Reconciliation in the Post-Communist Hungarian Lutheran Church*). He challenges the church to become *a theatre of the gospel*: “The church is the only forum in this world where sinners and their victims can shake hands, where former enemies can be reconciled with each other, where the mercy of God becomes concrete in the act of forgiveness ...” Many churches already have the basic components for making reconciliation concrete, visible and tangible – baptism, the Eucharist, and the practice of penance/repentance and absolution. How I wish my own church would rediscover the office of confession to find its way back to a more tangible forgiveness.

**4. The wounded God in a fragile world:** There is a tone weaved into the stories about experiences in reconciliation. The tone resonates with what Berhanu Ofga'a tells about “The wounded healers” in his story about the healing of the church in Ethiopia. The reason why they became vehicles for reconciliation was that they were themselves wounded. The strong and aggressive church leaders realized their vulnerability when the Spirit of the Lord took them aside and showed them that they were the reason for the split in the church. I hear the same tone, now loud and clear, in what Monica Melanchthon says about “the power of the powerless” and the “Mothering Ways and Reconciliation”. Yes, the Christian faith does create a spirit of optimism and confidence, but such confidence can become a hindrance for grasping the vulnerability of mission. “Vulnerable mission” in the midst of a worldview of fear. It refers both to mission in contexts of poverty and to mission by the powerless. Maybe vulnerability contains the potential, the capacity and power so much needed for a renewal of mission

and church? Is vulnerability to be considered “an enabling condition for mission”?<sup>5</sup>

In the Bible’s image of a reconciling God we meet his vulnerability, and in Christ God makes Godself vulnerable, to the extent that Jesus is God’s “wound in the world” (Kosuke Koyama). The vulnerable God calls us to be vulnerable if we want to be wounded healers in his service. At the same time, there is power in powerlessness. It opens up a new understanding of how God’s power is hidden under its contradiction (*sub contraria specie*, as Martin Luther said).

Vulnerable mission begins from below. Samuel Escobar calls it the heartbeat and the thrust of mission today: “There is an element of mystery when the dynamism of mission does not come from the people of a position of power and privilege ... but from below, from the little ones, those who have few material, financial or technical resources.”<sup>6</sup> Do we here find an essential reason for the growth of the Christian faith among the poor and the persecuted?

Unless we hear and receive the gospel from the poor and the vulnerable, from below, there is a genuine risk of a shift of emphasis from the grace of God to the works of humans. This view of a wounded God and his wounded healers also resonates with what Harold Segura from the Latin American context says about “the weakness of an all-powerful God”. Instead of stressing the image of the sovereign, absolute God, we should retrieve the image of the God who “emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant” (Phil 2:7). This God who becomes strong thanks to his own weakness is the origin and the model of our witness to reconciliation, peace, and justice. Is it not so that “Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation” involves a spirituality that configures the Jesus attitude of incarnation: the ability to lower himself, to empty himself (*kenosis*) and, from that position of weakness, to grant us his peace and his reconciliation? Scripture talks about the treasure in clay jars. We are the clay jars that the Lord uses on the dusty roads of reconciliation.

In her story about Musalaha in this volume, Bodil Skjøtt tells about how painful it can be to listen to the other side, but that that part of reconciliation is just being willing to listen with an open mind and a desire to know what the other – who may be both my “enemy” and my “brother” – believes. To do so without having to agree and then be willing to challenge one’s own story, calls into question things that are valued, but that may not be correct. Listening to the other side makes room for being vulnerable with one another. Being vulnerable and risking the pain, Skjøtt says, is necessary, and without it reconciliation is not possible. It is the story of the Cross.

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<sup>5</sup> See the report on “Forms of Missionary Engagement” in Daryl Balia and Kirsteen Kim, *Witnessing to Christ Today* (Oxford: Regnum, 2010), 121-22.

<sup>6</sup> Samuel Escobar, *A Time for Mission* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1995), p. 17.

**5. Reconciling communities:** In his review of the Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus*, Emmanuel Katongole says that the church's primary role is to point to and be a constant reminder of the story of new creation made possible by God's reconciliation. Reconciliation is not just bringing together two people or two groups in conflict. Rather it means re-establishing each into love and letting inner healing take place. Here, Katongole says, is the importance of the church since her mission is to give the Word: a Word that heals, sets free and reconciles. So reconciliation requires the church to be a reconciling community – an assembly of clay jars, the type of people that the world considers “nonsense” (1 Cor 1: 27), a company of wounded healers. Even so, the church is fundamental to the doctrine and understanding of reconciliation. There is no way around this: the church plays a key role in God's reconciling mission in a fragile world.

But the church is by no means a paragon of reconciliation, as John de Gruchy says about the churches in South Africa. This implies that “the relationship between the Church as empirical reality and its struggle to be true to its sacramental nature is of critical importance.”<sup>7</sup>

In this book we have been introduced to several reconciling communities such as *The Community of Sant'Egidio* in Rome. Consisting of lay Catholics, this community pursues an ecumenical vocation of reconciliation both within the church and in society. It “lives” in the poor Trastevere quarter of Rome and leads a simple life. Perhaps that is one reason why it played a vital role in helping to bring the civil war in Mozambique to an end. The recipe is daily worship, fellowship around a simple meal, humble boldness, and committed laity.

In Jerusalem we have met *Musalaha* (the Arabic word for forgiveness and reconciliation), a Christian non-government organization that has existed for more than twenty years. Its activities are placed all over the region where it is possible for Israelis and Palestinians to meet, something that has become increasingly difficult. *Musalaha* promotes practical reconciliation at a grassroots level in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The conviction is that believers in the Messiah on both sides of the conflict have a biblical mandate to take an active role in pursuing peace, breaking down the wall of hostility, and living out the testimony of the reconciling power of the Cross. The reconciling focus is to create a setting that allows believers in Jesus, from both sides of the conflict, to come together and meet in order to establish relationships where stereotypes can be challenged and broken down. Providing space is important – space where people can meet, where obstacles can be shared and seen, and where the Lord can become “the go-between”.

*The Forum for Naga Reconciliation (FNR)* began with a full-time Christian prayer group known as *Shisha Hoho*. It called for a three-day

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<sup>7</sup> John W de Gruchy, *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 5.

Naga peace convention. Very few responded and the convention was scantily attended. Nevertheless the idea of forming some kind of Naga forum for peace was floated. The Forum for Naga Reconciliation (FNR) was born. Four years later, FNR has had considerable success in drastically reducing violence, bringing about a semblance of social and political normalcy, and fostering a genuine sense of hope for Naga reconciliation. This is acknowledged from all quarters – the factions, civil society groups, tribal groups, church, mass media, the Nagaland government, the Indian government, and international agencies. FNR has been able to persuade most of the major factions to engage in dialogue and negotiation aimed at reconciliation. A major outcome was the “Covenant of Reconciliation”, jointly signed on June 13, 2009, by the leaders of three major factions.

At a global level we may say that the formation and the development of *the ecumenical movement* is a visible expression of the church’s commitment to be a reconciling community. Through hard work and many meetings, reconciliation processes have been strengthened, while relations have been rebuilt, or in some cases have newly emerged. The active involvement of so many churches in ecumenical activities and structures has been painstaking, though vitally significant for the process of reconciliation. It has been inspiring and hopeful to observe the progress on both theological and liturgical issues. Building ecumenical fellowships and alliances reveals the reconciling drive that ecumenism has.

I recall from my youth Bonhoeffer’s description of a reconciled community: Christ existing as church community (*Christus als Gemeinde existierend*).<sup>8</sup> The community is at one and the same time, Bonhoeffer said, *peccatorum communio* and *sanctorum communio* – a communion of sinners and a communion of saints. As both of these, it is representing the crucified and risen Christ and is therefore part of God’s act of reconciliation. We are to be both “with-each-other” and “being-for-each-other”. As Christ was the man for others, so are we to be a church for others. Reginald Nel applies this to his South African context and talks about a solidarity, equality-based *koinonia* where we become communities that acknowledge tensions and differences, but also equality, and as a result of that, exemplify a reconciled difference. This also finds expression in being a liturgical community where different gifts are blooming like God’s flowers.

**6. Doors to reconciliation:** It has been stimulating and enlightening to learn about the many doors to and “tools” of reconciliation. “Story-telling” keeps appearing in both theory and experience: a process towards healing of memories cannot succeed unless victims, but also perpetrators, find a space where they can tell their story. Reconciliation and truth commissions provide such spaces, but this is also a task of each Christian church and community. Story-telling by one group only may not bear the whole truth.

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<sup>8</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: Dogmatische Untersuchung zur Soziologie der Kirche* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1960).

But without the possibility of telling one's story to others who listen and take it seriously, no solution to conflicts can be found. Mission as reconciliation is based on story-telling. Musalaha is among those agencies that use historical narratives as a tool for reconciliation. This is done on neutral ground and in a setting where both sides are guests and strangers. The story of one side may exclude the other. So just listening to the narrative of the other side can be painful and may aggravate anger and a desire to deny the version of the story being told by the other side. But part of reconciliation is just being willing and able to listen to the other side with an open mind and a desire to know why and what the other believes. There is no doubt that the best way to speak about reconciliation is through story-telling, painful as it can be (South Africa and Liberia are illustrations of this).

Story-telling may take the form of *confession of guilt* and be connected with *a sacrament of penance or absolution* (someone has called it "the liturgy of the prodigal son"). Here is an important gate for many into the land of reconciliation.

*Interfaith dialogue* is a rather different door. The role of dialogue is not only to reconcile conflict between communities but also to prevent religion from becoming the source of tension between communities in the first place. It may add mutual empowerment when the dialogue is carried out in a spirit of reconciliation, as Sebastian Kim tells us in his chapter on "The Ministry of Reconciliation from an Interfaith Perspective".

From Georgia we have learned how Evangelical Baptist *diakonia* and humanitarian support to the Chechen refugees became a door to reconciliation and an example of *diapraxis*.

And we have heard two top political leaders (Kjell Magne Bondevik and Johnson Sirlleaf) tell us about how simply making people meet or setting up Peace Huts have become doors to reconciliation.

We have even learned that, in Hong Kong, developing a healthy soil for confrontation is a needed door in the churches' encounter with a Chinese ideology of harmony. A reconciling community needs to create an environment that allows for *healthy scepticism*.

In Ethiopia, the country of my youth, *acts of prayer and justice* became doors to reconciliation. The doors to reconciliation are seldom doors of splendour, but they are avenues or pathways for the reconciling Lord on his way to his people.

We have come to the end of our journey. I sincerely hope that the chapters of this volume have inspired, challenged and equipped us for being "go-between" people right where we have been placed. All of us need, more or less, to defeat the inner fears which bind us so that we can contribute to the spread of the gospel and the message of reconciliation among others, as Tharwat Wahba concludes his chapter on "Reconciliation

in Egypt: The Absent Ministry”. The ministry of reconciliation must never be absent from our individual lives, from our churches, or from our society.

Along the way, some of us will have to re-learn and re-teach some of the key components in a spirituality of reconciliation: establishing the truth, healing the memories, receiving and giving forgiveness, and doing justice. This requires a spirituality that is Cross-centred and Cross-bearing in a life of obedient and radical discipleship.

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Holistic mission, or integral mission, implies God is concerned with the whole person, the whole community, body, mind and spirit. This book discusses the meaning of the holistic gospel, how it has developed, and implications for the church. It takes a global, eclectic approach, with 19 writers, all of whom have much experience in, and commitment to, holistic mission. It addresses critically and honestly one of the most exciting, and challenging, issues facing the church today. To be part of God's plan for God's people, the church must take holistic mission to the world.

Kirsteen Kim and Andrew Anderson (Eds)

### **Mission Today and Tomorrow**

2010 / 978-1-870345-91-0 / 450pp (hardback)

There are moments in our lives when we come to realise that we are participating in the triune God's mission. If we believe the church to be as sign and symbol of the reign of God

in the world, then we are called to witness to Christ today by sharing in God's mission of love through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. We can all participate in God's transforming and reconciling mission of love to the whole creation.

Tormod Engelsen, Erling Lundebjerg and Dagfinn Solheim (Eds)

***The Church Going Global***

*Mission and Globalisation*

2011 / 978-1-870345-93-4 / 262pp (hardback)

The New Testament church is... universal and local at the same time. The universal, one and holy apostolic church appears in local manifestations. Missiologically speaking... the church can take courage as she faces the increasing impact of globalisation on local communities today. Being universal and concrete, the church is geared for the simultaneous challenges of the global and local.

Marina Ngurusangzeli Behera (Ed)

***Interfaith Relations after One Hundred Years***

*Christian Mission among Other Faiths*

2011 / 978-1-870345-96-5 / 338pp (hardback)

The essays of this book reflect not only the acceptance and celebration of pluralism within India but also by extension an acceptance as well as a need for unity among Indian Christians of different denominations. The essays were presented and studied at a preparatory consultation on Study Theme II: Christian Mission Among Other Faiths at the United Theological College, India July 2009.

Lalsangkima Pachuau and Knud Jørgensen (Eds)

***Witnessing to Christ in a Pluralistic Age***

*Christian Mission among Other Faiths*

2011 / 978-1-870345-95-8 / 277pp (hardback)

In a world where plurality of faiths is increasingly becoming a norm of life, insights on the theology of religious plurality are needed to strengthen our understanding of our own faith and the faith of others. Even though religious diversity is not new, we are seeing an upsurge in interest on the theologies of religion among all Christian confessional traditions. It can be claimed that no other issue in Christian mission is more important and more difficult than the theologies of religions.

Beth Snodderly and A Scott Moreau (Eds)

***Evangelical Frontier Mission***

*Perspectives on the Global Progress of the Gospel*

2011 / 978-1-870345-98-9 / 312pp (hardback)

This important volume demonstrates that 100 years after the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, Evangelism has become truly global. Twenty-first-century Evangelism continues to focus on frontier mission, but significantly, and in the spirit of Edinburgh 1910, it also has re-engaged social action.

Rolv Olsen (Ed)

***Mission and Postmodernities***

2011 / 978-1-870345-97-2 / 279pp (hardback)

This volume takes on meaning because its authors honestly struggle with and debate how we should relate to postmodernities. Should our response be accommodation, relativizing or counter-culture? How do we strike a balance between listening and understanding, and

at the same time exploring how postmodernities influence the interpretation and application of the Bible as the normative story of God's mission in the world?

Cathy Ross (Ed)

***Life-Widening Mission***

2012 / 978-1-908355-00-3 / 163pp (hardback)

It is clear from the essays collected here that the experience of the 2010 World Mission Conference in Edinburgh was both affirming and frustrating for those taking part - affirming because of its recognition of how the centre of gravity has moved in global Christianity; frustrating because of the relative slowness of so many global Christian bodies to catch up with this and to embody it in the way they do business and in the way they represent themselves. These reflections will - or should - provide plenty of food for thought in the various councils of the Communion in the coming years.

Beate Fagerli, Knud Jørgensen, Rolv Olsen, Kari Storstein Haug and  
Knut Tveitereid (Eds)

***A Learning Missional Church***

*Reflections from Young Missiologists*

2012 / 978-1-908355-01-0 / 218pp (hardback)

Cross-cultural mission has always been a primary learning experience for the church. It pulls us out of a mono-cultural understanding and helps us discover a legitimate theological pluralism which opens up for new perspectives in the Gospel. Translating the Gospel into new languages and cultures is a human and divine means of making us learn new 'incarnations' of the Good News.

Emma Wild-Wood & Peniel Rajkumar (Eds)

***Foundations for Mission***

2012 / 978-1-908355-12-6 / 309pp (hardback)

This volume provides an important resource for those wishing to gain an overview of significant issues in contemporary missiology whilst understanding how they are applied in particular contexts.

Wonsuk Ma & Kenneth R Ross (Eds)

***Mission Spirituality and Authentic Discipleship***

2013 / 978-1-908355-24-9 / 248pp (hardback)

This book argues for the primacy of spirituality in the practice of mission. Since God is the primary agent of mission and God works through the power of the Holy Spirit, it is through openness to the Spirit that mission finds its true character and has its authentic impact.

## **REGNUM STUDIES IN GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY**

David Emmanuel Singh (Ed)

***Jesus and the Cross***

*Reflections of Christians from Islamic Contexts*

2008 / 978-1-870345-65-1 / 226pp

The Cross reminds us that the sins of the world are not borne through the exercise of power but through Jesus Christ's submission to the will of the Father. The papers in this volume are organised in three parts: scriptural, contextual and theological. The central question

being addressed is: how do Christians living in contexts, where Islam is a majority or minority religion, experience, express or think of the Cross?

Sung-wook Hong  
**Naming God in Korea**

*The Case of Protestant Christianity*  
2008 / 978-1-870345-66-8 / 170pp (hardback)

Since Christianity was introduced to Korea more than a century ago, one of the most controversial issues has been the Korean term for the Christian 'God'. This issue is not merely about naming the Christian God in Korean language, but it relates to the question of theological contextualization - the relationship between the gospel and culture - and the question of Korean Christian identity. This book demonstrates the nature of the gospel in relation to cultures, i.e., the universality of the gospel expressed in all human cultures.

Hubert van Beek (Ed)  
**Revisioning Christian Unity**

*The Global Christian Forum*  
2009 / 978-1-870345-74-3 / 288pp (hardback)

This book contains the records of the Global Christian Forum gathering held in Limuru near Nairobi, Kenya, on 6 – 9 November 2007 as well as the papers presented at that historic event. Also included are a summary of the Global Christian Forum process from its inception until the 2007 gathering and the reports of the evaluation of the process that was carried out in 2008.

Young-hoon Lee  
**The Holy Spirit Movement in Korea**

*Its Historical and Theological Development*  
2009 / 978-1-870345-67-5 / 174pp (hardback)

This book traces the historical and theological development of the Holy Spirit Movement in Korea through six successive periods (from 1900 to the present time). These periods are characterized by repentance and revival (1900-20), persecution and suffering under Japanese occupation (1920-40), confusion and division (1940-60), explosive revival in which the Pentecostal movement played a major role in the rapid growth of Korean churches (1960-80), the movement reaching out to all denominations (1980-2000), and the new context demanding the Holy Spirit movement to open new horizons in its mission engagement (2000-).

Paul Hang-Sik Cho  
**Eschatology and Ecology**  
*Experiences of the Korean Church*

2010 / 978-1-870345-75-0 / 260pp (hardback)

This book raises the question of why Korean people, and Korean Protestant Christians in particular, pay so little attention to ecological issues. The author argues that there is an important connection (or elective affinity) between this lack of attention and the other-worldly eschatology that is so dominant within Korean Protestant Christianity.

Dietrich Werner, David Esterline, Namsoon Kang, Joshva Raja (Eds)  
**The Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity**

*Theological Perspectives, Ecumenical Trends, Regional Surveys*  
2010 / 978-1-870345-80-0 / 759pp

This major reference work is the first ever comprehensive study of Theological Education in Christianity of its kind. With contributions from over 90 international scholars and

church leaders, it aims to be easily accessible across denominational, cultural, educational, and geographic boundaries. The Handbook will aid international dialogue and networking among theological educators, institutions, and agencies.

David Emmanuel Singh & Bernard C Farr (Eds)

**Christianity and Education**

*Shaping of Christian Context in Thinking*

2010 / 978-1-870345-81-1 / 374pp

*Christianity and Education* is a collection of papers published in *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* over a period of 15 years. The articles represent a spectrum of Christian thinking addressing issues of institutional development for theological education, theological studies in the context of global mission, contextually aware/informed education, and academies which deliver such education, methodologies and personal reflections.

J. Andrew Kirk

**Civilisations in Conflict?**

*Islam, the West and Christian Faith*

2011 / 978-1-870345-87-3 / 205pp

Samuel Huntington's thesis, which argues that there appear to be aspects of Islam that could be on a collision course with the politics and values of Western societies, has provoked much controversy. The purpose of this study is to offer a particular response to Huntington's thesis by making a comparison between the origins of Islam and Christianity.

David Emmanuel Singh (Ed)

**Jesus and the Incarnation**

*Reflections of Christians from Islamic Contexts*

2011 / 978-1-870345-90-3 / 245pp

In the dialogues of Christians with Muslims nothing is more fundamental than the Cross, the Incarnation and the Resurrection of Jesus. Building on the *Jesus and the Cross*, this book contains voices of Christians living in various 'Islamic contexts' and reflecting on the Incarnation of Jesus. The aim and hope of these reflections is that the papers weaved around the notion of 'the Word' will not only promote dialogue among Christians on the roles of the Person and the Book but, also, create a positive environment for their conversations with Muslim neighbours.

Ivan M Satyavrata

**God Has Not left Himself Without Witness**

2011 / 978-1-870345-79-8 / 264pp

Since its earliest inception the Christian Church has had to address the question of what common ground exists between Christian faiths and other religions. This issue is not merely of academic interest but one with critical existential and socio-political consequences. This study presents a case for the revitalization of the fulfillment tradition based on a recovery and assessment of the fulfillment approaches of Indian Christian converts in the pre-independence period.

Bal Krishna Sharma

**From this World to the Next**

**Christian Identity and Funerary Rites in Nepal**

2013 / 978-1-908355-08-9 / 238pp

This book explores and analyses funerary rite struggles in a nation where Christianity is a comparatively recent phenomenon, and many families have multi-faith, who go through

traumatic experiences at the death of their family members. The author has used an applied theological approach to explore and analyse the findings in order to address the issue of funerary rites with which the Nepalese church is struggling.

J Kwabena Asamoah-Gyada  
**Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity  
Interpretations from an African Context**  
2013 / 978-1-908355-07-2 / 194pp

Pentecostalism is the fastest growing stream of Christianity in the world. The real evidence for the significance of Pentecostalism lies in the actual churches they have built and the numbers they attract. This work interprets key theological and missiological themes in African Pentecostalism by using material from the live experiences of the movement itself.

Isabel Apawo Phiri & Dietrich Werner (Eds)  
**Handbook of Theological Education in Africa**  
2013 / 978-1-908355-19-5 / 1110pp (hardback)

The *Handbook of Theological Education in Africa* is a wake-up call for African churches to give proper prominence to theological education institutions and their programmes which serve them. It is unique, comprehensive and ambitious in its aim and scope.

Hope Antone, Wati Longchar, Hyunju Bae, Huang Po Ho, Dietrich Werner (Eds)  
**Asian Handbook for Theological Education and Ecumenism**  
2013 / 978-1-908355-30-0 / 675pp (hardback)

This impressive and comprehensive book focuses on key resources for teaching Christian unity and common witness in Asian contexts. It is a collection of articles that reflects the ongoing 'double wrestle' with the texts of biblical tradition as well as with contemporary contexts. It signals an investment towards the future of the ecumenical movement in Asia.

David Emmanuel Singh and Bernard C Farr (Eds)  
**Inequality, Corruption and the Church  
Challenges & Opportunities in the Global Church**  
2013 / 978-1-908355-20-1 / 217pp

This book contains papers from the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies' quarterly journal, Transformation, on the topic of Christian Ethics. Here, Mission Studies is understood in its widest sense to also encompass Christian Ethics. At the very hearts of it lies the Family as the basic unit of society. All the papers together seek to contribute to understanding how Christian thought is shaped in contexts each of which poses its own challenge to Christian living in family and in broader society. Copyrighted Material

Martin Allaby  
**Inequality, Corruption and the Church  
Challenges & Opportunities in the Global Church**  
2013 / 978-1-908355-16-4 / 228pp

Why are economic inequalities greatest in the southern countries where most people are Christians? This book teases out the influences that have created this situation, and concludes that Christians could help reduce economic inequalities by opposing corruption. Interviews in the Philippines, Kenya, Zambia and Peru reveal opportunities and challenges for Christians as they face up to corruption.

## REGNUM STUDIES IN MISSION

Kwame Bediako

### **Theology and Identity**

*The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa*  
1992 / 978-1870345-10-1 / 507pp

The author examines the question of Christian identity in the context of the Graeco–Roman culture of the early Roman Empire. He then addresses the modern African predicament of quests for identity and integration.

Christopher Sugden

### **Seeking the Asian Face of Jesus**

*The Practice and Theology of Christian Social Witness  
in Indonesia and India 1974–1996*  
1997 / 1-870345-26-6 / 496pp

This study focuses on contemporary holistic mission with the poor in India and Indonesia combined with the call to transformation of all life in Christ with micro-credit enterprise schemes. ‘The literature on contextual theology now has a new standard to rise to’ – Lamin Sanneh (Yale University, USA).

Hwa Yung

### **Mangoes or Bananas?**

*The Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology*  
1997 / 1-870345-25-5 / 274pp

Asian Christian thought remains largely captive to Greek dualism and Enlightenment rationalism because of the overwhelming dominance of Western culture. Authentic contextual Christian theologies will emerge within Asian Christianity with a dual recovery of confidence in culture and the gospel.

Keith E. Eitel

### **Paradigm Wars**

*The Southern Baptist International Mission Board Faces the Third Millennium*  
1999 / 1-870345-12-6 / 140pp

The International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention is the largest denominational mission agency in North America. This volume chronicles the historic and contemporary forces that led to the IMB’s recent extensive reorganization, providing the most comprehensive case study to date of a historic mission agency restructuring to continue its mission purpose into the twenty-first century more effectively.

Samuel Jayakumar

### **Dalit Consciousness and Christian Conversion**

*Historical Resources for a Contemporary Debate*  
1999 / 81-7214-497-0 / 434pp

(Published jointly with ISPCK)

The main focus of this historical study is social change and transformation among the Dalit Christian communities in India. Historiography tests the evidence in the light of the conclusions of the modern Dalit liberation theologians.

Vinay Samuel and Christopher Sugden (Eds)

**Mission as Transformation**

*A Theology of the Whole Gospel*

1999 / 978-18703455-13-2 / 522pp

This book brings together in one volume twenty five years of biblical reflection on mission practice with the poor from around the world. This volume helps anyone understand how evangelicals, struggling to unite evangelism and social action, found their way in the last twenty five years to the biblical view of mission in which God calls all human beings to love God and their neighbour; never creating a separation between the two.

Christopher Sugden

**Gospel, Culture and Transformation**

2000 / 1-870345-32-0 / 152pp

*A Reprint, with a New Introduction,*

*of Part Two of Seeking the Asian Face of Jesus*

*Gospel, Culture and Transformation* explores the practice of mission especially in relation to transforming cultures and communities. 'Transformation is to enable God's vision of society to be actualised in all relationships: social, economic and spiritual, so that God's will may be reflected in human society and his love experienced by all communities, especially the poor.'

Bernhard Ott

**Beyond Fragmentation: Integrating Mission and Theological Education**

*A Critical Assessment of some Recent Developments*

*in Evangelical Theological Education*

2001 / 1-870345-14-2 / 382pp

*Beyond Fragmentation* is an enquiry into the development of Mission Studies in evangelical theological education in Germany and German-speaking Switzerland between 1960 and 1995. The author undertakes a detailed examination of the paradigm shifts which have taken place in recent years in both the theology of mission and the understanding of theological education.

Gideon Githiga

**The Church as the Bulwark against Authoritarianism**

*Development of Church and State Relations in Kenya, with Particular Reference to the*

*Years after Political Independence 1963-1992*

2002 / 1-870345-38-x / 218pp

'All who care for love, peace and unity in Kenyan society will want to read this careful history by Bishop Githiga of how Kenyan Christians, drawing on the Bible, have sought to share the love of God, bring his peace and build up the unity of the nation, often in the face of great difficulties and opposition.' Canon Dr Chris Sugden, Oxford Centre for Mission Studies.

Myung Sung-Hoon, Hong Young-Gi (Eds)

**Charis and Charisma**

*David Yonggi Cho and the Growth of Yoido Full Gospel Church*

2003 / 978-1870345-45-3 / 218pp

This book discusses the factors responsible for the growth of the world's largest church. It expounds the role of the Holy Spirit, the leadership, prayer, preaching, cell groups and



creativity in promoting church growth. It focuses on God's grace (charis) and inspiring leadership (charisma) as the two essential factors and the book's purpose is to present a model for church growth worldwide.

Samuel Jayakumar

**Mission Reader**

*Historical Models for Wholistic Mission in the Indian Context*

2003 / 1-870345-42-8 / 250pp

(Published jointly with ISPCK)

This book is written from an evangelical point of view revalidating and reaffirming the Christian commitment to wholistic mission. The roots of the 'wholistic mission' combining 'evangelism and social concerns' are to be located in the history and tradition of Christian evangelism in the past; and the civilizing purpose of evangelism is compatible with modernity as an instrument in nation building.

Bob Robinson

**Christians Meeting Hindus**

*An Analysis and Theological Critique of the Hindu-Christian Encounter in India*

2004 / 987-1870345-39-2 / 392pp

This book focuses on the Hindu-Christian encounter, especially the intentional meeting called dialogue, mainly during the last four decades of the twentieth century, and specifically in India itself.

Gene Early

**Leadership Expectations**

*How Executive Expectations are Created and Used in a Non-Profit Setting*

2005 / 1-870345-30-4 / 276pp

The author creates an Expectation Enactment Analysis to study the role of the Chancellor of the University of the Nations-Kona, Hawaii. This study is grounded in the field of managerial work, jobs, and behaviour and draws on symbolic interactionism, role theory, role identity theory and enactment theory. The result is a conceptual framework for developing an understanding of managerial roles.

Tharcisse Gatwa

**The Churches and Ethnic Ideology in the Rwandan Crises 1900-1994**

2005 / 978-1870345-24-8 / 300pp

(Reprinted 2011)

Since the early years of the twentieth century Christianity has become a new factor in Rwandan society. This book investigates the role Christian churches played in the formulation and development of the racial ideology that culminated in the 1994 genocide.

Julie Ma

**Mission Possible**

*Biblical Strategies for Reaching the Lost*

2005 / 978-1870345-37-1 / 142pp

This is a missiology book for the church which liberates missiology from the specialists for the benefit of every believer. It also serves as a textbook that is simple and friendly, and yet solid in biblical interpretation. This book links the biblical teaching to the actual and contemporary missiological settings with examples, making the Bible come alive to the reader.

I. Mark Beaumont

**Christology in Dialogue with Muslims**

*A Critical Analysis of Christian Presentations of Christ for Muslims  
from the Ninth and Twentieth Centuries*

2005 / 978-1870345-46-0 / 227pp

This book analyses Christian presentations of Christ for Muslims in the most creative periods of Christian-Muslim dialogue, the first half of the ninth century and the second half of the twentieth century. In these two periods, Christians made serious attempts to present their faith in Christ in terms that take into account Muslim perceptions of him, with a view to bridging the gap between Muslim and Christian convictions.

Thomas Czövek,

**Three Seasons of Charismatic Leadership**

*A Literary-Critical and Theological Interpretation of the Narrative of  
Saul, David and Solomon*

2006 / 978-1870345-48-4 / 272pp

This book investigates the charismatic leadership of Saul, David and Solomon. It suggests that charismatic leaders emerge in crisis situations in order to resolve the crisis by the charisma granted by God. Czövek argues that Saul proved himself as a charismatic leader as long as he acted resolutely and independently from his mentor Samuel. In the author's eyes, Saul's failure to establish himself as a charismatic leader is caused by his inability to step out from Samuel's shadow.

Richard Burgess

**Nigeria's Christian Revolution**

*The Civil War Revival and Its Pentecostal Progeny (1967-2006)*

2008 / 978-1-870345-63-7 / 347pp

This book describes the revival that occurred among the Igbo people of Eastern Nigeria and the new Pentecostal churches it generated, and documents the changes that have occurred as the movement has responded to global flows and local demands. As such, it explores the nature of revivalist and Pentecostal experience, but does so against the backdrop of local socio-political and economic developments, such as decolonisation and civil war, as well as broader processes, such as modernisation and globalisation.

David Emmanuel Singh & Bernard C Farr (Eds)

**Christianity and Cultures**

*Shaping Christian Thinking in Context*

2008 / 978-1-870345-69-9 / 271pp

This volume marks an important milestone, the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies (OCMS). The papers here have been exclusively sourced from Transformation, a quarterly journal of OCMS, and seek to provide a tripartite view of Christianity's engagement with cultures by focusing on the question: how is Christian thinking being formed or reformed through its interaction with the varied contexts it encounters? The subject matters include different strands of theological-missiological thinking, socio-political engagements and forms of family relationships in interaction with the host cultures.

Tormod Engelsen, Ernst Harbakk, Rolv Olsen, Thor Strandenæs (Eds)

**Mission to the World**

*Communicating the Gospel in the 21st Century:*

*Essays in Honour of Knud Jørgensen*

2008 / 978-1-870345-64-4 / 472pp (hardback)

Knud Jørgensen is Director of Areopagos and Associate Professor of Missiology at MF Norwegian School of Theology. This book reflects on the main areas of Jørgensen's commitment to mission. At the same time it focuses on the main frontier of mission, the world, the content of mission, the Gospel, the fact that the Gospel has to be communicated, and the context of contemporary mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Al Tizon

**Transformation after Lausanne**

*Radical Evangelical Mission in Global-Local Perspective*

2008 / 978-1-870345-68-2 / 281pp

After Lausanne '74, a worldwide network of radical evangelical mission theologians and practitioners use the notion of "Mission as Transformation" to integrate evangelism and social concern together, thus lifting theological voices from the Two Thirds World to places of prominence. This book documents the definitive gatherings, theological tensions, and social forces within and without evangelicalism that led up to Mission as Transformation. And it does so through a global-local grid that points the way toward greater holistic mission in the 21st century.

Bambang Budijanto

**Values and Participation**

*Development in Rural Indonesia*

2009 / 978-1-870345-70-4 / 237pp

Socio-religious values and socio-economic development are inter-dependant, inter-related and are constantly changing in the context of macro political structures, economic policy, religious organizations and globalization; and micro influences such as local affinities, identity, politics, leadership and beliefs. The book argues that the comprehensive approach in understanding the socio-religious values of each of the three local Lopait communities in Central Java is essential to accurately describing their respective identity.

Alan R. Johnson

**Leadership in a Slum**

*A Bangkok Case Study*

2009 / 978-1-870345-71-2 / 238pp

This book looks at leadership in the social context of a slum in Bangkok from a different perspective than traditional studies which measure well educated Thais on leadership scales derived in the West. Using both systematic data collection and participant observation, it develops a culturally preferred model as well as a set of models based in Thai concepts that reflect on-the-ground realities. It concludes by looking at the implications of the anthropological approach for those who are involved in leadership training in Thai settings and beyond.

Titre Ande

**Leadership and Authority**

*Bula Matari and Life - Community Ecclesiology in Congo*

2010 / 978-1-870345-72-9 / 189pp

Christian theology in Africa can make significant development if a critical understanding of the socio-political context in contemporary Africa is taken seriously, particularly as

Africa's post-colonial Christian leadership based its understanding and use of authority on the Bula Matari model. This has caused many problems and Titre proposes a Life-Community ecclesiology for liberating authority, here leadership is a function, not a status, and 'apostolic succession' belongs to all people of God.

Frank Kwesi Adams  
**Odwira and the Gospel**

*A Study of the Asante Odwira Festival and its Significance for Christianity in Ghana*  
2010 / 978-1-870345-59-0 / 232pp

The study of the Odwira festival is the key to the understanding of Asante religious and political life in Ghana. The book explores the nature of the Odwira festival longitudinally - in pre-colonial, colonial and post-independence Ghana - and examines the Odwira ideology and its implications for understanding the Asante self-identity. Also discussed is how some elements of faith portrayed in the Odwira festival can provide a framework for Christianity to engage with Asante culture at a greater depth.

Bruce Carlton  
**Strategy Coordinator**

*Changing the Course of Southern Baptist Missions*  
2010 / 978-1-870345-78-1 / 273pp

This is an outstanding, one-of-a-kind work addressing the influence of the non-residential missionary/strategy coordinator's role in Southern Baptist missions. This scholarly text examines the twentieth century global missiological currents that influenced the leadership of the International Mission Board, resulting in a new paradigm to assist in taking the gospel to the nations.

Julie Ma & Wonsuk Ma  
**Mission in the Spirit**

*Towards a Pentecostal/Charismatic Missiology*  
2010 / 978-1-870345-84-2 / 312pp

The book explores the unique contribution of Pentecostal/Charismatic mission from the beginning of the twentieth century. The first part considers the theological basis of Pentecostal/Charismatic mission thinking and practice. Special attention is paid to the Old Testament, which has been regularly overlooked by the modern Pentecostal/Charismatic movements. The second part discusses major mission topics with contributions and challenges unique to Pentecostal/Charismatic mission. The book concludes with a reflection on the future of this powerful missionary movement. As the authors served as Korean missionaries in Asia, often their missionary experiences in Asia are reflected in their discussions.

Allan Anderson, Edmond Tang (Eds)  
**Asian and Pentecostal**

*The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia*  
2011 / 978-1870345-94-1 / 500pp

(Revised Edition)

This book provides a thematic discussion and pioneering case studies on the history and development of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in the countries of South Asia, South East Asia and East Asia.

S. Hun Kim & Wonsuk Ma (Eds)  
**Korean Diaspora and Christian Mission**  
2011 / 978-1-870345-89-7 / 301pp (hardback)

As a 'divine conspiracy' for Missio Dei, the global phenomenon of people on the move has shown itself to be invaluable. In 2004 two significant documents concerning Diaspora were introduced, one by the Filipino International Network and the other by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization. These have created awareness of the importance of people on the move for Christian mission. Since then, Korean Diaspora has conducted similar research among Korean missions, resulting in this book

Jin Huat Tan  
**Planting an Indigenous Church**  
*The Case of the Borneo Evangelical Mission*  
2011 / 978-1-870345-99-6 / 343pp

Dr Jin Huat Tan has written a pioneering study of the origins and development of Malaysia's most significant indigenous church. This is an amazing story of revival, renewal and transformation of the entire region chronicling the powerful effect of it evident to date! What can we learn from this extensive and careful study of the Borneo Revival, so the global Christianity will become ever more dynamic?

Bill Prevette  
**Child, Church and Compassion**  
*Towards Child Theology in Romania*  
2012 / 978-1-908355-03-4 / 382pp

Bill Prevett comments that 'children are like 'canaries in a mine shaft'; they provide a focal point for discovery and encounter of perilous aspects of our world that are often ignored.' True, but miners also carried a lamp to see into the subterranean darkness. This book is such a lamp. It lights up the subterranean world of children and youth in danger of exploitation, and as it does so travels deep into their lives and also into the activities of those who seek to help them.

Samuel Cyuma  
**Picking up the Pieces**  
*The Church and Conflict Resolution in South Africa and Rwanda*  
2012 / 978-1-908355-02-7 / 373pp

In the last ten years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the world was twice confronted with unbelievable news from Africa. First, there was the end of Apartheid in South Africa, without bloodshed, due to responsible political and Church leaders. The second was the mass killings in Rwanda, which soon escalated into real genocide. Political and Church leaders had been unable to prevent this crime against humanity. In this book, the question is raised: can we compare the situation in South Africa with that in Rwanda? Can Rwandan leaders draw lessons from the peace process in South Africa?

Peter Rowan  
**Proclaiming the Peacemaker**  
*The Malaysian Church as an Agent of Reconciliation in a Multicultural Society*  
2012 / 978-1-908355-05-8 / 268pp

With a history of racial violence and in recent years, low-level ethnic tensions, the themes of peaceful coexistence and social harmony are recurring ones in the discourse of Malaysian society. In such a context, this book looks at the role of the church as a

reconciling agent, arguing that a reconciling presence within a divided society necessitates an ethos of peacemaking.

Edward Ontita

**Resources and Opportunity**

*The Architecture of Livelihoods in Rural Kenya*

2012 / 978-1-908355-04-1 / 328pp

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