

Wednesday: Standing on God's
Truth
15h15-16h30

The Role of Theological Education in aiding Reconciliation

Reconciliation as the Mission of God

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“In too many places, the blood of ethnicity, tribe, racialism, sexism, social class, or nationalism flows stronger than the waters of baptism and our confession of Christ .”

God's mission: The Christian faith embraces reconciliation as the mission of God in our fallen and broken world, accomplished in the work of Jesus Christ and entrusted to the church through people who participate by being transformed into ambassadors of reconciliation in a broken world. (<https://lausanne.org/content/reconciliation-mission-god-excerpt>)

Reconciliation: Reconciliation is God’s initiative, seeking “to reconcile to himself all things” through Christ (Colossians 1:19). Reconciliation is grounded in God restoring the world to God’s intentions, the process of restoring the brokenness between people and God, within people, between people and with God’s created earth. **Reconciliation between people is a mutual journey, requiring reciprocal participation.** It includes a willingness to acknowledge wrongs done, extend forgiveness, and make restorative changes that help build trust so that truth and mercy, justice and peace dwell together. (<https://lausanne.org/content/reconciliation-mission-god-excerpt>)

- *“For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in [the Son], 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.” (Colossians 1:19-20)*
- *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: The old has gone, the new has come! 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.” (2 Corinthians 5:17-20a)*
- *“For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:27-28)*

Christians always find themselves divided:

Few Examples:

- legalized apartheid (South Africa)
- Ethnic cleansing (the Balkans)
- Genocide (Rwanda),
- News of racism (USA)
- Terror and killing of civilian populations in Northern Ireland
- Conflict among Palestinians and Israelis

Christians are often bitterly divided on both sides

- This troubled situation calls for prayer, discernment, and repentance, and a critical re-examination of the very meaning of mission, evangelism, discipleship and even church in relation to God's reconciling mission. This is particularly urgent given cases where vast areas of revivals and church planting have become vast killing fields (such as Rwanda 1994), with Christians slaughtering neighbours and even other Christians.
- How do you think should be the role of reconciliation as Theological Educators?
- Are there opportunities to foster and nurture the spirit of reconciliation from our theological institutions?

- We seek to locate the role that could be played by theological institutions in the ongoing discussion around reconciliation within the African context.
- Biblical understanding of reconciliation is very important
- Identifying central New Testament texts which seems to be primarily occurring in the Pauline corpus (2 Corinthians 5:17-21, Romans 5:8-11, Ephesians 2:13-16, and Colossians 1:15-23).

The Vision of Reconciliation

The mission of God in our fallen, broken world is reconciliation. Sacred Scripture witnesses that God's mission of reconciliation is holistic, including relationships with God, self, others, and creation. This mission has never changed from the Fall to the new creation in Christ, to its fulfilment in the coming of Jesus in the *eschaton*. God's reconciling mission involves the very in-breaking of the Kingdom of God, as realized through Jesus' incarnation, His life and ministry and preaching, and through His death and resurrection.

<https://lausanne.org/content/reconciliation-mission-god-excerpt>

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The Hope for Reconciliation - Biblical and Theological Foundations of Reconciliation

- Amidst the world's profound brokenness, God's peace in the risen Christ is now powerfully at work, seeking to reconcile humanity to God's intended purposes for union with God, one another, and the material creation, resulting in the flourishing of all. From Genesis to Revelation, Scripture witnesses to God's total mission "*to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven*" (Colossians 1:15-20). The fullness of reconciliation is friendship with God in Jesus Christ, witnessed to in Christ's two-fold command to love God and neighbour (Matthew 22:37-40). Christ has prepared the way for reconciliation by abolishing the dividing wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile, making of the two one new humanity, establishing peace (Ephesians 2:11-18). Reconciliation is a sign of God's presence in the world, of the kingdom of God drawing near.
- The wholeness that God seeks to bring to all areas of brokenness is captured by the rich Scriptural notion of *shalom*. This is *shalom* as rooted within the full biblical story and not in any nationalistic or politically partisan sense. From the original wholeness of God's creation, broken by the Fall, to God's response to initiate restoration through covenant, to Christ tearing down the Jew-Gentile barrier, *shalom* proclaims peace as God's peace in distinction to the world's:
- "*Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you*" (John 14:27). *Shalom* as God's peace envisions the wholeness, well-being and flourishing of all people and the rest of creation both individually and corporately in their interrelatedness with God and with each other. *Shalom* as God's peace encompasses all dimensions of human life, including the spiritual, physical, cognitive, emotional, social, societal and economic. *Shalom* pursues mercy, truth, justice and peacefulness through both personal conversion in Christ and social transformation.
- Because God created all persons in God's image, reconciliation also proclaims God's love for every human being. One crucial implication is that Christians must stand against any destructive or dehumanizing barriers built up by one person or group of people against another, whether they are Christian or not.
- One theological implication of the above three paragraphs is this: God's mission of holistic reconciliation is the overall context for evangelism and making disciples. Reconciliation with God is essential and Christians must be agents of that restoration. However, to stress evangelism without also being agents of holistic reconciliation betrays the full truth of the gospel and the mission of God.

- In view of all this, Christians are called to faithfully embody God's total reconciling mission. Through new life given in Christ, the Holy Spirit's power, the church's faithful teaching, and on-going Christian practices, people can be deeply transformed toward loving God, neighbour and enemies. Only in this radical journey of conversion can Christians develop the skills to resist destructive conflicts and live out a way of being which, over time, can heal and reconcile.
- The church's ministry of reconciliation flows from a call to *being* a reconciled community.
- Christ prayed for the visible unity of the church, and intimately connected Christian unity to Christ being known as the One sent from God: *"I pray . . . that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me"* (John 17:20-23).
- We are led by Christ crucified to fully engage painful historical conditions and by the risen Christ to explode walls and barriers and build new forms of common life.
- The church's ministry should also be profoundly shaped by the truth that Jesus is fully human and fully divine. Christian discipleship is led by the crucified Christ to fully engage the painful historical conditions of separation, animosity, and destruction in the earthly realm, refusing "cheap grace" and shallow resolutions. Christian discipleship is also led by the risen Christ to live in ways which explode old walls and barriers and build hopeful new forms of Christian community and just society between divided peoples.
- Reconciliation and the quest for justice go hand in hand. There cannot be reconciliation if sin is not named, judged publicly and condemned. In the face of oppression, to reject vengeance is a double injustice — to the afflicted and to God's wrath against evil. What is crucial is how we appropriate vengeance: *"Do not take revenge...but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge, I will repay,' says the Lord"* (Romans 12:19). In Jesus' death, God judged all sins, abuses and atrocities. God's forgiveness in Christ "while we were yet sinners" guides our pursuit of justice toward healing. One mark of holistic reconciliation is a commitment to pursuing justice that is primarily restorative rather than retributive, keeping open the hope for future common life between enemies and alienated peoples.
- At the same time, we must heed Scripture's exhortation that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood." It is crucial to recognize an unseen, heavenly dimension to the quest for reconciliation in the world, a struggle against certain destructive forces and their ideologies, against "rulers," "powers of this dark world," "spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 6:10-18). This calls for a deep life of prayer and discernment "in the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:18) at the centre of Christian ministry amidst destructive conflict and proclaims that reconciliation is ultimately a matter of God's power and victory.
- Difference itself, or differences, are not necessarily the problem calling for reconciliation. In many ways, diversity of peoples and cultures is a gift, such as another language opening up a new world to us, or another culture as a gift to enrich us. Often the problem is how the will to dominate exploits the differences. While God's mission of reconciliation does not obliterate human diversity, it does seek to bring friendship with God and neighbour in a way which transforms human cultures. We must carefully and locally discern where the gospel affirms culture, where it opposes, and where it encourages transformation. Christians are called to lives of hospitality, to open themselves to the stranger, the alien, the outcast, and the enemy. Such openness radically changes one's relationship to one's culture, and how one engages cultures in transforming ways. The pursuit of reconciliation is an ongoing struggle. This quest should not be expected to end conflict in this world, but rather to transform it. True reconciliation and shalom is only in the *eschaton*, when all things are reconciled in Christ. While full reconciliation does not happen in this life, there is hope of substantial healing.