

The Christian Message of Reconciliation as an Effective Vehicle for Evangelization

Robert Schreiter

Catholic Theological Union

Academy for Evangelism in Theological Education

University of Northwestern

St. Paul, MN

June 20, 2014

Introduction

I am grateful for the invitation from your president, Dr. Winston Worrell, for this opportunity to discuss with you the training of clergy for more effective evangelism. Announcing the Good News of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ is central to the vocation of Christian clergy, and indeed to all of the baptized.

The theme of this year's meeting is "Training Evangelism Clergy to be Relevant for Today's/ Tomorrow's World." I wish to address this theme by taking up one particular topic that, to my mind, has become an important vehicle for evangelism today, namely, reconciliation.

Reconciliation is, as we all know, one of the ways in which the apostle Paul talks about the saving work of Jesus Christ in his writings. It is also a topic that has taken on broader relevance in the world over the past twenty-five years—so much so that there is now a huge literature on the topic in the secular sphere, especially in international studies and in political science. What I

would like to do with you here is present the discussion of reconciliation as a kind of case study in which to see how reading of what is happening in the world can be seen as a site for an approach to evangelism, when what is happening resonates in a special way with a parallel theme in the biblical message. That resonance, in turn, allows us to see new perspectives in the biblical texts, as well as proposes practices that incarnate that theme as a form of evangelism in a very concrete way. To illustrate just how that concretization takes place, I will present how it is affecting the curriculum at the institution where I teach, at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. In so doing, it is my hope that this case study can stimulate thinking about how other biblical themes, in conjunction with changing events in the world around us, might lead to more effective patterns of evangelism today.

The Emergence of Reconciliation as a Compelling Theme in the Contemporary World

How is it that particular ideas that are part of a common heritage, at certain junctures of history, become compelling themes that require us to both revisit them to see how they might illumine our present situation, and also expand them to meet the challenges that now impinge upon us? I believe that once such occurrence has presented itself to us in a salient way over the past twenty-five years. It is a theme that had emerged earlier from time to time but then, all of a sudden, took on an urgency that will not allow us to turn away from it. That theme is reconciliation.

In the 1970s and into the mid-1980s, the theme of reconciliation had arisen from time to time on a couple of different fronts. The need for racial reconciliation between peoples of European and African descent in the United States asserted itself in the Civil Rights movement, and in South Africa in the struggle against apartheid. In both places, the need for finding ways toward

reconciliation had been asserted, although without much development of just how that would take place. There was a concern, especially in South Africa, that a rhetoric of reconciliation—articulated mostly by White people who had been involved in oppressing Black people, either directly or indirectly—would be used as a sop to diminish conflict rather than engage in the action that would bring about a more just society. This was expressed most clearly in the 1985 Kairos Document, which protested against a kind of “Church Theology” that took up the language of reconciliation, but without engaging in any work to bring it about.

A similar fear was expressed in Latin America. “Reconciliation” came to be equated with impunity for wrongdoers, since it was the “Christian thing to do”: we should “forgive and forget.” This was especially evident after the “dirty war” in Argentina that ended in 1983. Church leaders in some Roman Catholic circles there proposed reconciliation as an alternative to liberation. Such rhetoric poisoned the term “reconciliation” for many people, especially those who had been victims of injustice and found their cries unattended to.

But a powerful concatenation of events reintroduced an interest in reconciliation. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 were the first of a series of events that reopened the question. The freeing up of the nations once part of the Soviet bloc in Central and Eastern Europe opened the opportunity for a revitalization of the Christian churches there. But in the struggles to rebuild and evangelize, it became apparent that deep divisions ran through churches and society. Church leaders had been severely compromised by their being co-opted into the surveillance network of government informers. This would have to be confronted and healed.

A 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 in the Rwandan genocide. The conflicts that were happening were within countries rather than between countries. What this meant was that the rebuilding after the conflict was even more difficult, since erstwhile combatants were often neighbors and now ways would have to be found to live together peaceably after the armed conflict was over. The genocide in Rwanda brought that point home even more. Missionaries often found themselves in the midst of violence, and churches were being called upon—as one of the few remaining credible actors in civil society—to lead peace processes and efforts at rebuilding the larger 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. Native peoples in the Americas, in Australia, in New Zealand, and elsewhere used this opportunity to testify to their suffering (and in some places, near extinction) at the hands of European colonial powers. This forced nations and churches to consider how to heal these grievous wounds. 1994 saw the UN Conference on Women in Beijing, an event that underscored the worldwide patterns of violence against women.

The intersection of 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 (and it is noteworthy that the majority of migrants are women and are Christian), in societies becoming more multicultural, in greater polarization in societies (due to growing economic inequality around the world and social hyperdifferentiation in wealthy cultures¹), and a compression of time and space through information technology and the media. These effects produced new fissures, divisions, and wounds in society at a quicker pace than societies could cope with. They contributed in a significant way to the “culture wars” that have been raging in the United States and elsewhere now for nearly two decades. 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. Sudden and massive migration from low-lying coastal areas, challenges to food security, and competition for potable water are all likely outcomes of climate change. Many activists called for reconciliation with the earth as essential to saving life on this planet.

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 happening. By early part of the twenty-first century, reconciliation had been a theme for the British and Irish Association of Mission Studies

¹ “Hyperdifferentiation” refers to the increasing differentiation in postmodern cultures to the extent that individuals and groups will form enclaves of like-minded people, and become less willing 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 hyperdifferentiation.

(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 Lutheran World Federation, the Lausanne Movement and elsewhere.

It had become evident that the world was in need of reconciliation in some 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, and not simply a continuation of interest in liberation, as had been the case in the previous two decades? Some suggest that the utopian visions that had played a formative role for many in the churches—beginning in the optimistic 1960s (in the theology of hope) and continued in the 1970s and 80s (in the theologies of liberation)—had crumbled in the face of the collapse of the great ideologies with their utopian dreams and schemes.

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 had become a compelling theme for Christians, a theme that played upon an important biblical message even as it was voiced in secular settings in so many different ways.

Reconciliation as a Biblical Theme

So how might the biblical theme of reconciliation be revisited in light of the increasing calls for the churches to engage in a ministry of reconciliation in a broken and battered world? The theme

of reconciliation is prominent in the Scriptures, although it is spoken of directly very little. The word “reconciliation” does not appear at all in the Hebrew Scriptures, although there are powerful stories of reconciliation to be found there, 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 in the Pauline writings. 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.

Indeed, some form of the word “reconciliation” (*katallegein*) only occurs fourteen times in the New Testament, and all but two of them in the Pauline corpus. Among these, the central locus is in Romans 5:1-11:

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have access to the grace in which we now 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 then, 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 through his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. (NRSV)

This passage, familiar to us also as the locus for the doctrine of justification, puts the theme of reconciliation at the center of the entire biblical narrative. Our focus on the theme of justification through the years may have obscured for us how much the passage talks about reconciliation as well. Certainly the events of the past twenty-five years have offered us a new opportunity to see that theme in a new perspective.

That the theme of reconciliation is woven into the central narrative of what God has done for the world in Christ has given reconciliation as a religious or theological theme a potency for Christians that it does not have in other religious traditions. Those other traditions take up many of the aspects of reconciliation, such as repair or healing, justice, mercy, forgiveness. But they are not brought together in a single narrative as is the case in the Christian one. I believe that this is one of the reasons why the Christian message of reconciliation has found the resonance that it has, since it becomes an important way of describing God's intentions for the world, what the *missio Dei* in the world is for us.

This message of reconciliation has been called the "vertical" dimension of reconciliation; that is, God's reconciling humanity to God's own self. It has been articulated theologically, especially in Western theology, in the doctrine of the atonement. But that doctrine, standing alone, does not seem to respond to the immediate and pressing needs for the work of reconciliation in all the settings that I have just summarized. What is the relation of the meaning of God's reconciling us to God's own self to the need we have for reconciliation among ourselves, as individuals and as communities? In other words, how does the more "horizontal" dimension of reconciliation relate to, or flow from, the vertical reconciliation effected by the suffering, death, and resurrection of

Christ? It has been the development of this “horizontal reconciliation” that has been the hallmark of theological work on reconciliation over the past two decades.

This horizontal dimension is rooted in Pauline teaching as well, especially 2 Cor 5:17-20, Eph 2:12-20, and the cosmic consummation of all things in Christ in Eph 1:10 and Col 1:20. The Corinthians passage is central to horizontal reconciliation:

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All of this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, 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.
(NRSV)

In the passage from Second Corinthians, Paul reminds us that any reconciliation we experience is a work of God and a gift from God. In that reconciliation, we are made a “new creation.” And in that new creation we are given both the message and the ministry of reconciliation, a message which we are called upon to share with others through a ministry of reconciliation. Here is the point where the vertical and horizontal axes of reconciliation intersect. It is at that crossing point that we are to discern just how God’s reconciling activity unfolds in human lives, and what our role as Christians is in that process. Even as we delineate just what that ministry looks like, we are constantly reminded that anything that we are able to do is grounded in the activity of Christ. This is the message of another distinctive Pauline passage on reconciliation, Ephesians 2:12-20. There the theme is the reconciliation between Gentile and Jew. Addressed to the Gentile Christians, they are reminded that they were once far from the covenant of promise, but now have been brought near by the blood of Christ, who in his own body has eliminated the enmity

between Gentile and Jew. In Christ, they find peace and are brought together into the household of God.

Finally, in the hymns that open the Letters to the Ephesians and Colossians, respectively, we are reminded that all things will be brought together in Christ at the end of time (Eph 1:10), peace having been made by the blood of his cross (Col 1:19-20).

Reconciliation as a Theological Theme for Ministry

What are the characteristics of this horizontal reconciliation as understood by Christians? How does the biblical message translate into a theology of reconciliation and as a framework for ministry? My own reflections have led me to consolidate the main outlines of what this reconciliation means in five points.

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 cooperate.* From a theological point of view, only God can bring about reconciliation. 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 in cooperation with God's grace.

Two important insights flow from this for a ministry of reconciliation. First of all, in the difficult and often inconclusive work of reconciliation among human beings, we never forget that reconciliation is God's work, and that means that our role is one of cooperation, not of possession. But that does not put us in a passive or apathetic attitude toward what we do. Rather, it keeps before us that our perspectives on the work of reconciliation are always partial and

incomplete. Second, the quality of our work as ministers of God's reconciliation will depend upon the quality of our relationship with God. We need to grow into a deeper intimacy with God as we become more involved in the ministry of reconciliation. It is only through deep communion with God that our work will be effective. For that reason, the Christian approach to reconciliation is not primarily one of technique or strategy. Reconciliation is more a spirituality than a strategy.

Second, *God begins the reconciling process with the healing of the victim*. Christians believe that God looks out in a special way for the victims and the marginalized generally—the widow and the orphan, the prisoner and the stranger. This is the message of the classical Prophets and evident in the ministry of Jesus himself. It is encapsulated in Catholic Social Teaching's option for the poor. This does not ignore or exonerate the wrongdoer. Rather, it recognizes that the wrongdoer oftentimes does not repent, and that the healing of the victim does not depend upon the remorse and apology of the wrongdoer. Indeed at times the healing of the victim even creates the social space in which the wrongdoer can come to repent. For this reason, the Christian ministry of reconciliation focuses especially on the healing of the victim, that is, the victim's restoration of dignity as someone created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26-27).

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 to the *status quo ante*, but takes all the parties involved to a new place, often a place that they could not have imagined beforehand. What this means concretely is that a Christian ministry of reconciliation is an accompaniment of the victim on a journey to that new creation. The moment of healing often comes as a surprise, as

something unexpected. That realization of God's grace in that moment is often one of the most powerful experiences of God that anyone can have, for at that moment they are touched most directly by God.

Fourth, any ministry of reconciliation must deal with the reality of suffering. *The release from that suffering is, for Christians, often patterned on the passion, death and resurrection of Christ.* Suffering in and of itself is destructive; it is not redemptive. It can only become redemptive for individuals and for societies if it is patterned onto a narrative larger than itself. This narrative for Christians is that of the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ, 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).

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).* This accounts for why we typically experience every effort at reconciliation we undertake as ultimately incomplete. We are also reminded that reconciliation is not only a goal or end; it is also a process in which we are called to cooperate. Consequently, a ministry of reconciliation must find sources of hope to sustain us in the quest for reconciliation, a hope "that does not disappoint." (Rom 5:5) Hope is different from optimism, which is our assessment of what we can achieve with our own strength. Hope, on the other hand, comes from God. And it is God who will lead us to the completion of that hope.

This, in a brief outline, is the basis upon which a ministry of reconciliation is built: a deep communion with God who is the author and end of reconciliation; a reconciliation that focuses especially on the healing of victims; a healing that results in a “new creation”; a pattern or praxis of dealing with suffering by connecting our own story to the story of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ; and living in hope that will carry us eventually to the final fulfillment in God.

The Practices of a Ministry of Reconciliation

The biblical vision of reconciliation that this sketch proposes provides us the words, the discourse of reconciliation if you will. But what makes reconciliation a form of evangelism is the deeds or practices of reconciliation. One is reminded of the dictum ascribed to Francis of Assisi: “Preach at all times; and when all else fails, use words.” It is the practices of reconciliation that flow from its message that are most likely to persuade hearers. How might those practices be understood? What practices derive from those words? I would like to note four such practices here.

The first is *healing*. For the healing of individuals, reconciliation might be seen as the restoration of their humanity; that is, a restoring of 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 the healing of 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 has three specific tasks: 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 developed about what has happened to us. Memories are powerful vehicles of both individual and collective identity. How we narrate the past shapes how we relate to the past. To attempt simply to repress the memories of a traumatic past does not erase the past; rather, it sets the stage for what Freudians have called “the return of the repressed.” It can portend a return of violence through revenge, retaliation or victims themselves turning into perpetrators.

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

The *healing of perpetrators* has best been mapped out by the Western Christian tradition of penitential practices as set forth in the early Church, however they might today be enacted. 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 practiced, because perpetrators—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 and those silences 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 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 produce greater justice for all.

Within the discourse of human rights that is so central to the liberal model of peacebuilding, there can be a tendency to reduce reconciliation solely to the pursuit of justice, or to say that there can be no reconciliation unless there is full justice. From the theological view this is an inadequate view of both justice and of reconciliation. 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 fulfillment of complete justice before anything else can be done 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 the work on forgiveness can take more than a generation. Difficult as it is, Christians believe that, with the grace of God once again, forgiveness 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 too early in their healing process. There are also fears among some that forgiveness means foregoing justice or punishment (it does not mean that). 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 a child of God as is the victim. 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.

These five points lay out certain trajectories along which the process of reconciliation takes place. It is important to remember that reconciliation is both a process and a goal. We often think of it only as a goal, and then fail to take effective steps in moving along toward that desired end. Most of the work of reconciliation is in the process of healing, of giving voice and truth-telling, of pursuing justice, of coming to some measure of forgiveness. That is why outlining these four practices is so important to understanding reconciliation in general, and the work of reconciliation as an effective vehicle of evangelism in particular.

Preparing Ministers of Reconciliation

I wish to turn to the final part of this presentation, namely, about the preparation of ministers of reconciliation. This is an area that has drawn a great deal of interest in recent years. I will speak of it here specifically from my own experience of trying to articulate what such training means, and what combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes would need to go into such a training.

What I have presented thus far—the biblical and theological foundations of the Christian message of reconciliation, and the principal practices of reconciliation—serve as the background for proposing some of the capacities we wish to build in someone aspiring to be a minister of reconciliation. I will now share something of my own work in this regard.

I teach at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, a graduate-level school for theology and ministry. We have about five hundred students, preparing for a variety of ordained and lay

ministries. We have a strong emphasis on intercultural ministry and on world mission. About thirty-five percent of our students come from outside the United States, hailing from about forty different countries. They have often developed a keen interest in a wide range of needs for a ministry of reconciliation, from dealing with domestic violence, to rebuilding societies after times of armed conflict, to building genuine cultures of peace. Two years ago, CTU's Board of Trustees urged us to become more specific about training our students to work in areas of reconciliation. The faculty is now in the process of incorporating this more into the curriculum, where there is already a great deal taught about aspects of reconciliation.

As a way toward this, a six-point profile of what capacities a genuine minister of reconciliation should have has been developed. Let me share with you each of these, with a bit of commentary on how they can be elaborated.

The first involves *learning the role of the "third party" who can be trusted by both sides*. Perhaps the simplest definition of the work of reconciliation is restoring trust. For someone to be a reconciler will require developing skills of active listening (that is, listening in such a way that it invites and encourages the other to speak), and skills of empathy. A reconciler must also be able to recognize the positive values in conflicting points of view. To use the words of John Paul Lederach, one of the world's foremost workers in conflict transformation, a minister of reconciliation is someone who can see paradox where others only see polarities. Seeing these seemingly opposing points of view does not mean agreeing with them, but rather respecting how people could come to hold these points of view.

Second, a minister of reconciliation must be able to *create new social spaces*, with an emphasis on the symbolic and ritual dimensions. These new social spaces must be *safe* for all parties concerned, spaces where they can reveal their wounds to others and sort through the narratives of what has happened to them. These new social spaces must be *hospitable*, that is, welcoming to those who have felt marginalized or excluded because of what has happened to them. The minister of reconciliation must be attuned to the symbolic and ritual dimensions of these spaces, since so much of the work of reconciliation is about undoing a past to which we do not have direct access.

Third, a minister of reconciliation must be able to help in *reshaping narratives as a basis for reconciled identity*. Narratives are key to human identity, and play a central role in the transition from being a wounded human being to a restoration of the victim's humanity. The healing process is one of reshaping personal narrative, whereby the victim is able to see meaning in life, and resituate traumatic events of the past within that meaningful narrative. This is most evident in the immediate situation of dealing with suffering. There the victim connects his or her own narrative of suffering with the narrative of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ. This is evident also in the speeches Peter gives in the Acts of the Apostles: his account of the death of Jesus is embedded in a narrative both of what Jesus' enemies have done, but more importantly, what God has done.

The minister must be attuned to the construction and development of narrative, both to people's own narratives, and also to how the narrative of God's dealing with the world, the *missio Dei*, intersects with human narratives as it draws everything together, eschatologically, into Jesus

Christ. Consequently, good listening skills that help discern the beginning, middle, and ends of narratives, and then how networks of meaning might be discovered within them, is a key part of what a minister of reconciliation is called upon to do. From the point of view of an evangelist, think of the importance of conversion narratives for those who have come to Christ. That intersection of personal narrative and the narrative of what God has done in Jesus Christ becomes the basis for a “reconciled identity,” that is, being a “new creation” in Christ.

Fourth, a minister of reconciliation must be able to work at *building new relationships and just institutions*. Certainly one of the most prominent parts of a ministry of reconciliation is the pursuit of justice. It is an indispensable part of the reconciliation process. Wounds are never inflicted outside concrete social contexts; nor are they healed in isolation from the network of relationships in which the victim is embedded. A renewed identity, that makes one right with God and with oneself, must be elaborated within the network of relationships of victims. The social dynamics and structures that lead to wounding and oppression must be set aright along with the interior disposition of the soul. What has emerged as a key consideration in recent years is the importance of restorative justice. Punitive justice, which is what usually comes first to mind in the pursuit of justice, is aimed at putting the wrongdoer in right relationship with the community. Restorative justice is directed more toward justice for victims, placing them once again in a network of right relationships that will allow them to develop a reconciled identity. Sin is both a personal and a social reality. The pursuit of justice is especially concerned with how the features of social environment impinge upon individual well being. For all things to be reconciled in Christ, the contours of the social environment must be in a reconciled—that is right—relationship with God as well.

Fifth, the minister of reconciliation must be capable of *accompanying victims in processes of interpersonal and social forgiveness*. Reconciliation processes are not complete until forgiveness has been extended and received. This is often the most difficult moment in working toward reconciliation. Christians frequently try to enter into forgiveness too early, and in so doing run the risk of victimizing the victim once again because the victim is unable to forgive quickly. Jesus certainly indicates that we are obliged to enter into the path of forgiveness, but it has to happen within the human framework of coming to terms with what has happened to us, and within the framework of divine grace. Forgiveness is essential if there is to be a different future from what can be extrapolated from the past; or in Archbishop Desmond Tutu's felicitous words, "there is no future without forgiveness."

Understanding forgiveness as a process, and a deep feeling for the risk the victim takes in extending forgiveness, are essential elements of a ministry of reconciliation.

Sixth and finally, the minister must *develop the interiority to imagine a different kind of future and provide for self-care in stressful situations*. Or put more simply, the minister of reconciliation must cultivate a deep communion with God, the author and end of reconciliation, through spiritual practices that will sustain him or her in this arduous work. Such a spirituality helps us be of the mind of Christ (Phil 2:5) so that we can be better prepared to recognize the future that God prepares as a new creation. This spirituality is also necessary to withstand the negative effects of working with traumatized persons (sometimes called "secondary trauma") that frequently occur with ministers of reconciliation.

Conclusion: Reconciliation as a Paradigm for Effective Evangelism

Let me conclude. What I am proposing here is one distinctive paradigm for effective evangelism today. To make such a proposal is hardly anything new. The *diakonia* of the Church—especially in education, medicine, and care for the poor and outcast—has long been a hallmark of Christian action and has served as some of its most effective forms of evangelism. Anthropologist and historian Rodney Stark has noted how Christians care for the poor impressed others in the Roman Empire and was a powerful source of attracting new members to the early Church.² In our own time, the powerful example of Mother Teresa’s work among Calcutta’s poor was such that the government of India ordered that she be given a state funeral.

Calling upon pressing issues in the cultural surroundings as a place for situating the saving message of Jesus Christ is hardly a new phenomenon, either. Slavery was a major issue in the Roman Empire, and the dissonant social roles of freed slaves constituted a major challenge. Even though slavery was not as strong an issue in Jesus’ native Galilee, Paul used the metaphor of manumission (*apolutrosis*) as a way of talking about what God had done for us in Jesus Christ.

Reconciliation is, I believe, one of those themes for much of the world today. From the broken lives of people in every society—be it at the level of family, or neighborhood, or whole society—cries out for a remedy. As I noted, elements of reconciliation—justice, truth-telling, memory, forgiveness, care for others—can be found in all the major religious traditions. But they do not cohere into a single narrative as they do in Christianity: the narrative of creation, fall, sending of the Son, and his death and resurrection, leading to a consummation of all things in Christ. The

² Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

Christian configuration of reconciliation, I have found, finds resonance among peoples of other faith and of no faith, yet remains distinctive in its integrity. Living the life of a minister of reconciliation is extremely challenging. But we believe at the same time that we as Christians are only able to do it inasmuch as we are deeply united with God who is achieving reconciliation in our midst. We are but ambassadors, but ambassadors of a powerful message that the world so sorely needs.