

## Introduction

This paper offers reflections on mission as reconciliation from an ecumenical point of view and is shared as part of the preparatory process for the 2005 Conference on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME). It is the result of a consultation attended by ten missiologists coming from five continents, rooted in their own contextual spiritualities and coming from various church traditions such as Orthodox, Protestant, Pentecostal and Roman Catholic. They worked hard to reach and express some common convictions. The statement was received as a study document by the CWME Conference Planning Committee (CPC) during its meeting near Athens in March 2004. The CPC decided to share it widely, in order to receive reactions, comments, critiques, suggestions for modification and improvement. The paper will then be presented, possibly in a revised version, to the WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism meeting later in autumn this year.

In its present form, the paper does not represent an official position of the World Council of Churches nor of any of its advisory bodies on mission and evangelism. It is offered as a resource in the preparatory process for the next world mission conference.

Responses, comments, suggestions, additional paragraphs, can be sent to

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# **Towards mission as reconciliation**

## **1) Mission as reconciliation - an emerging paradigm**

Mission is understood in different ways in various times and places. Since the late 1980s mission has been increasingly connected with reconciliation and healing. Furthermore, 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 are reminded that reconciliation is at the heart of Christian faith. The reconciling love of God shown in Jesus Christ is an important biblical theme and a central element in the life and ministry of the church. The Holy Spirit calls us to a ministry of reconciliation and to express this in both the spirituality and strategies of our mission and evangelism.

There are a number of reasons why reconciliation has become so prominent in the world today. These are related to the contemporary trends of globalisation, post-modernity and

fragmentation as identified in the CWME study document "Mission and Evangelism in Unity Today" (2000)<sup>1</sup>.

Globalisation has brought different communities of the world into closer contact than ever before and has highlighted human commonality. At the same time it has exposed the diversity of interests and worldviews among different groups. On the one hand, there are new ways to express unity and cross the boundaries that have divided us. On the other hand, there are also clashes of cultures, religions, economic interests and genders, which leave a legacy of hurt and grievances. The heightened enmity that has resulted from globalisation and the imbalance of power in today's world has been strikingly confirmed in the terrorist acts of September 11, 2001 and the subsequent "war on terror". In this context also, a number of initiatives have contributed to the reconstruction of societies after conflict through processes of truth and reconciliation. Christian witnesses are called upon to help bring peace with justice in situations of tension, violence, and conflict. As the churches seek reconciliation and peace, the World Council of Churches has launched the *Decade to Overcome Violence* (2001-2010).

Due to the dominance and pervasiveness of global market forces, the economic policies of the richer nations have tremendous and often highly damaging effects on poorer countries. Most are victims rather than beneficiaries of economic development. Unfair trade laws protect the richer nations and exclude and exploit the poorer ones. Many of the poorer countries are saddled with debt and its repayment is an intolerable burden. Structural adjustment programmes imposed by global bodies pay little regard to local wisdom and it is the poor who suffer most under them. In this situation, the *Jubilee Debt Campaign* has had a significant effect in raising awareness of trade imbalance and influencing G8 decisions. True reconciliation that involves the repentance of the rich and brings justice for the poor is urgently needed.

The network of global communications brings benefit to some and excludes others. In some respects, by increasing the possibilities of dialogue and cooperation, it is beneficial in widening fellowship and facilitating alternative movements for change. However the mass culture of post-modernity spread in this way is often experienced as a threat to personal and national identities and contributes to the increasing fragmentation of societies. As a result of globalisation, many have lost their family and local roots, many have been displaced by migration, and exclusion is widely experienced. Many are longing for the embrace of others and sense a need for belonging and community. In this situation, we are called to be reconciling and healing communities.

We look to the Spirit of God to lead us and all creation in integrity and wholeness and empower our reconciliation with God and one another. However, exposed to the strength and vicissitudes of global forces, the difficulties of discerning the Holy Spirit among the complexities of the world have never been greater as we are faced with difficult personal and strategic choices in mission. In 1996, at the last WCC conference on mission and evangelism, we were reminded in Salvador, Bahía, Brazil how the perpetrators of economic injustice denied the rights of indigenous populations and plundered resources given by the creator for all. We asked for forgiveness for this and sought reconciliation. Affirming that "the Spirit poured out on the day of Pentecost makes all cultures worthy vehicles of God's love" and "enables a real awakening of the image of God" in persons in oppressed groups, we committed ourselves at Salvador to "the search for alternative models of community, more equitable economic systems, fair trade practices, responsible use of the media, and just environmental practice"<sup>2</sup>.

In the climate of post-modernity, we are experiencing a resurgence of religions, particularly in their conservative forms. There is also a proliferation of new religious movements and a thirst for spiritual experience. On the one hand, the variety of spiritualities to which we are exposed raises our spiritual awareness and broadens our horizons. On the other, the problems created by aggressive methods of missionary activity encourage us to seek a reconciliatory spirituality for mission.

Within the Christian faith, while some churches continue to decline, many are experiencing rapid numerical growth. The centre of gravity of Christianity has decisively shifted towards the poorer nations of the world and the faith is most widely expressed in a Pentecostal-charismatic form. The rapid growth of the Pentecostal churches is a remarkable fact of our time. The positive impact of this gives great encouragement and hope for the future of Christian faith. It calls our attention to the theology of the Holy Spirit and the way in which the Spirit repeatedly renews the church for its mission in every age. At the same time, the potential for tension and disunity reminds us of the Spirit's close association with reconciliation and peace.

Since Pentecost the Holy Spirit has inspired the church to proclaim Jesus Christ and we continue to be obedient to the command to preach the gospel in all the world. The Holy Spirit anointed the Son of God to bring good news to the poor and we seek to continue his liberating mission through the struggle for justice on the side of the oppressed and marginalized. Recognising that the Spirit of God has been present in creation since the beginning and goes before us in our mission and evangelism, we have also affirmed the Spirit's creativity expressed in diverse cultures and we have entered into dialogue with people of other faiths. Now, confronted with the world situation we have described, we are rediscovering the ministry of the Spirit to reconcile and to heal.

## **2) God who reconciles: Theological, biblical and liturgical perspectives on reconciliation**

### ***The Holy Spirit and reconciliation***

Reconciliation is the work of the triune God bringing fulfilment to God's eternal purposes of creation and salvation through Jesus Christ: "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross" (Col. 1:19-20). The Godhead, the Three-in-One, expresses the very nature of the reconciliation we hope for: "The Trinity, the source and image of our existence, shows the importance of diversity, otherness and intrinsic relationships in constituting a community"<sup>3</sup>.

The Holy Spirit empowers the church to participate in this work of reconciliation as the document "Mission and Evangelism in Unity" states: "The mission of God (*missio Dei*) is the source of and basis for the mission of the church, the body of Christ. Through Christ in the Holy Spirit, God indwells the church, empowering and energizing its members."<sup>4</sup> The ministry of the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:8) is a ministry of reconciliation, made possible through Christ and entrusted to us (2 Cor. 5:18-19).

In the power of the Spirit, the church as *koinonia* - the communion of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 13:13) - continually grows into a healing and reconciling community that shares the joys and sorrows of her members and reaches out to those in need of forgiveness and reconciliation. According to the book of Acts (2:44-45; 4:32-37), the early church, having been born on the

day of Pentecost, shared its goods among her members, pointing to the interrelatedness of "spiritual" and "material" concerns in Christian mission and church life. One aspect of the empowering ministry of the Holy Spirit is to endow Christians and Christian communities with charismatic gifts, which include healing (1 Cor. 12:9; Acts 3).

The church itself is in need of continuing renewal by the Spirit to be able discern the mind of Christ as well as be convicted by the Spirit of division and sin within (John 16:8-11). This repentance within the church of Christ is itself part of the ministry and witness of reconciliation to the world.

The Holy Spirit "blows where it wills" (John 3:8). Thus, the Spirit knows no limits and reaches out to people of all faiths as well as those without any religious commitment - a growing number in this time of secularisation. The church is called to discern the signs of the Spirit in the world and witness to Christ in the power of the Spirit (Acts 1:8) as well as be engaged in all forms of liberation and reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-19).

In the sufferings of the present time, the Spirit shares our "groans" and the childbirth pains of the whole of creation subjected to "bondage under decay" (Rom. 8:26, 21-22). Therefore, we are looking forward to the redemption of our bodies (Rom. 8:23) with hope and joy. The same Spirit of God that "swept over the face of the waters" (Gen. 1:2) in creation now indwells the church and works in the world often in mysterious and unknown ways. The Spirit will participate in the ushering in of the new creation when the triune God finally will be all in all.

### ***Reconciliation in the Bible***

The Bible is full of stories of reconciliation. The Old Testament tells a number of stories of conflict and strife between brothers, family members, peoples; some of these end in reconciliation and others are unresolved. It acknowledges and bemoans the dimension of violence and underlines the need for and the power of reconciliation. The family stories of Jacob and Esau (Gen. 25:19-33.20), or of Joseph and his brothers (Gen. 37-45) are examples for interpersonal - and perhaps also communal - conflicts. They also illustrate the power of reconciling attitudes of people who try to solve strife, enmity, and experiences or perceptions of injustice through negotiations, forgiveness, and searching for a common basis and a shared future. The Old Testament also addresses again and again the estrangement between God and God's people and God's desire and urge for reconciliation and restoration of a relationship that was broken and fragmented through human pride and various forms of rebellion against the God of life and justice. Reconciliation is thus very much a theme in the biblical narratives and in the liturgical language of Israel - such as the Psalms, even though the Hebrew language does not know the specific term "reconciliation". In the books of the lament tradition, such as Lamentations and Job, human longing for reconciliation with God is poignantly expressed.

Similarly in the New Testament, though the actual term "reconciliation" does not appear very prominently, the matter itself is prevalent throughout. John's Gospel shows a particular concern for truth and peace; in the Gospel of Luke salvation is closely linked to the healing ministry of Jesus. The Book of Acts tells how Jews and Gentiles were reconciled in one new community. And throughout his letters, Paul is greatly concerned that those whom Christ has reconciled in his body should not be divided and that community life should be the first expression of God's plan to reconcile all things. He envisages the unity of not only Jew and Gentile but also of slave and free, male and female in Christ (Gal. 3:28).

Apart from Matthew 5:24, where it relates to the reconciliation of individuals, we find the terms "reconciliation" and "to reconcile" - the Greek words are *katallage* and *katallassein* - only in the letters of the Apostle Paul (2 Cor. 5:17-20; Rom. 5:10-11; 11:15; 1 Cor. 7:11, and then Eph. 2:16 and Col. 1:20-22). However, the apostle expresses the theme so forcefully that it emerges as a key notion in the Christian identity as a whole. Paul uses the term reconciliation in exploring the nature of God, to illumine the content of the gospel as good news, and to explain the ministry and mission of the apostle and the church in the world. The term "reconciliation" thus becomes an almost all-embracing term to articulate what is at the heart of the Christian faith.

There are several features of reconciliation as used by Paul to note briefly:

1. The very notion of reconciliation presupposes the experience of broken communion. This may be in the form of estrangement, separation, enmity, hatred, exclusion, fragmentation, distorted relationships. It usually also encompasses a certain degree of injustice, harm and suffering. Reconciliation, 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.
2. Paul applies the notion of reconciliation to three different though overlapping realms of brokenness and hostility, in which healing of relationship occur: reconciliation between God and human beings; reconciliation of different groups of human beings; and reconciliation of the cosmos.
3. Reconciliation is much more than simply a superficial fixing of distortions, the arrival of a status quo of coexistence. Reconciliation looks at a transformation of the present, a very deep-rooted renewal. The "peace" which Paul speaks about is certainly peace with God (cf. Rom. 5:1,11), but it is also the transformation of human relationships and the building of a community. It is the radical new peace between Jews and Gentiles that results from Christ breaking down the wall of hostility (Eph. 2:14). It is also the transformation of the whole creation towards peace as it is expressed in Colossians 1:20, where Paul speaks of Christ as reconciling "all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross". The last reference indicates that reconciliation indeed envisions a new creation as Paul expresses so vividly also in 2 Corinthians 5:17. The category of "new creation" shows that there is even more in view than a mending of brokenness. Reconciliation is a totally new quality of being.
4. According to Paul, it is God who takes the initiative towards reconciliation. Furthermore, God has already achieved reconciliation for the world: "in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor. 5:19). Human beings may seek for reconciliation and minister reconciliation but the initiative and the effectiveness of reconciliation lies with God. Human beings are only recipients of the gift of reconciliation. It is therefore essential to affirm that Christian life and attitude is grounded in the experience of reconciliation through Godself. Christians discover what God has already done in Christ.
5. The Christian narrative of reconciliation, as we find it in Paul's letters, is based on and centred in the story of the passion, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. The incarnation of Jesus of Nazareth links the suffering of Jesus, the Son of God, with the suffering of all humanity, and it is therefore an expression of the deep solidarity of God with an agonized, fragmented and tortured world. The cross is, at the same time, an expression of

the divine protest against this suffering, for Jesus of Nazareth suffered as the innocent victim. He refused to take refuge in violence, he persisted in the love of his enemies and he made love towards God and his fellow-human beings the central concern of his life. The gruesome act of throwing "the one who was just" out of this world is in itself the judgment of a world in which the powerful seem to prevail over the victims. In Christ, through whose wounds we are healed (1 Pet. 2:24), we also experience God seeking to rectify the wrongs of this world through the power of love with which God, in his Son, gave himself up for others, even for the perpetrators of violence and injustice.

6. It is through the Holy Spirit that human beings are empowered to share in the narrative of God reconciling the world in Jesus Christ. In Romans 5, where Paul explores the way God reconciles sinners and even God's enemies and the ungodly with Godself, Paul says that the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. In Jesus Christ, who was raised and ascended into heaven, we not only enjoy the gift of reconciliation, we are also sent in service and ministry into the world. This is expressed, for example, in the ethical teaching of Paul where he urged individuals and communities to be signs and expressions of the reconciliation they had experienced (cf. Rom. 12:9-21). It is also expressed in the way Paul talks about his own mission as a "ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:18). To share in this ministry of reconciliation - that is to participate in Holy Spirit's work of reconciliation and communicate God's reconciling activity to all of humanity - is the Christian calling today as much as in Paul's day.

### ***Reconciliation in liturgy***

The church's mission, in the power of the Spirit, derives from the teaching, life and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. However, this is to be understood in reference to the expectations of Judaism. The core of this was the idea of the coming of a Messiah, who in the "last days" of history would establish his kingdom (Joel 3:1; Isa. 2:2, 59:21; Ezek. 36:24, etc.) by calling all the dispersed and afflicted people of God *into one place*, reconciled to God and becoming one body united around him (Mic. 4:1-4; Isa. 2:2-4; Psa. 147:2-3). In the Gospel of John it is clearly stated that the high priest "prophesied that Jesus should die...not for the nation only, but to *gather into one* the children of God who are scattered abroad" (John 11:51-52).

It was on this teaching of Jesus about the kingdom of God that the church developed her mission. The apostles, and all Christians thereafter, are commissioned to proclaim not a set of given religious convictions, doctrines, and moral commands, but the coming kingdom, the good news of a new reality to be established "in the last days". This has as its centre the crucified and resurrected Christ, the incarnation of God the Logos and his dwelling among us human beings, and his continuous presence through the Holy Spirit in a life of communion, in a life of full-scale reconciliation.

This reconciliation was experienced in the liturgical, more precisely "eucharistic" (in the wider sense), life of the early church. The early Christian community suffered from factions and divisions but, reconciled through the grace of our Lord to God, felt obliged to extend horizontally this reconciliation to one another by being incorporated into the one people of God through the Eucharist, a significant act of identity, which was celebrated as a manifestation (more precisely a foretaste) of the coming kingdom. It is not accidental that the condition for participating in the Lord's Table was, and still is, a conscious act of reconciliation with one's sisters and brothers through the "kiss of love" (Matt. 5:23-24).

Furthermore, the Lord's Supper is not constituted where the congregation fails to share (1 Cor. 11:20-21).

This eucharistic act was not the only liturgical rite of reconciliation in the healing process. Baptism, the act of repentance, was a common sign of incorporation into the one body and Spirit (Eph. 4:4-5).<sup>5</sup> The act of confession, which has sacramental significance for some churches, was originally meant as the necessary reconciling process with the community - a sacrament of reconciliation. There was also the act - or sacrament - of anointment for healing. For many churches the Lord's Supper itself also has therapeutic meaning. These examples draw our attention to the importance of reconciliation and healing in the life and mission of the church.

This symbolisation of the kingdom in the community was the starting point of Christian mission, the springboard of the church's witnessing *exodus* to the world. The missiological imperatives of the church stem exactly from this awareness of the church as a dynamic and corporate body of reconciled believers commissioned to witness to the coming kingdom of God. In struggling to manifest the "ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:18) to the world, we become a "reconciling" community. This holistic understanding of mission includes a commitment to the proclamation of the gospel. "Evangelism aims to build up a reconciling and reconciled community (cf. 2 Cor. 5:19) that will point to the fullness of God's reign, which is 'righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit' (Rom. 14:17)". This affirmation of the preparatory document for Salvador finds an echo in the recent WCC mission statement: "To speak of evangelism means to emphasise the proclamation of God's offer of freedom and reconciliation, together with the invitation to join those who follow Christ and work for the reign of God."<sup>6</sup>

### **3) The mission of reconciliation and healing - goal, process and dynamics**

The powerful convergence of a new interest in the resources for reconciliation and healing within the churches, and a parallel new quest for healing and reconciliation in many societies around the world, have prompted us to rethink what God is calling us to in mission today. Remembering that the reconciliation we have received in Jesus Christ and that is signified in the Christian community is entrusted to us to share in the world as ambassadors for Christ (2 Cor. 5:18-20), we have come to see mission as reconciliation.

In order to understand what participation in God's mission of reconciliation may mean, this section 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.

#### Reconciliation - goal and process

Reconciliation means peace with justice. The vision is to establish community, where brokenness and sectarianism are overcome and people live together with mutual respect and tolerance. Reconciliation results in communication with one another without fear. It implies tolerance of others, inclusion and consideration of them. Reconciled community is where differences can be resolved through dialogue and without resort to violence.

Reconciliation is sought between *individuals*, in order to overcome divisions, enmity and conflicts from the past. Here the internal dynamics for both parties, for victims and

wrongdoers must be explored. Reconciliation also needs to occur between *groups* or *communities*. In these instances social and structural relations will need special attention. And reconciliation sometimes needs to happen within and among *nations*, in which the whole structures of societies will need examination. In the first instance, between individuals, reconciliation is often about restoring dignity and a sense of humanity. In the second instance, reconciliation focuses upon how to live together, both as human beings and in the whole of creation. In the third instance, on national levels, the institutions of society itself will need attention for reconstruction to be possible.

Reconciliation is both a *goal* and a *process*. As individuals and societies we need a vision to keep us moving toward a future state of peace and well-being. But without understanding the process we can lose heart and sense of direction in our work. In actual practice, we will find ourselves moving back and forth between goal and process, since we need both in reconciliation and healing. In what follows, we will focus on the process, especially the personal and social issues and dynamics that come forward, and how Christian faith illumines and challenges movement toward a reconciled and healed state.

### *Dynamics of reconciliation*

Attention needs to be given both to initiating the process of reconciliation and to sustaining it. The participants in this process are often divided into *victims* and *wrongdoers*. Sometimes the two parties are easily distinguished and identified, as for example in many cases of victims of rape and those who perpetrate the act. But in extended conflicts, victims may, at a later date, become wrongdoers, and wrongdoers become victims. This makes clear-cut categories less helpful. While Christian practice has special regard for the plight of victims, reconciliation and healing require restoration and healing both of the victim *and* repentance and transformation of the wrongdoer. These things do not always happen in a clear sequence, but becoming a "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17) requires change in both.

Four aspects of the reconciliation and healing process need special attention. They are: **truth**, **memory**, **justice**, and **forgiveness**.

Establishing the **truth** about the past is often difficult because abuses and atrocities have been shrouded in silence. Healing requires that the silence be broken and the truth be allowed to come to light. It allows for *recognition* of what has been hidden.

At other times, under a repressive regime for instance, there has been a systematic distortion of the truth. Lies prevail where truth should dwell. In such cases, the truth needs to be asserted. This is especially true when the language of reconciliation itself is misused. There have been instances where wrongdoers have called for "reconciliation" when they really mean that victims should ignore the wrongdoing done, and life should continue as though nothing happened. In such cases, the meaning of the word "reconciliation" has been so poisoned that it cannot even be used. In other cases, wrongdoers urge hasty "reconciliation" so that the claims of the victims will not even be considered. They may do this by making Christians feel guilty for not being able to forgive quickly. Such false uses of the idea of reconciliation must be resisted.

At a national level, after prolonged conflict and struggle, Truth and Reconciliation Commissions have been established to seek out the truth about the past. The Commission in

South Africa is perhaps the most well-known. The need for such commissions underscores how difficult it is to establish the truth, and how important it is for reconciliation and healing.

The Christian understanding of truth can help in such situations. The Spirit of God is truth (John 14:17), and Jesus prayed that his disciples be consecrated in truth (John 17:17). Establishing the truth, especially after situations of conflict, can be difficult. Respect for the truth comes from knowing God is the source of truth.

**Memory** is closely linked to truth. How will the past be remembered, how shall we speak of it? Authentic memory should yield the truth about the past. Traumatic memories of acts of wrongdoing or atrocity often will need healing if they are to be the building blocks of a different kind of future. To heal memories means that they lose their toxic quality. When that happens, memories do not hold us hostage to the past, but empower us to create a future where the wrongdoing of the past cannot happen again.

Memories are not just about the past. They are the basis for identity. *How* we remember the past is both the basis for how we will live and relate to one another in the present, and how we will envision the future. For that reason, memory is central to the process of reconciliation and healing.

Memories that do not heal can inhibit reconciliation. Sometimes the healing takes more than a generation. In some instances victims are so submerged in their memories that they need help in coming free of them. In a few instances, victims do not want to be healed, and use their memories to keep any progress from happening. Accompanying victims so that they can come free from traumatic memories is an important task of those who work for reconciliation.

Projects of recovering memory that has been suppressed or distorted are often important for building a different future together. Publishing the results of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (as in South Africa), or collecting recollections of what happened (as in Guatemala) are examples of this. Recovering memory can also be a threat to the wrongdoers who still hold power (the murder of Bishop Gerardi in Guatemala after he announced the results of such a report is a chilling reminder of this).

Recovering memory and allowing it to help us live in the present, as well as imagine the future, is central to Christian practice and witness. We celebrate the Eucharist to remember what happened to Jesus: his betrayal, suffering and death, and how he was raised from the dead. It is the memory of what God has done in the story of Jesus that gives us hope and the Spirit of Christ who empowers us in our work of reconciliation.

**Justice** is essential to the work of reconciliation. Three kinds of justice are needed. First, there is **retributive justice**, where wrongdoers are held accountable for their actions. This is important both for acknowledging that wrong has been done, and as a statement that such wrongdoing will not be tolerated in the future. Retributive justice should be the task of the legally constituted state. Punishment outside that forum can be renegade action or sheer revenge, and should be avoided. If the state itself is implicated in the corruption, it may be possible to achieve retributive justice by means of non-violent protest, as for example the "mothers of the disappeared" in Argentina. This will require great personal sacrifice.

Second, there is **restorative justice**, in which what has been taken wrongfully from victims is restored, either directly or in some symbolic way. This may be by reparation or compensation.

In other cases, for example when the perpetrator or victim has died, some other statement of reconciliation may need to be found - such as a public memorial. And finally, there is **structural justice**, whereby the institutions of society are reformed to prevent instances of injustice from happening in the future. Dimensions of restorative and structural justice often need special attention. For example, to achieve economic justice, reform of global trade laws and the mechanisms of trade will be necessary. Gender justice will require attending to the special contributions of women to overcoming injustice and retaining right relations. To overcome sexism and racism structural reform will be necessary. In recent years, the need for ecological justice has come to the fore as well.

The Holy Spirit spoke through the prophets of old against injustice and anointed Jesus Christ to bring freedom to the oppressed (Luke 4:18-19). The Spirit gives gifts of prophecy and boldness today as Christians struggle especially to aid in the process of restorative justice, and work toward the reforms that structural justice require. Biblical images of covenant - care for all, and right relations between God and humanity - support efforts for these reforms of society. These are illustrated by the collection from the churches taken up by the Apostle Paul to Jerusalem so that there might be "equality" between the churches in the mutual meeting of one another's needs (2 Cor. 8:14).

**Forgiveness** is often considered a specifically religious dimension of reconciling and healing. It is important to realize that forgiveness does not mean condoning past wrongdoing, or even foregoing punishment. Forgiveness acknowledges what has happened in the past, but seeks a different relationship both to the wrongdoer and to the deed. Without forgiveness, we remain locked in our relationships to the past and cannot have a different kind of future.

Along with having a Christian vision of the whole, seeking reconciliation for the human community today requires interaction with the different communities of faith. For us as Christians, this will call for some knowledge of how the other great religious traditions envision healing and wholeness, since many situations will require our acting together. In those situations also, we as Christians must be able to communicate our own contribution to the common task. Many cultures have their own spiritual and ritual resources for bringing about reconciliation and healing. Whenever possible, these need to be incorporated into our work toward reconciliation.

Forgiveness has special import for Christians. We believe that it is God who forgives sin (Mark 2:7-12). Jesus came among us preaching the forgiveness of sins (Luke 24:47), pointing to the graciousness of God and the possibility of overcoming the past for the sake of a different kind of future. Personal experience of acceptance and grace can be life-changing, inspiring individuals to reach out in love to others and transform society, as the story of Zacchaeus illustrates (Luke 19:1-10). After his resurrection, when he breathed the Holy Spirit into his disciples, Jesus sent them out with a ministry of forgiveness (John 20:21-23).

Forgiveness by God is bound up with our willingness to forgive others (see Matt. 6:12,14-15). Because of this, Christians often say that we should "forgive and forget." That is not what the Bible says, however. We can never forget wrongdoing, as though it never happened. To ask victims to do this would be to demean them once again. We can never forget, but we can remember in a different way - a way that allows for a different relationship to the past and to the wrongdoer. That is what we are called to as Christians.

Reconciliation and healing are *goals* we seek. Biblically, we speak of them as *shalom* or *the kingdom of God*. In contemporary terms, we also speak of the vision of justice, peace, and the integrity of creation. In other words, reconciliation and healing must embrace the totality of God's creation. At this point in history, we cannot fully describe or imagine them. But we must try to do so, for in so doing we renew hope. Indeed, seeking reconciliation and healing in our world requires a constant moving back and forth between imagining reconciliation as a goal and as the process of reaching that goal. This may be long and difficult struggle and it cannot be carried through unless it is in a spirit of love that "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor. 13:7). In the process we do not lose hope and, at the same time, focus our participation in the reconciling and healing work of the Holy Spirit in the whole creation.

#### **4) Reconciliation: The mission of the church**

The Holy Spirit transforms the church and empowers it to be missional: "The Holy Spirit transforms Christians into living, courageous and bold witnesses (cf. Acts 1:8)". Therefore, for the church, mission is not an option but an imperative: "Mission is central to Christian faith and theology. It is not an option but is rather an existential calling and vocation. Mission is constitutive of and conditions the very being of the church and of all Christians". The church is by nature called to participate in God's mission: "Through Christ in the Holy Spirit  participating in God's mission  should be natural for all Christians and all churches"<sup>7</sup>.

The church's mission in the power of the Spirit is to work for reconciliation and healing in the context of brokenness. Reconciliation constitutes an important focus and characteristic of the mission of God and therefore of the church's mission: "The church is sent into the world to reconcile humanity and renew creation by calling people and nations to repentance, announcing forgiveness of sin and a new beginning in relations with God and with neighbours through Jesus Christ"<sup>8</sup>. Reconciliation is the establishment of *shalom*, that is the creation - or re-creation - of harmonious relationships of justice. It is a holistic process, initiated by God and extended to the whole creation, both human and non-human. As we and all creation struggle for freedom from our bondage to decay, "the Spirit helps us in our weakness  [and] intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words" (Rom. 8:22-26). In a context of broken relationships in the world today, the specific challenge for the church is to grasp more deeply the gift of God's reconciliation in its life and ministry on behalf of the whole created order.

#### Reconciliation in the context of brokenness

The primary broken relationship is between *God* and humanity. The gospel of reconciliation is a call to turn to God, to be converted to God and to renew our faith in the One who constantly invites us to be in communion with Godself, with one another and with the whole creation. We rejoice that through our Saviour Jesus Christ, this reconciliation has been made possible: "Through our Lord Jesus Christ we have now received our reconciliation" (Rom. 5:11). We are called to extend this reconciliation to the rest of the world in mission and to join our energies with that of the Spirit of God in creation.

At the heart of the brokenness today is the distortion and destruction of the integral bond that existed in the divine order, between humanity and the rest of *creation*. The human-centred separation of human and non-human creation has led to a tendency of some parts of humanity to conquer and destroy nature. Much of the ecological crisis we face today may be attributed to a lack of respect for life and the integrity of creation. An ecological healing - or

"ecociliation" - is what Christians envisage: the reconciliation of "all things, whether on earth or in heaven" (Col. 1:20). In the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed we confess the Holy Spirit as the lord and the giver of life. Mission in the Spirit warrants a new perspective - a life-centred approach that will cause the earth to flourish and sustain human communities. This model of cosmic reconciliation and healing provides a powerful basis for reconciliation among humanity.

Brokenness is also felt in the area of *human relationships*. The image of God is distorted in estrangement and enmity, which is often related to power structures. These are manifested concretely in the form of discrimination on the bases of caste, race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status. Mission in terms of reconciliation and healing in this context is about going beyond and transcending such frontiers and thereby restoring the consciousness of the image of God in humanity. In real terms, the church's mission is to work for the dismantling of all such divisive walls - those within the church as well as outside. This means taking part in ecumenical attempts of reconciliation within and among churches and in people's struggles for reconstruction of society on the basis of justice and human rights. The body of Christ is endowed with various spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:8-10; see also Rom. 12:6-8). Exercised in the spirit of love (1 Cor. 13:1-3; Rom. 12:9-10), these build up the community and express its reconciled unity in diversity.

In a context where there are victims and perpetrators of injustice and exploitation, the church has a particular missionary role to play, namely that of a bridge-builder, between the poor and the rich, women and men, black and white, and so on. The Holy Spirit has been described as "the Go-Between God" because of the Spirit's role in creating and sustaining communion (Eph. 2:18, 4:3; John V. Taylor<sup>9</sup>). The "go-between" or "in between" position is not be construed as a value-neutral position but acknowledged as a rather risky and costly position to be in. While taking the sides of the victims, the church also has the mission of reaching out to the victimizers with the challenges of the gospel. Mission at the point of "in betweenness" is simultaneously a mission of empowering the powerless by accompanying them and also of challenging the perpetrators of hurt to repent. In this way it becomes a mission of mutual life-giving.

Brokenness is also sadly a mark of today's *church*. The divisions among churches, both doctrinal and non-theological, are a challenge to the mission of reconciliation and healing. A divided church is an aberration of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 1:13) and grieves the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:25-32). If churches are not able to reconcile one with the other, they are failing the gospel call and will lack credibility in witness. "Sent to a world in need of unity and greater interdependence amidst the competition and fragmentation of the human community, the Church is called to be sign and instrument of God's reconciling love... Divisions among Christians are a counter-witness to Christ and contradict their witness to reconciliation in Christ."<sup>10</sup> The churches have made significant progress towards shared baptism, Eucharist and ministry and also toward common witness. The gospel of reconciliation is shared with integrity if the church is a reconciled and healing community.

If the goal and process of mission is to be reconciliation, it is imperative that the church revisit its past and engages in some introspection and self-examination about its *mission* in the world. Any credible mission by the church has to begin with the confession that not all of her mission has been a reflection of the mission which God has intended and which Godself carries out in the world through the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit (*missio Dei*). If we have declared the love of God while hating our brother or sister, we are liars (1 John 4:20).

Where Christian missionary enterprise was - and still is - complicit in an imperial colonial project involving violent crusades, causing destruction of indigenous cultures and religions, fragmentation of communities and even division among Christians, it calls for repentance or conversion (*metanoia*). Repentance requires the confession of the sin of violent colonization in the name of the gospel. This is important for the "healing of memories", which is an integral part of the mission of reconciliation and healing. The church must take care to dress the wounds of the past (cf. Jer. 6:14 f). While we confess these sins, we also acknowledge the fact that there has been, and is, much genuine Christian mission in the spirit of peace and reconciliation. Such mission results in peace with God, healed lives, restored communities and the socio-economic liberation of marginalized peoples.

### Spirituality of reconciliation

Mission in terms of reconciliation and healing calls for a corresponding spirituality: one that is healing, transforming, liberating, and builds relationships of mutual respect. A genuine spirituality for reconciliation and healing reflects the interaction of faith and praxis that constitutes witness (*martyria*). Witness presupposes a spirituality of self-examination and confession of sins (*metanoia*), leading to proclamation (*kerygma*) of the gospel of reconciliation, service (*diakonia*) in love, worship (*leiturgia*) in truth, and teaching of justice. The exercise of these spiritual gifts builds up reconciled communities (*koinonia*)<sup>1</sup>.

The spirituality of reconciliation is one of humility and self-emptying (*kenosis*; Phil. 2:7), and at the same time an experience of the Holy Spirit's sanctifying and transforming power. In his struggle to reconcile Jews and Gentiles and other factions, the Apostle Paul declared that God's power is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor. 12:9; 1 Cor. 2:3-5). The spirituality of reconciliation is the spirituality of both the Passion and Pentecost. In the global context of the return of imperialism - especially in the form of the hegemonic power of globalisation - this self-emptying spirituality is a challenge both to the victims and perpetrators of systemic violence and injustice. The treasure we have is "in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us" (2 Cor. 4:7). The church's mission in this context is once again to be in the "in betweenness" - between the wielders of power and the powerless - to empower the powerless and also challenge the powerful to empty themselves of their power and privileges for the sake of the dis-empowered. The spirituality of reconciliation challenges the power structures of local communities, including the church, as well.

A self-emptying spirituality is also a spirituality of cross-bearing. The church is called to bear the cross of Jesus Christ, by being with the suffering. For example, the "Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel" aims to be with Palestinians and Israelis in their non-violent actions and concerted advocacy efforts to end the occupation. Such a spirituality of non-violent resistance is an integral aspect of reconciliation and healing in an age of continuing exploitation of the poor and the marginalized. In these and other situations of oppression, discrimination and hurt, the cross of Christ is the power of God for salvation (1 Cor. 1:18).

The sacraments and liturgical life of the church are symbolic expressions of this mission of reconciliation and healing. Baptism is an act of sharing in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is symbolic of the spirituality of cross-bearing, which is both a dying to self (Mark 8:34 and parallels) and a raising up to life (John 3:14, etc.). The Eucharist is a sacramental act of healing, an act of remembrance, and a re-enactment of the breaking of the body of Christ

for the sake of cosmic reconciliation. The bread of God, which comes down from heaven, gives life to the world (John 6:33). The sharing out of the bread and the wine among all symbolizes the redistribution of wealth and the equality of the kingdom that Jesus Christ proclaimed. In prayer, the church intercedes with God for the world, standing in the "in betweenness" in faith that God will bring reconciliation and healing. In preaching the word, the church brings comfort to the downtrodden, proclaims truth and justice, and calls all to repentance and forgiveness. The church's worship is itself a witness to the world of reconciliation in Christ, and in the power of the Spirit the church lives out this eucharistic witness in daily life.

Spiritual resources for reconciliation and healing are not confined to Christian faith traditions. This challenges us to take the inter faith dimensions of mission seriously, for reconciliation and healing in the holistic sense cannot be achieved without reconciliation amongst various faiths and cultures. As already noted, imperialistic projects of mission and evangelisation, with dismissive attitudes to other religions and cultures and exclusive truth claims, contribute to hostility between faith communities. Where this is the case, it demands a confessional act on the part of the Christian church that involves offering reparation to the victims of this form of mission. One way of doing this is to appreciate and learn from the spiritual resources available in other faiths and cultures. Other traditions and experiences of healing and reconciliation, including those of indigenous communities, are of great value.

The recent ecumenical statement on dialogue reminds us that "interreligious dialogue is not an instrument to instantly resolve problems in emergency situations". However, in times of conflict the relationships built up by patient dialogue during peacetime may prevent religion from being used as a weapon and, in many cases, pave the way for mediation and reconciliation initiatives<sup>12</sup>. Dialogue presupposes mutual recognition, it signifies a willingness to reconcile and desire to live together. A process of dialogue can build up trust and allow for mutual witness, in this way it may be a means of healing. However, while dialogue is important, issues of truth, memory, justice and forgiveness may need to be addressed before dialogue is possible. The "in betweenness" of the missionary praxis means that in some situations what is called for is the prophetic power of the gospel to critique religious practices and beliefs that promote injustice and to bring about repentance.

The ministry of the Holy Spirit - in which the church is privileged to share - is to heal and reconcile a broken world. In order to exercise this mission with integrity, the church must be a community that is experiencing healing and reconciliation in Christ. The spirituality of reconciliation is self-emptying and cross-bearing in order that the saving power of God may be demonstrated. The Holy Spirit endows the church with gifts and resources for this ministry and, in the spirit of dialogue, Christians are open to appreciate the resources that people of other faiths bring to it. The mission of the church involves going between the parties that are estranged or in conflict. This means accompanying them in their struggles and at the same time challenging the powers of injustice and violence to bring about reconciliation. The goal is to build up reconciled and healing communities which are again missional in commitment and practical ministry.

## **5) Equipping for reconciliation: Vision, pedagogy and pastoralia**

In the mission of reconciliation we are inspired by the gospel vision of peace on earth (Luke 2:14). In his preaching of the kingdom of God in both word and deed, our lord Jesus Christ showed us what the kingdom of God is like. It is the kingdom of truth and justice, repentance

and forgiveness, in which the first are last and the leaders are servants of all. In the epistles, the apostles taught the churches how to be communities of reconciliation. These bring forth the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). Members are called to love one another, live at peace with one another, and bless those who persecute them, leaving vengeance to God (Rom. 12:9-21). In the Book of Revelation, St John set down the vision given to him of the new heaven and new earth, the new creation that is the result of God's reconciling work in Christ (Rev. 21:1,5; cf. 2 Cor. 5:17-18). The New Jerusalem is the reconciled city where God dwells with God's people. In this city there is no longer any mourning or crying or pain because justice has been done. Nor is there any darkness because everything is in the light of the glory of God. Through the centre of the city runs the river of life for the healing of the nations (Rev. 21:1-22:5).

However, many have proclaimed peace where there is no peace and only superficially treated the deep wounds caused by broken relationships and injustice (Jer. 6:14). Any pedagogical and pastoral approach to mission has to acknowledge the fact that the ministry of healing and reconciliation is a profound and often lengthy process that therefore requires long-term strategies (Rom. 8:25). Once the church believes that mission belongs to God, and that it is not a frenzied activity initiated by the church, then the church's mission will be oriented towards the long-term goal of creating communities of reconciliation and healing. The realization of our hope requires patience, pastoral sensitivity and an appropriate educational method.

Our sense of being human is key to this educational process. Human beings are essentially relational beings, linked together and active in the web of life. For our survival, we depend on one another and therefore we need to live in just relationships of trust and build communities of reconciliation and healing. From a Christian anthropological perspective, human beings are also forgiven beings, forgiven by God. Forgiveness as a theological category has ethical ramifications as well. The ministry of reconciliation and healing through forgiveness involves truth telling and justice. In other words, the pedagogy of justice is what makes forgiveness a radical concept. Forgiveness that undermines justice is not Christian forgiveness. Costly discipleship, which is integral to the ministry of healing and reconciliation, has to be justice oriented.

Compassion for the broken and concern for life in all its fullness are the pastoral modes of Christian mission. One of the most important sources for learning about this ministry is the immense wealth of people's day-to-day life experience, especially that of the poor and the vulnerable. The church's involvement in people's life experiences, in their struggles to affirm life wherever it is denied, is perhaps the best learning process. Through this pedagogy of shared memories, the church will be enabled to carry out its mission effectively.

Equipping for mission in a paradigm of reconciliation has significant implications for existing models of theological and mission education and training. Imbuing the church with a pedagogy of justice and a compassionate pastoral theology brings challenges for both the content and the mode of instruction. Christians engaging in a ministry of reconciliation will continue to require the knowledge of language, culture and religious traditions that will help us enter into the experience of others and serve them. However, equally importantly, we will need a theology and spirituality of reconciliation. We should together develop a theological understanding of how God effects reconciliation in the world and Christians' part in it. The church needs to learn and teach the dynamics and processes of reconciliation and the

importance of the different dimensions of reconciliation ministry: establishing the truth, healing the memory, doing justice, receiving forgiveness and forgiving others. In order to overcome the contemporary culture of violence and counter the myth of redemptive violence, the church must demonstrate in its life and witness that justice and redemption is achieved through a non-violent resistance. This requires a spirituality of reconciliation that is self-emptying and cross-bearing for the sake of justice. We also have a responsibility to use and develop the spiritual gifts that, used in the spirit of love, build up community and overcome disunity and enmity (1 Cor. 12:8-10, 13:1-3; see also Rom. 12:6-10).

The main theme of the 2005 Conference on World Mission and Evangelism, "Come, Holy Spirit, heal and reconcile" calls our attention to the mission of the Spirit. According to St John's Gospel, the Holy Spirit is sent from the Father as *parakletos*, to accompany us in our aloneness and brokenness. The Spirit, the Intercessor, is in the "in betweenness", going between the Father, the Son and all creation. The *parakletos* is the Spirit of truth who leads us into all truth and interprets to us the teaching of Jesus. The Holy Spirit unites us to God the Father and the Son and makes us part of the *missio Dei* to bring life to the world. The Spirit teaches us to abide in Christ and to love one another, thus witnessing to the love of Christ. In a situation of enmity, the Spirit comforts us and gives us courage to speak and declare the word of God. The *parakletos* takes the side of the suffering and convinces the world of sin and righteousness and judgment. The Spirit, who is our counsellor, is the Spirit of peace in a violent world (John 14:15-16:15).

The *parakletos* provides a model and the medium for the church's ministry of reconciliation. The Holy Spirit heals and reconciles by coming alongside to inspire, enlighten and empower. In the Spirit, we are enabled to affirm what is true and at the same time to discern what is false and evil. The Spirit binds us together and in the Spirit we enjoy true communion and fellowship (2 Cor. 13:13). Though for a little while we, and all creation, groan like a woman in childbirth, the Spirit is our midwife and when the mission is accomplished we believe that our sorrow will turn to joy at the new life of reconciliation (John 16:20-22; Rom 8:18-25).

## **6) Questions for further study and discussion**

This attempt toward a theology of mission as reconciliation raises a number of questions that will need further and more detailed attention. These include:

What are the practical implications of the call for economic reconciliation? What are the processes that can bring Muslim-Christian reconciliation in the present context? What contributions does rapidly growing Pentecostal thinking and experience have to make to mission theology of reconciliation? In what ways can the theology of the Holy Spirit (pneumatology) further aid the practice of and reflection on reconciliation? What changes does mission as reconciliation suggest to existing paradigms of mission? In particular, what does it mean for the understanding of conversion? How can the importance of the spirit of reconciliation in mission be effectively communicated to those using aggressive missionary methods? How can we resource and develop appropriate ways to equip local churches to become reconciling and healing communities? How can the churches support those specially called and gifted in the ministry of reconciliation?

Notes

1 *Mission and Evangelism in Unity Today* adopted as a study document by the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the WCC in its meeting in the year 2000. Published originally in *International Review of Mission (IRM)* Jan/April 1999 and now with slight revisions as CWME Conference Preparatory Paper No. 1, available on the Conference Webpage: [www.mission2005.org](http://www.mission2005.org)

2 Christopher Duraisingh (ed), *Called to One Hope. The Gospel in Diverse Cultures*, Geneva, WCC, 1998, pp. 27 and 28. Acts of commitment of the 1996 world mission conference in Salvador da Bahía, Brazil.

3 *Mission and Evangelism in Unity Today*, *op.cit.*, § 39

4 *Ibid.*, § 13

5 Both the Faith and Order Commission and the Joint Working Group between the WCC and the Roman Catholic Church have work on common baptism high on their agenda.

6 WCC Unit II, Churches in Mission: Education, Health, Witness: *Preparatory Papers for Section Work, Conference on World Mission and Evangelism, Salvador da Bahía*. Geneva, WCC, 1996, p. 19. *Mission and Evangelism in Unity Today*, *op.cit.*, § 62

7 Three quotations from *Mission and Evangelism in Unity Today*, *op.cit.*, §§13, 9 and 13

8 *Ibid.*, §14

9 John V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God: the Holy Spirit and Christian Mission*. London, SCM, 1972.

1<sup>0</sup> "The Challenge of Proselytism and the Calling to Common Witness", Appendix C of the 7<sup>th</sup> *Report of the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches*, Geneva-Rome 1998, p. 45, §§ 8 and 9

1<sup>1</sup> *Mission and Evangelism in Unity Today*, *op.cit.*, §7

1<sup>2</sup> ***Ecumenical considerations for dialogue and relations with people of other religions. Taking stock of 30 years of dialogue and revisiting the 1979 guidelines***, WCC, 2003, §28