

World Council of Churches  
COMMISSION ON FAITH AND ORDER

**Realising mutuality and interdependence in a world of diverse identities**

*Theological consultation organised by Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches  
in partnership with the Church of Norway & Norwegian Church Aid  
as a contribution to the Decade to Overcome Violence  
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**Aide Memoire**

*“God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.” (Gen 1: 31)*

*Therefore do not worry, saying “What will we eat? Or What will we drink? Or What will we wear?...and indeed your heavenly father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matt. 6: 31, 32b, 33)*

A group of 20 theologians and peace activists from select regions of the world which have come to be known for their violent conflicts arising out of the aggressive assertion of identities - Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Philippines, D R Congo, Nigeria, Middle East, Eastern Europe, participated in this consultation. By sharing their specific contextual and experiential perspectives, they reflected together on the theme. (Invitees from the Sudan and Rwanda could not attend because of the difficulties in getting visas.) A few concerned theologians from Norway and other parts of the world also participated.

The purpose of this consultation was to identify the problems and prospects in realising mutuality and interdependence in contexts of diverse identities in an effort to challenge the churches to consider this as a contribution to the wider movement for peace during the Decade Overcome Violence. This is one of the five themes identified as possible theological challenges for the churches and processes of reflection which are also being facilitated by the Faith and Order during the DOV. For the text on these themes: please visit: <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/faith/texts-e.html>.

**The Theme**

The increasing reality of the diversity of cultures, religions, languages, nationalities, etc., while opening up new possibilities for greater human understanding, interaction and solidarity, has also brought with it tensions that make people and communities barricade themselves from others. Fear, suspicion, hatred and rejection dominate the language and experience of many all over the world. There are intense struggles for wealth, resources and power on the one hand, and for identity and justice on the other. In all these, violence has become a means to achieve people's objectives.

Furthermore, in an increasingly polarised world, awareness of power and desire for or feelings of self-sufficiency that reject the need of the other are also often in the background of most acts of violence. Sometimes such aspirations make people aggressive in their pursuits even if it means violating the lives and rights of others. This tendency to pursue one's own growth and fulfilment of desires by excluding and manipulating the other is present at all levels of human relationships. The present war on terror, pre-emptive wars, and the increased spending on defence for peace and security, despite terrorism exposing the myth that military strength could ensure security, is an expression of this tendency to overcome vulnerability through violent means. The same narrow, selfish pursuit is also evident in the violent ways humanity relates to the planet and its life systems.

It is unfortunate that in these power struggles religious identities, more than or along with national, ethnic and linguistic identities, are extensively made use of. Either as extremely parochial or exclusively spiritual or deliberately neutral, the dominant streams of world religions

have often failed to create and sustain values that uphold human interdependence and mutual responsibility in this ethos of increasing fragmentation and polarisation. Even the traditional Christian faith expressions are no exception to this. In spite of the strong accent on the love of the neighbour being decisive in a relationship with God, popular notions of salvation as ultimate in the human quest for fulfilment seem to be moulded by this spirit of individualism that promotes social irresponsibility.

It is against this background that this theological consultation tried to explore some of these questions in order to discern what these might mean to the churches as they participate in the *Decade to Overcome Violence*. The theme proposes an ethical possibility of realising mutuality and interdependence as a creative way by which churches can counter the reality of mutual fear and hatred that dominate our lives today. With the conviction that creative theology arises out of situations of struggle for life, this exploration opted for an inductive methodology of doing theology by drawing theological insights and directions from concrete historical experiences of the faith communities in many parts of the world.

### **Presentations: Building on existing studies**

Tom Best, acting director of the Faith and Order, in his presentation on Faith and Order's ongoing study: "Ethnic identity, National identity and the search for the Unity of the Church" (ETHNAT), drew attention not only to the doctrinal issues that keep the church divided but also to the theologies developed to justify the division. He said that the cherished goal of visible unity, though hard and seemingly elusive, must be pursued for the sake of the credibility of Gospel and the church. He then elaborated on the attempts of the Faith and Order to focus on the divisions caused by cultural, racial, ethnic, historical, social and gender factors. The ETHNAT study has wrestled with one major question: Can the churches heal or maintain divisions? He summarised the conclusions of the two consultations, one with biblical scholars and the other with theologians and social scientists (for more, visit <http://wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/faith/goal-e.html#5>). Citing some major findings of the Ecclesiology and ethics study process, Best reiterated that the churches cannot afford to remain indifferent to the growing threats to human unity and to the ethical integrity of the world as it also questions the integrity of the church itself.

Sturla Stålsett, professor of theology at the University of Oslo and Raag Rolfsen, Commander Staff Chaplain of the armed forces, made a joint presentation on Church of Norway's recent theological study on "Vulnerability and Security". Stålsett elaborated the transforming potential of vulnerability in the light of Jesus' way of *kenosis*. The realisation of vulnerability is the precursor for a process of humanisation, for a new self-discovery as a human being. Vulnerability, therefore, needs to be seen as strength and resource. Stålsett emphasised that we need to view this anthropological condition of vulnerability as an ethical pre-condition for responsible ways of human living. Vulnerability should therefore be protected and not removed. He asserted that this is the essence of God's salvation in Jesus Christ, rooted in the assertion of powerlessness. God's power does not dominate or destroy, nor does it violate or victimise. It transforms persons, communities and the world through love and just relationships.

Raag Rolfsen, in his continuation of the presentation, spoke about two asymmetries. The first is the recognition of the otherness of the other person as holy, as separated from one's ability to manipulate. The second is the misuse of vulnerability by the powerful. Placing the theme of mutuality and interdependence between these two asymmetries, Rolfsen identified the theological implications. "If you recognise the call to goodness issuing from the nakedness of the face, subjecting you to responsibility, then you also recognise that this is not just any call, not just any summons. It is what calls me back to myself, even prior to my freedom, claiming it at the same time that it is constituted. When responsibility is awakened, it inspires one to respond to all the injustice around. It is time to step out into the world, to do the work of justice. However, in order to prevent this work ending itself in self-righteousness and abuse, it has to be continually reconstituted by the call to responsibility. The vulnerability of the other person is the site from where I am summoned to myself as responsible. The asymmetry of the call issuing from the vulnerability of the other, the asymmetry of the distributive justice, and finally the realisation of mutuality and interdependence constitute the space where both the injustice and my responsibility encounter each other."

## **Biblical Reflections**

Diego Irarrazaval from Chile in his reflection on Luke 10:21 spoke about God's joy and compared it to the sense of humour that the indigenous communities in South America, particularly in the highlands of Peru, exhibited in the face of intense hardships during the times of political and military repression. They laughed at the shallowness of brute power that exercises itself on the powerless. He said that joy has a subversive element. Jesus referring to the ordinary listeners as the little ones and children upholds them as those worthy of God's revelation. The learned scribes may manipulate the law and make the knowledge of God incomprehensible. Jesus, who was also rejected by these learned scribes and the Pharisees, reveals his preferential option for the last and the least. The Lord derives joy in opting for the poor because in their struggle for life they see the face of God. This is the spirituality of the poor, the little ones of the earth.

Evelyn Parker from the US in her reflection on Esther 2:5-10, 20 and 4:13, 14, spoke about the attempts of the disempowered to hide their identity. Esther hid her identity for the sake of her own survival and of her people. She then went on to talk about the attempts of the African-American population in the US to hide their identity. She traced the historical roots of this phenomenon. Some mulatto children of white masters and their black enslaved mothers sought opportunity to pass as white US citizens. Passing depended on having a certain physicality that included fair or "white" skin and European physical features such as narrow nose, thin lips, naturally straight hair and narrow hips. This tendency to opt for passing affects identity and power among African Americans even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. African American adolescents and young adults most noticeably live out the effects of colourism, which is interiorised colour prejudice, in the choices about their physical appearances and the power wielded or not in their relationships. Shaking off imposed identities and asserting authentic identities are both important especially for the subjugated to transform the structures of relationships in the wider community.

Jamal Daibes from Palestine, in his reflection on Luke 2:39-56, spoke about the radical message of Mary who defies the norms of traditional patriarchal society and travels to meet Elizabeth. In spite of the stigma and ostracisation that her condition has brought upon her, Mary was able to acknowledge God's work through her. She sees the work of God primarily as one that would ensure justice to the excluded and the disempowered of her society and times. It is the empowering love of God that enables the hungry, the lowly and the weak to be filled with good things and to be ensured justice.

Anna Petterson, a young person from Sweden, shared stories of three women that she met in the West Bank where she was ecumenical accompanier. First was Diyala, a young Palestinian Muslim working in the refugee camps of Al Amari and Kalandia on the West Bank with disabled and traumatised children and sanitation workers. The second was another young Israeli woman (whose name she could not recollect) in Az-Zawiya who joined the Palestinian villagers in their protest against the Israeli Army against the encroachment of Palestinian lands. She is very active in the Israeli peace movement despite her parents' restraint. The third was Madeline, an accompanier from Switzerland who spent her time in the West Bank accompanying children morning and evening on their way to and from school. When asked she said that she felt she must do just the same as she would expect someone would do to take care of her children when in need or danger. Holding that we are all members of God's household (Ephesians 2:19) and that we need to take care of each other's needs as well as each other's burdens, Petterson said that there is great joy in working together and in that one can see healing and life blooming.

## **Contextual theological reflections**

Muteho Kasonga from the Democratic Republic of Congo said that realising mutuality and interdependence in DRC has to begin with healthy gender relationships. Widespread abuse and exclusion of women is very common. Rape is often used as a weapon to punish the opponent. Destitution and maiming of children too has become very common. Muteho argued that affirming and safeguarding the dignity of every human being is crucial for building mutually interdependent relationships as well as for just economic relationships. Sanctity of life and a life of dignity for everyone are to be seen as God's will for the world. Unity has no meaning if diversity and the distinctness of everyone are not affirmed.

Diego Irarrazaval from Chile wanted to unmask the power orientations not only of the ethno-centric and mono-cultural systems of thought but also of sexist forms of speaking about God.

Drawing on the spirituality of the indigenous communities in the Andean region (Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador and other neighbouring nations), where relationships are the most important encompassing reality, Irarrazaval proposed an alternative framework to monistic and totalitarian models through one that acknowledges differences, the values of a holistic approach and the transformation of reality. He upheld the Nahuatl wisdom (in Mexico and Central America) as dynamic and holistic. The Nahuatl comprehends the sacred as dual and relational. There is a duality of reciprocal elements, and not a dichotomy where one factor is a denial of or superior to the other. We need to recognise and affirm both the masculine and the feminine, in the motherly and fatherly dimensions of reality.

Rebecca Dali from Nigeria spoke about the hard fact of Muslims and Christians needing each other for their survival even as they hurt and kill each other. When there were tensions between Muslims and Christians in Jos, both the Hausa Muslims who own and run commuter buses as well as Christians who run other services suffered. The realisation of mutual vulnerability entails cooperation and shared destiny. The mystery of God's creation is such that not everything we need is found in any one location. This requires the need to be mutually interdependent. Subjugation and exploitation through sheer exercise of brute power not only hurts the powerless but also the powerful in that they lose their humanity. The God of the Bible was always on the side of the victim to insist that justice and love need to be guiding values for the world. The atonement is God's expression of loyalty to those who suffer. This is the Christian message and the church is commissioned to propagate it. It requires courage to take risks even against self-interests. Dali deplored that the church in Jos was a party to the atrocities and it failed to reach out to the Moslem victims.

Martin Sinaga spoke about Indonesia's growing culture of violence. As an alternative, he proposed the primal religion of Nunusaku which views God as the one source and creator of all that exists. "Since this primal religion has no structure, it offers the possibility of informal alliances (called *pe/a*) among people irrespective of their religious beliefs. In the recent reconciliation processes in Indonesia, *pe/a* is renewed again and Christians in the Moluccas have begun to introspect their given identity in the light of this primal religiosity. This has made possible new relationships based on the value of interdependence." Sinaga argued that Indonesian Christians need not be guided by western metaphysical Christian wisdom but instead by the peoples' traditions and cultures of prudence. He narrated the story of Ngampel, a village in central Java where Muslims and Christians work together to build a school and then a church. They participate in each others' rituals and festivals. During Easter, the *Pajitan* ritual - based on local religious cultures, is practised. He hoped that this may be a sign of the movement of Church towards becoming an open community, and a truly Indonesian church.

Margaretha Hendriks in her paper (that was read because she could not come following a road accident in Indonesia) described how the Indian Ocean *tsunami* made people realise that they need one another in times of tragedies and disasters. After all, God's intentions of creation are that it is a mutually interdependent and constantly interacting reality. Indonesia too is the *oikos* of God - of Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Christians and those who follow Javanese mysticism. Therefore, realising mutuality and interdependence is not just a social need to fulfil common interests but a spiritual imperative for Christians. Hendriks wrote: "God has created us to be interdependent and to be in mutual need for each other. We can even rightly say that to be human is to be interdependent, to be in reciprocal relationships with others in spite of our differences. This is actually what we also mean when we speak about *koinonia* or *oikoumene*".

Jamal Daibes from Palestine in his presentation posed unity among Christians as well as all those that belong to the Abrahamic faiths as a primary challenge. "Muslims, Jews and Christians hold themselves as God's chosen. The Muslim looks to this land as God's endowment; the Christian perceives it as his own because it is the place where Jesus Christ was born, lived, taught, died and rose from the dead in glory; and for the Jew it is the land of his/her faith and roots. Each holds on to this view dearly and passionately". Daibes elaborated on the need to reflect further on this claim of being the "God's chosen". "Here the unspoken implication is that if you are one of God's chosen, the other *is not*, and that you are superior." Acknowledging that it is a very difficult task for people to understand themselves otherwise, Daibes went on to reflect on acceptance and embrace. He rejected the goal of tolerance. "Tolerance is negative because you view the other as a burden to bear." A special relationship with God must entail Godlike responses of love, forgiveness and reconciliation. Christians in the Holy Land must not opt for

forgiveness and reconciliation because they are small and weak but do so because it is the calling of the church.

Alina Patru spoke about the harmonious relations that exist between Orthodox and Lutherans in a predominantly Orthodox Transylvania. She listed out the reasons: 1) they have not tried to convert each other but respect each other. 2) They have had stable identities. Stable identities are not static, but permit and even support mutual enrichment. Holding that exemplary relationships are not those without conflicts but those which have the capacity to overcome conflicts, Patru asserted that genuine religiosity cannot lead to hatred and violence. Acceptance of the other is an essential expression of true religiosity. She also pointed towards the need to help people to overcome the ill-effects of excessive memory. "In Christ, the believers obtain and develop their ability to forgive, which means to be relieved from the destructive power of the past, not to have the consciousness of a slave anymore, but that of a beloved child". Patru also gave a vivid description of ecumenical interaction at the local level and good will among churches and people in Transylvania. She hoped that "church leaders and theologians who know the history of the church very well will also be able to develop Christian virtues of humility and learn to be humble so that they learn from ordinary believers who, together with them, form the body of Christ."

Johnston McMaster, in his well argued presentation on Northern Ireland, held the need to realise the praxis of *kenosis* as the key to a shared future. If power is exercised or abused according to each person's capacity, there can never be peace. What is important is to develop an attitude that is sensitive to the needs of the other and affirms plurality over privilege. To that extent, recognition of mutual vulnerability is crucial. McMaster then went on to discern the form and functions of the church in situations of brokenness. He said that the Spirit has the broader functions of the transformation of the world. "Pneumatology is about social justice and there is no *koinonia*, the creation of the spirit, without solidarity with the poor and the vulnerable." Therefore, the *koinonia* of *ecclesia* needs to be viewed as a site of radical partnerships and as a potentially revolutionary site of social transformation. He then spoke about the need to cultivate a culture of active non-violence. Violence always delays justice and also destroys it. Paul discovered in his Christic experience that the heart of God, the ultimate mystery, was characterised by cruciform vulnerability. McMaster said: "the Damascus road meant that the person of violence discovered that *the antidote to sacred violence is identification with the victim*. The body of Christ has no option but to live a theology of public responsibility, a life of embodied *kenosis*, and *koinonia* as the culture community in radical contrast to sacred violence".

Bp. Kumara Ilanghasinghe shared six stories of vulnerability in Sri Lanka. These were: the rape of a *tsunami* victim by an aid worker; the unending violence between the Sri Lankan army and the Tamil Tigers; the attack on churches by Buddhist fundamentalists; the suicides of farmers; the attacks on judges by the underworld; and the continuing political instability. These stories tell us about fear, abuse of power and irresponsibility. Against this background, Ilanghasinghe spoke about the need to carry on the mission of peace in less pompous but more humble and humane ways. He substantiated his point by citing the eastern tradition of keeping silence during worship through which introspection is seen as necessary for a spirituality of action through involvement and participation. He also cited the Hindu practice of breaking coconut before entering the temple which symbolises breaking the hardness of heart before approaching the divine. Making oneself vulnerable and affirming vulnerability is a sure way of grasping the presence of the God of life in the other as well as in the whole of creation.

Sr. Miriam, from the troubled region of Mindanao in the Philippines, vividly described the ongoing tensions between Muslims and the Filipino army. Resonating with Ilanghasinghe, Miriam too spoke about silence. However, she made a distinction between a "listening silence" and "the culture of silence" and warned that it is contrary to the essence of Christian faith to keep silent when life is in danger. She gave a personal account of her involvement in facilitating the participation of people from different parts of Asia and the world in the life of the peasant communities in the Bikol region. "Such experiences prove that expressions of interrelatedness of peoples and their mutual exchange of experiences and gifts are necessary for the transformation of society." Miriam said that a culture of peace can only be nurtured through a collective exercise. Drawing parallels to the way rice grows better when it is planted together, she said that peace is grown better in the field of multi-faiths. "Those Christians who are committed to justice and peace movements, peace-loving Muslims and hundreds of indigenous peoples in the Philippines have

started a process of overcoming social and structural sin through several acts of social intervention.”

### Discussion (Summary)

- It is not the experience of suffering but the overcoming of suffering that makes the virtue of affirming vulnerability a redeeming and transforming factor.
- There are many who are already vulnerable - those without social security, no healthcare, no passport, no education, and no employment. How do we then preach to them the ethical sublimity of vulnerability? We need to discern the social locations of the vulnerability and of the addressees of Jesus’ message.
- Sacrifice theology is a part of market ideology! We need to interrogate atonement theories. Some theologies seem to be at the heart of the ideologies of violence.
- Churches’ indifference to the reality of brokenness is a matter of shame.
- The present post-Christian world may be seen as an opportunity to realise mutuality and interdependence.
- *Satyagraha*, the Indian model of non-violent resistance is a form of sacrifice that gives time and space for the perpetrator to reconsider or convert. It is the moral power of vulnerability that challenges the aggressor.
- *Koinonia* must lead to and find fulfilment in *oikoumene*.
- How do we realise mutuality and interdependence in contexts of intense struggles for wealth and resources?
- We need to learn from the spirituality of the subaltern communities.
- What are the costs of the church to be just and to be in the vanguard of justice?
- How can the church offer a broken witness in a broken world?
- Church leaders say a lot of good things but they never practice.

After a lengthy discussion on the emerging issues, the group synthesised their reflections and decided to work together in groups on four themes. Following are the summaries of reports from these working groups:

#### Group I: Dilemmas of Power

There was a king by the name of *Alawaka*. The king was very interested in hunting as kings often are. One day when returning from hunting, the king was very tired, and rested under a tree after his meal. He fell asleep but suddenly he woke up with a shock; the devil which occupied the tree had come out and was ready to kill and eat the king. Now, the name of the devil was also *Alawaka*. Then the king said ‘hold on my friend *Alawaka*, if you kill me and eat me now, your meal for today will be ensured. But let us make an agreement; I am the king and I will send a person to your doorstep to be killed and eaten every day’. The devil thought this was a good idea and they made an agreement. In stead of nurturing and feeding the people, the king sacrificed his people to be alive and retain his power. But at the same time the king became the devil.

*A Sri Lankan story*

The dynamics of power is an important factor in all human relationships. Power *per se* is not bad. It is in fact necessary. However, what makes it a problem is the intention and the way it is used. On the one hand power can be used to safeguard and enhance life and on the other it can be used to destroy and violate those who do not have the same. In an unequal and unjust world where social, economic and political power grants innumerable advantages to the privileged, a critical awareness of the destructive potential of power is necessary. It is therefore necessary to distinguish between these two dimensions of power – one as sheer ‘power’ and the other as the ‘authority’. Power sustains itself by dominating, possessing and destroying people and systems. Authority comes from its ability to empower and transform people and systems. Those with as well as those without power need to discern the nature of the power they hold or aspire for.

#### **An attempt to look at the difference between power and authority in the Bible:**

David was a man of both power and authority. He had both authority as the divinely elected and power as king of Israel. But at certain points in his life his power exercised itself over his authority, and it became clear to him and to all, that his power was not life-enhancing but life-denying (2 Samuel 11). David desired Bathsheba and he exercised his

power not only to fulfil his desires but also to kill her husband Uriah. And God interferes through Nathan to show the difference.

As he began his ministry, Jesus too was confronted with the choice of power and authority. (Matthew 4:1-11). Jesus could have opted for the easy way to become the Messiah by using his divine powers and by aligning himself with temporal powers. But Jesus rejects this manipulative and hegemonic power. Instead he opts for the hard choice that ultimately leads him to Calvary. His purpose was to inaugurate the new reign of God.

Therefore, Jesus declined the offer of power because it would have diminished his authority. Jesus declined the temptation of power that multiplies itself by controlling and manipulating people by pointing to the sources for his authority - to the word of God. Therefore, the people who met Jesus sensed his authority. Jesus transformed Zacchaeus' life on the very day that he met him. (Luke 19:1-9). The power of a tax collector was no longer an advantage to Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus had to leave the power he once considered the source of his position, and submit to the authority of forgiveness and truth. In opposition to power, this authority has the ability to transform people, situations and structures.

Power, understood as authority in the biblical usage, means one that is always to be shared; Jesus gave his disciples part of his authority when he sent them out, saying "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go..." (Matthew 28:18). Power cannot be centralised without subverting itself (cf. the introductory story). The chief priests, together with the elders of the community, sensed Jesus' authority and asked him by what authority he was preaching and healing (Luke 20:1-8). The powers of the world could not comprehend an authority devoid of certain symbols of power. The Cross event suggests the victory of power over spiritual authority. Before Jesus was taken to Golgatha, the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him (Matthew 27: 32-44) as if his authority had to submit itself to temporal powers. It could not even save Jesus from being killed. However, the death of Jesus was a battle between power and authority at the end of which authority won through the resurrection. The destructive nature of power could not decimate truth and life. Ultimately, power exhausted itself in the authority of the Lord: in his vulnerability and in his resurrection Jesus overcame death. That authority is grace that transforms and refuses to follow the ways of the world. It was an integral part of Jesus' earthly life and ministry. The destructive powers could not exterminate his gracious authority. God's transforming grace turns death to life, hopelessness to hope, and power to graceful authority.

## **Group II: Vulnerability and Kenosis**

*"The discovery and acknowledgement of my own vulnerability is what makes me aware of taking part in humanity, my possibility of being hurt is at the same time my possibility of being caressed and taken care of"*

*A participant of the consultation*

**The Myth of Invulnerability:** The dominant and the powerful tend to define vulnerability according to their own perceptions. They are driven by the assumption that humans are capable of doing and achieving everything. For the sake of their own safety and security they deprive many of their basic needs besides terrorising them with repressive laws and systems. Violence generates the fear of power and the vulnerable persons subject themselves to the manipulations of the powerful. However, the events of 11 September 2001 in New York and the phenomenon of suicide bombings have thoroughly exposed this myth of invulnerability. The rich political leaders and army generals in Nigeria built well-fortified houses with scanners, alarm systems and round the clock security guards could not avoid being attacked during the violent conflicts of a few years ago. The abuse of religious symbols, institutions and language has also become common place for the legitimisation of unjust centres of power. Some are held superior to, and more righteous and enlightened than the rest. This process of religious sanctification of certain anthropological assumptions has been at the root of some of the most heinous crimes against humanity in the history of the world. In an ethos of unequal social, economic and political power relationships, the disadvantaged become vulnerable to the manipulations of the privileged. They lose their subjecthood and their lives are governed by the value systems and vested interests of the

dominant. The processes of economic globalisation, by weakening the role of state and by inculcating consumerist and individualistic values, have also made those who have no assets and skills vulnerable to the extent of being commodified and trafficked. Women who are disempowered by the patriarchal value systems as weaker and powerless are the worst victims in all situations of war and violence, poverty, disease, illiteracy and unemployment. They are also victims of transferred aggression in war or conflict situations through rape and other atrocities.

### **Theological Reflection:**

Vulnerability is a fact of life and of all forms of life. To be human is to be vulnerable and the human face is all the more beautiful when vulnerability marks its features. God so loved the world that God took human vulnerability to its farthest limits and showed us that vulnerability can be overcome when human beings care for one another and the earth. No human frailty, no *man*-made laws and conventions, not even betrayal of trust, barbaric torture and death can obstruct people from caring for one another. In other words, by making himself utterly vulnerable, Jesus showed us that it is possible to be truly and utterly human. This humanisation is experienced in one's ability to love and to be responsible towards the other and the creation.

The marginalised and the oppressed peoples of today's world, through their historic ideological struggles, testify to the salvific significance of the *kenosis* of Jesus and his paschal death and resurrection. Their Passover journey puts into a single historic saving event the exodus of Israel from Egypt and the tribes' constitution as a nation in the Sinai desert, the Via Crucis of Christ, Mary and the disciples from Gethsemane to Calvary to a borrowed tomb, and the Emmaus journey of the Risen Lord. Their knowledge of God comes through what they experience of God amidst their struggles for life, justice and human dignity.

The indigenous peoples in Latin America have great reverence for the earth and refer to her as mother. On account of this deeply spiritual relationship with the earth, they see themselves as earthlings mutually interdependent and dependent on the earth. They exuberate a strong sense of respect for life. Similarly, the North East Indian tribes protect and care for vulnerable and helpless widows during forest clearing and harvesting time. Some tribes in Africa also have a deep sense of respect for women, children, and the disabled. They are protected during wars, violence and calamities.

Expression of solidarity in vulnerability is what makes one strong, makes every person loveable and diminishes all illusions of invincibility. It deconstructs even the reason for invincibility. Therefore in partnership with all those who are impoverished and disempowered, Christians can proceed from death-dealing conditions to a life-begetting journey with a new vision of heaven that is to be realised already here on earth.

### **Group III: Unity and diversity**

*"But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body....but God has so arranged the body, giving greater honour to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it." (1 Cor. 12: 18, 19, 24b-26)*

Every society in the world lives amidst diversities of cultures, religions, ethnicities, languages, etc. Although diversity presents possibilities for greater human self-understanding and interaction, it has also brought with it certain serious challenges of fear, suspicion and hatred of the other often resulting in intense and violent conflicts and tensions among people and communities. Cultural identities are good in themselves and can find a place in the church. Unfortunately, religions, through their links with national, ethnic or local identities, have become sources as well as perpetrators of violence and division. The reality of diversity, therefore, becomes problematic when divisions replace diversity and are asserted in order to overcome it. Division is result of the refusal of diversity.



## Challenges:

The diversity of the church, arising essentially out of specific geographical contexts and cultures, does not negate the notion of one universal church, the one body of Christ. The reality of that diversity is not antithetical but constitutive to its unity. While affirming the vocation of seeking unity in and for the sake of the unity of this diverse world, the church needs to take the following challenges into consideration:

1) There are a number of trans-denominational, informal and non-conventional formations of church in several parts of the world. These often gather around charismatic leaders or are motivated by certain theological orientations. Even as we acknowledge their popularity, we need to interrogate the theological basis upon which these are found and the purposes they seek to serve. These formations, often with an incomplete understanding of the purpose and scope of Christian faith, not only distort the faith but also serve the interests of the hegemonic powers.

2) Another important fact is the church's attempt to inculturate itself in historical contexts. Such attempts are necessary as these make the Christian faith relevant and meaningful to the experience of life in each context. However, this interaction can result in the unhealthy allegiance of the church with oppressive traits in local cultures and ideologies. It is necessary to differentiate the positive and the negative sides of such inculturation. We need to set criteria by which we are able to discern the life-affirming or life-negating elements in the cultures and religions that Christianity comes into contact with.

## Theological reflection

In our attempt to identify resources for the realisation of mutuality and interdependence, we may perhaps turn first to the concept of Holy Trinity as a model. The mutuality and diversity of the Trinity testify to the relational nature of God. The unity of the Triune God is the perfect expression of unity in diversity. All men and women are created in God's image. Our differences, including our differences of gender and cultures, reflect God's plan and will. Diversity, therefore, is a self-expression of God. The image of God in human beings is a call to grow in the likeness of God. In the process of growth, interdependence among creatures is God's plan for the sustaining of life.

In his love towards human beings and in order to show us the way to grow in God's image, God comes down to earth. God sent Jesus to be one of and with us, to share our life and to renew our relations with God and with one another. The suffering of Christ on the cross testifies to his service to humanity. He set himself as an example to his followers: to suffer with and not to ignore, to serve and not to dominate, to show compassion and not to justify violence. A true Christian can never be indifferent to the suffering of others around himself or herself.

The diversity within the church seen as Body of Christ (2 Cor 12) reflects a basic unity. Diversity and unity should be regarded as two complementary aspects. Christ wanted and prayed for one church. To seek unity constantly is a sign of being already united in Christ. On the other hand, while seeking full unity we must also acknowledge and work together towards visible expressions of unity. The unity we seek is not for uniformity. *Koinonia* should be based on *kenosis*, because Christ died on the cross facing injustice and the consequences of sin in this world. His resurrection gives meaning to the sufferings of people today and also the hope of a transformed life and world. This is the ethical basis of the church. The church should collaborate - and not be afraid of doing so - with believers of other religions in order to protect human life and promote human dignity and social justice. The experience of diversity is an invitation to interdependence and to express our solidarity with those who suffer, realising our mutuality for the transformation of the world.

## Group IV: Trauma and Healing

*"If God is good why didn't he protect me from being raped?... I was forced to save the life of my husband, but now I have no place to go because he has rejected me."*

*A Congolese woman raped by soldiers because the husband was forced to choose between being murdered himself or his wife being raped by the soldiers*

*“I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me” (Matt. 26: 38)*

During the conflict in Kafanchan, Nigeria in March 1987, Hyeladi Ziva, a 25-year-old student, and his family was attacked. His home was looted and vandalised. Hyeladi Zira was left presumed dead. In the crisis in the town of Kaduna in February 2000, Hyeladi, now 43, became the leader and organiser of a band of Christian youths. They went into the Muslim part of the ghetto and arbitrarily slaughtered the people living there, mostly women and children. One year later, in September 2001, Hyeladi was himself attacked again. Holding his new-born son in his arms, he could not run. His arm was cut off at the elbow, and his son died later from the injuries.

The church needs to recognise and speak the truth about the potential of trauma. It must learn to avoid theological escapism and theological rhetoric. The church must also avoid perverting the theology of the cross to justify and sustain the misuse of power, e.g. in relation to domestic violence.

Around the globe, in Africa, Europe, the Americas and Asia, human beings are trapped in the cycle of violence. The victims of today often become the perpetrators of tomorrow – violence becomes the answer to violence. Being traumatised points to the fracturing of basic trust, the destruction of relationships, the destruction of community and environment, and the destruction of communion with God. At a deeply personal level it means anger, fear, depression, apathy, loss of self-esteem, and suicide.

### **Theological themes**

The affirmation that human beings are created in the image of God not only has ontological but also functional implications. We are created to be in relationship with God, self, others and creation. The biblical witness recounts how this relationship was broken through violence and mistrust.

Human expectations about God have often been misplaced and unfounded, e.g. with regard to the expectation of God’s protection or intervention. Paul clearly did not anticipate people of faith being free from hardship, stress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril or sword. These are the realities of human experience. What he affirmed was not divine protection or intervention, but that nothing would be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ (Romans 8: 35-39). God remains with us despite the suffering.

Just as the biblical witness allows for the expression of trauma, it also contains resources for a healing process and for dealing with the spiral of violence. The process of healing and the application of such resources are highly complex. There are no simple methods or solutions. The healing process takes place within an intricate web of relationships where the victims and the perpetrators are intertwined, and all are nested within the community.

The language of “victim” and “perpetrator” is in itself difficult and is open to interpretation and challenge. There are macro and micro levels for understanding these phenomena. On the macro level we must consider economic and military structures of death, which place violence in a wider perspective. On the micro level victim and perpetrator may belong to the same community, and both have often been shaped by the history, systems, and structures of the community. Both are bound together in a web that is inseparable and indivisible. From a pastoral perspective, the church embraces both perpetrator and victim as bound together in the image and kinship of God.

The theological themes of Lament and truth telling, forgiveness and repentance, and reconciliation and trust are dynamic and relational. The pastoral process of healing can be enhanced by engaging with these interrelated theological themes.

1. Lament and truth telling: It is important to start with lament and truth-telling. The church has reached out to the victims of violence and jumped to hasty forgiveness and reconciliation. In the process it has ignored the need for lament and truth telling. Lament and truth telling are necessary to mend the fractured trust involved in the trauma. The biblical witness provides space for raw, naked honesty to be expressed in the presence of each other and God. The practice of lament needs to be recovered for our time, both in liturgy and educational programmes. Psalm 88 is an expression of hopelessness and a sense of the deep silence and absence of God. *Oh, Lord why do you cast me off?... You have caused friend and neighbour to shun me; my companions*

*are in darkness.* (vs. 13 and 18). Lament is closely connected to courageous truth telling. Truth telling involves more than the testimony of the victim. It also involves the perpetrator telling the truth about the crimes or atrocities committed. It means identifying the communal and structural dimensions, which may involve more than one version of truth. This means justice and truth demand that we become clear about who is victim and who is perpetrator.

2. Forgiveness and Repentance: Forgiveness is often an emotive and misunderstood word. Forgiveness is not about forgetting, but it is about remembering in a way that does not close the possibility of rebuilding trust and relationship. Remembering is “re-member-ing.” Forgiveness involves publicly naming the pain and the past. The act of forgiveness is actually an act of judgement. Forgiveness also has a political dimension and community responsibility. It will often involve the redistribution of power and resources. This underlines the close connection between forgiveness and justice. Often repentance is presumed to precede forgiveness. It can also follow or be a part of the process of forgiveness. This is vividly illustrated by the story of Zaccheus, Luke 19:1-10. It is only *after* he is accepted by Jesus that he expresses remorse, re-orientates his life, and makes restitution or reparation for his past actions. Repentance restores the humanity of the victim, as well as the dignity of the perpetrator.

3. Reconciliation and Trust: Reconciliation is a long-term process that involves many beginnings. Reconciliation is a painful process because the trust may be fractured and fragile to the extent that it is felt that it will surely be fractured again. The trust-building process may, with some frequency, even break down (cf. the story of Joseph and his brothers, Genesis 47-50 and the story of Jacob, Genesis 32 - 33:18). Jacob limped toward reconciliation, wrestling with the past, restoring relationships, yet he and his brother went different ways. Trust stems from (rebuilding) relationships of unconditional acceptance, openness, integrity and accountability. The process of dealing with trauma may at some stage involve encounter. Encounter is another phase of relationships. It is the meeting of self, other, community and God. The encounter between victim and perpetrator may take place at an advanced stage of the healing process. And when it does it requires community presence and sensitivity. The community presence is important as an act of solidarity, as well as providing hospitable and just space.

4. Identity: As stated earlier, we are created as relational beings, in the image of God. Violence violates identity and dignity. The African concept of *Ubuntu*, holds that ‘I am who I am through my relationships and interdependence with other people’. If my relationships are destroyed, so is my concept of self, my identity. When HIV positive African soldiers rape women, they do it because they want to destroy the property of men. The rape is not so much directed at dishonouring the woman, but about man dishonouring man. The woman is invisible. The same goes for other kinds of victims of violence. They become invisible and that is the intention of the perpetrator. If you are made invisible you may at best become insecure about yourself, at worst you lose your identity. When victims are allowed to tell their stories they, as well as their trauma, become visible once again.

In response to trauma, the church and its ministry in should get involved in looking anew at *diakonia*, word and worship, pastoral care, education, stewardship and homiletics. All of these categories of ministry could and should be developed. *Diakonia* could include mediation, advocacy, and education. Mediation would include the room to hear and tell stories. The challenge is to prepare the People of God for ministry in a world of violence, restoring trust and relationships.