

THEOLOGY OF RECONCILIATION AND PEACEMAKING FOR MISSION

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Lecture 3

PREPARING MISSIONARIES TO BE AGENTS OF RECONCILIATION AND PEACEMAKING

Communicating the Gospel in a New Context

Throughout history, Christian missionaries have configured their work according to different understandings of how best to communicate the Gospel. If reconciliation and peacemaking constitute a significant paradigm for mission today, how must missionaries be prepared in order to carry out their responsibilities?

To answer that question, it might be best to begin with a brief reflection on how missionary preparation changed over the past century. This might have the added advantage of raising questions which at first may not be obvious but may nonetheless be significant in the new paradigm we are exploring here.

If one goes back to the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, preparation of missionaries typically encompassed two areas: language and auxiliary professions. Formal language training was something that evolved from being apprenticed to a native to speaker to the setting up of special language schools to equip the missionary in local languages. Roman Catholic missionaries sometimes lagged behind in formal language preparation because the administration of the sacraments was in Latin throughout the Church, and in that area no new preparation was needed. But missionaries across the denominational spectrum provided special service in the area of language by sometimes compiling the first grammars and dictionaries in local languages, thereby saving some of these from extinction.

Likewise, auxiliary professions took on importance. To the extent that Christian mission at the time of colonial expansion was often seen as a “civilizing” mission as well, education and Western medicine were prime and prized auxiliary professions. This was especially the case for women in many instances. Missionaries not only saw such things as

education and healthcare as additional benefits for their charges, but could point back to the Apostle Paul and his tent-making as a way of supporting himself.

The emergence of dialogue and inculturation as modes of mission in the second half of the twentieth century brought new perspectives on preparation of missionaries. Knowledge of other religious traditions became increasingly important, especially in Asia and Muslim areas of Africa. Any knowledge acquired earlier (with some exceptions) was used to combat or refute the great traditions. As dialogue became more important, the desired knowledge enabled the missionary to be able to collaborate more with other religionists. Around the same time, the importance of culture as a concept began to take hold across the denominational spectrum. Rather than presuming the superiority of Western culture, attention now focused upon the integrity of the cultures that the missionary encountered, as well as their preservation as a vehicle for expressing Christian faith. The heightening of importance of local culture in the immediate period following political independence made this commitment to culture even stronger. On the Roman Catholic side, the Second Vatican Council endorsed the concept of culture officially in its Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et spes*. Manuals and guides to understanding culture began to be published in the 1960s.¹

A more recent outgrowth of the necessity of knowledge of culture for the preparation of missionaries has been interest in intercultural or cross-cultural communication. How cultural difference affects capacity to understand messages circulating in a given environment is now something many missionaries are encouraged to learn as part of their preparation for missionary work.

If indeed reconciliation is becoming a paradigm for mission, what will have to be included in the preparation of missionaries in the future? One would of course begin by noting that appropriate knowledge of relevant religious traditions in the locale in which the missionary will be working, as well as knowledge of the languages and cultures will all continue to be important for the missionary. It would be unimaginable that any of these could now fall by the wayside. However if we turn to reconciliation as the paradigm, there are some additional matters to be considered. Certainly first of all would be the theology and spirituality of reconciliation that were presented in the previous two lectures. An understanding of how God effects reconciliation in the world, and the missionary's role within activity would be foundational to any missionary activity. The differences and similarities between individual and social reconciliation would also need to be examined. The different dimensions of the work of reconciliation—as healing of memories, as reconstruction of societies after violence and conflict, as the creating safe and hospitable spaces in which the work of reconciliation might take place—all of these would

¹ Louis J. Luzbetak's *The Church and Cultures* (Techny, IL: Divine Word Publications, 1963) was among the first and most widely used. It is still in print forty years later, thanks to a Protestant publishing house, the William Carey Library.

require attention. Likewise, elements of the spirituality of reconciliation that inform the life and the work of the missionary would need to be inculcated in the new missionary: knowledge of one's own and others' wounds, the practice of contemplative prayer, creating safety and hospitality for victims all would have to be learned and practiced. In other words, all what has been discussed so far would need to find its way into the life and ethos of missionaries working within this paradigm.

At this point, I would want to take all the foregoing as something that could be presumed, and focus on a number of other areas. The theology and spirituality of reconciliation are still being developed and, one would hope, would continue to be developed in the years to come. In this presentation, I want to touch upon a number of areas that so far have not received as much attention, but will need to be examined more in the coming years. Some of these things have already been discovered in missionary work; others are known only in broad outline. Specifically, I want to explore here four areas: (1) the missionary and the experience of trauma in violent situations, (2) the missionary as mediating figure among different strata of the population, (3) the task of the missionary in pre-conflict, conflict, and post-conflict situations, and (4) processes of reconciliation in interreligious situations. None of these can be examined in depth here; rather, the hope is to outline some of the issues for the preparation of missionaries which are raised in each of these areas and, in some instances, to give indications on what needs to be developed. My wish is to stimulate the kind of discussion necessary to give better shape to these issues of missionary formation.

The Missionary and the Experience of Trauma in Violent Situations

The very fact that reconciliation is even being discussed as a paradigm for mission implies a heightened level of violence and conflict in the world today. A brief outline of some of those factors—a reshaping of the world economic and political order, globalization, the emergence of new awareness of difference and ethnicity, multicultural societies—was sketched in the first presentation. It was the growing awareness of how overt conflict was affecting not just combatants in armies, but civilian populations themselves that prompted the new interest in reconciliation.

What about missionaries who enter environments of violence? What effect does it have upon them? We have quite a bit of experience with this already. Experiencing violence, either inflicted upon one's own person or witnessing it being done to others, can be traumatic. It entails a threat to one's sense of safety and well-being. When one lives for longer periods of time in situations of conflict, overt violence, or violent repression, it can have a long-term effect upon one's sense of self as well as one's relation to others.

The study of trauma and its effects has been developing for nearly a century. From the study of “shell shock” during the First World War, down to what is called in some psychiatric circles “Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder” (PTSD), a picture is emerging of how the experience of violence, either to oneself or witnessed to, can disorient a human being.

A frequent response to violence is to try to suppress the emotions which arise from it: fear, anger, insecurity, and the like. While this may not be a healthy response to violence, it may at times be the only means of survival, especially when one cannot escape the violence. Missionaries have a special vulnerability in all of this. Studies are showing that the stress of living in a new or previously unknown culture can lower the mechanisms of repression used to protect oneself. Thus, suppressed memories and emotions from an earlier stage of a missionary’s life, such as childhood physical or sexual abuse, may come back to awareness because defense barriers are lowered. The self-image of the missionary as the hero-martyr² may delude the missionary into expecting invulnerability as the trademark of the good missionary. Or the missionary may be in the midst of such chaos and violence that his or her only concern is the rescue of others and not his or her own well-being. Closely related to this is what is sometimes called “survivor guilt,” i.e., guilt that one has survived because of being a powerful foreigner while local people have perished.³

The consequences of not attending to the trauma that the missionary has experienced can be multiple: numbness, undue risk-taking, inappropriate behavior, self-medication with alcohol or drugs, psychosomatic illness, sleeplessness, and other things. Because a paradigm of mission as reconciliation may lead to greater exposure of the missionary to violence, a number of steps need to be taken.

First of all, screening the missionary candidate’s past should happen before the missionary leaves home for mission work. If there is evidence of childhood or later trauma, these events could have a negative effect on the missionary’s self-image and performance. Sometimes the missionary calling itself can be trauma-induced: a way of fleeing one’s memories and family, a way of proving to oneself and to God that one is acceptable even though defiled by abusive behavior. Traumas of the past should at least be acknowledged, if not treated in some fashion, to alleviate their negative repercussions in the life of the missionary.

Second, missionaries should be equipped with a reasonable self-knowledge of how they respond to witnessing violence and conflict, if they do not have this already. They must have the ability to monitor their own responses to this, as well as how to detect unhealthy or inappropriate responses in their peers. How one deals with the consequences of violence and

² Angelyn Dries has explored this in “The Hero-Martyr Myth in the United States: Catholic International Foreign Missionary Literature, 1893-1925,” *Missiology* 19(1991)305-314.

trauma is at least partially culturally conditioned in nature, although the most severe consequences have a somewhat predictable pattern. Knowing oneself, one's limits, and one's resources is an important part of equipping the missionary for work in reconciliation. From a spiritual perspective, this has already been touched upon in the previous presentation in the section on knowing one's wounds. That one has experienced trauma is not necessarily negative; if one has learned how to cope with it, the experience can be a resource in helping others. But not attending to the consequences of trauma at all has potentially damaging consequences not only to the missionary but also (if it educes risk-taking behavior) can be damaging to others.

For those responsible for the supervision of missionaries in the field, it is important to secure resources to treat the effects of trauma and to sustain missionaries working in violent situations. Certainly among the best is the use of support groups among missionaries themselves which allows for self-monitoring and peer-care. "Reality checks" are also useful as well to see if people immersed in situations of conflict have maintained sound judgment in situations of danger.

The third area important in dealing with the effects of violence and trauma on missionaries is care for them when on furlough or when they return to their home countries. It was only about twenty-five years ago that "re-entry shock" came to be recognized as the correlate to initial "culture shock." Missionaries who have experienced trauma in the field may be returning home to family and peers who have no way of appreciating what the missionaries have experienced, or do not want to know. This can give missionaries a sense of isolation, even from their loved ones and their colleagues. Outlets must be found for them to examine and express what they have experienced. In some places organizations now exist where former missionaries can find sympathetic ears to listen to their stories.⁴

The experience of trauma and witnessing violence is something unfortunately all too common for missionaries today. Especially because of the commitment of so many missionaries to work with the poor and the marginalized, the chances that missionaries will find themselves in such circumstances is heightened. By devising reconciliation as a paradigm for mission, missionaries will, in some instances, be placed in situations of potential harm. It is imperative, therefore, that as this paradigm develops, the care of missionaries in violent situations become a central concern.

The Social Position of the Missionary in the Reconciliation Paradigm

Missionaries, as expatriate religious leaders, occupy a special social position in schemes of reconciliation. They may indeed see themselves in total solidarity with the people they serve, and may be accepted as such by the people themselves. This

³ A good introduction to these and related issues can be found in Robert Grant, "Trauma in Missionary Life," *Missiology* 23(1995)71-83. In a wider sense, including but also going beyond missionary life, see his *The Way of the Wound: A Spirituality of Trauma and Transformation* (privately printed by the author).

⁴ One such organization in the United States is FROM (Federation of Returned Overseas Missionaries), founded in 1976.

has stood at the center of the “option for the poor” which so many missionaries have exercised. Yet if they are expatriates they have to recognize a number of other features of their social position. They are likely better educated than many of the people they serve. If they maintain foreign citizenship or have an international missionary organization supporting them, they can be extricated from a difficult or dangerous social environment in a way that local people cannot. That may not affect their level of engagement with the people they serve, but it remains a social fact. Local people can acknowledge this and accept the missionaries’ commitment to them as genuine. At the same time, local people know that the missionaries can leverage power in ways that their own leaders may not be able to do.

Likewise, being both within and outside of local communities, missionaries are able to access those higher in the social hierarchy than themselves. Conflict expert John Paul Lederach has characterized missionaries as being in the “hinge” position in conflict resolution, between the few public leaders at the top, and the many most affected by the conflict at the bottom.⁵ He envisions the structure for the resolution of conflict as a pyramid. At the top of the pyramid are the few, highly visible national leaders, religious and political. These are the parties which forge peace agreements and sign treaties. While they may have access to the levers that start and stop conflicts, they are usually the most insulated from the direct affects of the conflict.

At the bottom is the “grass roots” population, the great masses of people. As civilians have become more and more implicated in conflicts, they are the most vulnerable to and least protected from violence.⁶ As civilian populations are becoming more used as pawns in the battle, pushed as displaced persons from one locale to another, terrorized by the competing sides, and stigmatized for the future (e.g., the use of the rape of women as military strategy), they are drawn more and more into the conflict whether they wish to choose to do so or not.

In reconciliation processes, it is these great masses of people who need attention, as they become displaced or refugees, as they are subject to pressures they cannot avoid. In reconciliation processes after conflict, it is often the middle group, which includes regional leaders and expatriate missionaries, who occupy the mediating position. It is this “hinge” group who can make known the plight of the mass population to the leaders, and who can interpret back to the masses the treaties and agreements worked out by the elite. They likewise can warn the elite where the agreements they have reached will be viable on the ground below. They can also monitor whether agreements reached can continue to be effective or, if not, what conditions will have to be met for this to happen.

⁵ John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington: U.S. Institute of Peace, 1997), 39-61.

⁶ Part of this is due to the change in the nature of conflicts. In World War I, only about 11% of the civil population was directly affected by combat. At the end of the twentieth century, in the conflict in Kosovo, the number had jumped to 96%.

Because this kind of role is relatively new for many missionaries, it may require some change in self-perception on their part. Their total identification with the grassroots should not blind them to the fact that they may be in grassroots communities, but not entirely of those communities. This should not be perceived as negative; on the contrary they can be of genuine assistance to those communities in situations of negotiation and reconstruction. Preparing missionaries more consciously for this role may enhance their capacity to fulfill it when the situation arises.

Missionaries in the Three Stages of Conflict

A literature is appearing which examines potential roles for figures like missionaries in different stages of conflict.⁷ This literature typically looks at three moments in the conflict situation: the pre-conflict stage, the conflict stage, and the post-conflict stage.

In the pre-conflict stage, the missionary is involved in *conflict prevention*. This entails missionaries using their religious authority to keep “conflict producing” agents at bay. The credibility of the missionaries with their own religious group—and as far as that might extend for other religious groups—is what such conflict prevention turns upon. Among the activities in this pre-conflict are *rumor control*, that is, preventing incendiary rumors to spread about the purported activities of the other group; *stopping broad attributions* of the potential actions of a firebrand few to the intentions of the entire group; *reality checking*, that is, trying to ascertain if news that circulates corresponds to reality; *setting up communication networks*, so that information communicated can circulate quickly and effectively; *countering stereotypes* that impugn the other group; *maintain contact* with the leadership of the counterpart group; and *curb excessive rhetoric* that will cause situations to deteriorate. Likewise, effective religious leaders in pre-conflict situations work with their membership to create multiple modes of identification by belonging to different groups. This helps cut down the easy divide into “us and them.” Sometimes, outside agitators will act so as to disrupt what had been relatively peaceable relations between groups at the local level. All of the skills just mentioned regarding communication, plus reminding local people of attitudes of trust and authority can serve to counter these destructive moves at least to some extent. At times, conflict cannot be avoided, particularly if relations have been deteriorating over a longer period of time, or long-standing grievances have not been addressed. When that happens, missionaries will find themselves in the second stage, conflict itself.

Cjeka and Bamat found in their study of seven cases of action by grassroots religious leaders that, when full-scale conflict has broken out, efforts to quell the conflict by religious leaders is generally fruitless. What religious leaders resort

⁷ See for example *Working for Reconciliation: A Caritas Manual* (Vatican City: Caritas Internationalis, 1999); Joseph G. Bock, *Sharpening Conflict Management: Religious Leadership and the Double-Edged Sword* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001); Cjeka and Bamat, op. cit.; Joseph G. Bock and Clark McCauley, “A Call to Lateral Mission: Mobilizing Religious Authority against Ethnic Violence,” *Mission Studies* 39(2003), forthcoming.

to in the face of all-out conflict is rescue efforts aimed at protecting the most vulnerable during the conflict. This involves ensuring as best one can the safety of children, women, and the elderly; prevention of widespread physical destruction if possible; and ensuring accuracy of communication, both at the grassroots level and to elites in a position to stop the conflict. This may seem to be meager in the face of violence, but it is frequently all that is realistically possible when conflict has turned to overt violence. Truth is often the first casualty of war, it has been said. Chronicling the truth as best as one has access to it may serve future, post-conflict situations the best. Ensuring safety for the vulnerable also has to be a priority.

The role of the missionary in the post-conflict situation has been covered generally in the first presentation. Working in whatever way possible to re-establish truth-telling, to initiate justice, and to ensure the rule of law are the foundational works to be undertaken. The missionary must help set up networks of collaboration to make venues for the healing of memories possible, an area already addressed at some length. One point should be added here. Not infrequently the fault lines of division in a society run right down the center of the Church. What then needs to be done is truth-telling within the Church, so that the Church, as much as possible, can serve as a model for what the rest of society might hope to become. Doing less than that will cost the Church credibility and a role in the reconciliation process.

And most importantly, the missionary must work toward aiding the moral reconstruction of society. That is done especially by attending to the symbolic dimensions and implications of decisions taken. Do the decisions represent the kind of society we wish to become? Will they lead us along a path that corresponds to our best lights? Hasty manufacturing of decisions can short-circuit the long term hopes for the future.

What does all of this mean for the preparation of missionaries? It means first of all that missionaries have to be aware of the social dynamics of each of the stages of conflict. Key to their being able to act is understanding the possibilities and the limitations of their roles as leaders and as what be termed “insider outsiders.” It is their moral authority which will enable them to do whatever can be done. Certain aspects of the roles mentioned in each of the three stages can be learned. Other parts of them simply must be intuited when the time comes. Because every conflict is different in its origins and the manner in which it builds up and explodes, so too the resolution of conflict and the type of reconciliation needed afterward will never be quite the same.

Reconciliation in Interreligious Settings

The work of reconciliation frequently has to be carried out in interreligious settings, i.e., where adherents to more than one religious tradition is present. The vision of reconciliation presented here has been one deeply informed by Christian faith.

It is important to note at the outset here that reconciliation is viewed differently in other religious traditions.⁸ In Judaism, more attention is given to the conversion of the wrongdoer than to the role of victim. In Islam, more emphasis is given on the role of the mediation of the dispute than either of the contending parties. Buddhism emphasizes the role of self-awareness within the situation.

This might be a convenient time to emphasize once again the role of culture in reconciliation processes. Many cultures, especially small-scale cultures where the cooperation of all is needed to survive, have rituals of reconciliation to which all agree to adhere. The ritual element is important here, since engaging in such patterned behavior underscores the fact that what is happening is larger than any single individual involved in the conflict. Many cultures celebrate the moment of reconciliation itself with a communal meal, where once contending parties now eat together. In any situation of conflict, it is important to know just what cultural resources are available to help effect reconciliation.

Interreligious situations pose two different scenarios for reconciliation and peacemaking. In the first scenario religious difference has been part of the conflict itself, and so dealing with religious difference becomes essential if there is to be reconciliation. Religious difference, if you will, is part of the problem. In the second scenario, religious difference has not been the principal reason for the conflict; other factors can be identified. In this situation, if you will, religion can be a resource for reconciliation and part of the solution.

It should be noted at the outset that all the great religious traditions view themselves as religions of peace. They can point to central elements in their traditions that make peace an essential part of experience of the transcendent and a key component in human well-being. At the same time, there are identifiable parts of each of their histories, and sometimes instances in their sacred texts, that appear to condone or even justify violence. Adherents of the respective traditions are often quick to downplay this history and those texts in their own tradition, but sometimes are equally quick to note instances of violence in the traditions of others.

In situations where religion has been called upon to support violent behavior, one must always first begin by ascertaining whether it was the religious tradition that initiated the violence, or whether it was used as a convenient foil to cover other motives, such as greed, the will to power, or group solidarity. Because all the great traditions make some sort of absolute claim, wrapping one's motives in the mantle of religion can produce an instant legitimacy for certain kinds of behavior. An example would be the cultivation of "hindutva" by Indian fundamentalists. The ostensive reason is that India is for Hindus

⁸ For a brief overview of the different traditions, see *Peacebuilding*, op. cit., 29-32. For more on Judaism, see Marc Gopin, "Forgiveness as an element of conflict resolution in religious cultures: Walking the tightrope of reconciliation and justice," in Mohammed Abu-Nimer, *Reconciliation, Coexistence, and Justice in Interethnic Conflict* (New York: Lexington Books,

only. A more likely reason is that low-caste Hindus are converting to Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism because they are receiving better treatment than they do from high-caste Hindus. This is eroding the Hindu political base. By making a neat identification of religion with the group's interests, no further justification need be sought. Engaging in violence becomes the will of God. This is especially the case where the lines of ethnicity and religious adherence coincide. It is an utterly convenient way to spur people into action.

How does one seek reconciliation in these settings? One has to begin by gauging the power relations between the two groups. If those relations are too lopsided (e.g., a Christian minority over against a Muslim majority, or a Muslim minority over against a Hindu majority), then there is little space to maneuver, especially if one is in the minority position. If there is room for movement, one needs to begin a process whereby multiple identification is possible; that is to say, that groups with which one can identify do not coincide exactly with religious adherence. This has been effective in places such as Northern Ireland, where Catholic and Protestant children belong to the same group and intermingle. A second strategy is to expose generalizations about the other. When the other is defined as individuals with distinctive personalities rather than a common stereotype, then there is the possibility for breaking down barriers of separation.⁹ Put simply, the playing field has to move from a dichotomy of us-versus-them to a more complex picture, where stereotypes and assumptions are challenged. Many of the strategies discussed about under conflict prevention are appropriate here.

Third, if there is a longer history of coexistence, then that history must be recalled, and the question raised why there is conflict now. If there had been a peaceful coexistence earlier, then perhaps the stimulus to conflict is coming from outside. Knowing this can allow a divided community to close ranks against outside agitation. If one of the religious parties is a recent arrival, due to government resettlement policies or refugee status, then that feature should become part of public awareness, since it shifts the onus of the conflict from religious belonging to other sources.

In the second scenario, where religion can be a resource and part of the solution to the conflict, a number of principles and strategies are in play. The first principle is respecting the role religion can play in the situation. For missionaries coming from secularized countries, the tendency is to invoke a secularism that marginalizes or privatizes the place of religion in the situation. This grows out of the missionaries' experience in their home country. But in many of the places where missionaries come to work, religion is a very public phenomenon and of utmost importance in the lives of people. So instead of trying to create a secular playing field for the resolution of conflict, one has to create one of religious pluralism.

2001); on Islam, Mohammed Abu-Nimer, *Nonviolence and Peacebuilding in Islam* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2003); on Buddhism, Thich Nhat Thanh, *Being Peace* (Berkeley: Parallax Books, 1987).

⁹ I deal with seven of the most common generalizations in *Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992), 52f.

That involves not only mutual respect among the religious traditions present, but also an ever-increasing knowledge of traditions other than one's own. Religion cannot be pushed to the sidelines in these situations, but must be acknowledged as an important feature.

Second, those mediating the conflict must insure that there is equal opportunity and equal access for the traditions. That is to say, one tradition must not gain privilege over the others. If there are prayers as part of the process, then all traditions should be represented. If financial resources are available, then decisions about how these might be used should be taken collectively. To do so is a way of implementing some of the principles presented earlier. To provide equal opportunity is a sign of respect for the religious traditions, and therefore also of their adherents. Showing respect helps build trust and create the safe space in which further negotiation can happen. Equal access promotes a sense of belonging and participation, creating the hospitable environment that will allow the parties to work together in the future. If people feel things are being done to them or for them, that will lessen the investment those parties have in the process.

Third, those mediating the situation must work as much as possible with the resources of each of the traditions rather than around them. This entails an increasing knowledge of the tradition of the other. Again, this helps to complexify the picture in a healthy way, avoiding the resort to stereotypes and other generalizations.

Respect, tolerance, inclusion, participation, and a greater knowledge of the traditions of others are attitudes and skills that can be learned. And what has been learned can be sustained and deepened by a spirituality of reconciliation. In the preparation of missionaries to be agents of reconciliation, thinking about and interacting with these scenarios can enhance missionaries' capacity to operate effectively in an interreligious environment.

Conclusion

In looking at different dimensions of the preparation of the missionary to work in a paradigm of reconciliation as mission, I hope that it has become evident that what might be done by way of preparation is not simply a response to challenges arising from the environment. The different mediating roles the missionary can play flow also out of the theology of reconciliation. The care of the missionary in the face of trauma fits closely with the spirituality of reconciliation in its elements of self-knowledge, the situation of the role of the agent of reconciliation within God's work, and acknowledgment of the limits of what we as God's agents can do.

Will reconciliation as a paradigm of mission fade away if the world becomes a less contentious place? The latter is unlikely, given the forces of globalization and the increasing pluralism in so many places in the world today. But even were that to happen, my intuition is that this paradigm will not disappear anytime soon. That is because it represents a rediscovery of a fundamental theological understanding of God's work in the world. It helps us see the form the *missio dei*

is taking for us. To be sure, as the world continues to change, other issues make take on greater urgency. For example, further ecological deterioration, or the scarcity of drinking water in some parts of the world may become issues which must be addressed immediately. But how God is reconciling the world is something that is likely to stay with us for a long, long time. As a form of mission, the experience of reconciliation can give us one of the most direct and intense experience of the divine in our lives. And that experience of God-among-us is something which we will always treasure.