

# THEOLOGY OF RECONCILIATION AND PEACEMAKING FOR MISSION

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## Lecture 1 - THEOLOGY OF RECONCILIATION

### Introduction: Change of Context, Change of Paradigm

Changes which have happened in the world since 1990 inevitably cause us to reflect on changes in the conduct of Christian mission. In his epic book, *Transforming Mission*, the late David Bosch already had a sense that major shifts were afoot. He concluded his survey of the history of Christian mission with what he termed “an emerging ecumenical paradigm.”<sup>1</sup> What he gathered together in that paradigm was a list of what many of us would call *desiderata* for any future theology of mission. But it was in many ways a list without a clear inner coherence.

More than a decade later, we are in a different position to perhaps be able to speak more effectively to what shape a paradigm of mission might take. In the period immediately after Bosch finished his manuscript, a number of events pointed us in a somewhat different direction for the immediate future. Let me try to enumerate some of them here:

1. The national security states and civil wars in Central and Latin America countries nearly all came to an end or some kind of resolution. This was, of course, something to be welcomed by all of the world. But it left many countries in that part of the world exhausted and traumatized by recent events. The reconstruction of societies after a long period of war or totalitarian rule challenged those who would lead the societies to a new place. Often overt conflict had ended, but powerful military regimes were still in place. The impoverishment which most nations faced did not portend well for the future. The theologies of liberation, which had been honed so well to resistance of oppression, had found oppressive conditions still to be present among the poor and marginalized, but the conditions under which they were to be addressed had shifted dramatically.
2. The collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and the end of the Soviet bloc of influence shortly thereafter led to a widespread ideological realignment of the world. Marxist states still existed, but Marxism as a prescription for a better society was fundamentally discredited. How these formerly Communist societies were to be reimagined became a major challenge. Two other events were at least partially constituted by the end of the bipolar ideological and political status of the world. First of all, economic and social globalization quickly rushed in to fill the ideological void caused by the end of the bipolar political and economic order. It presented itself, through neoliberal forms of capitalism and the power of social media, as having no alternative to itself.

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<sup>1</sup> David Bosch, *Transforming Mission. Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), chapter 12.

One was either included or excluded. The sweep of globalization led to further dislocation in already challenged societies. Second, the end of the bipolar grip on the political order allowed both for the emergence of many new states and for the (re)assertion of ethnic identities. The number of armed conflicts in the world surged in the early 1990s. However, most of these conflicts were now within national boundaries rather than across political borders. The number of conflicts has abated somewhat in the first decade of the new century, but there are still many “hot” situations in the world today. Picking up the pieces in those societies will consume energies for decades to come.

3. Globalization produced other effects as well. The commemoration of an earlier phase of globalization—the five hundredth anniversary of the first voyage of Christopher Columbus—prompted a review of colonization by the European and later North American powers, and its effects on indigenous peoples around the world. Calls for reparation and the healing of memories punctuated these encounters, as memories of painful pasts were brought again to the fore.
4. One final aspect of globalization might be mentioned as well. Typical of a period of globalization is an increase in the relative ease of travel. Migration is once again a major fact of contemporary life. Previously homogeneous societies frequently now find themselves suddenly, and profoundly, multicultural. With few exceptions (such as South Korea), this is now a fact of societies today.
5. The end of apartheid rule in South Africa focused the world’s attention on the evils which had occurred there, but also on the plight of much of the African continent today. The continuing prevalence of poverty, the disruption of civil wars, brutish rule and corruption, the debilitating effects of HIV/AIDS, and inattention by the wealthy world to other pandemic diseases in that part of the world make for a sad and sorry picture of much of Africa today.
6. The pressures of modernity and globalization have also led to an upsurge of interest in religion throughout the world. Even though the pundits of secularization had predicted that, following the European model, religion would first be privatized and then steadily fade away, the world today in most areas is more religious than it was before. This is not necessarily good news, however. A salient feature of this new interest in religion is the rise of various forms of fundamentalism, at times linked with political violence. Pentecostalism, the fastest growing form of Christianity in the world today, is seen with a greater ambivalence on the world scene. On the one hand, it represents the agency of the poor who are struggling to take some hold of their own lives. On the other, it can be an escape from the dreary prospects which await most of the poor in the world today.

This dire litany of issues provides something of a picture of the state of much of the world and the world’s population in the first decade of the twenty-first century. I present this not to paint a somber picture so that we can counter it with a

cheery Good News of Salvation. I do it rather in order to remind us of the depth of suffering in the world today, and some of the challenges we will face. The last decade has made us all keenly aware of the depth and strength of violence in our world today. Prospects in the immediate future do not harbor much hope for change. Take, for example, the question of median age. No European country is replacing its population because of low birthrates. Thus, European societies are aging, both because of lower birthrates and because of greater longevity. The recent battles over pension funds are only the beginning of the social challenges in that part of the world. Part of the upsurge of violence in the poorer parts of the world has to do with having a young, frustrated (male) population, who statistically (at least historically) are more prone to violence. Those involved in the violence of September 11, 2001 in New York and Washington were nearly all younger than thirty. When one sees the increase of child soldiers in parts of Africa and Latin America, one sees what possible consequences may lie ahead for a world which does not take care of its young nor offer them opportunity.

The rise of terrorism in recent years and the greater awareness of violence across the board, due in part to the reach of the global media, makes ending violence and the rebuilding of societies after violence a major priority for the world today. The coupling of violence with religion can give violent behavior even greater virulence. It is not surprising, then, that there is such interest in how to end violence (witness the World Council of Churches' decade-long program to end violence) and how to ensure peacemaking. Ten years ago, with the end of major nuclear threat, some people opined that peacemaking might become an obsolete undertaking. No one would say that today.

So we now find ourselves with a keen interest in themes like ending violence, peacemaking, and reconciliation. As the theme of this BIAMS meeting, it will be examined from a variety of different perspectives. In this series of lectures, I wish to explore especially how ending violence, peacemaking and reconciliation are creating for us the need for a new paradigm in mission. As was said at the outset, Bosch's magnum opus on mission was completed before many of these tumultuous events described here had begun to unfold. Today, we can take up his challenge to rethink a paradigm for mission in the first part, at least, of this new century.

In this first presentation, I want to propose a theology of reconciliation as such a paradigm for mission in a time so deeply concerned with ending violence, with peacemaking, and with rebuilding of societies. I wish to do this by proposing a theology of reconciliation which I find in the Pauline writings of the New Testament, and then suggesting how these elements of a theology of reconciliation can inform a way of conducting Christian mission. In order to achieve this latter end, I will try to situate a paradigm of mission as reconciliation in some of the other forms of mission which have emerged in the last fifty years.

## A Theology of Reconciliation

The word “reconciliation” does not occur all that frequently in the Bible, but the idea of reconciliation and the concern for it can be found in many places. Think, for example, of the moving stories in Genesis of Esau and Jacob, or of Joseph and his brothers. New Testament parables like that of the prodigal son are enshrined in the very center of the Christian imagination. I would like to concentrate here, however, on the Pauline writings, especially 2 Corinthians 5 and Ephesians 2. There we have accounts which deal both with what might be called “vertical reconciliation” (i.e., our relation to God), and “horizontal reconciliation” (i.e., our relation with one another). It seems to me that we need both of these dimensions to understand our task in mission today. To focus only on the vertical dimension (as would be the case elsewhere in Paul, such as in Romans 5) does not help us with the vexing situations of violence and the aftermath of violence in our world today.

I would sum up this theology of reconciliation in five points, based on Paul’s writing in the two books just mentioned:

1. *Reconciliation is first and foremost the work of God.* Christians believe, of course, that salvation comes from God and not from our efforts. In thinking of reconciliation in that light, what becomes apparent—especially in social situations after conflict—is that the magnitude of the damage which has been done is ultimately beyond any human effort at correction. Only God has the perspective that can ultimately sort everything out. Thus, Christians hold to the idea that it is God who through Jesus Christ brings about reconciliation, not ourselves. We are but agents of God’s activity—“ambassadors for Christ’s sake” in Paul’s words in 2 Cor 5:20. For this reason, reconciliation is as much a spirituality for Christians as it is a strategy. It is only by living in communion with God that we can come to recognize the action of God toward reconciliation in our world. To assume that reconciliation is something which comes entirely from our efforts results in the psychological and physical burnout so common among those who work in post-conflict situations.
2. *God’s reconciling work begins with the victim.* The common-sense understanding of reconciliation goes something like this: the wrongdoer repents of the wrongdoing and seeks forgiveness of the victim. The victim forgives the wrongdoer and then there is reconciliation. Laudable as this sense of reconciliation may be, there is a problem with this scenario: too often the wrongdoer does not repent. Sometimes the wrongdoer believes that nothing has been done wrong at all (think of the justifications given for totalitarian rule: to save the nation from subversive elements, and the like). In some instances the wrongdoer is no longer even present, and so cannot repent and seek forgiveness (Take for example the now deceased alcoholic parent whom the adult child wishes to confront). Where does all of this leave the victim? Is healing for the victim dependent upon the wrongdoer, and the wrongdoer’s capacity to come to repentance? A Christian

understanding would answer “no.” Rather, God begins by healing the victim. This is done by restoring the humanity of the victim which had been wrested away in the act of wrongdoing. This is in line, first of all, with the Christian understanding of a God who looks out for the widow and the orphan, the stranger and the prisoner. The healing God works in the victims makes it sometimes possible for the victim to forgive the wrongdoer even before any repentance takes place. There was evidence of this in some of the testimonies made before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. Not all victims are able to do this, nor should undue expectations be placed upon them. But we have to be able to account for how such forgiveness can and sometimes does take place without any action by the wrongdoer. I believe that this possibility reveals the very heart of the Christian understanding of reconciliation.

3. *God makes of both the victim and the wrongdoer a “new creation.”* To be healed of the trauma of the deed, or to be forgiven for what one has perpetrated, does not mean that things return to how they were before the conflict or the trauma arose. That would be to trivialize the extent of the damage that evil does. In both instances—healing and forgiveness—the victim and the wrongdoer find themselves in a new place, a place which they could not have anticipated. Healing comes as a surprise. Reconciliation is more than having the burden of the past lifted. It is the “new creation” of which Paul speaks in 2 Cor 5:17. For this reason, it is the vision of a new creation in the heart of the healed victim which provides the surest guide to reconstruction of a society after conflict. It provides a view which cannot be achieved by extrapolating from the *status quo ante* (how things were before the evil occurred), nor by imagining the symmetrical opposite of the evil now overcome.
4. *The Christian places suffering inside the story of the suffering and death of Christ.* Suffering is not of itself ennobling; by itself it is destructive of the human person. It is only when that suffering is brought into a new social space and with wider relationships that it can become ennobling and even redemptive. For Christians, this is done by placing their suffering within the framework of the sufferings of Christ. This is captured in another Pauline text, in Phil 3:10, where Paul says that he wishes to know Christ and be conformed into the pattern of Christ’s death, so that somehow he, too, might come to know the power of Christ’s resurrection. It is the belief in the power of the resurrection—a power which is more than the opposite of death, a power which comes from the living God—that makes the suffering more than the destruction of an individual person in society. For the Christian working toward reconciliation, such placing of one’s own suffering in such a framework can help give meaning to otherwise meaningless suffering.
5. *Full reconciliation will happen only when God will be all in all.* The hymns at the beginning of the Letters to the Ephesians and to the Colossians remind us that any reconciliation we now experience will be incomplete.

God is still working it out in Christ. This understanding, coupled with the first point about reconciliation made above (i.e., that God is the author of reconciliation) reminds us not to depend too much on our own capacities. We may experience frustration at how far the reconciliation we experience now can go, but we are hereby reminded that it is God who is our hope, drawing us forward even when things around us look utterly intransigent or even impossible. Here we experience the profound difference between optimism and hope: optimism arises out of our capacities and estimation of what we can do; hope comes to us from God, and provides a much broader horizon.

This, then, forms the heart of the Christian message of reconciliation as it is to be evidenced in the work of overcoming the consequences of violence in our world today. I would add something of a distinction between individual and social reconciliation. Individual reconciliation, as already noted, occurs when God restores the humanity, the human dignity, that has been wrested from a person in an act of wrongdoing. Social reconciliation (I am borrowing here from José Zalaquette, who chaired the Chilean Truth and Reconciliation Commission) is the moral reconstruction of society so that the wrongdoing of the past can never happen again.<sup>2</sup> The distinction between individual and social reconciliation is drawn here because there are different, though interlocking, dynamics at play. At the same time, I do not think that social reconciliation has much chance of succeeding if not led by a cadre of persons who have experienced the healing of individual reconciliation in their lives. It should be noted as well that the literature of conflict transformation will offer many other definitions. My purpose here is to focus on what might be the specifically Christian contribution to this discussion.

### **Reconciliation as a Paradigm for Mission**

If we take what has just been said about the Christian understanding of reconciliation, how might this inform a paradigm of mission? How might the work of reconciliation be seen as an embodiment or enactment of the Good News? We might best begin with a return to the Pauline corpus, this time to Ephesians 2:12-19. In this passage we have two parties, alienated from each other, being brought together and made a single body. The wall which had separated them has been pulled down. Now, together, they constitute a single group, fellow citizens in the household of God, alienated from each other no longer. This, it seems to me, forms the charter of a paradigm of mission as reconciliation.

How does this bringing together of groups once divided and far off into a single household translate into the conduct of mission? I would suggest that there are two dimensions to this, flowing from the definitions of individual and social reconciliation just offered above. Concretely, by engaging in the healing of the traumas of the past and by

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<sup>2</sup> In Alex Boraine, Janet Levy, and Ronnell Scheffer (eds.), *Dealing with the Past: Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa* (Capetown, IDASA, 1994), 11.

the moral reconstruction of a shattered society, the reconciling work of God is proclaimed and enacted in communities. Let us look at each of these two dimensions in turn.

### ***Healing the Traumas of the Past***

No matter how much one wishes to look to the future, the horrors of the past can impede any movement in that direction, and yawn before us like a bottomless pit. The past remains traumatic in some measure because there has been no opportunity to confront it and come to terms with it. In cases of civil conflict or repressive dictatorship, the wrongdoing of the past sometimes could not be voiced at all. In any event, the full emotional and spiritual impact of the past has not been plumbed. Without some measure of coming to terms with that past, the unhealed wounds will continue to fester, poisoning whatever new society is constructed, and posing the risk of victims themselves turning into the oppressors of others. How, then, are we to come to terms with the past? I would like to focus upon three areas to which Christian mission can contribute.

1. *Truth-telling.* The basis for healing the past is truth-telling. Truth-telling begins by speaking aloud those things kept hidden or secret during the conflict. People were often not allowed to speak of the atrocities they had experienced or witnessed in totalitarian regimes. One could not raise the question of what had happened to loved ones taken away by the police or the armed forces. Speaking the truth breaks through the wall of silence imposed upon a society. It is one of the walls alluded to in Ephesians 2 which must come down. Second, truth-telling counters the falsehoods and lies perpetrated by the wrongdoers to legitimate their wrongdoing. The narrative created by wrongdoers is a narrative of the lie that is intended to replace any truthful narrative. It not only legitimates wrongdoing; it seeks to convince the victim that the lie can be the only truth about the victim. Truth-telling, then, is essential for creating a different kind of society. It also exonerates those who have lived under suspicion and false judgment (this is especially important for the families which have loved ones killed by the police or armed forces; the truth can now be told about what really happened). Third, truth-telling is a matter of trying to establish just what did happen, and equally importantly, why it happened. This is usually very difficult to ascertain, and in itself can take a long time. But without at least some attempts at it, a society cannot construct a new narrative about itself to replace the narrative of the lie which had reigned in the conflict. Hence the usefulness in some instances of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions. Such commissions must be constructed with an eye to just what a new society hopes to achieve. They may not be the best way in all circumstances.<sup>3</sup> Fourth, truth-telling becomes an

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<sup>3</sup> I have explored this in more detail in "Wahrheitskommissionen im Spannungsfeld von Wahrheit, Gerechtigkeit und Versöhnung," in Gerhard Beestermoeller and Hans-Richard Reuter (eds.), *Politik der Versöhnung* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2002), 227-240.

important practice for the new society, something to be engaged in publicly and regularly. This is especially the case when untruthful propaganda has dominated public discourse.

2. *The Pursuit of Justice.* The truth must be told, but then it must be acted upon. Pursuing justice is both a way of healing the past, and of creating the practices which must undergird the new society. It must be remembered that truth-telling is a precondition for justice. To try to pursue justice without first establishing the truth runs the risk of seeking revenge under the guise of justice. Revenge is another kind of falsehood, which only continues the violence of the past and does not overcome it. Basically, there are three kinds of justice that need to be pursued. The first is *punitive justice*. This entails legitimate authority ascertaining wrongdoing and then punishing those responsible for it. It is a necessary but limited form of justice. It is necessary because it is part of a public discourse acknowledging the wrongdoing of the past and stating publicly that such behavior will not be tolerated in the future. But it is also limited as a form of justice. After a civil war, for example, not every combatant can be punished. To do so would require fair trials for each wrongdoer, and would tie up the resources and the emotional energy of a nation for decades. Thus there must be punitive justice, but it cannot continue indefinitely. Second, there is *restorative justice*. To the extent possible, whatever has been stolen must be returned, and those who have suffered loss must be given some compensation to aid them in the times ahead. The challenges here are many. Can property be restored to rightful owners decades after an oppressive regime is brought to a conclusion? Countries which have suffered through an extended conflict often do not have the resources to reallocate to their citizens. Even when this is the case, some public gestures must be made in this direction, however limited these might be. Third, there is *structural justice*. This involves changing the legal code, the judiciary system, and engaging in such acts as land redistribution, guaranteeing the rights of minority populations, and providing public services such as access to education, health, safety, and employment. This final kind of justice is part of the long work of reconstruction. It is in many ways the most difficult, but usually the most necessary.
3. *Healing of Memories and Forgiveness.* Healing memories and forgiveness are related to each other. Healing of memory does not mean forgetting what happened. To do so compromises one's own identity and integrity. Healing of memories means that the memories, though still present, are no longer toxic; that is, they no longer control our lives and poison everything they touch. Forgiveness has to be understood in this context. Forgiving is not forgetting; it is, rather, remembering in a different way. One is no longer controlled by the past event and by the perpetrator. One is able to see the perpetrator from a different perspective that does not allow the perpetrator to retain control over the victim. Forgiving the perpetrator need not entail not punishing the perpetrator or exacting restitution. To punish and to make restitution acknowledges the gravity



of what has been done and the need for punitive justice. Nor does the victim have to befriend the perpetrator; such may not be possible or even desirable. In forgiving, the victim seeks the redemption of the perpetrator. It recognizes the human dignity of the perpetrator, however deeply twisted and flawed.

Healing the trauma of the past is complex and complicated, requiring the efforts and talents of many different kinds of people. What Christian mission brings to the process of truth-telling, pursuit of justice, and healing and forgiveness is not all that will be needed. But Christian concern for the truth, the truth which sets people free (Jn 8:32) comes from its experience of God drawing near. God's ways are ways of truth, and to live in truth is to live in God. The passion which Christians bring to the pursuit of truth can be an important resource in healing the past. Similarly, the pursuit of justice, much explored in the theologies of liberation in the twentieth century, can be a contribution to helping a society pursue justice, a justice which is not revenge, but a justice which emerges in right relationships between all in society. The pursuit of justice requires imagination, but also compassion. And finally the redemptive healing of memory and the engagement of forgiveness were cornerstone of Jesus' own ministry. Christians engage in healing processes because they believe that redemption is possible, and that only God is capacious enough to embrace the suffering which has happened. They believe too that the experience of healing which takes place in reconciliation is one of the most powerful experiences of the presence and action of God in world which anyone can have. It is the Good News in the concrete. In looking at this dimension of a paradigm of mission as reconciliation, these elements speak perhaps most eloquently in deeds done rather than words given. They relate a pattern of relationships which begin to mirror the hoped for Reign of God.

### ***The Moral Reconstruction of Society***

The second aspect of reconciliation as a paradigm of mission is the moral reconstruction of society, that is to say, helping rebuild a society so that the evils of the past cannot be repeated. It is important here to focus on the *moral* reconstruction of society after a time of violence. This is not to be understood simply as preaching on moral values to be upheld. Rather, it means a special attention that must be paid to the steps that are taken in the reconstruction of society. As a society makes decisions about how it will move into the future, what does each of those decisions say about morals, norms, and values? What does the manner of the pursuit of justice say about the nature of justice in a just society? One might say that the moral reconstruction of a society has to do with attending to the symbolic reconstruction of society. What do our institutions, our policies, our actions say about us a society? To be sure, the Christian Church cannot assume the entirety of the reconstruction of society, even if the majority of the population are Christians. But it does and can have some say about the nature of what a society does. It can do this not only in its engagement in the public discourse of rebuilding the society, but also in very concrete ways. Let me name a few.

1. It can create spaces of safety and trust in a society which has been until now unsafe and not trustworthy. In doing this, it creates an environment where the truth can be told, and where healing can be sought. That is why at times church property has been used as sites for working toward a new order in society. It can create environments where people can learn how to engage in public discourse—and disagreement—necessary to the fabric of civil society.
2. It can attend especially to the needs and interests of the victims. This is an outgrowth of the belief that God, too, begins with the victim in the healing process. In the competing voices in the process of reconstruction, it can be a voice for those who are not heard.
3. Most importantly, it can model the healing process which society itself needs. It can struggle to speak the truth about itself and its own role in the past; it can apologize; it can seek and extend forgiveness. This may be the most important things for the Church to do, and is a powerful form of witness.
4. it can offer a larger vision of the healing process. If the story of the Exodus was the master narrative for theologies of liberation, then the master narrative of reconciliation is the rebuilding of the ruined city, be that the rebuilding of Jerusalem after the Exile,<sup>4</sup> or the rebuilding of the household of God suggested in Ephesians 2. The narratives offered from Christian faith may not be able to be adopted by the entire society, but it is important for any society to have access to such narratives during a time of reconstruction. Such narrative not only allow one to see the bigger picture; they can also engender hope.

The moral reconstruction of society requires a sensitive moral compass, and commitment to honesty and humility. In those narratives of reconstruction, the Good News is communicated once again. The healing God can bring is on offer to those willing to seek it and those willing to live by its discipline. In this way, I believe, reconciliation—as healing of memories and as moral reconstruction of society—can constitute a paradigm for mission in a world which clearly needs it now so badly.

### **Reconciliation as Paradigm alongside Other Paradigms of Mission**

In this third and concluding section, I want to try to situate what has been said here about reconciliation as a paradigm for mission alongside other paradigms of mission now salient in mission theory and practice. This will help us see the continuities and discontinuities between different forms of mission and practice.

At the outset it must be said that the peculiar shape mission takes is always influenced in some fashion by the larger Church's understanding of itself and its perception of the "other" to whom it is directed. Rereading Bosch's great work on mission, already referred to, makes that eminently clear. Context does not determine mission but mission in any given time and place cannot be understood without reference to context. Thus the mission motif of much of the

European Middle Ages, “make them come in” (a reference to Luke 14:23 and the parable of the wedding feast) portrays a Christian Europe which sees itself at the center of the world, and the “others” which surround it as being on the periphery. The earth-shaking experience of the voyages of European discovery, from the end of the fifteenth century, required a profound reorientation of that vision. It was in the sixteenth century that Justinian von Welz proposed that the biblical motivation for mission should be Matthew 28:19-20, now known simply as the Great Commission. Rather than pressing others to come in, the imperative now was to go out.

I have suggested elsewhere (and the idea is not original to me) that another shift came in the middle of the twentieth century as the period of the great European empires came to an end. One place where that change was noted was at the 1981 SEDOS Mission Seminar, held near Rome. It brought over a hundred Roman Catholic missionaries, missiologists, and theologians together to reflect upon what was happening to mission now that the period of colonization was over. The end result of that seminar was a proposal that there were four forms of mission discernible in contemporary missionary practice. The first of these was proclamation. It had been the centerpiece of missionary in the previous four hundred years, and continued to play an important, indeed indispensable role. But three new forms had emerged with the second half of the twentieth century, a time of independence from colonialism and nation-building. These forms were: dialogue, inculturation, and liberation of the poor.

Dialogue was most evident in the many interreligious dialogues which had come about since the middle of the century. Dialogue was not understood as an alternative to proclamation or a subterfuge to proselytize where proclamation was not possible. It was seen rather as an honest and soulful communication with the religious “other” which could lead to a deepening of commitment on both sides. Inculturation (or contextualization) began to emerge in both Protestant and Catholic circles in the 1970’s as a new force. It gave greater voice to churches to express the Good News of Jesus Christ in their own idiom. It was not an historical accident that the initial interest in inculturation coincided with the efforts at nation-building in the former European colonies. But the form of mission which had perhaps the greatest impact on the missiological imagination was the liberation of the poor. Starting in Latin America in the late 1960s, but quickly spreading to other continents, the concern for the liberation of peoples from poverty and oppression was a powerful vehicle for conveying the Good News that God stands especially by the poor.

If a biblical warrant for carrying out mission in this manner were sought, one might choose Luke 24:13-35, the Emmaus story, for models of dialogue and inculturation, or Luke 4: 18-19, the incident in the synagogue in Nazareth, where Jesus cites the passage from Isaiah 61, for mission as liberation.

All three of these forms which emerged in the twentieth century remain important modes of mission in the twenty-first. I think, however, that the events of the 1990s, chronicled at the beginning of this lecture, have all modified the

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<sup>4</sup> This is the suggestion of Charles Villa-Vicencio in his *A Theology of Reconstruction. Nation-building and Human*

valence of these models of mission. In the case of dialogue, there is clearly now a greater imperative to dialogue not just to get to know the religious other, but to form bonds of interreligious solidarity against the hijacking of religion to legitimate violence. An example might be useful here. When the war broke out in Bosnia, the leaders of all three of the major forms of faith—Muslims, Orthodox, and Roman Catholic—spoke out against the violence and the use of religious affiliation to legitimate that violence. None of the voices was strong enough to be heard. To make sure such things do not happen again, leaders of these three traditions have formed an Interfaith Council which meets publicly and regularly so that, should violence happen again, they will be able to speak out and to be heard.

Inculturation has taken some new turns in the past decade as well. Certainly the leading consideration about inculturation in the first two decades of its pursuit was an issue of identity of the churches in the newly formed nations. One can detect some changes in the 1990s and in the present decade. Here one finds, on the one hand, a postcolonial retrieval of a deeper past and, on the other hand, an attempt to situate local identity in the midst of a wider picture and to use the voice which emerges to speak out for justice and equity in an age of globalization.<sup>5</sup> The early optimism about nation-building has been sobered by the effects of globalization, by the development of multicultural societies, and the struggle to envision a future.

Liberation has received perhaps the widest attention in all of this. Given the opposition of the Vatican to theologies of liberation in Roman Catholic settings, the disappearance of an economic alternative to global neoliberal capitalism, and the need to move from resistance to reconstruction in societies, theologies of liberation have undergone a profound soul-searching, the outcome of which is still not entirely clear.<sup>6</sup> To be sure, poverty and oppression still abound. But how can they be best addressed in a globalized world, a world that seems to be breeding ever greater violence, especially against the poor?

One can discern continuities and discontinuities with each of these forms of mission. Dialogue becomes increasingly important in the emerging multireligious societies being created by migration. And, as already mentioned in the example of Bosnia-Herzegovina, it is imperative as a voice against religiously legitimated violence. For the sake of reconstructing societies, especially those riven by religious violence, dialogue becomes also a practice of reconciliation. To be sure, the great religious traditions have different understandings of reconciliation, and each will need to contribute its own understandings of reconciliation, forgiveness, and peacemaking if multireligious societies are to succeed as human societies. Dialogue, therefore, will need to be more than an academic exercise. The concerns of healing and of the reconstruction of societies will take increasing priority.

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*Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> These changing features are explored by Jan H. Pranger in his “Redeeming Tradition. Inculturation, Contextualization, and Tradition in a Postcolonial Perspective,” (University of Groningen diss., 2003).

<sup>6</sup> See for example the collection by Georges De Schrijver, *Liberation Theologies on Shifting Grounds. A Clash of Socio-economic and Cultural Paradigms* (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1998).

Inculturation, too, has a place in mission in the twenty-first century. But as was noted, its focus is undergoing change. Inculturation can be used ideologically to shut out other voices or create ethnicity where there was none before. One of the paradoxes of globalization has been that it homogenizes the world, on the one hand, but also leads to a new emphasis on the local, on the other. That new sense of the local must remain communicative, that is, serve as a bridge across boundaries of difference and not simply be a way of ignoring the other. The particular and the common, the local and the universal need all to have a voice in the twenty-first century. This latter is also a concern of reconciliation as a paradigm. Voices need to be heard in the authenticity which a peculiar locale can give them, but they must also be able to connect with other voices, both similar and dissimilar to their own.

Liberation, too, is a voice still needed to be heard. It continues to point to situations of suffering, even as it seeks an appropriate form to respond to them. The concerns liberation as mission share with reconciliation are numerous.<sup>7</sup> Both are concerned with suffering and its alleviation; both pursue justice. Where there may be a difference may actually be one of emphasis. Liberation theologies, as they have developed, have been particularly good at creating resistance to evil and to engendering hope. Reconciliation theologies, as they are developing, focus more on the healing of societies after oppression and to the reconstruction of those societies. One of the things that is being discovered in many countries is that the skills needed to lead in resistance are not the same as those needed to create a common, shared approach to reconstruction. This may be emblematic of where the two theologies (and therefore, the two paradigms of mission may be different).

## **Conclusion**

This first lecture has tried to set out elements of a Christian understanding of reconciliation, and how that is translated into a new paradigm of mission. A final section looked especially at how this new paradigm of mission as reconciliation could be situated among three other paradigms that emerged in the second half of the twentieth century. As I hope can be seen, the emergence of reconciliation as a new paradigm of mission was prompted by the changes the world experienced through the 1990s. It builds upon a profound message of Christian faith, and draws upon three other paradigms which developed in time immediately before it did. What will be the enactment and the further resources for this paradigm, and how to prepare missionaries as agents of reconciliation, will be the topics of the next two lectures.

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<sup>7</sup> I have tried to work this out in more detail in "Liberation and Reconciliation as Paradigms of Mission," in *SMT: Swedish Missiological Themes/Svensk Missionstidskrift* (forthcoming).