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David A. Steele
University of Edinburgh

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A CHRISTIAN EXPLORATION OF NATIONALISM AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION:

Raising the Questions

by **David A. Steele**

Dr. David A. Steele (United Church of Christ) is an ordained minister and holds a Ph.D. in Christian Ethics and Practical Theology from University of Edinburgh. For the past year he has worked as a research analyst at the Center for Strategic & International Studies in Washington, doing research on the role of religion in conflict intervention in Europe. Both before and after the changes of 1989, Dr. Steele has periodically travelled in many East European countries for purposes of research. He is currently organizing a CAREE task force to address issues of nationalism and conflict resolution in Eastern Europe. The purpose of this paper is to invite response and encourage participation. Dr. Steele may be contacted at 12 Goodport Lane, Gaithersburg, MD 20878.

Nationalism has emerged today, not only in Eastern Europe and the former U.S.S.R., but throughout large parts of the world. India, Ethiopia, Canada, and South Africa are but a few of the very different contexts in which this issue has become acute. Certainly the resolution of the issues differs from one context to another. However, the basic questions are much the same.

The very heart of the issue is highlighted by the seemingly opposite directions being taken by West European integration and East European emergent nationalism. Overcoming separatism, which led to repeated warfare, was the engine which drove the beginnings of the EEC. On the other hand, overcoming a suffocating collectivism was the impetus which spurred the democratic movements in the former Soviet block. Is this simply a matter of two different groups of societies having very different needs at this point in time? Is each need based legitimately in its own context? Or are there radically different understandings of nationalism at hand?

I. General Questions

It is certainly very possible to have different kinds of nationalism, each of which conceivably could be buttressed by civil religion. On the one hand, there is an aggressive, exclusivistic nationalism which can be used to solidify the status quo through suppression of

internal dissent and obstruction of international cooperation. This "top-down" brand of nationalism is frequently accompanied by xenophobia and racism. On the other hand, one can also find a "bottom-up" nationalism in which legitimate self-expression and self-determination serve to preserve culture. There are also different kinds of integration--one "from above" and the other "from below." The hard questions become--When does necessary separatism, for the sake of cultural identity, become exclusivistic? When does autonomy become a kind of fragmentation which endangers democratic process? When does cooperation and unity become assimilation? Should apparent domination be sympathetically investigated so as to discover both valid and invalid grievance arising out of a complex history? Does genuine integration require some form of nationalism as a precondition, and if so, what kind of nationalism can enhance ethnic identity without destroying larger community? Is a healthy integration possible for societies of unequal social development or power? What is the relationship of the rights of social groups to the common good of the community as a whole?

I. A. Identity: General Questions

The issue at the center of these questions is that of identity. Certainly national identity is one important part of the picture--with the preservation of language, culture, and ethnic tradition often at stake. However, it is not the only level of identity. There are many levels--individual, family, association or group, town/city, ethnic group, nation, region (eg. pan-European), racial, and humanity as a whole. How we understand ourselves as "belonging" to these various groupings is crucially important in determining the extent to which each identity influences behavior. For example, are we to understand national identity to be the same as ethnic identity? In the case of some multi-cultural societies this becomes a very complicated issue. On the one hand, the tendency for the smaller ethnic group to become assimilated raises the cry for the structures of sovereign statehood to protect the ethnic identity. On the other hand, very few of these sub-units of states are ethnically homogeneous. An excellent example of the tensions created is the assertion of Georgian autonomy over against the Soviet Union, coupled with that of Ossetian autonomy over against Georgia. It seems there must be a distinction between political loyalty and ethnic loyalty. But what ought to be the relationship between these?

There are, in fact, some societies (e.g. the United States) where ethnic identity has never determined national identity. But what, then is the nature of the bond which we call national identity? Can a political creed, a construction of the mind, a set of philosophical principles--something closer to ethics than ethnicity--be the foundation of nationhood? Yet, if this becomes the locus of national identity, how does that nation avoid the temptation of ideological purity--whether that be democratic capitalism, or socialist collectivism, or some

other "ism" by which a rationale is constructed to, not only distinguish oneself from, but to delegitimize, the other? For example, are those U.S. citizens who push "political correctness" any closer to a constructive form of nationalism than those who rail against multiculturalism?

This raises the question of the place of myth within nationalism. Whether one defines nationalism in terms of ethnicity or ideology, the mythmakers are usually critical to the success of the identity formation. The passed-on stories give a sense of "who we are." Is the extent to which these stories are based in reality important? Does exaggeration, or outright lie and distortion, so corrupt the mythology, that the foundation of constructive nationalism becomes impossible? At what point does the legitimate desire for collective self-esteem turn to pride and then to intolerance and delegitimation of the outsider? In short, what is the distinction between "good" and "bad" national mythology?

The key issues, again, are integral to the exploration of identity: how we belong to the various groupings (ethnic, national, regional, etc.)--how we understand the relationship between the various levels of identity--how we construct the borders of each level of identity so that they create definition, but not exclusivity and animosity--who determines the exact nature of the identity formation (from above or from within). As the last two questions have not received explicit attention, I will set out some aspects of these problems. The question of boundaries is especially important to people of faith because religion is frequently used as one of the important "marks" by which a people define themselves. Within pluralistic societies, how does this boundary issue work? Is the goal to live as separately as possible so as to confine the influence of the larger society on "one's primary group?" Or do such calls for the purification of a given society (whether measured by ethnic, ideological, religious, or other standards) simply contribute to an illegitimate blaming of "others" for all the ills of the society and, therefore, an infringement of the "others'" rights? Alternatively, is the goal to live together without assimilation? If the latter is the desired aim, then does this require forging some kind of consensus on values and rights? This brings us face to face with the question about who determines the nature of identity formation. Is it simply a matter for the group itself? Or does it arise out of any given group's interaction with other groups on the very basic issues of rights and values?

I. B. Human Rights: General Questions

Infringement on a group's perception of "its rightful due" is frequently at the center of resurgent nationalism. Therefore, it is essential to review a number of issues surrounding an examination of human rights. First, one must acknowledge that discussion of rights also includes the other half of citizenship, namely the recognition of responsibilities. Without this, legitimate grievance gives way to victimization, a juvenile culture of complaint where no one is willing to accept their fair share of responsibility, or guilt, for the ills of society.

A good example of this has been the tendency of both Serbs and Croats to play the victim, accompanied by each side's historical "verification." Yet, the nature of the relationship between rights and responsibilities is a delicate one in any society. Knowing who is responsible to provide what for whom is fraught with increasing ambiguity the closer one gets to a society enmeshed in ethnic strife. Furthermore, differing ethical systems place more emphasis on one or the other end of the rights/responsibilities tension.

Setting priorities among various human rights is another important issue in the examination of that topic. The fact of social living mandates limitations on the rights of all parties and often necessitates hard choices between the rights of various groups. But when, where and how should such determinations of priority be made? When the rights of one group or individual come into conflict with those of another, it usually reflects divergent sets of values. Conflict often exists between antithetical philosophies regarding what is most conducive, or essential, for establishing or guaranteeing justice in any given society. One such controversy is over whether the right to harmony and order should be subordinated to the right to freedom and self-determination, or vice versa. A second dispute consists of balancing the claims of individual human rights over against those of the cultural, social, national, or racial group (previously a major discrepancy between western and eastern perceptions). A third tension involves determining which principles of distributive justice are most appropriate for deciding priority of rights. Should the arguments be based on what will achieve equal distribution of resources and fulfillment of rights among various ethnic groups? Or if justice demands unequal distribution, should it be based on need or on merit?

Finally, one must ask how human rights are to be protected, once they have been delineated and prioritized. Is it possible to protect them by building a trans-cultural, or cross-cultural community? If so, can the ecumenical church legitimately function in such a capacity? Yet, the prior question is--which rights can be protected in this fashion, and which require more specific solidarity with a particular group?

I. C. Conflict Resolution: General Questions

Can the multi-cultural groups in transfrontier regions serve as a bridge to cultural understanding and enrichment? Can they provide a way of moving from separatism to "diversity within unity." Or is this asking too much? It probably depends on the particular context. But this simply pushes the question further. In which contexts can cross-cultural community-building perform this function? In which contexts would the attempt merely hinder the kind of identity formation necessary for genuine, ultimate integration? For example, one must ask: In what ways will the effectiveness of the intervention be influenced by the nature of the protagonist parties (number of parties, degree of power symmetry, intra-party unity, nature of hierarchical organization)? In what ways does it depend on the issues

at stake (number and complexity)? In what ways does it depend on the stage of the conflict (incipient, escalating, stalemated, or de-escalating)?

The same questions can also be asked regarding the intervention of third parties. When, where, and how a particular third party can perform a given function, again, depends on many of the same external and internal conditions of the conflict, as listed in the previous paragraph. In addition, there are a few other factors to consider in the case of conflict intervention. In what ways may the effectiveness of the intervention be influenced by the participants representing the conflicting parties in a given process (number, status and social background of participants, range of views, process of selection, and experience with conflict resolution)? How does it depend on the character of the interaction process (degree of isolation/contact, interaction size, and need on the part of antagonists for differentiation/integration)? How does it depend on the identity of the third party (its status, credibility, impartiality, institutional affiliation, control over resources, expertise, attitudes, formality of operating style, or whether or not it is invited)? When is it most likely that the presumed greater objectivity of the intermediary (if such can be assumed on the basis of Weber's value neutral sociology?¹) can assist in the development of a conflict resolution process? Finally, how useful are the techniques developed by the problem solving school of conflict resolution--such as facilitation of communication, alteration of perception, search for common and compatible interests, and brainstorming of possible solutions--as tools for genuine resolution as opposed to mere settlement? In other words, can these techniques help in the curtailment of exclusivistic nationalism, cessation of enemy imaging, or the healing of wounds inflicted by ethnic conflict?

Both internal and external nongovernmental efforts can provide needed impetus for the resolution of conflict in many situations. However, one cannot escape looking at constitutional questions, at divisions of power within government, at ways to safeguard human rights in the courts, etc. This requires a close examination of the ways governments are presently structured, as well as ways in which they might need to be restructured. Can either the trans-frontier groups or the outside intermediaries be helpful at this point? Or does permanent and significant change usually require that it come from within either the government or the dominant society? Again, the answer is undoubtedly dependent on context.

¹Max Weber, Max Weber: Selections in Translation, ed. by W.G. Runciman, trans. by E. Matthews (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 69-87.

II. Theological Questions

The issues of identity and human rights, which arise out of an examination of nationalism, as well as the questions raised about conflict resolution, all pose concomitant theological challenges.

II. A. Identity: Theological Questions

The issue of identity carries with it immense theological overtones related to questions of security, allegiance, and enmity.

a. Security

With respect to security, a basic question is, "What does one wish to protect?" There is a distinction between protecting territory and protecting culture or ethnic integrity. The relationship between land and identity is still very complicated. But, can Israel's process of identity formation during the exile (which had to be based on something other than territory) be used to inform present day identity in situations where a given ethnic group does not enjoy political sovereignty? Upon what was Israel's identity based in this context? How was the fear of assimilation or domination handled during exilic as well as post-exilic periods? How was exclusiveness/inclusiveness of foreigners handled? Also, one might ask about the place of ethnic vs. territorial integrity in Jesus' perspective (with reference to his teaching on relations between Jews and Samaritans, or his behavior in relation to the Zealots and their linkage of security with territorial sovereignty [e.g. paying taxes to Caesar])? What are the lessons to be learned for today?

b. Allegiance

On the question of allegiance, the Bible continually confronts us with the problem of idolatry whenever primary allegiance is given to anyone or anything but God. Such biblical faith necessarily comes into conflict with nationalism when the latter is sacralized into the highest good and the ultimate loyalty. Yet, the close linkage between religion and culture in many places in Eastern Europe makes this a more complex issue. When religion serves as one of the most powerful vehicles of ethnic or national identity, there is a kind of fusion of political and religious sentiments, making it difficult to sort out allegiances. Furthermore, we also live within a tradition which has been heavily influenced by a Constantinian understanding of relations between church and state. Should allegiance today be understood in terms of Eastern Orthodoxy's continuing theology of symphonia (with its identification of the state with the blessing of God), or should it be informed by some factions of western christendom which present a more anti-establishment stance (with its identification of the state with the "principalities and powers" to be resisted if and when they stand in the way of justice)? In other words, should some degree of allegiance even be shown to the unjust

ruler (e.g. Cyrus) or should the predominant paradigm be that of opposition in the Israelite exodus from Egypt?

If some form of resistance is deemed permissible (if not mandatory) for purposes of justice, other questions emerge regarding the limits of resistance or allegiance. First, is coercive, or even violent, resistance a Christian option? One could bring to bear all the arguments of just war theory. Or does coercive or violent action, in the name of nationalism, merely memorialize a cult of coercive and militaristic virtues which, in turn, become sanctions for new acts of imperialism and tyranny. The transformation of Zionism from liberation force to oppressor captures this dilemma. On the other hand, one may ask if noncoercive resistance is too utopian? How does one balance the witness of the Magnificat against that of the Sermon on the Mount? Second, should there be a distinction between evil and evildoer, with condemnation of the former and mercy for (perhaps even continued allegiance to) the latter? Or does this create too much of a gap between action and responsibility?

c. Enmity

The problem of resistance leads to the very pertinent question of enmity, a topic which raises many complicated issues. How can one legitimate the expression of valid grievance without creating an atmosphere where animosity and exclusivity contribute to the development of stereotypical enemy imaging? On the other hand, how can one "love one's enemy" without denying the very real adversarial nature of some relationships? Or can loving the enemy perhaps change the enemy into a friend (as proposed by St. Maximus the Confessor²) or a partner (as proposed by Moltmann³)? Can Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount provide any guidance on these matters? Must one always turn the other cheek or go the extra mile? Or are these injunctions merely meant to be illustrative of the Pentateuch's call for hospitality to the stranger, even to one from a hostile tribe? Theologically speaking, the showing of hospitality need not ignore the reality of adversarial relations (according to New Testament scholar John Koenig⁴). Yet, is it possible to both unmask these adversarial relations and eliminate them at the same time? It seems there is much in the teaching of both Jesus and Paul which suggests that one ought to at least make

²Stanley Samuel Harakas, Toward Transfigured Life: The Origin of Eastern Orthodox Ethics (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1983), p. 165, quoting Chapters Concerning Love, St. Hekatonas, p. 40.

³Jürgen Moltmann, The Experiment Hope, ed. and trans., with a foreword by M. Douglas Meeks (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1975), p. 175.

⁴John Koenig, New Testament Hospitality: Partnership With Strangers as Promise and Mission (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), pp. 11, 28-38, 55-56, 60, and 65-78.

the attempt. Examples include Jesus' admonition to remain open to a variety of traditional "enemies" (from Samaritans to tax collectors) and Paul's attempts to break down the walls of hostility between Jew and Gentile, or between master and slave (Philemon/Onesimus). Even when one is to turn one's back on an adversary, by "shaking off the dust of one's feet," this is only to be done after an effort of extending hospitality. When rightly understood, does hospitality necessitate a kind of partnership whereby the stranger (or even enemy) is both welcomed and treated as an equal (neither overlord nor underling)? In other words, can the extension of Christian hospitality become a vehicle for empowerment of the perceived subordinate party, at the same time that it calls for an elimination of hostility. If this is a valid theological understanding of hospitality/"love for enemy", how can it be applied to contemporary conflicts in such a way as to facilitate both justice and reconciliation?

Frequently, the validation of enemy imaging is based on the contention that "the truth" must be known so that justice can be done. Examples include Serbian calls to uncover the truth of Croatia's Nazi past, and Croatia's calls to expose current Serbian hegemony. I would suggest that Niebuhr's understanding of "our truth" vs. "the truth" might help put this issue in better light. A realization that the full truth is much larger can produce a measure of tolerance which will help to raise the "search for truth" above the level of enemy baiting. When one perceives one's own truth as partial, limited, or even distorted, then one is more likely to be open to the corrective truth which comes from the other.⁵ Yet, what happens when basic values are in conflict? Are the limitations of "our truth" so easily observed? Certainly there is the risk of rigid ideology, with its blindness to any truth but its own. However, is there not also a danger of acting as though one is so far above the ideological fray that one pretends not to hold any ultimate values? How then does one find the right balance between the necessity of affirming one's own truth and values, on the one hand, and being open to the values and truth of the stranger (or enemy) on the other? Can the biblical understanding of truth as relational, rather than ideological, shed any light here? If fundamental truth comes from being in relationship, rather than from abstract conception, does this not put fundamental emphasis on values of faithfulness, reliability, and fidelity (all included in the meaning of the Hebrew term, "emeth"), rather than on accuracy of knowledge? Yet, such a corrective speaks only to the ideologue and not the extreme nationalist whose fidelity is focused exclusively on one's own ethnic group. Only when relational truth is properly rooted beyond human community is the full impact of the gospel felt on exclusive nationalism. Can the oneness of humanity, in the light of oneness with God

⁵Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation, Vol. II: Human Destiny (London: Nisbet & Co., 1943), pp. 221-28.

(so emphasized in Eastern Orthodoxy) help, in this way, to inform our perspective on truth and enmity in the context of ethnic and nationalistic tension?

II. B. Human Rights: Theological Questions

Oneness with God is also the foundation for a Christian understanding of human rights. The irreducible dignity of all human beings rests on the *imago dei* in which we were created. Yet, dignity and rights are not the same thing. Is it not possible that awareness of one's dignity, at times, involves the sacrifice of one's rights? Was this not the example of Christ on the cross? Granted, this is a voluntary sacrifice. But it still raises a very important question regarding the pursuit of rights, namely when and where responsibilities, as opposed to rights, ought to be the focus of the church's attention. Traditionally, Eastern Orthodox ethics has laid greater stress on responsibilities. For Stanley Harakas, for example, one can only speak of rights for that individual or group which has fulfilled its responsibilities.⁶ Various branches of Western Christendom, on the other hand, have emphasized both rights and responsibilities. However, contemporary western tradition would differ with Harakas by insisting that rights were inherent, i.e. not dependent on faithful execution of responsibility. What do each of these traditions have to offer the discussion of rights and responsibilities with respect to questions of nationalism and ethnic conflict?

The basing of human rights in *imago dei*, and the accompanying question of rights versus responsibilities, will also influence any theological discussion over the setting of priorities among conflicting human rights. The rights of the individual to freedom and self-determination have long been perceived in western Christendom as being inalienable givens, stemming from *imago dei*. On the other hand, Eastern Orthodoxy has long stressed the corporate, and with it the application of *imago dei* to the rights of groups. How we see the image of God reflected in individuals or in groups or in all people will have immense implications for our understanding of human rights and for the adjudication of conflicts surrounding the prioritization of these rights.

Yet concern for the corporate also finds expression in western Christendom. Augustine's "*tranquillitas ordinis*" places priority on that "order" which is necessary to restrain anarchy.⁷ Rights to individual freedom are secondary to the good of the community. Is "*tranquillitas ordinis*," then, a valid basis for communal rights? Or does Augustine stress order and harmony to the detriment of liberation and justice, not only for individuals, but also for

⁶Harakas, Toward Transfigured Life, p. 198.

⁷Saint Augustine, The City of God, 19.13, trans. and ed. by Marcus Dods, The Hafner Library of Classics (2 Vols.; New York: Hafner Publishing Company, 1948), II, pp. 319-20

groups. Is "*tranquilitas ordinis*" an expression of communal rights or an expression of pacification whereby the dominant can subdue the oppressed? On the other hand, without some conception of order and harmony, do inter-group relations inevitably degenerate into chaos (witness the recent riots in Los Angeles and the fighting in Bosnia)? Revenge, sometimes even tinged with a crusade mentality which ostensibly purports to set everything "right," seems to be equally as dangerous as pacification. Is there a Christian conception of "order" which is less static than Augustine's? Can a more dynamic conception of order contribute to the discovery of a creative balance between the rights of individuals and groups?

Finally, the discussion of distributive justice (as presented in the previous section on human rights) will also be influenced by one's theology. The principles of equality, need, and merit are all founded on the presupposition of answering the question of fairness. Though this is certainly important, the Christian tradition goes beyond fairness to the question of mercy. When one goes beyond concern for law to the appropriation of grace, how does this effect criteria for distributive justice? From the perspective of grace and *imago dei*, can one be concerned only for a fair solution to a conflict situation (based on such criteria as tradition and precedence), or is one compelled to look for an optimum solution (based on a vision of new creation which can break down the walls of hostility)? Yet, even if one must look beyond the question of fairness to the possibilities of discovering the optimum, one can not completely avoid the fairness issue and, with it, the hard choices of distributive justice.

There has been much written regarding the relationship of theology to questions of distributive justice. I will raise two issues related to the application of the criteria of merit and need. First, although a theology of grace may cast a shadow over use of the merit criterion as a basis for distributive justice, are there not some situations where the use of such a criterion is valid if not essential? For example, should one be rewarded for "good" behavior? If Russians or Germans retreat from previous imperialistic behavior, should that merit a different response from surrounding nations or from Western powers? Second, does the need criterion more fully reflect Christian values? If so, how is need distinguished from desire? For example, when Serbia speaks of a need to protect Serbs living in Croatia or Bosnia, is this actual or presumed need? Can a theologically informed process of identity formation (as discussed above) help to distinguish real need from just desire and thus influence the formulation of a fair system of distributive justice?

II. C. Conflict Resolution: Theological Questions

A theological perspective can also contribute to a discussion on the process of conflict resolution. Certainly the theme of reconciliation is central to the Biblical witness. Yet, as

indicated in the above section, order and harmony can be stressed to the neglect of liberation and justice. Pitfalls actually lie with the adoption of either extreme. As mentioned on the section on enmity, reconciliation can be distorted to mean pacification and liberation can degenerate into a crusade mentality. The difficulty in assessment is illustrated by the Romanian/Hungarian conflict in Transylvania. Is the heightened awareness of Hungarian identity, spurred to a great extent by the Hungarian Reformed Church, an example of necessary countermeasure to pacification attempts by the regime or is it an example of a crusade mentality running rampant over the valid concerns and interests of the Romanian community? Theological attempts at reconciliation and conflict resolution will have to address such issues.

One contribution of theology to conflict resolution may be in the process of identity formation. Much has been said already about this in the above theological section on identity. In addition to providing input on issues of security, allegiance, and enmity, theology can address the question of what it means for an individual or group to pursue the best for itself. Both western and eastern Christian traditions challenge an identity based on an egotistical, narcissistic regard for oneself. A mature love for one's own welfare involves that kind of growth which leads to *imago dei*. Augustine states well this concern for finding one's "*summum bonum*" in God rather than in one's own selfishness.⁸ Can this understanding of a healthy self love be transferred to the development of ethnic group identity. Can it help an ethnic group, or its representatives in a given conflict resolution process, to more accurately identify its real needs and interests, as opposed to those desires prompted by revenge or self-indulgence? Could Serbs and Croats, despite their present conflict and their historically different Christian traditions, find a common ground in their mutual desire to grow into *imago dei*? Of course this would not sort out all the differences. But could such a perspective help them to view differently the myriad other differences which divide even the Christian leadership in those lands?

Another contribution of theology to conflict resolution may be the manner in which it handles the question of grievance. In much of the Old Testament, the lament was a valid expression of a human desire for retaliation. It was a component of the justice of God, not just an expression of complaint. Yet the expression of outrage was not the same as the exaction of a penalty. The actual purpose for this expression of hurt was to limit vindictiveness by providing for a formalized ritualization of the anger. Could such an

⁸ Saint Augustine, *The Trinity*, X, 5.3-8.6, in *Augustine: Later Works*, trans. by John Burnaby, VIII (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1955), pp. 77-82; and

Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. by Philip S. Watson (3rd ed.; London: SPCK, 1982), pp. 183-89 and 532-48, citing Saint Augustine, *The Trinity*, VIII, 8.2; *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 91.4; *Sermon XXXIV*, 5.8; and *Sermon XCVI*, 2.

understanding of grievance change the way Christians on opposite sides of a given conflict will behave? Furthermore, in its later form in Deutero-Isaiah, the lament was frequently combined with confession of guilt. Can this coupling of confession and grievance provide a way to help each side to face itself as both victim and agent of victimization? Can this coupling of catharsis and repentance become an antidote to both the crusade mentality and pacification? Could it lead to the discovery of valid concerns and mature interests? In fact would it become more possible to discover complimentary and compatible interests which could counter the trends toward exclusivistic nationalism and enemy imaging?

Yet, this also raises questions about allocation of blame. Can it be assumed that at least a measure of guilt rests on each side? What about situations of genocide? Does the sinfulness of all humanity require that the church help even the apparent victim to confess, and the apparent oppressor to express grievance? Again, one can point to Niebuhr, who distinguishes between the equality of sin and the inequality of guilt, for insightful input.⁹ On the other hand, why should even the establishment of greater guilt require a total separation between those who must confess and those who can express grievance? Still, should this factor not influence the church's involvement with the parties? For example, can we relate in the same way with the Kurds as we do with the regime of Saddam Hussein?

A third contribution of theology to conflict resolution may be the place of conversion/transformation. When and how can attitude change on the part of individuals lead to genuine resolution of conflict? What are the limits of this kind of personal self-examination? When is the altering of perception not enough and one needs to speak of structural change? Yet, perception alteration is frequently important, even when structural change is also required for a genuine resolution of conflict. The transformation of Peter and Paul into apostles for the Gentiles, and its influence on the structure of the early church's ministry, illustrate the point. Therefore, it is important to ask what conditions promote, as opposed to inhibit, the kind of personal transformation which can help in the resolution of conflict?

In addition, one may ask whether the type of transformation called for by the Christian gospel exceeds the traditional perception alteration of secular problem solving. The transformation of basic values involves a probing process of self-examination and confession which can address attitudes of both dominance and exclusivity. Can such a self-examination process go beyond the ability of simple perception alteration to unmask, as well as eliminate, adversarial relations? What would it mean, in the context of ethnic strife in Eastern Europe, to embark on a process of value transformation based on the gospel? Where, when, and how could this make any difference--in the incipient conflict in Transylvania, or the escalating

⁹Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation, Vol. I: Human Nature (London: Nisbet & Co. Ltd., 1941), pp. 233-39.

conflict of Bosnia, or the stalemated stand off between Armenia and Azerbaijan? What are the basic gospel values which should address the participants in each context? Who should make this determination? What is the role of the indigenous church (or Muslim sect in the case of Azerbaijan) in addressing this need within its own culture? What third party role can be played by the outside church in the process of value transformation? Which specific religious third parties would be best qualified to perform this role, or to encourage expression of grievance and confession, or to assist in the discovery of mature, and perhaps compatible, interests through the pursuit of *imago dei*?

There is certainly no way to guarantee the success of any conflict resolution process, theologically informed or otherwise. In fact, the church, more than most potential players, should know that transformation of either individuals or structures is ultimately dependent on the Spirit of God. In light of this, the church's first task must be to hold up the fullness of the vision of shalom. Then it must discern prayerfully the specifics of the vision for a given situation and the beginnings of any movement of the Spirit toward fulfillment of that vision. Finally, it must ask the nature of the role it can play in this activity of the Spirit. The questions raised in this paper are an attempt to help the church in such a process of reflection.