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## **Mercy, Mercy, Mercy: An Ethic of Reconciliation**

David Hutchinson

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

MERCY, MERCY, MERCY:  
AN ETHIC OF RECONCILIATION

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

DAVID HUTCHINSON

PORTLAND, OREGON

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Dedicated to the members of Genesis Community Fellowship  
The organizers of the Restorative Listening Project on Gentrification  
And members of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Portland, OR

“We hang in the balance, dangle ‘tween hell and hallowed ground.  
Every one of us could use a little mercy now”

From “Mercy Now” by Mary Gauthier

\*\*\*\*\*

“Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness,  
so that we may receive mercy  
and find grace to help in time of need”

Hebrews 4:16

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## ABSTRACT

Title: MERCY, MERCY, MERCY: AN ETHIC OF RECONCILIATION

Author: David Hutchinson

Year: 2010

Institution: George Fox Evangelical Seminary

The author of this dissertation contends that reconciliation is the goal of divine and human action. The problem addressed is that human attempts at reconciliation are incomplete. Reconciliation can be defined with careful attention to the use of the words “mercy,” “justice,” and “truth.” The dissertation’s thesis is that the South African experience of mercy provides a reconciliation model for relationship, conversation, and ministry in Portland, Oregon.

Chapter 1 introduces the challenge of addressing the problem through an account of a Restorative Listening Project on Gentrification meeting. The challenge is to move from words to action. Chapter 1 then describes the ministry contexts in and around Westminster Presbyterian Church in Portland.

Chapter 2 addresses four key issues: (a) human and divine aspects of reconciliation and the relationship between them, (b) reconciliation as a central theme in the Bible, (c) enacting human reconciliation, and (d) biblical roots of the words “restorative justice” and “mercy.”

Chapter 3 addresses four issues similar to those in chapter 2 from a theological perspective: (a) human and divine aspects of reconciliation, (b) a postmodern challenge to universals and reconciliation as a goal, (c) enacting human reconciliation, and (d) justice out of balance. The final issue exemplifies how determining the meaning of the word justice can lead to tension. In this chapter, as in the previous one, the author intentionally chooses scholars who disagree to explore the tensions that stand in the way of reconciliation.

Chapter 4 describes the South African experience of mercy, relates mercy to forgiveness, and defines truth as narrative truth. It examines critiques of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission experience in South Africa and provides a model for reconciliation based on the South African experience.

Chapter 5 describes the Restorative Listening Project on Gentrification and the Genesis Community Fellowship, used by the dissertation's author in translating the reconciliation model from chapter 4 into action.

Chapter 6 claims that a balance of mercy, justice, and truth is the strongest and deepest reconciliation response to human divisions and injustice. The dissertation claims that balance demands increased attention to mercy. The dissertation shows that though human attempts at reconciliation are imperfect, it is important to continue them.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **The Challenge**

The “beer summit” held by President Obama following the arrest of Henry Louis Gates Jr. on July 16, 2009 provided an opportunity to consider the current state of race relations in the nation and to evaluate what progress has been made toward racial reconciliation.<sup>1</sup> Obama met with Gates and the arresting officer, James Crowley, at the White House on July 30, 2009, following intense press coverage of the arrest and Obama’s televised response. In Portland, Oregon, the “beer summit” was discussed at a meeting of the Restorative Listening Project on Gentrification (RLPG). RLPG Organizers John Canda and Judith Mowry published editorials in Portland’s daily newspaper, *The Oregonian*. Canda wrote:

I’m discouraged because with one incident and the use of a term I hoped was buried with our nation’s racist history that we would be light years beyond where once again it appears we are. . . .

On the national level, President Barack Obama not only made bold statements regarding the incident but he went to the next level by inviting the primary people involved to his home for a discussion Thursday. Whatever your views are about the facts of the case, would you have been so bold as to create a forum so that differences could be aired and processed? Do you believe that such a process under the right circumstances could cause people to act differently?

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<sup>1</sup>Michael A. Fletcher and Krissah Thompson, “Domestic Diplomacy at a Picnic Table,” *The Washington Post*, July 30, 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/07/29/AR2009072903273.html?hpid=topnews> (accessed February 17, 2010).

The President did what we've been doing at the Restorative Listening Project here in Portland for several years now. The difference between his meeting and ours, of course, is that beer was served. We use food, our intellect, life experiences and our hearts.<sup>2</sup>

Judith Mowry wrote,

When I watched the news coverage of the beer summit at the White House on Thursday, I reflected on how significant it was to have a president who modeled for us the simple act of sitting together and talking. I don't know what was said, but I do know how powerful these conversations can be. . . .

For those who are wondering if we have entered a "post-racial" period, this episode should be illuminating. After spending his entire news conference talking about health care—a huge legislative issue that has been commanding headlines—the president briefly answered one question about the arrest of professor Gates. Yet it was that sliver of all his comments that evening that consumed the media for the next several days.

The election of President Barack Obama prompted some to ask, "Have we talked enough about race?" The question before us now is not, "Do we still need to talk about race?" but rather, "How do we talk about race?" Portland's recent experience with renaming of the street as Caesar Chavez Boulevard is a prime example of the deep levels of confusion and tension we have when issues of race are raised.<sup>3</sup>

Following the editorials, numerous comments were posted to *The Oregonian*

website in response. Included in the responses to Canda were the following:

I think that if we live in the past and only discuss all the bad things that happened to black people we will never get to improving race relations. How about talking about what is happening now for black people, white people, hispanic [*sic*] people and indians [*sic*], both good and bad, and deciding where to go from here.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> John Canda, "Conversing about Race: Portland Efforts Mirror Goal of Obama's Beer Summit," *The Oregonian*, Sunday, August 2, 2009, [http://www.oregonlive.com/opinion/index.ssf/2009/08/conversing\\_about\\_race\\_portland.html](http://www.oregonlive.com/opinion/index.ssf/2009/08/conversing_about_race_portland.html) (accessed October 10, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Judith Mowry, "Conversing about Race: Arena for Ideas, Dialogue Benefits Our Parallel Worlds," *The Oregonian*, Sunday, August 2, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Canda, "Conversing about Race," under "Comments: Astorian."

Another respondent wrote:

What a complete change from the previous article by Judith Mowry. Obviously Mr. Canada is extremely misinformed. All of his rhetoric [*sic*] is biased and one sided. But that is typical of hate filled blacks who blame whitey for all the problems.<sup>5</sup>

Participants at the August 17, 2009 meeting of the RLPG discussed the editorials and subsequent letters to the editor. All respondents were invited to attend, although those who made negative comments about Canda did not make themselves known. The meeting was well attended, and several African American youth described their experiences in Portland, saying they did not feel any racism nor did they know of any incidents of racism in Portland. The meeting organizer asked them to describe a racist incident, and it became clear that ideas about racist incidents, and the language used to describe them, differed among participants. Participants also disagreed on the means to end racism and the nature of racial reconciliation. Some argue that these conversations perpetuate untruths and problems that support racism. The challenge is to move from words and discussion to actions and decisions in real-life situations. This dissertation offers a model for reconciliation that addresses both words and actions.

Several issues, evident in this opening example, recur throughout this dissertation. First, people disagree on the extent of racism and the importance of discussing it. Some think that racism is insignificant in their experience and do not want to discuss reconciliation. The first issue to emerge, therefore, is to determine the significance of reconciliation either in words or actions. Secondly, people who agree that racism is a

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<sup>5</sup> Canda, "Conversing about Race," under "Comments: Rockright."

significant problem disagree on what to do about it. Third, people disagree about the words and their meanings. People might agree, for example, that justice is important, but disagree about what justice means. This dissertation discusses the same sort of disagreement in relation to the words “mercy,” “truth,” and “reconciliation.”

This dissertation explores three aspects of reconciliation: justice, mercy, and truth. Writers and commentators use these words frequently in their work on human and divine reconciliation.<sup>6</sup> The words are used in different ways and have greater or lesser prominence depending on specific reconciliation models. When balanced, however, these three aspects of reconciliation offer the fullest definition of reconciliation that I have found. This dissertation will show that these words are potential traps if they are ill-defined and used carelessly. A definition of reconciliation involves bringing justice, mercy, and truth together and determining how they interact, and a more complete model of reconciliation is possible through study of these three aspects of reconciliation and their characteristics.

The article “Speak, Listen, Heal” describes the link between the RLPG’s work and storytelling, and the complexity of defining words like “justice” or “injustice”:

Some see little point in storytelling when the damage is done. Others say the listening project is misguided. Willie Brown, who leads the Black Citizens

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<sup>6</sup> For mercy see James Cone, “Strange Fruit,” *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 45, no.1 (Winter 2007), 53; James William McClendon Jr., *Ethics*, vol. 1 of *Systematic Theology*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2002), 231; Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 86; for truth see Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, 26; Miroslav Volf, *The End of Memory* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 70-76; for justice see Cone, “Strange Fruit,” 53; McClendon, *Ethics*, 270-271; Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, 54; Jim Wallis, *The Great Awakening: Reviving Faith and Politics in a Post-religious Right America* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 299-309.

Coalition of Portland Neighborhoods, says the project fails to address the economic injustice underlying gentrification. “If we had the money and the jobs, there would be no question whether we had to move or not,” Brown says.

But telling the stories, says Mowry, raises awareness. “Once your curiosity is ignited,” she says, “it's not long before you're able to see those systemic injustices and act on them.”

Since the project began last year, 15 African Americans have shared their experiences. In total, 225 people have participated. The results are small but powerful, a series of revelations that suggests a path forward.

Blacks, for example, mourn the loss of familiarity and the feeling that in this part of town, they could be themselves. But they also miss a sense of connection. And that is something that many people seek and can attempt to revive—by getting to know one another, acknowledging one another, sitting on the front porch rather than in the backyard.<sup>7</sup>

This statement reveals the complexity of translating concepts like justice into real life. When addressing issues of gentrification, some people say they want justice, but they disagree on what justice means in their actions. Brown and Mowry exemplify that tension.

The RLPG is an initiative of Portland’s Office of Neighborhood Involvement and was organized by three city employees who connect with local residents and facilitate candid conversations. The RLPG describes its approach on its website: “The Restorative Listening Project is based on principles of restorative justice which says that only when those most impacted are heard, acknowledged and efforts have been made to repair the harm can the community be made whole again.”<sup>8</sup> A *New York Times* article describes a link between the RLPG and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa:

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<sup>7</sup> Erin Hoover Barnett, “Speak. Listen. Heal,” In Portland, *The Oregonian*, April 17, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Judith Mowry, “What Is the Restorative Listening Project?” Office of Neighborhood Involvement, <http://www.portlandonline.com/ONI/index.cfm?c=45627> (accessed December 5, 2008).

“Ms. Mowry, the [RLPG] project’s leader, describes it as being rooted in restorative justice, similar to the type applied in the truth and reconciliation commission after the end of apartheid in South Africa.”<sup>9</sup>

The thesis of this dissertation is that the South African experience of mercy provides a reconciliation model for relationship, conversation, and ministry in Portland. The RLPG has contributed to the development of this model in Portland. South Africa has not reached a state of complete reconciliation in the decade following the TRC, and South African culture differs greatly from Portland, OR; nevertheless, the experiences of mercy and forgiveness enabled by the South African model are exemplary for this dissertation.

The imperfections of the efforts at reconciliation in South Africa are part of the usefulness of the TRC as a model. One main lesson of this dissertation is that human reconciliation efforts are imperfect, but that does not mean that humans should avoid working toward reconciliation. One way to move forward is to understand the nature of the imperfections. This dissertation will show that the imperfections of human efforts at reconciliation arise from the three issues raised: (a) people disagree on the significance of reconciliation; (b) people who agree reconciliation is significant disagree about what to do about it; (c) the same words hold different meanings for different people.

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<sup>9</sup> William Yardley, “Portland Journal: Racial Shift in a Progressive City Spurs Talks,” *The New York Times*, May 29, 2008, [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/29/us/29portland.html?\\_r=2&pagewanted=1&ci=5087&em&en=63fee218058cf972&ex=1212206400&oref=slog](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/29/us/29portland.html?_r=2&pagewanted=1&ci=5087&em&en=63fee218058cf972&ex=1212206400&oref=slog) in (accessed February 17, 2010).



A fourth important issue for Christians and people of faith to consider in reconciliation work is the link between divine and human reconciliation. Reconciliation may be described as something that happens between God and humans or between humans themselves. The connection between being reconciled to God and being reconciled to one another has enormous significance to reconciliation.<sup>10</sup>

There is potential for disagreement and dissension on this subject. This dissertation chooses to place reconciliation at the center of both divine and human action. Reconciliation describes divine and human action and movement toward God and humanity. Shallow movements in either direction are potentially dangerous when it comes to productive conversation and authentic work toward reconciliation.<sup>11</sup> Human work for reconciliation has a long, rich history, and God's reconciliation with all creation is woven into the biblical narrative.

This fourth issue does not mean, however, that non-Christians or non-believers are inadequate in their work toward reconciliation. Certainly people of all faiths, including atheists, might share some hope for reconciliation in the human realm and work diligently toward it. Rather this fourth issue is a caution to people of faith to remain humble in their work, and humble about their own efforts at reconciliation. This

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<sup>10</sup> The Confession of 1967 is an example from Presbyterian history that highlights the tension between divine and human reconciliation. For further discussion of this see Appendix B.

<sup>11</sup> Jack Rogers, *Presbyterian Creeds: A Guide to the Book of Confessions* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 214.

dissertation will show that when human work is rooted in God's work, believers maintain a more merciful perspective toward others.

### **One Congregation's Story**

Westminster Presbyterian Church was organized as a Sunday school in 1889 and formed as a Presbyterian congregation in 1892. It moved to its current location on Hancock Street in Northeast Portland in 1912 and has remained there, housed in a stone American-Gothic structure. The membership has fluctuated between 725 and 740 in the period 2002-2009. Worship attendance averages three hundred on Sunday mornings, and three pastors serve on staff with nine support-staff members. The membership is 98 percent Caucasian and I am as well. Several African-Americans fill leadership roles, and the Board of Deacons includes people of Hispanic and Thai origin. I have been Associate Pastor at Westminster Presbyterian Church for seven years, and the church is located within the Presbytery of the Cascades. The Presbytery of the Cascades includes 125 churches in western Oregon, southern Washington, and northern California.

Westminster congregants have been involved in mission partnerships in Cuba, Columbia, and Palestine over the past decade. The church's mission focus is local and global, and the local mission focuses primarily on meeting economic needs and addressing hunger issues. The congregation discusses how to be more welcoming to all people including those with physical disabilities, members of all ethnic and cultural backgrounds, different economic status, political views, and sexual orientations. A

congregant group of family and friends of gay and lesbian people who are members of the congregation began this conversation about being more welcoming.

Westminster is made up of people who hold a wide range of opinions on nearly any topic, and the congregation embraces this variety and attempts to listen despite differences. These differences can cause tension when strong opinions connect to unjust situations, and sometimes the commitment to justice conflicts with the desire to be reconciled. These situations may create opportunities to learn from the South African experience of mercy, which is the goal of this document.

Westminster's commitment to mission involvement led to a partnership with a multi-cultural, non-denominational congregation called Genesis Community Fellowship (GCF), which launched officially in 2007 from informal relationships begun in 2004. GCF adopted a mission of racial reconciliation from its beginning, which has guided the GCF-Westminster relationship. Members of each congregation met, prayed, and told stories of their experiences of racism, and over the years the partnership pursued projects and developed greater familiarity and closer relationships. These friendships became a guide toward the South African merciful reconciliation model, which will be described in subsequent chapters.

Westminster's motivation to work for racial reconciliation grows in part out of Portland's history of racism, redlining,<sup>12</sup> and KKK activity in the 1920s and 1930s. Many of the African-American families moved to the Albina neighborhood in Portland to work

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<sup>12</sup> Redlining is the practice of drawing a red line on a map around an area. In that area banks are discouraged from investing in business or providing loans for housing.

in the shipyards during World War II.<sup>13</sup> The black population grew from 2,000 to 25,000 during the war, and 15,000 African-Americans left Portland after 1945. The remaining 10,000 African Americans were told in many ways that they were no longer wanted.<sup>14</sup> Westminster's motivation around reconciliation also grows from issues related to the remaining African Americans and current community issues.

On May 30, 1948 Vanport City was flooded and virtually wiped out. Prior to the flood, Vanport had been a home to poor families who had come to work in the shipyards, including 5,000 African-Americans.<sup>15</sup> According to a history by the Portland Bureau of Planning, "Although Vanport City sat in the midst of the flood plain of the Columbia River, there had never been any real concern for its safety."<sup>16</sup> Following the 1948 Vanport flood, a series of development projects displaced residents, and the interstate highway corridor, Fremont bridge, and expansion of Emanuel hospital left blocks of land undeveloped and leveled homes.<sup>17</sup> As new developments occur along Alberta Street in the area around Westminster Presbyterian Church, some people remember these stories because they lived them, but others have no memory of the events. Some residents come

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<sup>13</sup> Gretchen Kafoury, Robert E. Stacey Jr., and Michael S. Harrison, *The History of Portland's African American Community (1805 to the Present)* (Portland, OR: Bureau of Planning, 1993), 60-61.

<sup>14</sup> Roy E. Roos, *The History of Albina: Including Eliot, Boise, King, Humboldt, and Piedmont Neighborhoods* (Portland, OR: Roy E. Roos, 2008), 37.

<sup>15</sup> Kafoury, Stacey, and Harrison, *The History of Portland's African American Community (1805 to the Present)*, 76.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Roos, *The History of Albina*, 38.

from neither the black community nor the white community, some are mixed-race couples, and Thai, Chinese, Hispanic, and Russian people live in the area.

Gentrification is a current neighborhood issue. Gentrification is the increase in property values because of additional high-density housing and the renewal of existing property that causes low-income residents to leave due to rising taxes.<sup>18</sup> Some believe gentrification benefits property values and stimulates property repair, but it also brings newcomers without neighborhood roots who displace longtime residents. The neighborhood surrounding GCF has experienced gentrification, and Westminster is located immediately south.

Westminster is a historic Presbyterian congregation within the Presbytery of the Cascades, and the Presbytery exhibits much of the variety that characterizes Westminster. Disagreements occur, and have sometimes led to tension and division rather than merciful reconciliation. The challenge of staying in an imperfect community that includes people with whom one disagrees is one of the tensions that give rise to this dissertation. The baptismal covenant binds Presbyterians to one another and calls them to care for all creation and one another in spite of their differences. Sometimes people decide to leave rather than stay in a relationship or in a community, however, and that decision can be one of the most difficult in the work of reconciliation.

Throughout this dissertation I will compare and contrast scholars and people who disagree in the realm of human reconciliation. People who agree about the goal of

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 40.

reconciliation offer different options about what to do in response. Sections of the next few chapters on enacting human reconciliation examine people who reach different positions. Subsequent sections explore what has been said about reconciliation and the words “justice,” “mercy,” and “truth.”

In this dissertation, reconciliation is a goal for human relationships and divine interaction with humanity.<sup>19</sup> Reaching that goal is the center of divine and human action in this dissertation. Other concepts might contend for this central place: justification, redemption, blessing, peace, enlightenment, and fulfillment. This dissertation, however, demonstrates that reconciliation describes the goal of divine and human action most fully. Human reconciliation efforts have a rich history, describe what God intends for all creation, and are central to the biblical narrative.

Westminster has been guided by the partnership with GCF, a local, multi-cultural church. Over the past several years the GCF congregation has mentored Westminster’s pastors and members, and GCF’s pastor guided this dissertation’s author. Both Genesis and Westminster members have been engaged in community meetings and listened to participants very carefully.

The RLPG arranged many community meetings, and RLPG uses a South African restorative justice model described in this dissertation. GCF and the RLPG help exemplify how the reconciliation model might function in Portland. The TRC’s South

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<sup>19</sup> Karl Barth, *Doctrine of Reconciliation* vol. 4, part 1 of *Church Dogmatics*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1961), 22, 43; McClendon, *Ethics*, 231, 237. Barth described reconciliation as the “purpose” and “goal” for divine interaction with humanity, and McClendon described reconciliation as the “goal” of human community.

African experience suggests how to balance the qualities of justice, mercy, and truth within communities.<sup>20</sup> The reconciliation process is unbalanced in communities or with leaders when either justice, mercy, or truth is overemphasized or ignored. For example, incomplete justice or truth occurs when justice or truth does not serve the purpose of merciful reconciliation.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, an important element of reconciliation is lost if Westminster members and others in the community do not emphasize mercy, and consider only justice and truth. The South African experience provides a model for Westminster and an opportunity to consider new ways to think and act mercifully. Desmond Tutu uses the word forgiveness often, and the way he uses it defines how the author uses mercy in this dissertation.<sup>22</sup> In addition to the South African model for reconciliation and the balance of justice, mercy, and truth, God's reconciling work in Christ offers a biblical model for reconciliation that exemplifies this balance.

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<sup>20</sup> Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, 26-27, 155-156.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 31-32. See also Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996), 120-125.

<sup>22</sup> Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*. 86. Tutu connects forgiveness and mercy directly.

## CHAPTER 2

### BIBLICAL MATERIAL

This chapter begins with the fourth issue identified in the introduction. This issue is particular to people of faith and in that way separate from the other three. The remaining three issues will be addressed in the order of the introduction. The chapter will address these four key biblical issues: (a) Human and divine aspects of reconciliation: This section will show that reconciliation between humans is connected scripturally to reconciliation between God and humanity. (b) Reconciliation as a central theme: This section will examine proposals to recognize reconciliation as the central themes of the Bible and Paul's thought. (c) Enacting human reconciliation: This section will consider differing proposals for human reconciliation in response to the letter to the Ephesians, which emerge despite a shared commitment reconciliation. (d) Restorative justice and mercy: The final section of chapter 2 will examine and expand the meaning of two biblical words that lay the groundwork for the work of the TRC, which will be explored in chapter 4.

#### **Issue #1: Human and Divine Aspects of Reconciliation**

God's reconciling action can be upheld, while diligent work for human reconciliation continues.



Human work for reconciliation is strengthened if it is connected to God's action. For people of faith, however, connecting human work to God's work creates an approach of humility and mercy toward others because the connection keeps human work and its imperfections in perspective. A number of scholars who have written about reconciliation in light of the work of the TRC in South Africa share this perspective and will be examined in this chapter.

Colin Gunton connects this chapter's first two issues to recent events in South Africa:

Reconciliation is one of the few words deriving from the Christian theological tradition to remain in vogue in the secularized vocabulary of modern politics. The aftermath of apartheid in South Africa . . . render(s) it a word constantly on the lips of those for whom an explicitly theological construction of its meaning would be out of the question. And yet it is in theology that it took its rise, and in theology that its prior meaning is centered not on the relations between human beings but on that between God and the fallen world, especially the human part of it. 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself' (2 Cor. 5:19) is one of the possible candidates for a single sentence summary of what the Christian faith teaches, and it raises the question of the relation between the claim that reconciliation belongs first to the transcendental realm, involving the priority of divine action in time, and what happens between people as a consequence.<sup>1</sup>

Gunton asserts two conclusions of the study of reconciliation. Regarding God, he states "The center of our interest is not reconciliation but the reconciler."<sup>2</sup> Regarding human action, he states that it is "right to attempt to adopt the concept of reconciliation to

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<sup>1</sup> Colin E. Gunton, ed., *The Theology of Reconciliation* (London: T and T Clark, 2003), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Colin E. Gunton, "Toward a Theology of Reconciliation," in *The Theology of Reconciliation*, ed. Gunton, 174.

express important political realities . . . but wrong in separating it from the only one in whom its reality can be found and realized.”<sup>3</sup>

Christoph Schwöbel examines the connection between historical reality and the life of God, and he begins with a theological reflection on the South African truth commissions:

The South African truth commissions do their work under the presupposition that there can be no reconciliation based on deception and lies, that truth is a necessary prerequisite of reconciliation between parties in conflict. However, sometimes it seems that it is precisely the emergence of truth that makes reconciliation impossible. Can there be reconciliation between the perpetrators of the most serious forms of injustice and their victims?<sup>4</sup>

Schwöbel suggests that reconciliation is the way past feelings of retribution and revenge and is rooted “in the language of Christian proclamation.” He seeks to “retrieve the authentic meaning of reconciliation” and mend the “gap between the rhetoric and the reality of reconciliation.”<sup>5</sup>

Schwöbel analyzes the biblical texts and points out that Paul’s use of the word for reconciliation (*katalasso*) occurs six times, of which five refer to the divine-human relationship and one to an interpersonal human relationship.<sup>6</sup> He asserts that, for Paul, “reconciliation is defined in a theological context and not developed analogically from

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Christoph Schwöbel, “Reconciliation: From Biblical Observations to Dogmatic Reconstruction,” in *The Theology of Reconciliation*, ed. Gunton, 13.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 14-15.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 15.

interpersonal relationships.<sup>7</sup> Reconciliation occurs in the entire biblical narrative context beginning with the creation story and ending in the hope of a final fulfillment in Christ.

Schwöbel refers to Colossians 1:16-20: “Here we have to note that the statement about reconciliation is bracketed by statements about the mediation of the creation of all things in Christ and the fulfillment of the final destiny of all things through him.”<sup>8</sup> God is the sole agent of reconciliation in this “cosmic Christology.” Humans receive God’s reconciling act in Christ passively, and God’s reconciliation constitutes an enduring relationship between the living Christ and the reconciled. This Christology begins with the action of God, and not humans. There is, however, reconciliation and justice for humans that Schwöbel describes:

[C]osmic reconciliation is made concrete by pointing to the believer’s own life of faith. The life of a believer “in the hope of the gospel” is the concrete application of the cosmic reconciliation achieved through Christ. . . . “Formerly you were alienated from God.” . . . The alienation from God has an inner dimension. It is enmity in heart and mind as it is documented by evil actions. . . . In Ephesians 2:14-18, the Pauline theme of peace through reconciliation in Christ is extended to comprehend the two realms of the Jewish and Gentile world. The Gentiles who were “far off” (2:13) “excluded from the community of Israel,” “living in a world without hope and without God” (2:12) “have now been brought near” (2:13).<sup>9</sup>

The key to this Christology is to keep the role of God in reconciliation primary: “Reconciliation understood from this theological perspective is not based on mutual agreement that has to be established first, but on a one-sided step to break up the pattern of mutuality of enmity. Reconciliation is based on a one-sided offer of peace where there

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

was conflict.”<sup>10</sup> That is why “the healing of a broken relationship or the overcoming of separation from God, the destiny of humanity, indeed of all creation, must be to be in communion with God.”<sup>11</sup>

Viewing the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) through this Pauline lens shows why theological and Christological work is essential in the healing interaction between justice, mercy, and truth that constitutes reconciliation. The human side of reconciliation appears different when connected to God’s reconciling action, and Murray Rae suggests it is primarily an act of thanksgiving and praise: “Human response, then, is to be conceived fundamentally as an act of thanksgiving and praise. . . . It is in this life of thanksgiving and praise that the community of Christians may become witness to the atonement and reconciliation won for the world through Christ.”<sup>12</sup>

Karl Barth is a scholar of major importance in the study of reconciliation.<sup>13</sup> He dedicates the entire third part of *Church Dogmatics* to the doctrine of reconciliation, more than 2,700 pages.<sup>14</sup> Rae describes Barth’s position: “Jesus did not leave the matter of salvation in our hands . . . for who among us can offer an adequate repentance? . . . We cannot imagine, Karl Barth contends in his famous argument with Emil Brunner, that we

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 35.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 24.

<sup>12</sup> Murray Rae, “A Remnant People: The Ecclesia As a Sign of Reconciliation,” in *The Theology of Reconciliation*, ed. Gunton, 105.

<sup>13</sup> Barth, *Doctrine of Reconciliation*.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

are able to swim a few strokes ourselves.”<sup>15</sup> The definition of Christ’s role as “mediator” is essential to understanding Barth’s position, as Schwöbel points out in his discussion about Barth.<sup>16</sup> This reality should not produce a passive stance even though God is the sole agent of reconciliation.

Barth’s editor, Thomas Torrance, writes in *The Mediation of Christ*, “‘All of grace’ does not mean ‘nothing of man,’ but precisely the opposite: all of grace means all of man.”<sup>17</sup> The question of how humans respond can be left open even though God is the sole agent of reconciliation. The third section of chapter 2 of this dissertation discusses the issue of human response. This first section demonstrates that human work for reconciliation is strengthened if it is connected to God’s action, and God’s action is understood as primary.

## **Issue #2: Reconciliation as a Central Theme**

The case for holding human action for reconciliation in tension with God’s action is stronger if divine action is of central importance in the Bible. If reconciliation is a minor theme in either the Bible, or only of some part of the Bible like in Paul’s letters, then it is easier to set it aside in favor of some other theme. If reconciliation is of central importance then so is the work of understanding the character and nature of reconciliation. This section acknowledges that other theological concepts compete for

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<sup>15</sup> Rae, “A Remnant People,” 104-105.

<sup>16</sup> Schwöbel, “Reconciliation,” 27.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs: Helmers and Howard, 1992), xii.

this central place, but it also shows that there are those who see reconciliation as central, both for the Bible and for Paul.

Gunton makes a broad claim about reconciliation and its place in biblical thought: “‘God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself’ (2 Cor. 5:19) is one of the possible candidates for a single sentence summary of what the Christian faith teaches.”<sup>18</sup> Barth states in *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, “It would be possible and quite correct to describe the covenant fulfilled in the work of reconciliation as the heart of the subject matter of Christian faith, of the origin of Christian love, of the content of Christian hope.”<sup>19</sup> Barth maintains that the “covenant fulfilled in the atonement” was the center, origin, content, and focus of Christian dogmatics. Reconciliation, for Barth, was the center of Christian faith.

Philip Martin reaches a conclusion similar to Barth’s about the place of reconciliation in Paul’s thought: “‘Reconciliation,’ the present author believes, can be presented as an interpretative key to Paul’s theology; and if we are pressed to suggest a simple term that summarizes his message, the word reconciliation will be the ‘chief theme’ or ‘center’ of his missionary and pastoral thought and practice.”<sup>20</sup> Martin suggests several ways to interpret Paul, including through Palestinian Judaism, Hellenistic Judaism, and Gnosticism, and he discusses key Pauline ideas: justification, salvation, and

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<sup>18</sup> Gunton, *The Theology of Reconciliation*. 1.

<sup>19</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 3.

<sup>20</sup> Ralph P. Martin, *Reconciliation: A Study of Paul's Theology*, New Foundations Theological Library (Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1981), 5.

communion with Christ. Martin concludes, “We have surveyed the chief attempts to set Paul’s teaching under the rubric of its ‘leading theme’ or ‘center.’ None has proved satisfactory since we really need a larger frame to encompass the apostle’s diverse modes of expression; therefore, Paul’s thought can best be captured in the omnibus term ‘reconciliation.’”<sup>21</sup> This notion of a larger frame best describes Martin’s approach. Martin’s argument is based on his study of leading themes or motifs, rather than tallying specific words, and this contrasts with Ernst Käsemann, whose work Martin acknowledges as a major challenge to Martin’s thesis.

Käsemann describes reconciliation as one element in Paul’s thought, but concludes that “justification” is the heart of the Christian message for Paul.<sup>22</sup> This difference of opinion is critical in scholarly debate, as Martin acknowledges.<sup>23</sup> According to Martin, Käsemann bases his argument on the fact that Paul uses the various Greek words for reconciliation infrequently and concludes that reconciliation is not central to Paul’s thought. Martin believes, however, that reconciliation is a larger framework that includes justification: “[A]ll these motifs could well be subsumed under the overarching rubric of ‘reconciliation.’”<sup>24</sup> According to Martin, reconciliation is a leitmotif or ruling

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>22</sup> Ernst Käsemann, “Some Thoughts on the Theme ‘The Doctrine of Reconciliation in the New Testament,’” in *The Future of Our Religious Past: Essays in Honour of Rudolph Bultmann*, ed. Rudolph Bultmann and J. M. Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 49-64.

<sup>23</sup> Martin, *Reconciliation*, 74-75.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 80.

idea that was current across a broad cultural spectrum of primitive and later Christianity.<sup>25</sup>

Käsemann and Martin offer justification and reconciliation as interpretive keys to Paul's thought. Martin suggests that reconciliation is broader and includes the notion of justification as well as other elements from Paul and other Christian writers. Other possible interpretations include J. Christiaan Beker's claim that "the coherent center of Paul's gospel is an apocalyptic center."<sup>26</sup> He suggests that in all cases when Paul's thought is contingent, or connected to historical events as context, the contingent interpretation points to "the imminent cosmic triumph of God" as Paul's coherent, core idea.<sup>27</sup>

E. P. Sanders identifies two starting points for understanding the convictions that governed Paul's life: Jesus Christ is Lord for the salvation of believers, and that Paul was an apostle to the Gentiles.<sup>28</sup> He expands this and says the heart of Paul's soteriology is human participation in God's saving action. Sander's keys to Paul's thought are participation in and union with Christ.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 80-81.

<sup>26</sup> Johan Christiaan Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), xvii.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>28</sup> E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1977), 441-442.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 447, 523.



Beker presents a cosmic version of Paul in which reconciliation involves redemption of all creation at the end of time. Sanders says reconciliation results from participating in Christ as salvation's source. Neither Beker nor Sanders would place reconciliation as the center of Paul's thought; however, the author of this dissertation uses their work as interpretative structures, not as rationale to abandon the word reconciliation altogether. This section of chapter 2 has provided a brief sketch of the issue of determining whether either the Bible or Paul can be said to have a particular central theme. The author of this work believes Paul's central theme and that of the biblical narrative is reconciliation because of the work of Barth and Martin and how reconciliation functions as an interpretive key to biblical texts. Recognition of reconciliation as centrally important supports the work of understanding the character and nature of reconciliation.

### **Issue #3: Enacting Human Reconciliation**

Issue 3 turns to human action because many disagreements about reconciliation arise in human action. Divinely enacted reconciliation is of central concern, but what role do humans play? Ephesians clearly urges reconciliation among people, and urges human acts of unity among Jews and Gentiles; however, scholars reach different conclusions about what reconciliatory actions to take. In the other epistles reconciliation is described clearly as a primary action of God, and these merit careful study. For example, 2 Corinthians 5 has already been mentioned. I have chosen to focus on Ephesians, however, because of its emphasis on human and ethnic reconciliation, and because of the

disagreements about that work. This section compares two scholars who reach different conclusions and urges caution about reaching conclusions about reconciliation too quickly.

If reconciliation is at the center of Paul's thought and the biblical narrative as a whole, how should humans respond? Perhaps they respond to God in thanksgiving for God's action, as previously suggested by Rae, but human response to one another is another issue. Human work toward reconciliation, even as a limited response to what God has done, is full of decisions along the way. Forming a community as a way of living into the grace humans received requires making choices about how they live together. Humans have many different choices in politics and human community in response to God's reconciliation accomplished in Christ.<sup>30</sup> As an example it is helpful to compare and contrast the different positions of Philip Martin and Tet-Lim N. Yee on how the writer of Ephesians approaches reconciliation.

Scholars disagree on the identity of Ephesians' author, based on several factors.<sup>31</sup> The letter contains a number of words and phrases that Paul does not use in his other letters and lacks personal greetings, and these factors are seen as evidence that the letter was not written by Paul because it is atypical of his style. The lack of personal greetings leads some interpreters to conclude the letter was intended for a wider audience than the

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<sup>30</sup> Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, 32.

<sup>31</sup> Ralph P. Martin, *Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon*, Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1991), 3-6.

congregation at Ephesus, and the epistle circulated among several churches. Martin believes it was an open letter, or a “tract dressed up in epistolary form.”<sup>32</sup>

Paul is named in the opening verse, and some writers attribute the letter to Paul, but this is a minority opinion. The letter is open to a number of interpretations because of this ambiguity, and this has led to the divergent opinions about its meaning. A comparison of Martin’s and Yee’s approaches to this letter highlights the challenges in moving from reconciliation concepts to concrete actions.

Ephesians refers to reconciliation (Eph. 2:14-18), but Martin points out that interpreters cannot use other Pauline letters to help interpret the meaning if these verses were not written by Paul. There is no reference to Ephesus in the letter, and someone later applied the title to the manuscript.<sup>33</sup> Who wrote the letter and to whom are important issues in determining its meaning, because the claims of the letter depend on who wrote it and to whom it was addressed.

According to Martin, Ephesians is an exalted prose poem of praise dedicated to the theme of “Christ in his church.”<sup>34</sup> Martin believes this places the document in a period of church history when “old battles having been fought are now regarded as belonging to the past, former tensions between Jewish Christians and Gentile congregations founded by Paul are resolved . . . the engagement between Paul as champion of Gentile liberty in Christ . . . and the Judaizers who insisted on the necessity

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<sup>32</sup> Martin, *Reconciliation*, 157.

<sup>33</sup> Martin, *Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon*, 5.

<sup>34</sup> Martin, *Reconciliation*, 158.

of circumcision . . . is now over and done with.”<sup>35</sup> Martin describes the new situation the Ephesians’ author addresses as “a church predominantly made up of Gentile Christians,” and in this context the danger or challenge was reversed. “It was not that Gentile believers will succumb to Judaizing practices. . . . Rather the threat was that Gentile Christians should want to cast off all association with the Old Testament faith and disown their origins in Israel’s salvation history.”<sup>36</sup> Martin believes Ephesians was written to a broad group of Gentile Christians who became proud of their access to salvation through a non-Jewish path, and the author encouraged them to reclaim their Jewish roots.

According to Yee, loss of Jewish roots was not the problem that prompted the letter. Rather, the problem was hostility toward Gentiles who were excluded from God’s promises based on ethnic divisions. Yee asserts the letter’s audience was also Gentile Christians, but a more limited and specific group. Yee writes, “Jewish attitudes toward the Gentiles had become the main factors which had led to Gentiles being excluded from the purpose of God before the latter had any positive connection with Christ. The Gentiles were excluded from Israel’s God-given blessings on the basis of a particular *ethnos*.”<sup>37</sup> Yee states, “The author of Ephesians has this specific group of persons in mind and speaks to them in the second person.”<sup>38</sup> Yee responds to what he believes is a lack of

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 158-159.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>37</sup> Tet-Lim N. Yee, *Jews, Gentiles and Ethnic Reconciliation: Paul's Jewish Identity and Ephesians* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University, 2005), 31.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 33.

attention to the Jewish perception and attitudes toward Gentiles in Pauline scholarship, particularly scholarship on Ephesians, and the connection between the attitudes and ethnic reconciliation.<sup>39</sup>

The difference between Martin's and Yee's approaches lies in their conclusions about authorship and how they describe the author's vision for reconciliation. Martin claims the author is a disciple of Paul, who knew Paul and added liturgical elements and teachings that developed after Paul's death.<sup>40</sup> According to Yee, this description omits or simplifies obvious Jewish features of the letter that reveal Jewish attitudes toward Gentiles. Yee believes the letter has an overtly Jewish character, and "the letter is of a native (Hellenistic) Jewish perspective."<sup>41</sup> Yee believes it was written by a Christian Jew "who never ceased to be a Jew."<sup>42</sup> According to Yee, the Ephesians letter was written with a "rhetoric of admission,"<sup>43</sup> and the purpose in revealing negative attitudes toward Gentiles is not to reinforce them, but a kind of confession that may facilitate reconciliation.

Yee and Martin reach very different conclusions about Ephesians. According to Martin, the letter suggests a kind of "third race" that is neither Jew nor Gentile.<sup>44</sup> Martin

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

<sup>40</sup> Martin, *Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon*, 4.

<sup>41</sup> Yee, *Jews, Gentiles and Ethnic Reconciliation*, 31.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>44</sup> Martin, *Reconciliation*, 167.

writes, “How far the author believed that in their being reconciled to one God . . . they would be thereby become reconciled to each other . . . is not clear.”<sup>45</sup> He also writes, “When the matter of priority—racial harmony or soteriological relation to God—is pressed, it seems clear that the Ephesians author’s basis is God’s action in Christ the reconciler of sinners.”<sup>46</sup> The main point of Ephesians for Martin is that “It is God’s design to create Gentiles along with converted Israel as one new people . . . a new entity is born that is not a revamped Judaism nor a patched up paganism; it is the new creation.”<sup>47</sup>

Yee argues differently from Martin: “I suggest that one of the main issues . . . that shapes the thought of Ephesians is the author’s concern about the place of the Gentiles within the purpose of God, and that Jewish attitudes toward them should be our starting point.” He states, “There is also no concrete evidence for Gentile triumphalism over ethnic Israel in Ephesians. . . . Rather, the author’s language is of a renewed and expanded Israel/’holy ones’ in which a ‘Gentile Christianity’ cannot be understood itself except in terms of the category of Israel and of Israel’s blessing.”<sup>48</sup>

Martin believes a student of Paul wrote Ephesians and challenges triumphalistic Gentile Christians to hold on to their Jewish roots, but Yee asserts a Jewish Christian confesses the sins of ethnic exclusion to a Gentile audience. The purpose of Ephesians for

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>48</sup> Yee, *Jews, Gentiles and Ethnic Reconciliation*, 221.

Martin is a new race discontinuous from the former ones. For Yee, Ephesians envisions a radically inclusive Judaism that includes Gentiles. Yee states, “[I]t would be wrong to suggest that Ephesians represents the abandonment of Judaism in favor of Gentile triumphalism over ethnic Israel. Rather, we should speak of a Jewish messianic inclusivistic movement which transcends covenantal ethnocentrism.”<sup>49</sup>

These radically different conclusions reveal the complexity involved in the development of a reconciliation model for human action and interpretation of biblical texts that address reconciliation. It is of major significance whether reconciliation develops from a new creation that abandons the past, grows out of the past, or involves inclusion of the past. History would be different if the Christian church had sought to create a “third race” and a new creation. The relationship between Jews and Christians would be different if Christians became part of the continuous and inclusive Israel, rather than including Jews within a triumphalistic notion of the Christian church. Perhaps the relationship between Christians and Jews would be more merciful as a result of such considerations. An answer to the question, “What specific actions do human models of reconciliation require?” depends on the context, which is critical when making decisions about specifics.

#### **Issue #4: Restorative Justice and Mercy**

Two biblical concepts, restorative justice and mercy, lay the groundwork for the discussion of the TRC in South Africa in chapter 4. Carol Dempsey writes about justice

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 228.

in the context of a relational covenant. Her specific work on restorative justice in the Old Testament lays the groundwork for considering the TRC and its use of restorative justice. Mary Douglas' work on Leviticus helps reframe Old Testament priestly work as that of atonement and reconciliation rather than ritual purity. This section also lays the groundwork for the discussion in chapter 4 that mercy is an important concept to the work of the TRC. Restorative justice and mercy help broaden our understanding of God's reconciling action and the connection between God's action and humanity. These two biblical concepts expand the description and understanding of reconciliation.

Carol Dempsey distinguishes between an Old Testament belief in a theology of retribution that influenced the Israelites' conception of justice and a New Testament vision of justice and reconciliation.<sup>50</sup> She identifies views of justice in the Old Testament based on compassion and uses Genesis 4 and Hosea 11 as examples.<sup>51</sup> She describes a retributive view of justice including violence that sometimes liberates, and she spends much time exploring other notions of justice that are more conciliatory. She relies on Micah and states, "[J]ustice and loving-kindness . . . was [*sic*] at the heart of Israel's life."<sup>52</sup>

Dempsey draws the connections between justice and compassion, and she suggests this connection relies on "right relationship" and a relational view of the

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<sup>50</sup> Carol J. Dempsey, *Justice: A Biblical Perspective* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2008), 9, 36.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.



covenant.<sup>53</sup> Dempsey believes the people of Israel “understood that Torah was not only Law but also an attitude and way of life meant to safeguard and sustain covenant relationship.”<sup>54</sup> This understanding is similar to Barth’s description of reconciliation at the center of Christian dogmatics as “the covenant fulfilled in the atonement,” as described previously in this chapter. The notion of a relational covenant in which right relationship leads to reconciliation is a key idea for this dissertation, based on the priestly worldview.

The contrast between retributive and restorative justice is central to the work of the TRC in South Africa. Dempsey’s work highlights a more conciliatory and compassionate notion of justice that leads directly to mercy and reconciliation. The title of Dempsey’s book, *Justice: A Biblical Perspective*, suggests she uses this understanding of a justice of compassion and right relationship as a broad interpretive category. This understanding of justice assumes a close connection between compassion and mercy. Dempsey does not describe reconciliation and mercy as the center of prophetic thought, but her analysis provides a base for that connection and what it implies.

Mary Douglas draws a distinction between two strains of priestly thought and takes a different approach to reconciliation in the biblical material. She identifies tension between the priestly views of Leviticus and Numbers and believes there are two lines in the Aaronic priesthood tradition. One comes from a northern Josephite perspective and

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 101.

another from the southern tradition around Jerusalem reflected in the works of Chronicles and Ezra.

According to Douglas, Ezra redefined Israel so as to include only Judah in the post-exilic period as tensions around the returning exiles led to fear on all sides. Ezra believed a pure Israel included those exiles who returned with him to Jerusalem. Douglas writes, “For Ezra the little group of returned exiles were the only descendants of Jacob inhabiting the country of Yehud . . . the ‘people of Israel.’”<sup>55</sup> By contrast, the earlier priestly view had been broadly inclusive of the twelve tribes of Israel, defined as all the original descendants of Jacob, including Ephraim and Manasseh.

Douglas believes Ezra defined Israel and the priesthood narrowly; therefore, the priesthood came to be the domain of the Levites who abandoned an earlier, more inclusive view:

The priestly editors certainly seem not to have been around when the sages returned after the second destruction of the temple. Political animosity being strong, and the priests having been losers, they had evidently lost credibility and been thrust aside. In the early Second Temple community, through the promotion by Nehemiah and Ezra, the Levites had succeeded to their role.<sup>56</sup>

What Douglas believes was lost with this redefinition of Israel and the priesthood was an understanding of the priestly role and the tabernacle as a place of reconciliation, righteousness, and covenant. Instead, this understanding was replaced by Levitical notions of purity and impurity, ritual cleanliness, and exclusion. Douglas describes the

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<sup>55</sup> Mary Douglas, *Jacob's Tears: The Priestly Work of Reconciliation* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2004), 71.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

more inclusive and older priestly view: “Their work was an urgent, priestly, engagement with the times, a profound response to sin and guilt, and a simple, direct teaching about confession and reconciliation.”<sup>57</sup> This included an understanding of Leviticus as a teaching centered on righteousness and covenant.<sup>58</sup>

In this view, the book of Leviticus is not a legal or forensic rule book about purity, but a microcosmic representation of the tabernacle. Readers of Leviticus can take a mental walk around the tabernacle and reengage the worship practices and sacrifices designed to purify the tent for God and make room for God’s presence. Making room for God is the goal in this interpretation. Instead of making the individual bodies of worshippers pure, as the Levitical rules had emphasized, the goal was to make the body of the tabernacle pure for an encounter with God.

The “mercy seat” is a final image that broadens an understanding of temple activities. The Greek word *hilasterion* (ἱλαστήριον) occurs two times in the New Testament, once meaning “expiation” or “sacrifice of atonement” (Rom. 3:25),<sup>59</sup> and once meaning “mercy seat” (Heb. 9:5).<sup>60</sup> This word connects the saving work of Christ on humans’ behalf, with the holy place or seat that was the center of the Hebrew Day of

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>59</sup> Richard E. Whitaker and John R. Kohlenberger III, *The Analytical Concordance to the New Revised Standard Version of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 525.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 408.

Atonement.<sup>61</sup> The center of both the Jewish and Christian faith, it could be argued, is in the saving work of atonement and expiation of sins.

The mercy seat is located on the top of the ark of the covenant and placed within the tabernacle's innermost "holy of holies." This is the dwelling place of God in the tabernacle of Leviticus, and it is the center of the priestly work. It is also located right at the centerpiece of the Pauline discussion of righteousness, redemption, and atonement in Paul's thought.<sup>62</sup> This provides a remarkable connection between the Old and New Testament understandings of atonement that leads to the basic meaning of reconciliation. Martin discusses this connection but suggests the relationship between the old and new covenants in Romans 3:25 creates "disjunction [rather] than continuity" and that "the rationale of reconciliation is largely bypassed in Romans 3:24ff."<sup>63</sup>

I disagree. An alternative is that this connection between Christ's atoning work and the mercy seat is also a connection between a Christian notion of atonement and the kind of radically inclusive priestly perspective that Douglas suggested in her analysis of Leviticus. It points toward how the mystery of God and sacrifice operates in all work of human reconciliation. A compassionate notion of justice grounded in right relationship develops from understanding the covenant as rooted in the atoning work of God's mercy, rather than vindictive notions of revenge. The work of racial and other forms of human reconciliation rooted in God's merciful atoning heart creates a richer and fuller meaning.

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<sup>61</sup> Martin, *Reconciliation*, 86-87.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 88-89.

The book of Hebrews is an important New Testament tool for understanding Jesus in Levitical and priestly terms because the writer's basic framework is Jewish.<sup>64</sup> Hebrews contains three major images for Christ, including Christ as a high priest who seeks mercy on behalf of humanity.<sup>65</sup> One of the book's central ideas is the role of mercy in redemption (Heb. 2:17, 4:16, 8:12). Hebrews' author describes humanity's proper response: "Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16 NRSV).

### Conclusion

Attempts that establish reconciliation as an interpretive principle for biblical materials should find a balance between human action and God's action that places God's action first. This balance hinges on whether reconciliation is understood as something God accomplishes between God and humanity, or whether reconciliation is understood as primarily a human interaction between people separated and alienated from one another. A short answer is that the two understandings should be balanced. The differences between Martin and Yee demonstrate, however, that the answer is more complex. Reconciliation describes a main theme or center of biblical thought and leads to a more merciful understanding of human and divine reconciliation when God's primary action is affirmed.

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<sup>64</sup> Thomas G. Long, *Hebrews*, Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1997), 2.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

The connection between the prophetic notion of justice and maintenance of “right relationship” within the covenant is fundamental to a more compassionate and merciful notion of justice. Evidence supports a retributive notion of justice in the Old Testament, but there are other perspectives as well. A biblical notion of justice includes these more merciful approaches.

Understanding the priestly function of Christ is crucial to a fuller and more biblical definition of mercy. Douglas Farrow has suggested that reexamining the ascension of Jesus could free Christians to think of Jesus in Levitical terms.<sup>66</sup> This Old Testament lens for viewing the work of Christ helps answer the concerns of contributors to Gunton’s anthology, such as Murray Rae, who reflect Gunton’s words: “Whoever responds in faith to the person and work of Christ does not aid Christ in the priesthood.”<sup>67</sup>

The priestly function points toward mercy because seeking mercy is the priest’s role. Conversely, reconciliation in delicate balance with justice is on an unsteady fulcrum. Reconciliation as the goal only after justice is achieved is a distant goal. Reconciliation as an act of mercy, however, reconnects believers to God’s merciful action, invites them into God’s heart for reconciliation, and Christ’s atoning work on the cross fulfills the covenant as a merciful act more than justice or truth.

Atonement rights the wrongs and sins of the world by mercifully entering into them and sacrificially redeeming them. A focus on mercy keeps God’s atoning act in

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<sup>66</sup> Douglas Farrow, “Ascension and Atonement,” in *The Theology of Reconciliation*, ed. Gunton, 87.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

Christ central, and merciful actions are acts of thanksgiving. Work for justice and the truth could be seen as acts of thanksgiving, but they can also become ends in themselves. Mercy facilitates reconciliation, reflects the heart of God's work in Christ, and points the way for believers. That way includes relationships of mercy between people. Developing and sustaining those relationships will be addresses in what follows.

## CHAPTER 3

### THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Chapter 3 examines four issues similar to those of chapter 2 from a theological rather than a biblical perspective. The issues are these: (a) human and divine aspects of reconciliation, (b) a postmodern challenge to universals and reconciliation as a goal, (c) enacting human reconciliation, and (d) justice out of balance.

#### **Issue #1: Human and Divine Aspects of Reconciliation**

The first section of chapter 3 compares the theology of Thomas Torrance and James Cone, who address the link between human and divine aspects of reconciliation differently. Torrance cautions against a too-easy identification between divine and human action, whereas Cone connects divine and human experience by connecting “the cross and the lynching tree.” Cone displays a well-developed theology of the cross that connects divine and human activity and resists anything easy about the connection. Cone suggests a way to connect human and divine experience to strengthen the motivation to work for human reconciliation.

Caution restricts any easy identification between human action and the action of God in Christ. Thomas Torrance represents this position in *The Mediation of Christ*: “[E]ven in our repenting and believing we cannot rely upon our own response but only



upon the response Christ has offered to the Father in our place and on our behalf.”<sup>1</sup>

Torrance explains the relationship between Divine and human action:

Jesus did not come, therefore, to reorganize the human social and political structures on the surface of Israel’s life. . . . He came rather, to penetrate into the innermost existence of Israel in such a way as to gather up its religious and historical dialogue with God into himself, to make its partnership and its conflict with God his own . . . to strike at the very root of evil in the enmity of the human heart to God.<sup>2</sup>

Torrance urges a focus on Christ as mediator, and the mediatorial role of Christ means that reconciliation is not an act of human imitation of God, or acceptance of God’s love. Rather, it envisions a radical grace, in which only God’s action brings reconciliation. Torrance describes how this can be accomplished:

[I]n becoming incarnate he not only took what is ours to make it his, but thereby really took upon himself our sin and guilt, our violence and wickedness, so that through his own atoning self-sacrifice and self-consecration he might do away with evil and heal and sanctify our nature from within. . . . He did all that precisely as Mediator who brought God and man together in himself, thereby actualizing reconciliation and recreating our humanity.<sup>3</sup>

Torrance is aware of possible criticism: “Jesus Christ in his humanity stands for the fact that ‘all of grace’ does not mean ‘nothing of man’ but the very reverse, the restoration of full and authentic human being in the spontaneity and freedom of human response to the love of God.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, xii.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

Torrance's description of the radical grace of self-sacrifice points to a connection between reconciliation and the priestly action of Christ described in the book of Hebrews, as explained in chapter 2 of this dissertation. For Torrance, merciful self-sacrifice can be described as, "God loves you so utterly and completely that he has given himself for you . . . acted in your place . . . believed for you . . . made your personal decision for you." Therefore Christians can make a "spontaneous joyful response."<sup>5</sup>

Cone displays an understanding of Christ's role as mediator and a theology of atonement in *God of the Oppressed*, and in his more recent writings on the "cross and the lynching tree."<sup>6</sup> Cone's explanation of Paul's words echoes Torrance's themes. Cone writes, "We must keep in mind that when Paul said, 'God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself,' he was not making a sentimental comment on race relations. God's reconciling act centered on the cross, and it reveals the depths of divine suffering for the reconciliation of enslaved humanity. . . . But the victory in Jesus' resurrection is God's liberating act that makes possible human reconciliation with God."<sup>7</sup> In this statement, Cone rejects any attempt to identify God's reconciling act with human actions. Cone also tenaciously defends God's act as a concrete historical reality by affirming that Jesus is who he was, is who he is, and is who he will be: "My assertion that 'Jesus is who he was' affirms not only the importance of Scripture as the basis of Christology. It also stresses the biblical emphasis on Jesus' humanity in history as the starting point of

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 94-95.

<sup>6</sup> Cone, "Strange Fruit."

<sup>7</sup> James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1975), 236.

Christological analysis. We cannot have a human Christ unless we have a historical Christ.”<sup>8</sup> Cone emphasizes historical reality and connects the historical Jesus with the present encounter of Jesus:

Against Pannenberg, who uses the historical Jesus as the sole criterion for Christology, I contend that our interest in Jesus’ past cannot be separated from one’s encounter with his presence in our contemporary existence. . . . I reject Pannenberg’s conclusions about the absence of Christ in our present. . . . I must take my stand against Pannenberg and with my people who say that Jesus has not left us alone but is with us in the struggle for freedom.<sup>9</sup>

Cone concludes, “I realize that my theological limitations and my close identity with the social conditions of black people could blind me to the truth of the gospel. . . . But I contend that there is no universalism that is not particular.”<sup>10</sup>

Cone presents a well-developed theology of atonement. It takes seriously God’s action in the historical person of Christ and God’s continuing action in historical reality. Brian McLaren and Jim Wallis lack Cone’s developed theological language, which will be the topic of section four of this chapter.

In his recent work on the “cross and the lynching tree” James Cone connected forgiveness and mercy. The connection is rooted in a theology of the cross: ‘The cross has been transformed into a harmless, non-offensive religious object that Christians wear around their necks . . . the cross needs to be rescued—that is liberated—from the superficial pieties of Christians.’<sup>11</sup> He adds, “The gospel is not derived from this world

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 118-119.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 120-122.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>11</sup> Cone, “Strange Fruit,” 48.

because it is not a human word. . . . The gospel is in the world but not of the world.”<sup>12</sup>

The offensive “in the world” character of the transcendent cross is the link between the cross, and the more contemporary image of a lynching tree. Cone believes the gospel and the cross cannot be separated:

The cross and the lynching tree need each other: the lynching tree can liberate the cross from false pieties of well-meaning Christians. The crucifixion was a first-century lynching. The cross can redeem the lynching tree, and thereby bestow upon lynched black bodies an eschatological meaning for their ultimate existence. The cross can also redeem white lynchers . . . but not without profound cost, not without the revelation of the wrath and justice of God, which executes divine judgment, with the demand for repentance and reparation, as a presupposition of divine mercy and forgiveness. Most whites want mercy and forgiveness, but not justice and reparations; they want reconciliation without liberation, and resurrection without the cross.<sup>13</sup>

This statement connects forgiveness and mercy and emphasizes the importance of maintaining God’s sacrificial action on humans’ behalf with any claim on mercy.

Language that appropriates the words “justice,” “mercy,” or “truth” in service of a human agenda will always minimize God’s sacrificial action.<sup>14</sup> It is essential, therefore, to develop a theology of atonement that stays connected to concrete human actions and visa versa. It is also why it is essential to maintain the balance of justice, mercy, and truth when talking about reconciliation. A pressing concern in this area is the way the word “justice” is sometimes misused, and the relationship between justice and mercy is an area for further work, which is demonstrated in what follows.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>14</sup> Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 11, 37, 113. Also Rowan Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 1990), 88-92, 188-190.

## **Issue #2: A Postmodern Challenge to Universals and Reconciliation as a Goal**

This section of chapter 3 is divided into two parts. The first part must address postmodernism's challenge to any proposals for a central theme or universal, because this dissertation does precisely the opposite. The section's second part compares and contrasts three theologians who disagree about whether the goal is a theology of reconciliation or liberation. In this context, a goal is similar but not identical to a central theme as discussed in the last chapter. The contrast helps expand the understanding of the nature and character of reconciliation because one of the three theologians, James Cone, chooses liberation, but he leaves open the hope for reconciliation of a sort.

### **Issue #2 Part 1, Universals**

One significant stream of postmodern thought rejects universal answers to the deeper questions of human social, political, and moral life.<sup>15</sup> This includes a rejection of claims about how humans should live that apply universally to all times and places.<sup>16</sup> By rejecting universals, this type of postmodernism challenges the claims that there is a main theme to the Bible and a universal goal to human and divine action. The author of this dissertation claims that reconciliation is the goal of divine and human action and the Bible's main theme; therefore, the challenge of this stream of postmodernism will be addressed. The stream of postmodernism that rejected universals did so because universal

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<sup>15</sup> Heath White, *Postmodernism 101: A First Course for the Curious Christian* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2006), 45-46.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

answers led to failure on moral and humanitarian fronts characterized by the violence of the holocaust and World War II.<sup>17</sup> According to Stephen Toulmin, a similar failure led to the development of modernism, when a sense of chaos and uncertainty developed as the result of the violence of the Thirty Years' War.<sup>18</sup> His thesis is that people sought universal answers because they were uncertain.<sup>19</sup> Toulmin contends that it was chaos and uncertainty, rather than reason and progress, that led to modernity's quest for universals. There is a standard "received view" of modernity, Toulmin writes, in which "success was the outcome of substituting a rationally self-justifying method for the medieval reliance on tradition and superstition."<sup>20</sup> In his view this standard account "misses all the light and shade in a complex sequence of events."<sup>21</sup>

Instead of moving from a time of chaos and superstition into one of prosperity and progress, seventeenth-century modernism moved from a tolerant Renaissance humanism typified by Montaigne, into the chaos and violence of the Thirty Years' War. Toulmin writes, "The longer fighting continued, the less plausible it was that Protestants would admit the 'certainty' of Catholic doctrines, let alone that devout Catholics could concede the 'certainty' of Protestant heresies."<sup>22</sup> Instead of a flight from the chaos of superstition,

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 39-45.

<sup>18</sup> Stephen Edelston Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (New York: Free Press, 1990), 70.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 69-71.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 55.

modernism was the flight into the chaos and anxiety that underlay a desire to establish some kind of certainty. Toulmin writes, “The 17<sup>th</sup>-century philosophers’ ‘Quest for Certainty’ was no mere proposal to construct abstract and timeless intellectual schemas. . . . Instead it was a timely response to a specific historical challenge—the political, social, and theological chaos that embodied the Thirty Years’ War.”<sup>23</sup>

Toulmin stresses the need to return to the kind of humanized rationality that he believes was current before Descartes.<sup>24</sup> He describes the consequences of the current international situation after the breakdown of confidence in the nation-state and a move to a more global world: “The key problem is no longer to ensure that our social and national systems are *stable*: rather it is to ensure that intellectual and social procedures are more *adaptive*.”<sup>25</sup> He contends that adaptation requires a move away from universals. The characteristics he sees in the humanism of a century before Descartes are the same that postmodern critics of modernity call for: particular rather than universal, local rather than general, timely rather than timeless.<sup>26</sup> For example, this move involves a return of case ethics rather than general universal ethical codes.<sup>27</sup> Whether these moves are ancient or postmodern, they lead away from universals. By contrast, I believe that misguided

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 200.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 30-34, 186-190.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 188.

attempts to achieve certainty can be rejected while maintaining some universal human goals such as reconciliation.

Alasdair MacIntyre lends support to the attempt to reclaim universals for a postmodern world. If Descartes led the way into modern thought, Alasdair MacIntyre set the stage for the ethical conversation in response to postmodernism.<sup>28</sup> He rejected both the universalistic claims of the Enlightenment, and the radical relativism of early postmodern thought.<sup>29</sup> Toulmin moves away from universals, but MacIntyre moves toward a kind of universal in the realm of purpose, rather than reasoning. Nancey Murphy describes Toulmin's contribution: "Against the universalists, MacIntyre argues that all ethical thought is indebted to some particular moral tradition—even the Enlightenment tradition of 'traditionless reason!'"<sup>30</sup> The danger inherent in such recognition, however, is moral relativism, that is, that there will be no way to justify a community's or tradition's moral reasoning in the public forum. MacIntyre has complex and ingenious arguments that show it is nonetheless possible to make respectable public claims, showing one tradition of moral reasoning to be superior to its rivals despite the tradition-dependence of moral arguments.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Nancey C. Murphy, Brad J. Kallenberg, and Mark Nation, eds., *Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition: Christian Ethics after MacIntyre* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 1.

<sup>29</sup> Nancey Murphy, "Introduction," in *Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition*, ed. Murphy, Kallenberg, and Nation, 2.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*



Central to MacIntyre's thought is the idea that the modern Enlightenment project was doomed to fail because it lost the concept of *telos*, or purpose.<sup>32</sup> Moral imperatives were based on rational arguments about rights, ends, or universal laws, but not directed toward the purpose of life, or an answer to the question: "What is human life for?"<sup>33</sup> Brad Kallenberg explains that MacIntyre's point relies on Aristotle, and that the Aristotelian tradition provides meaning for good and justice and *telos*. Practices, narratives, and tradition interact and nurture the development of virtues in people.<sup>34</sup>

For MacIntyre, social practices lived out constitute a tradition. Traditions are extended because people tell and hear the narratives of traditions. Through this kind of interaction, virtues become the internal goods of the practices undertaken, and the storied roles in narratives are retold. MacIntyre's biggest problem is his anxiety over the lack of moral communities, and his lack of an answer to the problem he poses.<sup>35</sup> He suggests communities must exist to nurture virtue, but he does not have much hope for their development. Kallenberg believes MacIntyre does not say enough about the *telos* MacIntyre believes is missing from moral and ethical philosophy.<sup>36</sup> Other theologians, however, attempt to describe this *telos*, and they are the topic of the next section.

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<sup>32</sup> Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2007), 62, 243, 273.

<sup>33</sup> Brad J. Kallenberg, "The Master Argument of MacIntyre's *After Virtue*," in *Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition*, ed. Murphy, Kallenberg, and Nation, 11.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

## Issue #2 Part 2 Reconciliation as Goal

Reconciliation is one *telos*, purpose, or goal for human community. When reconciliation is the purpose of human community, members of that community may practice moral discernment within that community and develop practices of reconciliation.<sup>37</sup>

Nancey Murphy suggests three practices in answer to the question: “What is the church for?” She writes that “works of mercy, witness, and worship, provide one answer to the question . . . what must the church do to be the church?”<sup>38</sup> She then adds discipling and discernment. She believes that whatever argument there might be about the essential practices of the church, “the first question to ask with regard to Christian ethics are these: Are we as a community doing all these things well? And are we forming in our members the virtues necessary to sustain these practices?”<sup>39</sup> Murphy finds examples of how community practices sustain virtues in James William McClendon Jr.’s work because he connects the practice of community formation with worship at the Lord’s Table and the practice of reconciliation.<sup>40</sup>

McClendon describes “embodied virtues” and “embodied witness.” He includes in these notion the idea of “presence” which he defines: “Presence is being one’s self for someone else; it is refusing the temptation to withdraw mentally and emotionally; but it is

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<sup>37</sup> Nancey Murphy, “Using MacIntyre’s Method in Christian Ethics,” in *Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition* ed. Murphy, Kallenberg, and Nation, 30-34.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

also on occasion putting your own body's weight and warmth alongside the neighbor, the friend, the lover in need."<sup>41</sup>

For McClendon, embodied witness is the beginning consideration. Embodied witness is situated in communities of "watch care," and these communities center around two practices: the communal meal at the Lord's Table and the practice of forgiveness that leads to reconciliation. McClendon writes that, in the early Christian community, law was interpreted, applied, and adjudicated case by case in a community where ongoing reconciliation was a communal goal.<sup>42</sup> He asserts, "This practice [of community establishment and maintenance] was for them no mere social convenience; the risen Christ was at the center of their meetings; their assemblies were his 'body;' their nourishment was his proffered selfhood."<sup>43</sup> In a community of care and discernment as McClendon describes, case ethics could be authoritative, but avoid the abuses of a supposedly objective universal ethic unjustly applied by an impersonal political power.

The problem remains, however, that it is very difficult to hold to an ethic centered on reconciliation in a world of incredible power and violence. Miraslav Volf addresses that challenge by placing a commitment to reconciliation next to the radical evil of the world's violence. He writes about three cities and states that, "the intrusive images [that] came from Sarajevo, Los Angeles, and Berlin [were] no accident. The cities represented respectively the country of my origin, the location of my residence, and the place I was to

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<sup>41</sup> McClendon, *Ethics*, 116.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

speak. . . . They were connected by a history of vicious cultural, ethnic, and racial strife.”<sup>44</sup>

Volf describes “exclusion of the other” at the heart of this violence: “[S]tories of ethnic cleansing are about the most brutal forms of exclusion, about driving out rather than taking in.”<sup>45</sup> Volf does not deny the importance of being differentiated selves and draws a contrast between differentiation and exclusion. Differentiation involves being both separate from and yet bound to another. If there is no separation, “the other then emerges as in inferior being.”<sup>46</sup> If on the other hand there is no binding, the other emerges as an enemy or a nonentity. Differentiation binds individuals to one another while allowing for appropriate separation; exclusion does neither.

Unlike McClendon’s communitarian approach, Volf focuses on the other and the self, but both writers place reconciliation at the heart of the ethical endeavors. For Volf, embrace is the opposite of exclusion, makes space for the other without coercion, and enters into covenant as into the “open arms of Christ on the cross.”<sup>47</sup> Volf describes the dynamics of exclusion and embrace, and he discusses the difficulty related to reconciliation that embrace implies. The difficulty is violence in a world that abuses the desire to embrace:

But when war is raging – a war with words or with weapons—why should we want to make a movement from the self to the other? . . . What will make us

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<sup>44</sup> Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 14.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

submit to truth about our enemies, especially if it undermines prejudices that sustain our enmity? Nothing will. Nothing, that is, unless in the midst of enmity we refuse to project dehumanizing images on them and are willing to embrace them as friends.<sup>48</sup>

Volf and McClendon believe reconciliation can only be sustained by the resurrection hope that transcends the world's divisions. McClendon describes this through the image of an Easter procession and resurrection as the vindication of justice in the realm beyond this world.<sup>49</sup> Volf appeals to the image of the rider on the white horse in the book of Revelation<sup>50</sup> and holds doggedly to pacifism in this violent world. Volf and McClendon leave vengeance ultimately to God. Volf's position is the more powerful because of his native Croatian identity, and he has witnessed terrible violence. His thesis is, "[W]e should not retaliate since God is perfect noncoercive love." He elaborates the thesis: "Soon you would discover that it takes the quiet of a suburban home for the birth of the thesis that human nonviolence corresponds to God's refusal to judge. In a scorched land, soaked in the blood of the innocent, it will invariably die. And as one watches it die, one will do well to reflect about many other pleasant captivities of the liberal mind."<sup>51</sup> Volf maintains the virtue of reconciliation in a violent world, and presbyteries and congregations can follow his example as they pursue ethical discernment. He envisions reconciliation at the heart of ethics.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 257.

<sup>49</sup> McClendon, *Ethics*, 269-271.

<sup>50</sup> Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 295-299.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 304.

James Cone takes a different direction from Volf and McClendon. Cone wrote a groundbreaking work on black theology in terms of liberation rather than reconciliation.<sup>52</sup> Cone's early work rejects reconciliation as a goal or central theme for theology or ethics, and he refutes a colleague who put reconciliation at the center of black theology: "I simply cannot accept either the theological or the sociological basis of Roberts' analysis of reconciliation. In his concern to make reconciliation a central theme in Black Theology, he not only distorts its Christian meaning, but contradicts his own argument. . . . Either liberation is the foundation of reconciliation or it is not."<sup>53</sup>

Cone's rejection was primarily based on Roberts' misuse of the term reconciliation that Cone believes relegated it to the realm of human action, separated from God's act.<sup>54</sup> Cone understood reconciliation as God's action, rather than a human political arrangement, and he developed a theology of atonement described later in this chapter. Cone comments on 2 Corinthians 5:19: "According to the Bible, reconciliation is primarily an act of God. . . . Reconciliation is not a human quality or potentiality, although it affects human relationships."<sup>55</sup> He describes his rejection of reconciliation:

What is always ruled out is white converts using their experience in our community as evidence against blacks, claiming that reconciliation with whites is possible. . . . Unless whites can get every single black person to agree that reconciliation is realized, there is no place whatsoever for white rhetoric about the reconciling love of blacks and whites.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 229.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 242-243.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

Cone's focus on reconciliation as an act of God puts his rejection of flawed human attempts at reconciliation in perspective. Cone describes eschatology as a present reality<sup>57</sup> but is closer to Volf's eschatological position because both hold out hope for full and complete reconciliation only in God. Cone hopes for reconciliation in the end but rejected integration in 1969 as the pathway forward.<sup>58</sup> His explanation of black power points to issues of identity and human dignity: "The structure of white society attempts to make 'black being' into 'nonbeing' or 'nothingness.'"<sup>59</sup>

Cone connects reconciliation with issues of identity:

[B]lack people must treasure their hostility, bringing it fully into consciousness as an irreducible quality of their identity. . . . Black people can only speak of reconciliation when the black community is permitted to do *its* thing. . . . The history of slavery and Jim Crow and "integration" efforts renders white people virtually incapable of knowing even how to talk to black people as persons. . . . They simply do not know how.<sup>60</sup>

In spite of Cone's hostility in these comments, he concludes, "It is to be expected that many white people will ask: 'How can I, a white man, become black? My skin is white and there is nothing I can do.' Being black in America has very little to do with skin color. To be black means that your heart, your soul, your mind, and your body are where the dispossessed are."<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York: Seabury Press, 1969), 126.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-19, 148.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 144-145.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

John Perkins raises similar identity issues as a black evangelical. Perkins comes from a different theological position than Cone and is a proponent of reconciliation.<sup>62</sup> He writes in *Let Justice Roll Down*, “Everybody needs to feel important—*because he or she is*. But brutality is something like dope. Some people have to have it to confirm themselves. It’s the sickness of the racist.”<sup>63</sup> Perkins committed to reconciliation and integration,<sup>64</sup> but he also promoted boycotts and co-ops as non-violent ways to address the racist structural issues.<sup>65</sup> Perkins writes about blacks lost focus on their work when they addressed structural issues: “[T]hese blacks began pulling away from us. They had an easier way of life in the white missionary community, and it seemed their feelings of being real persons hung on that way of life. Anything that was different, anything that expected them to be persons on their own seemed to frighten them.”<sup>66</sup>

Cone and Perkins hold different perspectives, but both see identity issues as keys to reconciliation. Desmond Tutu discusses these issues in his reflections on South Africa and, like Perkins, suggests humans form their sense of self in community: “[T]his universe has been constructed in such a way that unless we live in accordance with its moral laws we all pay the price for it. One such law is that we are bound together in what

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<sup>62</sup> Elizabeth Perkins, Postscript to *Let Justice Roll Down*, by John Perkins (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1976), 214-215.

<sup>63</sup> John Perkins, *Let Justice Roll Down* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1976), 168.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 88-89, 142, 193.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 138-146, 177.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.



the Bible calls ‘the bundle of life.’ Our humanity is caught up in that of all others. We are human because we belong.”<sup>67</sup>

The author of this dissertation believes issues of identity and human dignity are at the heart of reconciliation, and the pathway toward reconciliation must welcome, nurture, and defend them. The word “reconciliation” cannot be used as to reinforce racial violence and hatred nor make “black being” into “nonbeing.” Healthy identity formation within the relationships of human community is the heart and goal of real reconciliation.

### **Issue # 3: Enacting Human Reconciliation**

Cone’s remarks on reconciliation move discussion from terminology toward concrete human action, but he rejected integration while others embraced it. Cone described New Testament faith grounded in God’s exclusive action to reconcile the world in Christ,<sup>68</sup> but he did not advocate integration efforts, nor reconciliation with whites who allow continued injustice. If Christians care about reconciliation, whether human or divine, should they support efforts at integration? This was an important question for America in the late 1960s.<sup>69</sup> This question is an example of controversies that emerge when Christians move from theology to concrete human action.

Memory is another area of human response to reconciliation. This material lays the groundwork for the issue of trauma addressed in chapter 5. Memory plays an

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<sup>67</sup> Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, 196.

<sup>68</sup> Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 148.

<sup>69</sup> Juan Williams, *Eyes on the Prize: America’s Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965* (New York: Penguin, 1987), 19, 66, 93.

important role in preparation for the work of truth telling, which was the work of both the TRC and the RLPG described in chapters 4 and 5. How do Christians respond to God's reconciling action by choosing to either remember or forget? The contrast between Cone and Volf helps to clarify the issues and the differences between them. Cone refuses to forget oppression and calls others to reject any movement to forget: "We black theologians must refuse to accept a view of reconciliation that pretends that slavery never existed, that we were not lynched and shot, and that we are not presently being cut to the core."<sup>70</sup> He asks rhetorically with Melvin Tolson: "Oh, how can we forget our human rights denied? Oh, how can we forget our manhood crucified? When justice is profaned and plea with curse is met, when freedom's gates are barred, oh how can we forget?" Cone responds to his own question: "The truth of the matter is that we dare not forget."<sup>71</sup> Cone has maintained this position and reiterates it in his writings on the Lynching Tree: "Is it not best forgotten? Absolutely not!"<sup>72</sup>

Volf takes a different view in *The End of Memory*. He begins with an account of his own interrogations in the former Yugoslavia by "Captain G." According to Volf, Volf's mind was enslaved by the abuse he suffered as though Captain G. had "moved into the very household of my [Volf's] mind." Volf wanted to get Captain G. out of his mind, but there was "no way to forget him." Volf describes the topic of his book: "The memory of wrongdoing suffered by a person who desires neither to hate nor disregard but to love

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<sup>70</sup> Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 227.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 227-228.

<sup>72</sup> Cone, "Strange Fruit," 55.

the wrongdoer.”<sup>73</sup> Volf addresses this difficult topic based on his understanding of Christian faith, and he admits that, according to a retributive-justice approach, guilty perpetrators should be punished. He writes, “But if I were to share this view, I would have to give up on a stance toward others that lies at the heart of the Christian faith—love of the enemy, love that does not exclude the concern for justice but goes beyond it.”<sup>74</sup> He argues that it is important to remember and to “remember rightly.” Volf describes what it means to “remember rightly,” and it is less about whether to remember, and more about how to remember.

The implications of Volf’s argument about memory and true justice involve a number of issues: trauma, identity, the unreliability of memory, and how memory can function as both a “sword and a shield.” Events are relived as they are remembered and can cause trauma; Volf doubts that remembering is an unambiguous good because of this dynamic. He points out that memory of wrongs suffered is “infused with pain and suffering”<sup>75</sup> because “[T]o remember suffering endured is to keep one’s wounds open.”<sup>76</sup> This observation leads him to a crucial point for his thesis: ultimately salvation does not lie in memory, but in freedom from the painful memory of past suffering and in what individuals do with those memories.

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<sup>73</sup> Volf, *The End of Memory*, 9.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

Memory relates to identity in that persons are much of what they remember, and they are who they are because of how they remember. Volf asserts, “[I]f salvation lies in the memory of wrongs suffered, it must lie more in what we do with those memories than in the memories themselves. And what we do with our memories will depend on how we see ourselves.”<sup>77</sup> Volf describes it another way: individuals can see themselves as terrorized persons or as persons delivered from suffering.<sup>78</sup> Volf’s treatment of memory and identity links to Cone’s ideas.

The unreliability of memory is directly connected to truth claims. In response to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volf cautions that memories can be distorted. The TRC in South Africa involved people telling the truth publically about what they experienced as acts of justice. Volf says that, “If a victim’s telling of truthful stories is a form of justice, then a victim’s skewing of painful memories must be a form of injustice.”<sup>79</sup> Volf concludes, therefore, that victims have a moral obligation “to act justly by remembering truthfully.”<sup>80</sup>

Volf uses the above observations to support the claim that memory can be a shield against evil because evil thrives when it is concealed, but languishes when exposed. He says, however, as victims seek to protect themselves they may become perpetrators. He

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 55.

concludes, “So easily does the protective shield of memory morph into a sword of violence.”<sup>81</sup>

Volf moves from the question of how an individual remembers accurately and truthfully in this life, to the promise of non-remembrance in the world to come. He claims there is a proper way to forget. He points out the close association of forgiving and forgetting in Christian tradition, through Scriptures such as: “I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more” (Jer. 31:34b).<sup>82</sup>

The key to understanding Volf is to understand that forgetting, or as he describes it “not-coming-to mind,” is a characteristic of the world to come more than of this world. He draws a distinction between human actions in this world, and in the world to come. He writes, “[W]e should not argue: ‘Since memories of evil will not come to mind in the world to come, we can responsibly give up on such memories now.’ . . . ‘We take this journey partially and provisionally here and now when we forgive and reconcile.’”<sup>83</sup> Volf maintains an eschatological perspective, as he did in *Exclusion and Embrace*:<sup>84</sup> “The reason for our non-remembrance of wrongs will be the same as its cause: Our minds will be rapt in the goodness of God and in the goodness of God’s new world, and the memories of wrongs will wither like plants without water.”<sup>85</sup> The way two people

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 150-151.

<sup>84</sup> Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 275-306.

<sup>85</sup> Volf, *The End of Memory*, 214.

remember, and the way they recount a wrong, can vary, and when two people share a commitment to reconciliation their memories can differ. The complex work of responding to God's reconciling action with concrete human action involves assessing and sharing memories in appropriate ways.

Another area of human response to reconciliation involves community formation. McClendon's ethic is communitarian and this section of the chapter explores how to create "watch care" communities that McClendon encouraged. McClendon described the role of forgiveness, community formation, and the sharing of a covenant meal. McClendon writes, "[F]orgiveness is this: one takes another's life up into one's own, making the offender a part of one's own story in such a way that the cost of doing so overcomes the power of the injury."<sup>86</sup> McClendon connects forgiveness to mercy in this statement.<sup>87</sup> Merciful forgiveness is a crucial human practice in the establishment of trusting communities necessary for "watch care."

Parker Palmer describes a community similar McClendon's "watch care" groups in *A Hidden Wholeness*, and he urges the formation of "circles of trust" as a form of community.<sup>88</sup> Palmer is an educator and community organizer, and describes

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<sup>86</sup> McClendon, *Ethics*, 229.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

<sup>88</sup> Parker J. Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey toward an Undivided Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 71-89.

communities found in the Quaker practice called a “clearness committee”<sup>89</sup> or “circles of trust.”<sup>90</sup>

In these circles, individuals can speak their truth “to the center of the circle” in an environment of trust. Ultimately, truth is more communal than individual, and Palmer opines,

Truth in a circle of trust resides neither in some immutable external authority nor in the momentary convictions of each individual. It resides between us, in the tension of the eternal conversation, where the voice of truth we think we are hearing from within can be checked and balanced by the voices of truth others think they are hearing.<sup>91</sup>

Forming healthy community also involves a balance between self and the other, and this is a theme in the writings of Edwin Friedman and Parker Palmer. Friedman works with family systems theory and writes about leadership, and he describes a balance between “togetherness” and individuality that is necessary for healthy community in which his key concept is “self-differentiation.”<sup>92</sup> He urges leaders to seek clear self-definitions while understanding their position within human systems, whether these are families or organizations. He believes a clear self-definition brings health to relationships with others. Palmer describes something similar to Friedman’s concept, but he focuses on communities more than individuals as he describes his “circles of trust.” Palmer believes

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<sup>89</sup> Parker J. Palmer, *To Know As We Are Known: Education As a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 82.

<sup>90</sup> Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness*, 22.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>92</sup> Edwin H. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*, New ed., ed. Margaret M. Treadwell and Edward W. Beal (New York: Seabury Books, 2007), 2-3.

the goal of the “circle of trust” is to provide space for the “soul to show up.”<sup>93</sup> The goal of the circle is to define the self more clearly and enable healthier relationships. Friedman also emphasizes healthy relationships, but he focuses more on pathology as a starting point. He describes pathology:

Since the emergence of the earliest self-producing life forms, a critical principle of evolution has been that as new forms develop, life evolves in the direction of its strengths by preserving a balance between togetherness and individuality. The herding instinct in a chronically anxious family upsets that balance, however, by encouraging the force for togetherness to smother the force for individuality.<sup>94</sup>

Friedman focuses more than Palmer on the diagnosis of the pathology, but they describe a similar pathology in human relationships rooted in anxiety<sup>95</sup> and without a “quick-fix.”<sup>96</sup> They both believe the way forward into health is appropriate relationships between self and others. The difference is that Palmer thinks healthy community is necessary for the development of healthy selves, but Friedman stresses that a clear self-definition is necessary for healthy community.

The difference between them is exemplified by their descriptions of empathy. Friedman has no time for empathy; Palmer encourages it. Palmer urges empathy in relationships: “The relationships of the self require not only sensory evidence of the other; not only logical linkages of cause and effect; they also require inner understanding of the other, which comes from empathy; a sense of the other’s value, which comes from

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<sup>93</sup> Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness*, 22.

<sup>94</sup> Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 66-67.

<sup>95</sup> Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness*, 14-15; Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 2-3.

<sup>96</sup> Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness*, 22.



love.”<sup>97</sup> Friedman writes on the other hand, “[S]ocietal regression has too often perverted the use of empathy into a disguise for anxiety, a rationalization for the failure to define a position, and a power tool in the hands of the ‘sensitive.’”<sup>98</sup> Friedman believes pathology develops when people focus too much on empathy and not enough on responsibility: “I say this knowing that empathy has achieved such inviolable, holy status in the thinking of some that to even question its value will be considered as irreverent, if not sacrilegious, as denying the Trinity or cursing the Land of Israel.”<sup>99</sup> For Friedman, a step precedes empathy that “regulate[s] the systemic anxiety in the relationship system . . . and . . . inhibit[s] the invasiveness of those factions which would preempt its agenda. After that, they can afford to be empathetic.”<sup>100</sup> He continues, “This is not to say that . . . there is no hope for reconciliation, recovery, recuperation. But empathy alone will never promote the self-organization necessary.”<sup>101</sup>

Palmer, in contrast, believes “circles of trust” are rooted in basic ideas:

[First,] the journey toward inner truth is too taxing to be made alone. [Second,] the path is too deeply hidden to be travelled without company: finding our way . . . requires the kind of discernment that can happen only in dialogue. [Third,] the destination is too daunting to be achieved alone: we need community to find the courage to venture into the alien lands.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Palmer, *To Know As We Are Known*, 53.

<sup>98</sup> Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 133.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>102</sup> Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness*, 26.

Palmer and Friedman emphasize courage in the work of reconciliation. Friedman urges a spirit of adventure similar to the early explorers who proved the earth was round by sailing toward the unknown.<sup>103</sup> Palmer suggests that a divided self can only be healed by the courage that comes from healthy community that is gathered apart from the rest of life.

#### **Issue #4: Justice out of Balance**

This dissertation's author believes misunderstandings about theology produce division and frustrated attempts at reconciliation. The words "justice," "mercy," and "truth" can be used to support many agendas and mean different things to different people. The following examples demonstrate how the word "justice" can be used in ways that increase tension rather than facilitate reconciliation. Attention to theological language may strengthen the positions of those who work for justice.

Janny Scott wrote an article, "In Speech, Obama Chooses Reconciliation over Rancor" for the *New York Times*. Scott asserts, "Mr. Obama invoked the fundamental values of equality of opportunity, fairness, social justice. He confronted race head-on, then reached beyond it to talk sympathetically about the experiences of the white working class and the plight of workers stripped of jobs and pensions." Scott describes how Obama responded to Jeremiah Wright after the media quoted Wright making "ferocious

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<sup>103</sup> Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 32.

charges about white America.” Scott writes, “He condemned Mr. Wright’s remarks as divisive but at the same time embraced him as family.”<sup>104</sup>

Sean Hannity’s interview of Jeremiah Wright aired on “Hannity and Colmes” on Fox News Network, and Wright said,

WRIGHT: If you're not going to talk about theology in context, if you're not going to talk about liberation theology that came out of the '60s, (INAUDIBLE) black liberation theology, that started with Jim Cone in 1968, and the writings of Cone, and the writings of Dwight Hopkins, and the writings of womanist theologians, and Asian theologians, and Hispanic theologians. . . .

HANNITY: Reverend, I've got to get this in.

WRIGHT: Then you can talk about the black value system.

(CROSSTALK)

HANNITY: I'm going to tell you this. Listen . . .

WRIGHT: Do you know liberation theology, sir? Do you know liberation theology?

HANNITY: I studied theology; I went to a seminary. And I studied Latin.

WRIGHT: Do you know black liberation theology?

HANNITY: I'm very aware of what you're calling black liberation, but let me get my question out.

(CROSSTALK)

WRIGHT: I said, do you know black theology?

HANNITY: Reverend, I'm going to give you a chance to answer my question.

WRIGHT: How many of Cone's books have you read? How many of Cone's book have you read?

HANNITY: Reverend, Reverend?<sup>105</sup>

As if following Wright’s lead, radio personality Terry Gross investigated black liberation theology, and interviewed Cone on “Fresh Air.” Cone replied to her question:

I would define black liberation theology as mainly a theology that sees God primarily as concerned with the poor and weak in society, and because it comes

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<sup>104</sup> Janny Scott, “In Speech, Obama Chooses Reconciliation Over Rancor” *New York Times*, March 19, 2008, A14.

<sup>105</sup> Sean Hannity and James Cone, “Obama’s Pastor: Rev. Jeremiah Wright,” Hannity and Colmes, Fox News, March 1, 2007, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,256078,00.html> (accessed April 17, 2008).

out of the black community we call it black liberation theology. But it is not just for black people in a narrow sense of the term. It is concerned about the gospel for everybody, and if everybody is for the gospel in this society then they are for the poor and weak, and if you are for the poor and weak you are also concerned about liberation of black people. So black theology is an understanding of the gospel that sees justice for the poor as the very heart of what the Christian gospel is about.<sup>106</sup>

Cone's response connects justice and black liberation theology to Wright. Justice is at the heart of the biblical prophetic voice,<sup>107</sup> but its proclamation can upset some people if the word "justice" is misused. A basic question is: Was it the way Wright proclaimed justice, or was it his vision of justice, that caused the tension?

Cone answered a question asked by the author of this dissertation at a conference on religion and violence that helps frame the Wright media frenzy and the possible theological implications behind it.<sup>108</sup> The author asked, "Is there an inherent tension between justice and reconciliation, or is it possible to have both at the same time?" Cone said,

I can tell you one thing, there's not going to be reconciliation without justice. It would only be on the terms of those who had power. So the white South thought they were doing fine, until Martin Luther King and all of the other black people down there said they were not doing fine. So I think genuine reconciliation is possible only with justice, but at the same time both are in tension with each other. But you can't get reconciled until you get liberated.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> James Cone, "Black Liberation Theology: In Its Founder's Words," Fresh Air, NPR, March 31, 2008, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=89236116> (accessed April 17, 2008).

<sup>107</sup> Dempsey, *Justice*, 3.

<sup>108</sup> James Cone, "West Coast Questions," An Interfaith Dialogue on Religion and Violence, 38<sup>th</sup> Trinity Institute National Theological Conference, Trinity Episcopal Church Wall Street, January 22-23, 2008, [http://www.trinitywallstreet.org/calendar/index.php?event\\_id=41561](http://www.trinitywallstreet.org/calendar/index.php?event_id=41561) (accessed April 17, 2008).

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

Cone discusses the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and says he thinks Americans might need a similar kind of Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the United States, and he urges his conviction: “You have to resist separation.” The interviewer, Mark Richardson, responds, “It’s a risk. We do need to work on this truth and reconciliation, we need to be able to talk to each other across boundaries, and we worry about hurting feelings and anger, but it’s a risk we need to take.”

Cone emphasizes Robinson’s theme of risk:

It’s indispensable. You will never get reconciliation—the beloved community—without communication back and forth between people who have been alienated from one another . . . What I am interested in is finding ways for people who have been separated to come together. If King means anything he means reconciliation for all the people of the earth.<sup>110</sup>

With this comment, Cone moves from an emphasis on justice to an emphasis on reconciliation, and reconciliation includes the notion of mercy, as demonstrated by Cone’s reference to the love of Christ. If a balance between justice and mercy can occur, this might be it. But the balance starts with tension, as Cone describes it:

It’s the people in power who don’t want to talk about it. Notice, whites don’t want to talk about it. And if you start telling the truth about it, then they say, you’re being violent, you’re being angry, you’re separating us, you’re making me feel guilty. You can’t talk about that kind of violence without making people a little bit upset, no matter how you search the English language for the right words to express it.

I’m talking about Christians now. They say God was in Christ, reconciling the World to God’s-self. Quoting Paul . . . That’s what they say. Why aren’t Christians embodying the reconciliation they say Christ accomplished in the cross and the resurrection. Why don’t we embody that in our life? That’s why I say that if Christian community comes together for any other reason that’s not for justice, you better question.

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

Interviewer: “So you’re making sure that we never separate the love of Christ from the justice?”

Cone: “That’s right.”<sup>111</sup>

Early in the interview, Cone reflects on the meaning of the cross and connects the cross and the resurrection. Robinson asks: “So the cross itself is really only hope if it remains attached to an account of resurrection?” Cone responds,

Yes, It’s hope out of what seemed like defeat. That’s why you need the lynching tree. If you can get hope out of lynching—if you can get hope out of black people being strung up on trees - then that’s real. If you’ve got some ‘pie in the sky hope’ that’s not real—If you can live in history and still hope, then you can see the cross as the flip side of the resurrection.<sup>112</sup>

If Cone can connect historical reality to the life of God and Christ, he may identify what brings healing to the fractured conversations in the church and world about justice, mercy, and truth. Engaging in these conversations as active theology could bring new life and reconciliation to many relationships within American culture and the church.

This dissertation’s author believes one important outcome of balance among justice, mercy, and truth in theological language is enhanced relationship. Christians talk about theology, convictions, and actions in a way that depends upon relationships with others. If they have a passion for justice, they may feel called to talk and theologize about it, and urge others to act with them. McLaren and Wallis receive notoriety for how they motivate others to work for justice in the world. Some conservative Christians criticize

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

McLaren for his discussion about “progressive evangelical Christianity,”<sup>113</sup> but McLaren seems to think the negative reactions stem from the differences between his view of God and theirs. His thinking creates a false dichotomy that divides rather than heals. One practical outcome of this dissertation is encouragement of a fuller, deeper, and more nuanced conversation about theology and social action.

McLaren writes in *Everything Must Change*, “Today, for the first time I see what Jesus meant by the kingdom of God. I see that it’s about changing this world, not just escaping it and retreating into our churches. If Jesus’ message of the kingdom of God is true, then everything must change.”<sup>114</sup> The “kingdom of God” is McLaren’s centerpiece for this book and *The Secret Message of Jesus*.<sup>115</sup> McLaren focuses on the kingdom of God as a core gospel message, and he urges readers that that the kingdom applies to more than the end of time and individual believers saved in heaven; it applies to all of creation.

McLaren establishes a false dichotomy that leads to a weak soteriology. A stronger soteriology, or doctrine of salvation, might strengthen the book and lead to a better way of building human relationships in the church, especially across theological divides. McLaren writes that there are “two views of God;” however, he also writes, “Of

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<sup>113</sup> Brian D. McLaren, *Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crises, and a Revolution of Hope* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 2.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>115</sup> Brian D. McLaren, *The Secret Message of Jesus* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 117-128.

course, there aren't really just two, . . . [they are] two ends of a broadening spectrum."<sup>116</sup>

He writes,

[T]he emerging view sees Jesus as a medicinal cure to a lethal infection that plagues humanity . . . the conventional view sees Jesus primarily as the legal solution to a capital infraction against God. . . . The emerging view sees God's primary focus as the transformation and salvation of humanity in history, the conventional view . . . dreams of a better afterlife "by and by" rather than motivating and mobilizing them to transform the world here and now.<sup>117</sup>

Following this characterization, McLaren connects salvation and justice: "Jesus replaces salvation by win-lose competition, with salvation through seeking justice. . . .

Competition won't save us, Jesus is saying. Justice will."<sup>118</sup> Herein lies one of my main objections to McLaren's theological language: it is not justice that saves in a theology of atonement; it is mercy known in God's love and self-sacrificial grace.<sup>119</sup>

McLaren urges readers to "join God in the healing of the world through love and the pursuit of justice and the common good."<sup>120</sup> McLaren motivates people to work for justice, healing, and the common good, but the author of this dissertation believes this identification between salvation and human work for justice, and the previously described false dichotomy, lead in the wrong theological direction. Jonathan Wilson presents a soteriology in *God So Loved the World* in response to the question: "What are you going

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<sup>116</sup> McLaren, *Everything Must Change*, 77-78.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>119</sup> Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 11, 37, 113. Williams connects mercy and sacrifice in: Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge*, 17.

<sup>120</sup> McLaren, *Everything Must Change*, 295.



to make of the kingdom of God?”<sup>121</sup> Wilson writes, “What we must always keep in mind is that we do not win the victory or bring the kingdom; rather, we inherit the victory and receive the kingdom.”<sup>122</sup> He adds, “In our words and deeds, the kingdom of Jesus Christ continues today, not because of our achievement but because of our participation in the kingdom of God. . . . God graciously initiates the presence of the kingdom, but our participation in it makes the kingdom actual here and now.”<sup>123</sup>

Jim Wallis writes about justice and in *The Great Awakening* he calls to Christians to participate in “justice revivals.”<sup>124</sup> Wallis writes about Paul’s words: “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself” (2 Cor. 5:19), but he misses the point Barth, Torrance, and Cone understand: reconciliation is primarily God’s act. Wallis writes,

“In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself” and is now, “entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.” We are therefore “ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us,” and we are literally commanded to “be reconciled to God,” which also entails being reconciled to one another (2 Corinthians 5:19-20). This is not a suggestion but a command from God, “Be reconciled!”

Certainly all this is extremely challenging and, “from a human point of view,” many would say completely unrealistic. Yet without a doubt this is the vision that God expects us to carry out.<sup>125</sup>

Wallis admits the impossibility of this from a human point of view, but he seems to suggest that reconciliation is a human activity Christians can accomplish.

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<sup>121</sup> Jonathan R. Wilson, *God So Loved the World: A Christology for Disciples* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 9.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>124</sup> Wallis, *The Great Awakening*, 308.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

The same is true of Wallis's use of the word "justice," and he writes about justice: "God is creating something new that will be characterized by justice, joy, and hope and invites us to join in."<sup>126</sup> Wallis uses the phrases "join in" and "join a movement" repeatedly.<sup>127</sup> In one place he describes relationship to Jesus as if it is primarily about joining Wallis' club or movement. He says, "Individuals are called to Christ, to join the new order of the kingdom of God, to enter into an alternative community living by its new values, to engage the world around critical and specific issues of injustice . . . to seek the common good."<sup>128</sup> Wallis also uses language about joining a movement and the experience of being born again: "Being born again was not meant to be just a private religious experience . . . but rather the prerequisite for joining a new and very public movement—the Jesus and kingdom of God movement. . . . It is far more than a call to a new inner life, or a rescue operation from heaven."<sup>129</sup>

Wallis calls Christians to do something about their faith, and to address injustice and the evils and greed that create poverty. His call emanates from the sense that too often Christians seem not to care about "social justice."<sup>130</sup> In the midst of Wallis' revival meeting, however, is a missed opportunity to let Jesus be Jesus, when he uses this

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 238.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 61, 78, 238, 296.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 1.

language. It might sound like being born again means joining the Jim Wallis justice revival movement.

A former steering committee member of one of Wallis' "Justice Revivals" makes a similar point in "Bridging the Great Divide." Lydia Bean writes, "We need to call people to make a concrete commitment to God, not just our campaign. When I was on a steering committee helping Sojourners plan a 'Justice Revival' in Columbus Ohio, we spent a lot of time asking 'So, what's our altar call?'"<sup>131</sup> She continues,

Now, on the religious left, the altar call can sound something like this: "Hey stop driving that SUV and repent! Believe the good news of the Democratic platform! Buy a compact car and call you senators about poverty issues—because Jesus is a liberal!

It's true that God despises worship without justice (check out Amos 5:21-24) But justice without worship is unsustainable—we'll easily become consumed with self-righteousness and bitterness. We can't do it on our own. That's where the Holy Spirit comes in. When people give their lives to Jesus, they receive the Holy Spirit—and that changes what is possible in the material world.

That's why we need to invite people to commit their lives to Jesus – and then invite them to carry out specific works of justice and mercy to publically express that commitment.<sup>132</sup>

Bean demonstrates her theological sensitivity when she includes acts of mercy with acts of justice in her article. The balance between justice and mercy is the issue, and as her article makes clear, misunderstandings arise and agendas dominate when these are out of balance.

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<sup>131</sup> Lydia Bean, "Bridging the Great Divide," *Sojourners*, March 2009, 24.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

## **Conclusion**

Mercy should reemerge in the liberal Christian community's language. This is equally important in the emerging liberal evangelical church represented by McLaren and Wallis, and the reformed mainline, liberal Protestant denominations such as the Presbyterian Church (USA). If Christians can reclaim the word mercy in their theological dialogue and can let justice, mercy, and truth be more fully understood, they may experience and live the reconciliation accomplished by God in Christ. They may also help heal the divide between liberal and conservative Christians. One important guidepost is the work done by Desmond Tutu and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, which this dissertation describes in chapter 4. The connection between truth-telling and identity issues explored in this chapter will frame that discussion. This author began to explore reconciliation at the divide between liberals and conservatives as described in the introduction. The theologians in this chapter moved reconciliation to center stage. Because of this re-centering I was more open to the idea of mercy in the work of the TRC and in my own ministry setting.

This chapter has shown that despite the resistance by some postmodern thinkers to universals, reconciliation can describe the goal of human community if individuals do not use reconciliation as an excuse to deny others' pain. Instead, reconciliation involves the recognition and healing of others' pain. This healing takes place in communities that nurture and defend human dignity and healthy identity formation. Human community should not be too easily identified with divine community, but it is important to

remember that Christian attempts at human community are more than convenient social arrangements; they are a glimmer of what God intends for humanity.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE MODEL IN SOUTH AFRICA

Section 1 of this chapter addresses an issue that has been second in the list of four in the past several chapters. Reconciliation was of central importance in South Africa and is essential to understanding what happened there. The second section of this chapter will examine the issue of the link between human and divine reconciliation by exploring the roles mercy and forgiveness played in the truth and reconciliation process. The chapter considers human actions and their link to words and concepts in two sections: one on justice and truth and the other on storytelling. The final section will describe the pieces of a model for reconciliation.

#### **Section #1: The Goal of Reconciliation**

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established when the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act 34 was adopted on December 15, 1995.<sup>1</sup> Seventeen commissioners appointed by President Mandela headed the TRC. The hope was that the TRC would provide what Archbishop Tutu described as a “third way” between the judicial trials of the kind Europe experienced after World War II in the

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<sup>1</sup> Audrey R. Chapman and Hugo Van der Merwe, “Introduction: Assessing the South African Transitional Justice Model,” in *Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: Did the TRC Deliver?* Pennsylvania Studies in Human Rights, ed. Audrey R. Chapman and Hugo Van der Merwe (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2008), 8.

Nuremberg trials, and another unacceptable option of “national amnesia” in which the abuses of apartheid were ignored and South Africans “let bygones be bygones.”<sup>2</sup> The TRC’s members decided to offer amnesty to criminal perpetrators if they told the complete truth about their crimes and their crimes were politically motivated. There was no blanket amnesty for everyone in the country or a judicial solution; instead, amnesty was linked to truth.

The TRC process in South Africa fell short of expectations, for reasons that will be explained. As previously stated, however, an analysis of both the inadequacies and the successes will contribute to a revised model, and there is much that can be learned from the TRC’s mistakes as well as its triumphs. Critiques of the TRC process cover the ten-year span between the completion of the hearings and the present. The reparations process remained incomplete during that period, and the failure began soon after the TRC process ended. According to Lyn Graybill, when Thabo Mbeki succeeded Nelson Mandela in office in 1999, serious talk of a wealth tax from apartheid’s beneficiaries ceased, and Mbeki’s administration decided it could afford token payments of only 3,000 rand per victim.<sup>3</sup> This angered many who suffered while struggling for liberation, and as of 2008, the reparations process remained incomplete and ignored by the government.<sup>4</sup> In

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<sup>2</sup> Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, 27.

<sup>3</sup> Lyn S. Graybill, *Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: Miracle or Model?* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2002), 152.

<sup>4</sup> Timothy Sizwe Phakathi and Hugo van der Merwe, “The Impact of the TRC’s Amnesty Process on Survivors of Human Rights Violations,” in *Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa*, ed. Chapman and van der Merwe, 136; Audrey R. Chapman and Hugo van der Merwe, “Did the TRC Deliver?” in *Truth and*

2009 the government changed hands with the election of Jacob Zuma as president, but there is no indication that reparations will ever be completed. In addition, violence and crime have continued to challenge the country and reports of xenophobic violence filled the media in 2008.<sup>5</sup> These realities complicate and expand what observers can learn from the TRC experience in South Africa. They highlight the cost that is often attached to merciful actions, especially when the cost is not acknowledged or freely chosen. Like “justice,” the word “mercy” can be used to support a political or social agenda.

It is unclear, however, that the reparations problems stem from TRC actions because delivering reparations was a state responsibility, not the responsibility of the TRC.<sup>6</sup> The TRC mandate was discovery of the truth about apartheid and its abuses, and reconciliation promotion.<sup>7</sup> The failure of subsequent governments to follow the TRC’s lead cannot be blamed on Tutu, Mandela, and others who led the country through the remarkable, non-violent transition of power.

One of the lessons is that human attempts at reconciliation remain imperfect, but this was clear before the TRC process began. Nevertheless, since the TRC completed its work in 1998, numerous other countries have adopted the South Africa model.<sup>8</sup> The

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*Reconciliation in South Africa: Did the TRC Deliver?* Pennsylvania Studies in Human Rights, ed. Audrey R. Chapman and Hugo Van der Merwe (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2008), 265.

<sup>5</sup> Philip Gourevitch, “Struggles,” *The New Yorker*, June 9, 2008, [http://www.newyorker.com/talk/comment/2008/06/09/080609taco\\_talk\\_gourevitch](http://www.newyorker.com/talk/comment/2008/06/09/080609taco_talk_gourevitch) (accessed November 17, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Chapman and van der Merwe, “Introduction,” 12.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Chapman and van der Merwe, Preface to *Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa*, ed. Chapman and van der Merwe, vii.



lessons of the South African experience are many in spite of the failures, and the lessons come from the successes and failures. These lessons constitute the building blocks of a model that I hope will transfer to other contexts such as the ministry in Portland, OR. One thing is clear about the TRC process: it established the central importance of reconciliation in South Africa. Those who longed for reconciliation and those who saw no need for it could not ignore the TRC, which is central to South Africa's history. Reconciliation was the goal of this historic endeavor.

## **Section #2: Being Merciful in Response to God's Mercy**

When Desmond Tutu describes his experiences on the TRC in South Africa, he often uses the word forgiveness and states that there is no future without it.<sup>9</sup> More recently, Tutu has described God as a God of compassion and grace.<sup>10</sup> Compassion, forgiveness, healing, and grace comprise what this chapter describes as the South African experience of mercy. Compassion, forgiveness, healing, and grace are expressions of mercy. The writers discussed in the previous chapter used the word "mercy" less frequently than words "justice" or "truth," and Tutu used these expressions of mercy frequently. In addition, as chapter 2 demonstrated, biblical writers rely on mercy to describe God's reconciling action in Christ.

In 1982, the government of South Africa and the administration of P.W. Botha investigated the South African Council of Churches (SACC). Tutu testified during this

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<sup>9</sup> Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*.

<sup>10</sup> Desmond Tutu and Douglas Abrams, *God Has a Dream: A Vision of Hope for Our Time* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 11-13, 111.

investigation and gave evidence of the theology of the SACC. He connected God's compassion and concern for the plight of humanity with God's mercy in his testimony:

The God we worship does care that people die mysteriously in detention. He is concerned that people are condemned to a twilight existence as nonpersons. . . . I will show this from the Bible. I might add that if God did not care about these and similar matters, I would not worship him, for he would be a totally useless God. Mercifully, he is not such a God.<sup>11</sup>

In the same testimony, Tutu described atonement as God's action to expiate sin and reconcile humanity, instead of punishing sin. This connection between compassion and atonement is evidence of Tutu understanding of God's merciful, priestly action in Christ:

It is a perverse exegesis that would hold that the story of the Tower of Babel is a justification for racial separation, a divine sanction for the diversity of nations. It is to declare that divine punishment of sin had become the divine intention for humankind. That is a position the Bible would not support. The entire situation at the end of the story of the Tower of Babel cried out for reconciliation, for atonement. . . .

The story of the Bible could be said to be the story of God's movement, God's mission to restore the harmony, the unity, the fellowship, the communion, the community which were there at the beginning. . . .

This is the divine movement and activity in which the SACC is involved as it prays and works for the unity of the churches and humankind . . . And so God sent his son to effect reconciliation to bring about the at-one-ment that would achieve the peace, justice, friendliness, compassion, wholeness which were his intention for his creation from the beginning. St. Paul says, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19). . . .

And in St. John's gospel is to be found what tradition speaks of as the high priestly prayer of our Lord as recorded in chapter 17. The heart of the prayer is the petition that his followers will be one with a unity that reflects the unity that subsists between the Father and the Son.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Desmond Tutu, *The Rainbow People of God: The Making of a Peaceful Revolution*, ed. John Allen (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 55-56.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 61-62.

Through this passage, Tutu asserts that God first enacted reconciliation on behalf of humanity out of a sense of mercy and compassion. The human activity of the SACC, therefore, was an attempt to give thanks for that divine activity.

Tutu painted a picture of healing and restoration when he explained the idea of restorative justice that lay behind the TRC approach. This dissertation includes both healing and restoration in its definition of mercy. Tutu wrote:

One might go on to say that perhaps justice fails to be done only if the concept we entertain of justice is retributive justice, whose chief goal is to be punitive, so that the wronged party is really the state, something impersonal, which has little consideration for the real victims and almost none for the perpetrator.

We contend that there is another kind of justice, restorative justice, which was characteristic of traditional African jurisprudence. Here the central concern is not retribution or punishment. In the spirit of *ubuntu*, the central concern is the healing of breaches, the redressing of imbalances, the restoration of broken relationships, a seeking to rehabilitate both the victim and the perpetrator. . . . Thus we would claim that justice, restorative justice, is being served when efforts are being made to work for healing, for forgiving, and for reconciliation.

The effect of amnesty is as if the offense had never happened since the perpetrator's court record relating to that offense becomes *tabula rasa*, a blank page. . . . That is indeed a very high price to ask victims to pay. . . . Our freedom has been bought at a very great price.<sup>13</sup>

Marietta Jaeger, one of the victims who testified before the TRC and chose to forgive the man who kidnapped her daughter, connected her decision to forgive with mercy and compassion:

I had finally come to believe that real justice is not punishment but restoration, not necessarily to how things used to be, but to how they really should be. In both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures whence my beliefs and values come, the God who raises up from them is a God of mercy and compassion, a God who seeks not to punish, destroy, or put us to death, but a God who works unceasingly to help

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<sup>13</sup> Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, 54-55.

and heal us, rehabilitate and reconcile us, restore us to richness and fullness of life for which we had been created. This, now, was the justice I wanted for this man who had taken my little girl. Though he was liable for the death penalty, I felt it would violate and profane the goodness, sweetness, and beauty of Susie's life by killing a kidnapper in her name.<sup>14</sup>

This is a powerful description of mercy, and Tutu also described these experiences of forgiveness by the word mercy. For example he wrote, "And, mercifully and wonderfully, as I listened to stories of victims I marveled at their magnanimity, that after so much suffering, instead of lusting for revenge, they had this extraordinary willingness to forgive."<sup>15</sup>

The above accounts exemplify what this dissertation's author refers to as the South African experience of mercy because mercy is connected to compassion and forgiveness. Tutu's descriptions of compassion and forgiveness, and reports of forgiveness in the accounts of the TRC, are the source of this dissertation's understanding of mercy. As Tutu puts it, "It is ultimately in our best interest that we become forgiving, repentant, reconciling, and reconciled people because without forgiveness, without reconciliation, we have no future."<sup>16</sup>

### **Section #3: Justice and Truth**

This chapter links the issues of enacting human reconciliation and talk about reconciliation. In South Africa, the TRC process linked the issues of justice and truth-

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 155-156.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 165.

telling. Telling the truth became an act of justice for some, while for others the process of truth telling obscured justice.

The final report of the TRC in South Africa stated that truth is complex: “The complexity of this concept [truth] also emerged in the debates that took place before and during the life of the Commission, resulting in four notions of truth: factual or forensic truth; personal or narrative truth; social or dialogue truth . . . and healing and restorative truth.”<sup>17</sup> The TRC report describes personal or narrative truth: “By telling their stories, both victims and perpetrators gave meaning to the multi-layered experiences of the South African story. . . . In the South African context, where value continues to be attached to oral tradition, the process of storytelling is particularly important.”<sup>18</sup>

What does it mean to tell the truth? The question is complicated, as evidenced by the report of the TRC in South Africa.<sup>19</sup> The truth about individuals connects to who they are, and their sense of personal identity. To understand truth as a data gathering enterprise is to miss part of what truth really is, particularly where people are concerned. The truth about personal identity forms through storytelling and narrative.<sup>20</sup> The truth about who persons are is found in their life stories more than in any individual fact about them.

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<sup>17</sup> *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, 5 vols. (Cape Town: Truth and Reconciliation Commission; Juta; Distributed in the USA and Canada by Grove’s Dictionaries, 1999), 110.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 110-114.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

This chapter explores the connection between truth and storytelling and involves understanding issues of personal identity formation in the context of storytelling. Before addressing the issue of identity formation fully, however, the issue of truth must be linked to injustice and reconciliation. It is one thing to tell the truth in a friendly and supportive environment. It is quite another to be truthful in the context of injustice, and it may or may not bring reconciliation. Storytelling may lead to reconciliation in a context in which speaker and listener are open to forgiveness, but not if injustice remains unaddressed.

A fundamental question about the nature of truth is whether truth telling and storytelling reconciles people. If telling truthful stories is important for the reconciliation process, truth telling must somehow be linked to a search for justice. Telling truthful stories cannot bring reconciliation between people if justice is ignored.

This chapter examines the experiences of the TRC in South Africa, and in the next chapter reviews the Restorative Listening Project on Gentrification (RLPG) and the Genesis Community Fellowship (GCF). These two organizations were introduced in the first chapter. The RLPG is an initiative of City of Portland's Office of Neighborhood Involvement, and GCF is an interracial congregation in Northeast Portland. The RLPG, like the TRC, uses storytelling to address injustice. In both cases compassion, forgiveness, and mercy can move the process forward as people try to listen to one another, but the process is difficult.

Donald T. Frazier told his story at a recent meeting of the RLPG. Frazier is the pastor of GCF, and his comments are introduced here because of a link with comments made by Tutu. Frazier described life in Portland several decades ago from his perspective

as an African American man, and he compared these experiences to the present day. After he spoke, an organizer of the RLPG asked him several questions. One of her questions was for Frazier to describe what the election of Barak Obama meant to him. Frazier began by telling the story of looking for a Christmas card as a child. He remembered looking at the people on the cards and in store advertisements, and he noticed no one looked like him. He asked himself, “Where do I exist? Where do I ‘happen at?’” He said the election of Obama was not about policies so much as it was that his election “affirmed the humanity of black men.” He said “a man in the White House who is black” elevates everyone.<sup>21</sup>

Frazier’s question, “Where do I exist?” and his story allow listeners to encounter a truth about the impact of racism on a person’s identity in a new way. When Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6), he invited followers on a journey and into a relationship; he did not simply make a propositional statement about truth. Jesus’s statement also begins with “I am,” and his identity and the identities of followers merge when they follow Jesus on “the way.” Tutu’s reflection on the African notion of *ubuntu* is similar because it ties relationship to others into a sense of personal identity. Tutu credits the success of the TRC in part to the spirit of *ubuntu* that “My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Donald Frazier, statements made at a Restorative Listening Project on Gentrification meeting, Genesis Community Fellowship, Portland, OR, November 17, 2008, at which the author of this dissertation was present.

<sup>22</sup> Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, 31

Tutu claims, in his memoir about the TRC experience, that the reason Africans could forgive rather than demand retribution was based on *ubuntu*.<sup>23</sup> He connects this notion of *ubuntu* with a different way of viewing human existence: “It is not, ‘I think therefore I am.’ It [*ubuntu*] says rather: ‘I am human because I belong. I participate. I share.’”<sup>24</sup> Tutu connects the success of the TRC to an African concept that overturned Rene Descartes’ *cogito ergo sum*, “I think therefore I am,” and provides a link between issues of personal identity and truth in Frazier’s story. Something important is at stake because both Frazier and Tutu connect issues of existence and identity with attempts to tell the truth about their life stories.

The idea that the core of personal identity is found in telling truthful stories may be at odds with the foundations of the Western post-Enlightenment worldview and with North American and European culture. If that seems like too strong a claim, suffice it to say that there may be resistance to the idea that truth is found in storytelling in the hearts and minds of readers and elements of their culture.

One example of this resistance comes from Audrey Chapman and Hugo van der Merwe’s critique of the TRC. Chapman and van der Merwe respond to the question: Did the TRC deliver? They suggest that the TRC invested its resources in processes focused on the subjective dimensions of truth, and they conclude: “Unlike most other truth commissions, the TRC’s conceptualization of truth prioritized the subjective over the

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 31.



objective dimensions of truth finding. Its experience shows the risks of adopting a postmodern understanding that privileges subjective approaches over objective approaches to knowledge.”<sup>25</sup> By referring to postmodernism, they reveal their concern with an approach to knowledge that abandons the kind of quest for objectivity that developed from the scientific method and the Cartesian-led European Enlightenment.

As stated earlier, the TRC used four descriptions for truth. The final report of the TRC in South Africa asserts that truth is complex: “The complexity of this concept [truth] also emerged in the debates that took place before and during the life of the Commission, resulting in four notions of truth: factual or forensic truth; personal or narrative truth; social or dialogue truth . . . and healing and restorative truth.”<sup>26</sup> The TRC report describes personal or narrative truth: “By telling their stories, both victims and perpetrators gave meaning to the multi-layered experiences of the South African story. . . . In the South African context, where value continues to be attached to oral tradition, the process of storytelling is particularly important.”<sup>27</sup> The Commission report acknowledges that its authors focused on this narrative form of truth: “While narrative truth was central to the work of the Commission, especially to the hearings of the Human Rights Violations Committee, it was in its search for social truth that the closest connection between the

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<sup>25</sup> Audrey R. Chapman and Hugo van der Merwe, “Reflections on the South African Experience,” in *Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa*, ed. Chapman and van der Merwe, 289.

<sup>26</sup> *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, 110.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

Commission's process and its goal was to be found."<sup>28</sup> The TRC report acknowledges that, while the goal of reconciliation hinged on a new social truth that was shared by everyone in the nation and would bring dignity to all, the commission members chose to begin their limited work by recording stories that might be used later to construct truth publicly. The TRC deliberately emphasized one notion of truth from among many: narrative truth.

This choice is at the heart of Chapman and van der Merwe's critiques of the TRC and others who contributed to their research. Chapman and Patrick Ball write, "The TRC downgraded the significance of scientific and forensic truth . . . the TRC defined truth in a way that prioritized subjective forms of truth at the cost of objective facts."<sup>29</sup> They claim that truth commissions are more suited to pursue what they call "macro-truths." They state, "Macro-truth provides a framework for understanding the structural causes of violence. . . . Macro-truth involves the determination of who was ultimately responsible for the patterns of human rights violations . . . what kinds of structural factors enabled them to take place."<sup>30</sup> Chapman and Ball make this critique because "The approach of the TRC personalized and individualized responsibility for the gross abuses of the past . . . the TRC also failed to deal adequately with the institutional racism of the apartheid

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>29</sup> Audrey R. Chapman and Patrick Ball, "Levels of Truth," in *Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa*, ed. Chapman and van der Merwe, 147.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 144-145.

system.”<sup>31</sup> They believe one of the best results from the TRC process that addressed their concerns was hearings focused on specific sectors of society: media, business, labor, prisons, the faith community, the legal system, and the health sector. According to Ball and Chapman, the institutional hearings constituted a “counterweight” that revealed the systematic underpinnings of the violations, but they believe the hearings succeeded only in building a partial picture.<sup>32</sup>

According to Chapman and van der Merwe, one of the most significant implications of the way the TRC understood truth was that the commission ignored the way many South Africans understood justice.<sup>33</sup> Van der Merwe believes many people who came forward had a more punitive understanding of justice than the TRC. This assessment conflicts with Archbishop Tutu’s claim that the spirit of *ubuntu* is at the heart of African culture as a defining context for the TRC. According to Tutu, revenge is the opposite of *ubuntu* because *ubuntu* is a spirit of forgiveness.<sup>34</sup> Tutu writes about justice in his memoir, compares retributive and restorative justice, and links a retributive notion of justice with punitive actions. Similarly he links restorative justice and the spirit of *ubuntu* in South Africa.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>33</sup> Hugo van der Merwe, “What Survivors Say About Justice,” in *Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa*, ed. Chapman and van der Merwe, 44.

<sup>34</sup> Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, 86.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 54.

Van der Merwe's research reveals something else: "While the TRC portrayed survivors as generally forgiving and restorative, the empirical evidence of the transcripts paints a picture of survivors as generally still focused on the need for prosecution and punishment."<sup>36</sup> He suggests the meaning of truth overlaps with different approaches to justice. Truth, he writes, is relevant in both the accountability and retributive-justice models, but under retribution truth is about "criminal investigations to find out who is responsible for what exact act in order to . . . decide appropriate punishment,"<sup>37</sup> whereas under an accountability model, more like that of the TRC, truth is about "understanding why things happened."<sup>38</sup>

The TRC report writers agree with Chapman and van der Merwe that a relationship exists between how individuals understand truth and their approach to justice.<sup>39</sup> That relationship is at the heart of the formation of the TRC.<sup>40</sup> No evidence indicates, however, that notions of justice and truth are static, because people grow and change and so do their levels of understanding. Individuals may understand truth or justice more fully as they encounter pain and healing with guidance. In the process of healing, frequently one needs a guide or teacher. If Tutu and the members of the TRC played that role in South Africa, it does not invalidate the experiences of those who

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<sup>36</sup> van der Merwe, "What Survivors Say About Justice," 44.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, 117-131.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 125-128.

changed or were healed. This author acknowledges the accuracy of Chapman and van der Merwe's point that some participants in the TRC process continued to want vengeance and retributive justice; however, I think that misses something. Some persons' resistance to forgiveness is what makes the forgiveness offered by the others so astonishing. The "truth" of that forgiveness does not lie in its statistical probability but in its counter-cultural improbability.

Lyn S. Graybill writes in an evaluation of the TRC process, "The reconciliation that occurred in South Africa under 'the persistent prodding' of Mandela and Tutu, who made forgiveness a 'matter of patriotic duty,' may dim as these 'moral beacons pass from the scene.' . . . Reconciliation may falter from the start"<sup>41</sup> in those countries without a Mandela or a Tutu who provides critical political and spiritual leadership. This author believes there is another interpretation of Mandela and Tutu's role. They showed strong leadership when it was needed, and the leaders' strength does not mean the leaders are malicious or wrong. Rather, Mandela and Tutu acted in a priestly role for a nation seeking reconciliation, and in so doing, people grew in their understanding of justice, mercy, and truth. A faith-based reconciliation process needs to attend to those who do not share that faith or the process may be difficult to sustain. Taking the priestly role does not mean forcing Christian faith on people against their will, but rather acting as healers for people of all faiths. Differing positions on what justice or truth signify does not mean all are equally valid in all contexts. In this context, it took time for some people to make the

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<sup>41</sup> Graybill, *Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: Miracle or Model*, 178.

connection between *ubuntu* and the restorative justice and healing for which the TRC worked.<sup>42</sup> Part of the lesson of the Tutu-led TRC process is that humility is important with respect to imperfect human endeavors compared to God's primary action in reconciliation, and toward those who may not share convictions about God and come from other than a faith based perspective.

Chapman writes that South Africans were oriented more toward justice than forgiveness, and she questions Tutu's emphasis on forgiveness.<sup>43</sup> She supports her claim based on an analysis of data that reveal only 14 percent of deponents mentioned forgiveness on their own. She states, "A quarter of the deponents who discussed forgiveness (19 persons) did so in a negative context."<sup>44</sup> She bases her assessment on reports from seventy-six people, and this is an insufficient sample upon which to judge the spirit of *ubuntu* in a nation as historic and large as South Africa. Sometimes, however, even the minority report contains important truth.

Tutu admitted in his memoir that the examples of "willingness to forgive left us speechless with amazement,"<sup>45</sup> and this suggests that forgiveness is remarkable. Chapman seems to grant Tutu's point when she says "that 14 percent of the deponents even thought to mention forgiveness might be higher than many other countries emerging

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<sup>42</sup> *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, 125-131.

<sup>43</sup> Audrey R. Chapman, "Perspectives on the Role of Forgiveness in Human Rights Violations Hearings," in *Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa*, ed. Chapman and van der Merwe, 65, 68.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>45</sup> Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, 165.

from decades of repression and abuse.”<sup>46</sup> There is a relationship between approaches to justice and an understanding of truth. And in the case of the TRC, a narrative notion of truth that focused on storytelling was linked with a restorative approach to justice that was merciful, forgiving, and compassionate.

#### **Section #4: Storytelling and Structural Analysis**

These reports from the TRC suggest that the complexity of justice and history of injustice can be understood more clearly through story and narrative than in an objective or data-oriented approach to history. That is not to say, however, that no need exists for structural analysis. The critiques of Chapman and van der Merwe seem to equate data and truth, and they suggest a narrative approach obscures the truth with subjectivity. They believe the TRC approach failed to provide a structural and systemic analysis of the causes of injustice.<sup>47</sup> This author disagrees with their assessment, and Chapman admits that the institutional hearing process offered a “stunning indictment of the manner in which the apartheid system operated.”<sup>48</sup> Storytelling and narrative approaches to truth can reveal structural and systemic issues based on an analysis of “stock stories.”

Eric Yamamoto explores the role of stock stories in the interracial situation of post-civil rights America, and he defines stock stories as “narratives shaped, told, and

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<sup>46</sup> Audrey R. Chapman, “Perspectives on the Role of Forgiveness in Human Rights Violations Hearings,” in *Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa*, ed. Chapman and van der Merwe, 73.

<sup>47</sup> Chapman and van der Merwe, “Did the TRC deliver?” 272, 277.

<sup>48</sup> Audrey R. Chapman, “Truth Recovery through the Institutional Hearings Process,” in *Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa*, ed. Chapman and van der Merwe, 187.

embraced by groups about themselves and others.”<sup>49</sup> He critiques the current legal situation in the United States as inadequate because he believes it does not address the complexity of racial issues that are not simply black-white issues. His work reveals the limits of legal justice and the complexity of interracial dynamics, and he asks and answers an important question: “Why have the plaintiffs’ attorneys cast the case in narrow binary white-black antidiscrimination law paradigm? ‘Because that is how antidiscrimination law is framed.’ The victim-perpetrator, good-bad, either-or framing of issues, however, belies the multilayered interminority dynamics of this and related justice controversies.”<sup>50</sup> He describes the situation and connects narrative and structural analysis by referring to “stock stories that groups themselves tell to explain the conflict and justify the groups’ responses.”<sup>51</sup>

According to Yamamoto, “decoded” stock stories can inform specific interracial conflicts and often reveal shaky or even illusory factual bases. He uses a specific example of a hat-shop controversy between a Korean woman and an African American man to demonstrate how failing to decode stock stories produces problems.<sup>52</sup> The controversy involved an apology in which both the man and the woman saw themselves as sufferers because they misunderstood each other’s cultural expectations around apology.

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<sup>49</sup> Eric K. Yamamoto, *Interracial Justice: Conflict and Reconciliation in Post-Civil Rights America* (New York: New York University, 1999), 180.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 236-253.



Yamamoto writes, “However sincere . . . apologies . . . without some joint remaking and retelling of the intergroup story, are not likely to promote sustained interracial healing.”<sup>53</sup>

Neither person attempted, in their apology, to retell their stories of economic struggle experienced by their ethnic groups of origin.

Michael Emerson explores a concept similar to stock stories as he describes the division between white and black evangelicals in America. He suggests that white evangelicals cannot see the structural issues that surround race in America because of the religio-cultural tools in the “White Evangelical Tool Kit.”<sup>54</sup> His research demonstrates that white evangelicals tend to individualize race issues far more than black evangelicals:

On careful reflection, we can see that it is a necessity for evangelicals to interpret the problem at the individual level. To do otherwise would challenge the very basis of their world, both their faith and the American way of life. They accept and support individualism, relationalism, and anti-structuralism. Suggesting social causes of the race problem challenges the cultural elements with which they construct their lives. This is the radical limitation of the white evangelical tool kit.<sup>55</sup>

Emerson writes that the relational nature of the evangelical tool kit and its stress on primary relationships is an important contribution.<sup>56</sup> The other elements in their tool kit, however, are serious limitations, especially because black evangelicals tend to see the structural issues much more clearly.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>54</sup> Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University, 2001), 76.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 170.

Both Emerson and Yamamoto point to the need for structural analysis through narrative. They suggest that some kind of reparations for injustice could be connected to these reframed narratives. Yamamoto adds to this an important insight about the limitations of the law to bring reconciliation.

Issues of personal identity emerge again within the context of narrative and structural analysis through group storytelling that is central to the hope for reconciliation in race issues. Put simply, whether individuals emphasize justice or mercy, storytelling or structural analysis, the need for human dignity and a sense of self are central in reconciliation. Frazier's comment in this chapter about Barack Obama's election pointed in that direction when he talked about the humanity Obama's election introduced and his sense of whether or not Black men existed in the American mindset before the election. This chapter concludes with further exploration of identity issues.

As noted in the previous chapter, Cone wrote on black power early in the conversation about race in America. He explained the basis of a liberation movement and called for separation between the races rather than integration. Cone hoped for racial reconciliation, but finally rejected integration as the path forward, and his explanation of black power points to identity and human dignity as the core issues: "The structure of white society attempts to make 'black being' into 'nonbeing' or 'nothingness.'"<sup>57</sup> Like Yamamoto, Cone points here to the limits of the law: "[T]he traditional civil rights organizations fall into this category. Though they changed laws, they were essentially

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<sup>57</sup> Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 7.

movements which appealed to the conscience of white America. They were asking for black Americans to be included in the total structure of the white American way.”<sup>58</sup>

These limits help explain the need for structural analysis through narrative. Story and narrative facilitate a different kind of listening that reveals the causes behind structural injustice, issues of personal identity, and human dignity.

### **Section #5: The Model**

The reconciliation model in the next section presents a collection of seven lessons that I identified as I investigated the work of the TRC. This list of seven lessons is not exhaustive, but I hope it serves as a catalyst for future work.

Any model of merciful reconciliation that includes a plan for reparations must also include communication about expectations and clarity about the process. Otherwise the failures of governmental infrastructure can detract from the successes in reconciliation, forgiveness, and mercy. One of the clearest lessons from the South African TRC experiment is that human efforts are often incomplete, and this is an important point. Given the human tendency to seek a complete working model that delivers success, it is important to consider how much good can come from actual efforts. For example, biblical accounts report imperfect leaders and stories of the disciples’ inadequacy (Exod. 4:10-17, Mark 9:14-29). Good, however, can come from the imperfect.

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 136.

The second lesson is that remembering that human efforts are incomplete keeps them in proper perspective when compared to God's actions. Humans have less reason for despair about their imperfections when they compare themselves to God's perfection. God is at work, and believers are free to work in ways that honor God and one another. Even Desmond Tutu displayed his imperfection in the TRC process. His tendency to prod others toward forgiveness, as pointed out previously, may have caused some people to offer a kind of forgiveness that was not genuine.

The third lesson from the TRC reconciliation model relates to the first. Mercy and forgiveness are connected and have their roots in God's action, and this emphasizes the importance of theology and language about God. How individuals know God and describe God's action influence decisions about human action and work toward reconciliation. Acts of mercy connect to an understanding of God's mercy, and God's merciful action to heal and redeem creation is the first act in the drama. God does not ask believers to create a perfect system of human behavior that will eventually be fully complete and universal. Rather, God's mercy makes human reality whole, and God's compassion forgives and heals creation. God loves humans and that love changes humans.

Believers' response to God's love is simple and complex. Thankful lives express the joy of knowing God's grace, but decisions are not always clear when translated into human action, especially in politics and church life. Tutu lives this tension. Anyone who has heard him speak knows the joy of his countenance and infectious laugh; nevertheless, he negotiated the complexity of national politics and made some unpopular decisions.

The lesson is that it can be difficult to reconcile God's perfection and acknowledge and accept human imperfection. For example, God is merciful and forgiving, but how do those qualities impact human attempts at forgiveness and mercy? The complexity calls humans to listen to one another because listening helps avoid intransigence. Listening then becomes an act of love and mercy.

A fourth lesson from Tutu's experience in South Africa is that knowing God sustains believers when human failures loom large. Tutu describes his experience of daily Eucharist during the struggle in South Africa, and he connects that experience to mercy:

It was a mercy, too, to have the joyful privilege of daily Eucharist—normally in my office with my personal assistant, the media director, and the policeman appointed to see to my security, and on Fridays in St. George's Cathedral whenever in Cape Town, or in a hotel room when we were at hearings in the different parts of the country. . . . Without all this I know I would have collapsed and the powers of evil, ever on the lookout to sabotage efforts to attain the good, would have undermined this extraordinary attempt to heal wounded people.<sup>59</sup>

A merciful reconciliation model should include opportunities for worship and renewal.

The fifth lesson is the importance of addressing reconciliation on both interpersonal and structural levels, which sometimes can be disconnected. Storytelling and narrative truth provide opportunities for them to connect, and a model of merciful reconciliation should include opportunities for storytelling that address personal pain and structural injustice. Storytelling also helps establish a common humanity as a basis for reconciliation.

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<sup>59</sup> Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, 201.

The lesson that truth is conveyed through storytelling guides a reconciliation model based on the South African experience, especially when telling the truth about issues related to identity and dignity. A person who experienced recent trauma may have difficulty dealing with racism presented in a forensic or scientific way. Telling the story and listening for its truth, however, may surface personal and structural issues more effectively. Discovering the truth about personal identity is a fundamental, life-long endeavor, and the stories people tell about themselves may help them experience that truth. Coming to know all people as persons of dignity with stories that lead toward a more complete truth is part of an inclusive, functional reconciliation model. A merciful reconciliation model based on these lessons takes into account the storyteller's trauma, and it may be necessary to amend the process if the trauma is recent.

The sixth lesson from the TRC report is that justice can be pursued in restorative and not merely punitive ways. It is important, however, to attend to those who might abuse or take advantage of the situation. Restorative justice is delivered with a price, and the price may affect previously wounded persons. Restorative justice, however, also produces human dignity and healing benefits. The restorative-justice process can be painful, or it may provide an escape for those in the midst of trauma or those closed to repentance and forgiveness. It is important to attend to issues of identity when using this model because people are not all in the same place emotionally or spiritually, and their emotional and spiritual sense of identity affects how they participate.

The seventh clear lesson is that reconciliation involves commitment to one another, as evidenced by Tutu's comment that the South African people must live

together after apartheid ended. One of the reasons Tutu gave for the South African decision to engage in restorative justice as a model was that they experienced a different context from Europe after WWII. He wrote, “While the Allies could pack up and go home after Nuremberg, we in South Africa had to live with one another.”<sup>60</sup> This meant that after the fall of apartheid, human rights criminals became fellow citizens living alongside everyone. Tutu believes a retributive justice model would have led to “South Africa lying in ashes.”<sup>61</sup> I believe this also explains the need for a priestly and healing role played by a leader like Tutu. That role leads to forgiveness and mercy, but only over time and only in community.

The most significant lessons may be that reconciliation involves a commitment to live with one another, over time, which is part of the critiques offered in Chapman and van der Merwe’s collection. They point out that the TRC victim hearings were “events” rather than “sustained community engagement processes.”<sup>62</sup> This may be one lesson from the mistakes of the TRC process and is supported by the TRC process’s failure to have lasting impact. The failure is due to many factors including the abandonment of the process by Mbeki’s government. The outcome is instructive, whatever the cause. Reconciliation is a commitment to live with one another, and it is not something that can be accomplished and forgotten. Referring back to the concept of *ubuntu*, humans are part of one another and humanity is bound up together.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>62</sup> Chapman and van der Merwe, “Introduction,” 9.

These lessons can be incorporated into a merciful model of reconciliation adopted within the ministry context of Portland in and around Westminster Church. The next chapter describes two groups that guided this author in that direction: the RLPG and GCF leaders who guided and mentored the author, Westminster members, and staff in this process. The next chapter presents the model in support of this dissertation's thesis that the South African experience of mercy provides a reconciliation model for relationship, conversation, and ministry.



## CHAPTER 5

### RECONCILIATION IN PORTLAND

The Genesis Community Fellowship (GCF) and the Restorative Listening Project on Gentrification (RLPG) have contributed to the development of a merciful model of reconciliation in Portland. This model is rooted in the South African experience of the TRC. In Portland there have been challenges and moments of beauty along the way, which will be described in this chapter. The leaders of these groups have inspired and guided the author, and this chapter describes each group and its contribution to the topic. The third section describes how the author's ministry context has been and could be impacted, and it describes how the lessons from the previous chapter that comprise the emerging model for reconciliation are expanded. Chapter 5 describes GCF and RLPG. The chapter will consider the four issues identified in previous chapters as they arise in each description rather than attempt to conform each description to a four-part format. The descriptions of these organizations support and expand the thesis that the South African experience of mercy provides a model for Westminster and the Presbytery.

#### **Section #1: The Restorative Listening Project on Gentrification**

Narrative truth focused on storytelling was linked with a restorative approach to justice in the South African TRC. This restorative approach to justice focuses on narrative and is also the foundation of the RLPG. Judith Mowry, an RLPG leader,

describes the link between the RLPG and the TRC in a *New York Times* article also cited in a previous chapter. The link is rooted in restorative justice, similar to the type applied in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission after the end of apartheid in South Africa.<sup>1</sup> John Canda, Celeste Carey, and Judith Mowry organized the RLPG. The RLPG meets on Monday nights once a month at locations throughout the community, including colleges and churches. Each month the meeting agenda involves a community leader or a small group of leaders who tell stories of their experience of racism and the effects of gentrification. The issue of the relationship between divine and human aspects of reconciliation is less apparent in the RLPG story because its parent organization, the Office of Neighborhood Involvement, is a secular city organization. Many of the meetings take place in church buildings, however, and many who speak do so as an expression of their faith. Nevertheless, RLPG welcomes listeners from all faith backgrounds, including atheists, in this conversation about gentrification.

Gentrification is often used without definition along with terms such as revitalization, and this causes confusion about what gentrification means.<sup>2</sup> Ruth Glass coined the term in 1964 to describe changes in London neighborhoods. “Gentry” is historically a British word and refers to the landed aristocracy.<sup>3</sup> The origins of the word make clear that gentrification is about land ownership. Neil Smith and Michele LeFaivre

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<sup>1</sup> William Yardley, “Racial Shift in a Progressive City Spurs Talks,” *The New York Times*, May 29, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Bruce London and J. John Palen, eds., *Gentrification, Displacement and Neighborhood Revitalization* (Albany: State University of New York, 1984), 6-7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

define gentrification as “the rehabilitation of working class inner-city neighborhoods for upper-middle-class consumption.”<sup>4</sup> This definition points to changes in ownership because new people purchase land and move into a neighborhood. Gentrification differs from revitalization because revitalization refers only to property improvement, whereas gentrification often implies changes among residents from renters to owners. Long-time residents may be unable to secure loans to purchase the property and are displaced by newcomers. Racism enters the picture when lenders make racially biased decisions and employ unfair loan practices. As with the words “justice,” “mercy,” and “truth,” it is important to be attentive to what is meant by the word “gentrification.”

Cities may be segregated into distinct neighborhoods with distinct racial majorities. In the case of Portland, primarily African Americans occupied the Albina neighborhood and other adjacent parts of Northeast Portland for several decades. As property changed hands, many African Americans had to move out to the eastern edge of Portland because of the property costs,<sup>5</sup> and the sense of community once felt by some older residents disappeared. The stories told at the RLPG describe the pain some people feel about these changes as newer residents with no memory of the community move in.

The RLPG focuses on gentrification. Many stories about racism do not involve gentrification and include racial profiling or lack of access to education, but gentrification

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<sup>4</sup> Neil Smith and Michele LeFaivre, “A Class Analysis of Gentrification,” in *Gentrification, Displacement and Neighborhood Revitalization*, ed. London and Palen, 43.

<sup>5</sup> Roos, *The History of Albina*, 40.

in Portland has been significant in the past two decades.<sup>6</sup> It is not always clear if gentrification is a positive or a negative given the various ways it is sometimes defined. The results seem positive for those who see the improvement in property conditions and the disappearance of drug activity. Others may acknowledge those results, but believe there is more to the story including the disappearance of a sense of community and a feeling of displacement. In addition, the racist experiences described in this dissertation's introductory chapter and the sense that many in the white community do not care about their pain affect residents. Portland does not have anything like apartheid in South Africa, but there is a sense of apart-ness.<sup>7</sup> Some participants at the RLPG describe a kind of apart-ness in race relations as simple as the lack of a smile.<sup>8</sup> Reconciliation may mitigate apart-ness.

Canda told the author two stories that capture the tension between justice and mercy, which is important to this thesis and RLPG's focus. John has lived in Portland all his life, and his first story is about the "Chapel of the Chimes" that was located on Killingsworth. John recounts that it was the site of over 300 funerals for friends and family members, and he attended funerals at the chapel, including services for gang violence victims. The McMenamin brothers bought the building and converted it into a

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<sup>6</sup> Kafoury, Stacey, and Harrison, *The History of Portland's African American Community (1805 to the Present)*, 143-146.

<sup>7</sup> *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. "Apartheid." Apartheid means "apartness" in Afrikaans.

<sup>8</sup> Noni Cause and Charles Ford, *Porches and Smiles*, DVD (Portland, OR: Flying Focus Video Collective, 2009).

hip pub, as they have done in several other Portland locations. John said that the building looks more beautiful externally, but the conversion to a pub erased community history.<sup>9</sup> This illustrates how storytelling might be a step toward justice, but it is difficult to say what justice is in this case. No laws have been broken, because the developers followed the laws; however, they were insensitive to the site's meaning for the community. This illustrates the difficulty of connecting what is said and what is done. Owners of the restaurant might say that they hope to impact the neighborhood positively, but the effect of choosing this building speaks differently to some.

Portland has a history of racist laws and redlining that may be unknown to young, new residents. For example, in 1949 a realtor named Clarence E. Enders was expelled from the Realtors' association for selling property to a black Pullman porter and his Cherokee wife. Enders cited the code of Realtors as the justification. In fact, contracts on some houses in Portland that have not changed hands in decades contain redlining clauses.<sup>10</sup> This story illustrates how difficult justice is to reach, and that a legal response may be unavailable. Without knowledge of this history, new residents might make choices unwittingly similar to the McMenamin brothers.

The second story is about mercy and grace. Grace Collins was a German immigrant who cared for African American children in a Christian day care center on Russell and Martin Luther King Drive. John said many African American families used

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<sup>9</sup> John Canda, interview by author, Portland, OR, October 15, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> *Local Color*, directed by John Tuttle, Oregon Public Broadcasting, 1991. Scene near the end of the documentary.

her center, and many white people ostracized her because of it. John remembered Collins holding him in her arms and praying when he was a child. He said Collins sewed the first seeds of faith in his heart because his parents did not go to church. When asked, “So this is sort of the opposite of the McMenemy story?” he responded, “Absolutely.”<sup>11</sup>

These sorts of stories are often told at RLPG meetings. The stories highlight the complexities of linking history told and justice done. This complexity can be related in story and narrative more effectively than in objective or data-oriented historical approaches. Sometimes the storytelling process creates opportunities for participants to show mercy toward one another; however, this does not negate the need for structural analysis. Chapman and van der Merwe’s critique of the TRC discussed in the last chapter seems to equate data and truth, and that suggests narrative approaches obscure the truth with subjectivity. They suggest this approach abandons a structural and systemic analysis of the causes of injustice. This author disagrees, because sometimes storytelling and narrative approaches reveal structural and systemic issues. Both methods have merit.

### Section #1, Part 2: Trauma in the Telling

The tension between storytelling and structural analysis is connected to the issue of determining the RLPG’s goal. The project organizers are clear about their use of words when they define the use of storytelling and restorative justice as a model; however, clarity about words does not always accompany clarity about purpose. The goal is to listen, but some question the goal forcefully, as the following example illustrates.

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<sup>11</sup> John Canda, interview by author, Portland, OR, October 15, 2008.

The program for the September 2009 RLPG evening meeting differed from the usual format. Instead of listening to someone tell a story, program organizers asked a white male university professor, known to RLPG members, to lead an exploration of institutional racism. Two African-Americans in the audience, a man and a woman, voiced their discomfort and pain during the presentation.<sup>12</sup> The woman resisted an exercise in which anecdotes or episodes of racism provided a foundation for the discussion. She said the clinical recounting of such incidents in a room full of people from at least four racial ethnic backgrounds was traumatizing or re-traumatizing. She said she did not want to hear about these things, because she lived them every day. Trauma is a complex phenomenon, but her reaction may demonstrate several things; for example how the trauma of personal experience and the truth of a person's story can lead to different conclusions than the clinical assessment of data. Or it may be that her reaction only underlines the truth of the data in a more honest way. It may also stem from incidents experienced outside the meeting, recent or past, that were triggered that night.

The evening became emotional and honest after the woman protested, and the professor told his own story and what led him to participate in the meeting. RLPG organizer John Canda addressed the situation and tried to create an atmosphere in which people could listen to one another, and he appealed to the participants to "stay in the room together." These words echoed Tutu's statement that what unfolded in the South

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<sup>12</sup> Restorative Listening Project, meeting at AME Zion Church, Portland, OR, September 21, 2009. The author of this dissertation attended this meeting.

African reconciliation process was acceptance of the fact that they had to live together. Staying together is a difficult and crucial piece of a reconciliation model.

The evening meeting illustrates an important lesson about staying together and suggests that how stories of trauma are handled plays a significant role in any reconciliation process. Trauma may be in tension with staying together for those experiencing racism in the present. The evening also emphasizes the lesson that understanding a person's story is an important first step that precedes interpreting that story. The participants that evening really did not know one another or the story of the woman who spoke out. Without a fuller experience of listening, it is impossible to reach conclusions about the nature of the trauma she was experiencing or its meaning.

Those who told their stories in South Africa often re-experienced trauma while telling the stories, and Tutu tells of breaking down himself at one of the "victim hearings."<sup>13</sup> These traumatic experiences relate to the speakers' and the listeners' sense of identity in complex ways. Volf cautions that participants can see themselves as the terrorized or as those delivered from suffering.<sup>14</sup> Tutu says, "Our Minister of Justice, Dullah Omar, had called us a 'nation of victims' and that was an apt description up to a point. But we should also declare that ours was also wonderfully a nation of survivors."<sup>15</sup> This suggests reconciliation is difficult if traumatic experiences are fresh, or if unresolved injustice remains unacknowledged.

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<sup>13</sup> Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, 144.

<sup>14</sup> Volf, *The End of Memory*, 26.

<sup>15</sup> Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, 103.



In *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, Joy Leary highlights the severe impact of trauma on healthy identity formation. She documents America's legacy of racist injury and appeals for healing. She defines "post-traumatic slave syndrome" by comparing it to "post-traumatic stress disorder" and says that, like PTSD, PTSS has never been adequately addressed by the professional counseling community.<sup>16</sup> In a chapter on healing, she addresses her African-American sisters and brothers:

We are a spiritual, loving and hopeful people. . . . We, as a people, seem to have forgotten that this is who and what we are. We seem to have forgotten our own identity. We have forgotten our own greatness. . . . Certainly we need to heal from our historical injuries, and we need to do more. We need to become healthy. . . . There is a significant difference between not being sick, and being well.<sup>17</sup>

Leary also describes the connection between trauma and anger. She writes that anger may lie just below awareness and, at times, may burst forth. While she agrees there is reason for anger, if the anger remains unresolved it can contribute to a shorter life span.<sup>18</sup> The presence of anger and pain indicates the need for mercy, because engagement in this process is difficult, and people need to be merciful to each another. Mercy may not mean people abandon or ignore pain or the causes of the trauma. Mercy may mean the opposite of accepting; it may mean rejecting the causes of pain. Leary says people sometimes choose to forget for survival: "In efforts to move beyond the humiliation from past injustices, many of us have disassociated ourselves from the indignities that we or our relatives experienced in the struggle to prevail over slavery, systemic racist practices

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<sup>16</sup> Joy Degruy Leary, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome* (Milwaukee, WI: Uptone, 2005), 117-120.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

and poverty.”<sup>19</sup> She believes it is important to remember and to tell the stories. When trauma remains unhealed, stories must be told to promote healing. In the end, healing involves an identity defined by the capacity to love rather than by trauma.

The complexity of the phenomenon of trauma demands caution about interpreting data or a piece of someone’s story too quickly. Further study on the topic would strengthen the work of listening and storytelling and, while beyond the scope of this study, is recommended.<sup>20</sup> A central lesson of this dissertation on reconciliation is the dynamic between staying in relationship and leaving. The complexity of the staying and leaving dynamic equals that of trauma. This thesis does not recommend staying in an abusive or traumatizing relationship. Sometimes healing depends on leaving or acknowledgement of injustice trauma or abuse. Sometimes the acknowledgment of the trauma and the difficult work of staying in relationship can lead to reconciliation. The issue of trauma, however, highlights the enormity of that work.

## **Section #2: Genesis Community Fellowship**

GCF and its pastor have guided the author of this dissertation to understand merciful reconciliation more deeply. This section of the chapter describes the author’s personal journey and is written in first person.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 206.

<sup>20</sup> Trauma from a family systems perspective: Yael Danieli, *International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma*, (New York: Plenum, 1998); Issues of identity and self esteem: Elaine Pinderhughes, *Understanding Race, Ethnicity, and Power: The Key to Efficacy in Clinical Practice* (New York: The Free Press, 1989).

I learned about a congregation in northeast Portland called Genesis Community Fellowship five years ago. I met the pastor, Donald Frazier, in the fall of 2004, and he told me their story. During the months of September and October 2004, members of GCF and Westminster Presbyterian Church members, where I serve as associate pastor, met, listened to one another, prayed together, and shared meals. The meetings had a twofold purpose: to build relationships and to listen as individuals described experiences of race and racism. Since 2004, members of the congregations interacted periodically without clearly defined reasons but for mutual support between the congregations, and Pastor Frazier and I met for lunch and conversation. GFC has taught me that reconciliation might be summed up in the word “stay,” or, more biblically, “abide.”

GCF and Westminster planned a variety of combined programs for several months following an initial series of meetings. For example, GCF member Nick Christmas and Westminster member Sid Birt were part of a small group that met with members of the Portland Police Department to talk about racial profiling. GCF and Westminster planned a jointly sponsored after-school program that did not develop, for reasons described later in this section. Pulpit exchanges, shared educational classes, and Bible study deepened the partnership. In October 2007, GCF and Westminster formed a partnership recognized by the governing bodies of each congregation and the Presbytery of the Cascades. The purpose of the partnership was mutual support in mission and ministry.

During the 2004-2007 period, Frazier considered becoming a Presbyterian minister, and the GCF congregation explored becoming a Presbyterian congregation.

Neither of these things has happened. An outcome of the congregational partnership, however, was the completion of negotiations whereby the GCF congregation could purchase the building of a closed Presbyterian church where GCF had been meeting. Rather than becoming a Presbyterian congregation, they purchased the building and remained non-denominational. GFC and Westminster continued pondering shared ministry options, and in the spring of 2009 they began a food program for people in need with the support of Northeast Emergency Food Program (NEFP), a local non-profit.

The congregations contribute what they have and the food pantry addresses the immediate need of hungry people. GFC provides space for a site in a neighborhood NEFP desires to serve in exchange for some rent, and Westminster purchases the food from NEFP. Both congregations provide volunteers and leadership. The idea emerged out of already existing mission and ministry in each congregation.

At the beginning of the joint venture, I was unconvinced that it was the ultimate project for our partnership, nor that it would succeed. I wanted it to succeed, because we had tried things previously that did not work. As a leader, I waited and listened as lay leadership from each congregation negotiated details. I believed the project had to emerge organically in order to succeed. The attraction of the project for me, however, had little to do with the food program details and much more with building a relationship as we worked together.

Previously, I watched our attempts to start an after-school program fail because of financial and organizational issues and misunderstandings. I was unaware of how differently the congregations approached leadership, ministry, financial, and

organizational issues, and I did not listen carefully enough early on. I believe this resulted from naïve enthusiasm that led me to charge ahead without the full support of the Westminster congregation. The GCF members felt let down when the after-school program failed. Fortunately, Frazier and I maintained our friendship throughout this period, and we are entering a renewed phase of partnership because we “abided” with one another and stayed in relationship. In some situations, this sort of abiding may be impossible and would not lead to reconciliation. In Frazier’s and my case, however, it led to a deeper appreciation of one another over time. I believe our story contains a lesson, but it is one that must always be learned in context. In our case, staying in relationship led to a broader partnership in which others have attempted to do the same.

The official partnership between GCF and Westminster served as a way for Westminster to support and advocate for GCF with the Presbytery; however, other missteps along the way included misunderstandings between GCF members and members of the Presbytery Board of Trustees about the building. Some speculated about whether the GFC might be able to have the building if they became Presbyterian, and some disagreed about the loan interest rate after GCF decided to remain non-denominational and purchase the building.

The issue behind the partnership through this several year period was often the question: what shall we do about our mutual commitment to racial reconciliation? A program dedicated to serving the hungry is not an obvious choice, because it addresses economic issues of hunger rather than addressing race directly. The program serves as a vehicle for relationship. Members of both congregations support the program, and a

group of volunteers work together across racial lines. For example, the key leaders in each congregation come from different racial backgrounds, work together as organizers, understand that the multi-cultural relationships are part of the intention of the program, and have become friends.

Mistrust and miscommunication lingered, however, in the minds of some GCF members with respect to Presbyterians. I tried to create an alternative impression as a Presbyterian, and I believe I succeeded, at least in part. We held a celebratory dinner at which members of both congregations and the Presbytery were served side by side and celebrated our partnership and the purchase of the building. Any success links directly to my effort to “abide” with GCF through the process. I am humbled and amazed that GCF members are willing, as an act of grace and mercy, to continue the partnership with me and Westminster, especially in light of their congregation’s history.

GFC began on Easter Sunday in 2000 as a result of a merger of two congregations: one, primarily African-American, called Mt. Sinai and one, primarily Caucasian, called Crosstown. High energy and expectation characterized the initial year after the merger. The GCF congregation met in a school gymnasium, many people attended, and the local press described their success and celebrated their interracial nature.<sup>21</sup> Their goal was clearly one of racial reconciliation from the beginning, and many people embraced the goal enthusiastically. This changed as they moved into the second and third years, with an initial exodus of many people followed by what Associate Pastor

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<sup>21</sup> Nancy Haught, “Two Churches Finding One Way,” *The Oregonian*, April 23, 2000.

Eric Porter described as “a slow bleeding.” According to Porter, this slow but persistent loss of initial members over time hurt morale more than the initial exodus.<sup>22</sup>

Porter believes the congregation entered a period of healing from losses that included people who had considered one another good friends. Porter said at the outset, “We created a church where everyone is welcome, but no one is completely comfortable.” Porter explained that many GCF members experienced broken relationships over issues of cross-racial cooperation. Given these realities, GCF members reacted to my interest in a congregational partnership (Westminster is 98 percent Caucasian) with understandable skepticism and amazingly gracious support.

I sought further understanding and talked to several GCF members about GCF’s early years and the initial exodus. GCF member Nick Christmas has lived in Portland all his life and witnessed the Vanport flood, described earlier in this dissertation as one of the most significant experiences for understanding the nature of race relations in Portland.<sup>23</sup> Portland experienced a huge influx of African Americans into an otherwise very “white” city during WWII when the shipyards provided jobs that supported the war effort. A community called Vanport was built in a flood plain in north Portland to accommodate the new residents during the shipbuilding phase. When the war ended, many of those who had come to work in the shipyards stayed in Portland.

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<sup>22</sup> Eric Porter, interview by author, Portland, OR, May 11, 2009.

<sup>23</sup> Kafoury, Stacey, and Harrison, *The History of Portland’s African American Community*, 76-85.

The 1948 Vanport flood displaced residents, and many African-Americans moved into the Albina neighborhood near the current location of GCF. Nick Christmas experienced the flood, and as he described it, “I just stayed.”<sup>24</sup> Nick attended Mt. Sinai, where he and his wife were baptized before the merger that formed GCF. He describes Frazier as “ahead of the curve,” and he believes sub-cultures around beliefs, emotions, and behaviors associated with race influenced those who left GCF.<sup>25</sup>

Moses Davis expanded on this idea when he described the initial exodus of members from GCF, and he believes issues related to style of worship and age influenced the exodus. For example, the mostly white, younger Crosstown members wanted to bring coffee into the sanctuary and were more casual than older black members. Moses identified that the most significant disagreements involved Bible study. People from the Mt. Sinai congregation were accustomed to regular Bible study, and a large number of their members participated consistently in some form of Bible study. They viewed Crosstown members as casual in dress and casual in their attitude toward the Bible. Nevertheless, Moses believes many people left for non-substantive reasons of style, and in his opinion, “This is not the way to go . . . to leave for no good reason . . . just to let go.”<sup>26</sup> Davis’ story connects the issue of staying in relationship with the issues of human action and language. What people say can be linked to a number of different human actions. For example, some church members held behavioral expectations different from

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<sup>24</sup> Nick Christmas, interview by author, Portland, OR, October 23, 2008.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Moses Davis, interview by author, Portland, OR, October 22, 2008.



other church members. The different expectations resulted in tension that caused some to leave while others stayed.

Vera Nembhard was born in Louisiana and moved to Portland in 1991 after some time in California. She prefers the slower pace of Portland and likes living there. She was a member of Mt. Sinai and then GCF, and she attributes the success of GCF to Frazier's personality and commitment: "It works because of Pastor Frazier."<sup>27</sup> Vera's strong mother worked as a nanny. Vera remembers her mother nursing a white boy, and when Vera's brother cried in response she said, "Vera, don't hate." At 80 years of age, Vera continues to be guided by this phrase, and she says about mixed-race couples at GCF, "If you are in love, race should not stand in the way."<sup>28</sup>

A younger white woman, Doreen Barnhouse, has been with GCF since the beginning and says, "You can't be in it and not change."<sup>29</sup> Doreen came to GCF as a divorced woman and felt love and acceptance that kept her coming back: "There are so many sad stories, you can't shun anyone or you would have no members."<sup>30</sup> She had been married to a black man and was surprised by the extent of racism she experienced in that relationship. Now single, Doreen has adopted three African-American children and supports the GCF reconciliation ministry.

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<sup>27</sup> Vera Nembhard, interview with author, Portland, OR, November 19, 2008.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Doreen Barnhouse, interview with author, Portland, OR, November 10, 2008.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

My gratitude to GCF and my desire for a partnership grows with these glimpses into the GCF story. I believe God leads our efforts and that the Holy Spirit is at work because I did not plan the course of events that unfolded. I audited a cultural anthropology course Frazier teaches at Multnomah University and again heard GCF church members telling their story to young college students. I was amazed by their willingness to simply tell their beautiful story because, as I have learned, it is far from simple. The GCF story has taught me again the importance of storytelling, listening, and abiding. The GCF experiences provide a laboratory in reconciliation.

Frazier recommended a book that frames some of my experiences with GCF more clearly as experiences of grace. In the book *Grace Matters*, Chris Rice describes his seventeen year friendship with Spencer Perkins. Their friendship united them across a racial barrier because Rice is white and Perkins is African-American. They met while Rice was a short-term volunteer from Middlebury College who signed up for a five-month period in Jackson, Mississippi. Five months turned into seventeen years, and they ended up living with their families and others in a communal lifestyle modeled on the biblical community in Antioch that Paul describes in Acts and Galatians.<sup>31</sup> In addition to the stresses and joys of living in community, Rice and Perkins wrote a book about their experiences called *More than Equals* and published a magazine on race and reconciliation called *Urban Family*. They addressed many audiences about their

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<sup>31</sup> Chris Rice, *Grace Matters: A Memoir of Faith, Friendship and Hope in the Heart of the South* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 65-66.

relationship until Perkins' death in 1998. My GCF experience cannot compare in intensity to theirs, but the parallels are instructive.

From the beginning, Rice struggled with staying. He described his decision not to return to Middlebury College and remain in Jackson: "The thing was, I couldn't bear the thought of staying. Or leaving."<sup>32</sup> Every time an individual or a couple decided to leave their intentional community, they experienced it as a "divorce."<sup>33</sup> The word that Rice and Perkins chose to describe the nature of their partnership was "yokefellows." He writes, "And if we could become yoked together, in spite of all our inadequacies, in spite of Antioch's ups and downs . . . then there was hope that black and white in the nation could too."<sup>34</sup> They discovered an important thing about truth telling: "[T]ruth telling is as much about how and when you speak as what you say."<sup>35</sup>

Their most important discovery was that God's love underlay their ability to create a culture in which they exhibited the grace that permits healing rather than destructive truth telling. The biblical theme of God's love for humans emerged and transformed their community more than the call to love God or to love neighbor. This theme emerged as they wrestled with relational conflicts. Rice describes it: "God loves you. Unless we are gripped by that fact, it's too dangerous to do anything. It's about God's action among you, or it's nothing. . . . [T]he point of it all wasn't what I—or we—

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 186.

did for God. Faithfulness to God . . . was unintelligible apart from God's faithfulness to us."<sup>36</sup> That discovery led their community down a new path as they sought a "culture of grace" in which someone could "give grace while preaching justice." Grace was primary in their communal culture. This example addresses the link between God's reconciling action and human action. Human action is strengthened when God's action is primary.

Nevertheless, the tension in their story reminds others that staying in relationship is not a simple universal ethic. In fact, after Perkins' death, Rice eventually left the community he loved, and at that point he described this leaving as an act of trust and faith.<sup>37</sup> Staying in relationship is always in tension with leaving, and the decision must be made in a particular context to be meaningful to the reconciliation process.

The South African TRC experience and the GCF and Westminster experience reinforced by Rice's experiment in Mississippi demonstrate the connection between grace and God's love for humans that reframes the conversation about how justice, mercy, and truth interact in reconciliation. As this dissertation demonstrates, all work toward human reconciliation must be grounded in God's reconciling heart because God's loving action is primary. If that connection is lost or if personal actions precede God's, human reconciliation efforts lead to frustration and failure because they become a human work. In a culture of grace, however, individuals can receive God's love and mercy and be more honest about their shortcomings. Truth should be told in the context of God's love

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 220.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 284-287.

and forgiveness rather than something humans achieve or demand from each other. When told in the context of God's love, truth is more possible and justice is more lasting.

For example, if GCF and Westminster's food-for-the-hungry program becomes something they must do successfully for the relationship to flourish, this puts too much stress on program success or failure. If they view the partnership as lasting no matter what, they can enjoy working together in good times and in bad. For another example, if Frazier or I believed we must stay in relationship to prove something, we might grow weary of meeting. The remarkable thing about our meetings was how unnecessary they are because no one requires them. In fact, members of the Presbytery might have wondered why we met after the GCF congregation decided not to become Presbyterian. GCF's decision illustrates the complex staying-and-leaving dynamic, and how leaving can be a healthy part of the reconciliation process. If the GCF congregation had stayed in relationship to the Presbytery and engaged in the process of becoming Presbyterian, I do not believe it would have created a healthy congregational identity. In spite of this, however, the congregational partnership and the inter-personal relationships such as the one between Pastor Frazier and myself demonstrated the opposite side of the stay/leave dynamic as we stayed in relationship.

GCF members were astoundingly graceful, and that reflects their experience of God's graciousness toward them. Connections exist among God's grace, God's mercy, and God's abiding love. Mercy is found in abiding, in staying, and truth can be told more fully and reconciliation experienced more radically in a spirit of grace.

### **Section #3: Next Steps for Ministry at Westminster and Relationship in the Surrounding Community**

As I move between my ministry setting at Westminster Presbyterian Church and meetings of the RLPG, or from a meeting of the Presbytery of the Cascades and a meeting at GCF, I sometimes feel as though I live in different worlds simultaneously. How do I reconcile these experiences? What do I make of this merciful model of reconciliation for my ministry setting?

One lesson from the South African TRC, RLPG, and GCF experiences is the importance of abiding and staying together. Persons sometimes tend to leave when differences of opinion occur. People feel the urge to separate from one another and live apart, and this may be necessary at times because togetherness may not be healthy when trauma is fresh or when pain is at a particularly high level. The trauma may not be acknowledged and mercy and reconciliation may be premature in unjust situations.

Cone resists easy use of the word reconciliation; however, individuals can spend time apart and maintain hope of future reconciliation or come back together following healing. Reconciliation is the ending chapter of a longer story that begins with pain and trauma, moves to truthful storytelling, addresses injustice, and culminates in forgiveness and mercy. This path to reconciliation is complete only through God's perfect mercy and grace, and it is connected in part to Westminster through its baptismal vows. Congregants vow to be family to one another and promise to stay together "for better or for worse." This vow reflects their basic character as a baptismal covenant community.

One of the stories Westminster congregants can investigate is the story of the church's racial and ethnic makeup. Why is the congregation 98 percent white? What is our story through the period of the Vanport flood and beyond? My experience of many white communities is, rather than a story of their unique identity, they more often tell a story of how they fulfill the myth of progress and stability. It may be time to reexamine the story we tell ourselves, and relationships are a key to this process. The growing relationships between GCF and Westminster members will continue to guide us.

The ethic of merciful reconciliation explored in this thesis has implications beyond issues of race, and the Presbyterian denomination is divided at the national level on numerous ethical issues. The continual struggle to stay together should not become an end in itself. The decision must be made in a particular context of mutual relationship and grounded in God's abiding love. Presbyterians may stay together in a more honest way if they deal with other issues raised by this thesis such as injustice and theological language.

Reconciliation of injustice is possible through long-term relationships and one of the first steps in acknowledging injustice is truthful story telling. We lack universal agreement on the nature of injustices and this must be recognized before reconciliation can be considered. This thesis deals, in part, with the issue of theological language because mercy is crucial for successful reconciliation. The model of merciful reconciliation can guide ministry at Westminster.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter illustrated how the seven lessons that comprised the model developed in the previous chapter apply in a new context. Lesson number seven may be the most comprehensive and so this conclusion will consider the seven lessons in reverse order of chapter 4. Commitment to staying in relationship over time is at the heart of human work toward reconciliation, but it must always be lived out in tension with leaving, and leaving can sometimes be an action that leads to health and healing. The biblical notion of covenant relationship is the basis for this commitment to “abide” through time. Abiding is always an incomplete human action that reflects God’s complete and perfect abiding love for humans. Abiding is an active approach and requires commitment to address challenges, disagreements, and misunderstandings.

Misunderstandings can be addressed through storytelling. Telling truthful stories involves more than factual data; it includes sharing one’s identity and facing the role of trauma and healing in identity formation. This storytelling approach to reconciliation is part of a restorative, non-punitive approach to justice. This chapter described the RLPG’s modeling of restorative justice (lesson six) and the relationship between Westminster and the GCF that relied on storytelling (lesson five) to build relationships that would lead to reconciliation.

Lesson four emphasized the way worship and personal renewal create a foundation for reconciliation. Westminster and the GCF have continued to pray for one another, and this author continues to attend GCF worship services and GCF members attend worship at Westminster.



The third lesson connected mercy and forgiveness to one another and to God's action. This connection is a part of the mission of GCF and is evidenced by the use of 2 Corinthians 5:19 on both their website and on worship banners in their sanctuary. In addition, the members of GCF modeled mercy and forgiveness toward the author and Westminster church over misunderstandings between the GCF congregation and the Presbytery, or between the two congregations.

The issue of reparations is complex when it comes to the issue of gentrification because of the confusion and complexity about how gentrification is defined and whether it leads to good or bad results. When the partnership between Westminster and GCF is examined through the lens of the first and second lessons, the purchase of the building may be relevant. The completion of a mutually acceptable agreement between Presbytery Trustees and the leaders of GCF set the stage for a deeper relationship that followed. Had this agreement not been reached, the partnership between Westminster and GCF would have remained preoccupied with this largely financial matter. Until the agreement was reached, conversations about it dominated our interactions with one another and neither side was clear about the expectations of the other. Clarity about financial matters (lesson one) would have helped. Mistakes were made in this process prior to reaching an agreement. The imperfect nature of human endeavors (lesson two) was clear in this example.

Lessons one through six emphasize the importance of lesson seven. The issues of finance and reparations, storytelling and structural justice, trauma, identity, and trust are

complex; therefore, they demand time and patience. A commitment to abide creates the space necessary for human relationships to develop, and for God to work.

I learned the act of abiding is an act of grace and mercy. It is first and foremost God's graceful embrace of humanity. Humans who choose to abide move in the direction of reconciliation if the choice is made in a context of mutual relationship that does not perpetuate abuse, trauma, or ongoing racism. Efforts in these areas are always imperfect, and those who make the choice do so humbly. I have learned this lesson not by some effort I have made, but those who have made the choice have humbled me. Chapter 3 described how Miroslav Volf made that choice. This chapter has described how others from the GCF chose to stay in relationship with Westminster and me; therefore, I learned the lesson not by trying to achieve it, but by watching others offer relationship as a gift.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

The mercy and forgiveness experienced in South Africa during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission process clarify reconciliation rooted in God's merciful, reconciling heart. This understanding of reconciliation balances justice, mercy, and truth as a complex process of human interaction. Since less has been written and said about mercy than about justice or truth, more attention to mercy in the future will help balance the discussion. Reconciliation efforts that balance justice, mercy, and truth are the biblical response to human divisions and injustice. Justice and truth are most fully expressed when they overcome the divisions between people and open them to God's mercy.

Translating theological ideas into concrete human action is an imperfect endeavor. This dissertation's thesis, however, is that the South African experience of mercy provides a reconciliation model for relationship, conversation, and ministry in Portland. Genesis Community Fellowship and the Restorative Listening Project on Gentrification exemplify how that model operates.

Chapter 2 demonstrated that reconciliation describes a main theme of the biblical narrative. Careful attention should be given to the balance between human and divine action. Reconciliation is first an action of God on humanity's behalf, and what this means

for action in the human realm is often negotiated. Prophetic notions of justice are more compassionate and more merciful when understood through the lens of covenant and “right relationship.” This is the foundation of the concept of restorative justice.

Additionally, the priestly perspective is an important lens that clarifies God’s atoning action in Christ and connects atonement to the idea of mercy. My discovery of the connection between the priestly role and mercy made it possible to understand Tutu and the TRC experience in a transformative way.

Chapter 3 addressed the postmodern critique of universals, and the author provided an alternative. A universal sense of purpose or goal is not based on rational method but on community discernment. Theologians have described the goal or main theme of human existence to identify an ethic for human behavior. Miroslav Volf and James McClendon Jr. center their ethics in reconciliation, but some theologians disagree. James Cone, for example, initially rejected reconciliation in favor of liberation, but he articulates a well-developed theology of the cross and an understanding of God’s atoning action in Christ. Three examples demonstrated the difficulty of human responses to God’s atoning action: integration, reluctance to remember or forget past abuses and violence, and community formation.

The choice to remember or forget is often connected with personal identity issues, and either choice is connected with the formation of healthy human community. The chapter described some issues involved in healthy community formation. The relationships between human community and divine community, and the relationships between human and divine actions, are complex. The chapter examined several examples

of how language about justice can be divisive rather than reconciling based on inattention to relational and merciful dynamics.

Chapter 4 reviewed the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. The commission's forgiveness experiences and Desmond Tutu's use of the word forgiveness described mercy because forgiveness leads individuals to act mercifully or experience mercy. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report contains four descriptions of truth, and individuals' understanding of truth affects how they conceptualize and enact reconciliation. Critiques of the TRC stressed that TRC members' understanding of justice and truth may differ from the way other South Africans understood these issues. Nevertheless, the TRC recorded moving experiences of mercy and forgiveness throughout the process, and these experiences point the way forward. The TRC's focus on restorative justice rather than retributive justice was more merciful. The experience in South Africa is instructive in its imperfection as well as its success. Mercy cannot be coerced and care must be taken to assure that it is freely offered. Chapter 4 also explored the connection between truth, storytelling, and a structural analysis of racism. These issues are connected with individual identity, and storytelling addresses structural issues effectively, especially in traumatic events.

Seven lessons emerged from the author's examination of the South African experience that can comprise a merciful reconciliation model. These lessons are: (a) Clarity about financial matters and reparations is necessary. Money and how it is handled can often complicate the reconciliation process. (b) Human attempts at reconciliation are imperfect, as evident in disagreements about what to do in response to racism.

Imperfection is not a reason to abandon reconciliation as a goal, but rather is a caution to remain humble in the process. (c) Mercy and forgiveness are connected and rooted in God's action in Christ. Human acts of mercy and forgiveness are rooted in God's action. This, as with the previous lesson, helps believers approach reconciliation attempts with humility, mercy, and open minds and hearts. (d) Worship and personal renewal are often foundational for reconciliation. (e) Telling truthful stories is a part of a merciful reconciliation process that deals with trauma, identity, and structural issues. Storytelling connects personal and structural aspects of reconciliation through narrative rather than data-oriented truth. (f) Justice can be interpreted as restorative rather than punitive. (f) Abiding, or staying in relationship, is central to merciful reconciliation, but is always in tension with leaving when injustice or trauma go unacknowledged.

Chapter 5 examined how these seven lessons apply in another context and expanded on the role of personal identity and trauma. A participant's description of trauma at a RLPG meeting showed the complexity of trauma and how storytelling may be connected with healing. The chapter described the work of the RLPG as a reconciliation guide and the GCF congregation's partnership with Westminster Presbyterian Church in Portland.

This author's interest in mercy was spurred by Leonard Sweet, who asked readers to "measure the 'wideness of mercy' in our life and community."<sup>1</sup> Sweet writes,

For the same reason it is easier to imagine hell than heaven, it is easier to recognize "injustice" than to formulate a positive definition of what is "justice."  
 . . . Are you standing before God one day and saying, "Okay, Lord, give me

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<sup>1</sup> Leonard Sweet, *So Beautiful* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2009), 236.

justice. Bring it on! Give me justice!” I’m not. My cry will be one of “Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy.”<sup>2</sup>

In her album, “Mercy Now,” Mary Gauthier sings, “We hang in the balance, dangle ‘tween hell and hallowed ground. Every one of us could use a little mercy now.”<sup>3</sup> This song was used as a prayer during a worship service at Westminster Presbyterian Church and moved the author to experience mercy and to hope for more. I have experienced mercy from GCF members and from God as I have explored this thesis.

An important lesson from the GCF-Westminster partnership is the connection between reconciliation and staying together. Tutu described the connection when he said the victims and perpetrators of apartheid abuses had to live together after the end of apartheid. Tutu points to that fact as a major reason for the merciful process they undertook. John Canda said something similar at a meeting of the RLPG when he urged participants to “stay in the room” in order to reach reconciliation. The associate pastor of GCF said it by emphasizing the word “stay.” This lesson must be understood by RLPG and GCF in order to emulate the South African, merciful reconciliation model. Those who follow a merciful reconciliation model must wrestle with what that means in their communities. Staying together involves individuals picturing the persons with whom they disagree, the persons who hurt them, or the persons they hurt, and asking what staying in relationship means. For this author it means that relationships with members of Westminster, GCF, the RLPG, and Pastor Frazier are more than academic or temporary.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 237.

<sup>3</sup> Mary Gauthier, *Mercy Now*, Lost Highway, CD, 2005.

They are part of God's call and a sign of God's mercy in staying lovingly with me and offering me healing grace.

The relationships in which people choose to stay should not become ends in themselves. Staying is a decision made in a particular context of mutuality and is grounded in God's abiding love for humans. The decision to stay in a relationship that involves some measure of reconciliation means that staying is always in tension with leaving. Leaving some relationships may lead to health and healing in some circumstances. Abiding or staying is always incomplete as a human action, but reflects God's complete and abiding love for humans.

Staying together does not presume any specific outcome. It does not presume what sort of justice will be done or that the hope for justice will be abandoned. It does not assume what truth will be told or what truth may be ignored. Staying together is an act of mercy. It is the kind of mercy that waits for fully realized justice and truth and creates reconciliation rather than division. One way to measure progress might be based on Sweet's suggestion that participants talk about and do "works of mercy" instead of "justice ministries."<sup>4</sup>

A theology of the cross is another possible outcome of this thesis, and a theology of the cross at Westminster requires significant time and care. Cone began this development with his writings on "The Cross and the Lynching Tree." In *The Great Awakening*, Wallis makes a confession about the cross. He reports he spoke to Lutheran teenagers, and he passed under a huge lighted cross as he entered the auditorium. He

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<sup>4</sup> Sweet, *So Beautiful*, 237.



writes, “The dramatic imagery made me adjust my remarks on the spot.”<sup>5</sup> What follows that remark is the only place he offers anything like a theology of atonement or of the cross, in a book that repeatedly urges “justice revivals.” This is, however, the kind of theological work is crucial for reconciliation in contemporary culture.

Those who pursue the work of merciful reconciliation should tend to their relationships, and key questions include: relationships and partnerships with whom? At Westminster this involves mission partnerships and community involvement. Key questions include: “Are our partnerships with people like us? Do our partnerships support our positions or do they stretch us?” Westminster’s partnership with GCF stretches participants and requires relational tenacity tested over time.

This dissertation demonstrates that Christians are called to pay attention to the stories they tell about themselves and stories told by others. Listening is a demanding endeavor and requires work and practice that improve listening skills over time. Learning how to tell individuals’ stories may involve confession and repentance because telling stories and listening to others’ stories involves listening for the truth. The truth can open speakers and listeners to personal and structural issues and revelation. Listening is an act of mercy that dignifies others and can lead to reconciliation rooted in God’s merciful heart.

The work of reconciliation is incomplete. This dissertation contends that we are not so much expected to complete the work of reconciliation but rather to keep working toward it in the knowledge of its incomplete nature. The work of reconciliation is,

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<sup>5</sup> Wallis, *The Great Awakening*, 293.

therefore, an act of trust in one another and in the case of believers trust in God. Recent events in Portland highlight the importance of this ongoing work. On Friday, February 19, 2010, two events occurred simultaneously. Survivors of the Vanport flood were acknowledged at city hall in Portland for the first time. As the mayor handed out certificates to them, some of the onlookers had just arrived from a rally expressing anger over the shooting of an African American man named Aaron Campbell by a Portland police officer. The anger at the rally was reported the next day in the *Oregonian* newspaper.<sup>6</sup> A report of the acknowledgement of the Vanport survivors appeared much later in the February 24 edition of the *Portland Observer* rather than the *Oregonian*.<sup>7</sup> The *Portland Observer* is a newspaper “committed to cultural diversity.”<sup>8</sup>

The anger and division in the Aaron Campbell rally took center stage. The anger is not new, as the *Oregonian* article states. In contrast, the acknowledgement by about fifty people of some of the survivors of the Vanport flood sixty-two years after it occurred is an important but insufficient human action to create a climate of complete reconciliation. One of the lessons of this dissertation is that human efforts at reconciliation are imperfect, yet this dissertation emanates from a longing for more hopeful acts like the Vanport flood acknowledgement, in spite of their imperfections. As I stood in attendance, I wondered where this small step toward telling and hearing an

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<sup>6</sup> Nikole Hannah-Jones, “Violent Death Adds to an Old Anger” *The Oregonian*, Saturday, February 20, 2010. See accompanying photograph for account of the rally.

<sup>7</sup> “Flood Survivors Honored,” *Portland Observer*, February 24, 2010, [http://portlandobserver.com/?page\\_id=10](http://portlandobserver.com/?page_id=10) (accessed February 24, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> This quotation appears on the front page of every edition of this newspaper.

important story would lead. I lived in Portland for 12 years before I knew about the Vanport flood. I continue to wonder how to address anger like that expressed by those who attended the rally in response to the Campbell shooting. I believe the two events are connected. I believe that telling and hearing the stories is a merciful way toward both justice and truth. Maybe if we listen long enough we will eventually know what to do.<sup>9</sup> And then do it. I believe that injustices might be acknowledged and responded to differently if more people knew more history. It would be a huge mercy if history did not always repeat itself.

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<sup>9</sup> Thanks to RLPG organizer Celeste Carey who once said this to me in a conversation.

## APPENDIX A

### HUMAN AND DIVINE RECONCILIATION

The following diagrams illustrate the difference between reconciliation as a human action between people and God's reconciliation on humanity's behalf. The first figure depicts reconciliation as a divine action that reconciles all creation through mercy, justice, and truth. God's action completes human hopes for healing from injustice and reveals a truth that brings dignity to all in a merciful way. God initiates mercy, and mercy expresses God's heart.

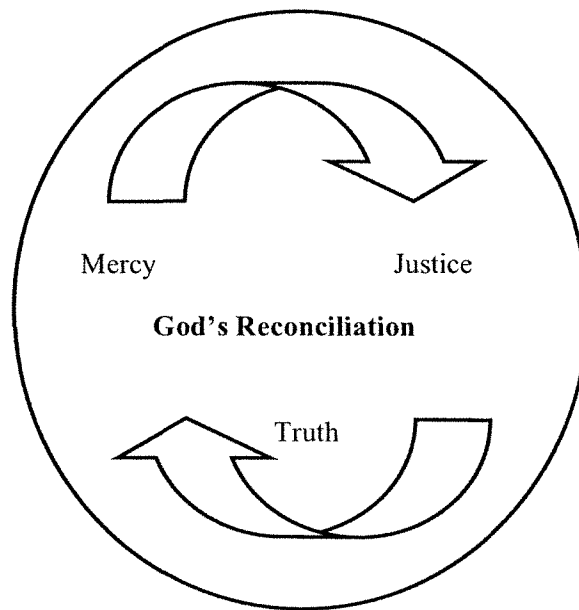


Figure 1. God's reconciliation through mercy, justice, and truth

The second figure illustrates reconciliation on a human level. Human reconciliation efforts begin with trauma and pain, and humans can move toward

reconciliation by telling the truth about their experiences. Truth telling can be an act of justice, or it can identify injustices and address them through repentance and reparation. Individuals can begin acts of mercy and forgiveness when they address the issues, and these actions move toward reconciliation, which is ultimately complete only at God's heavenly banquet after this earthly life.

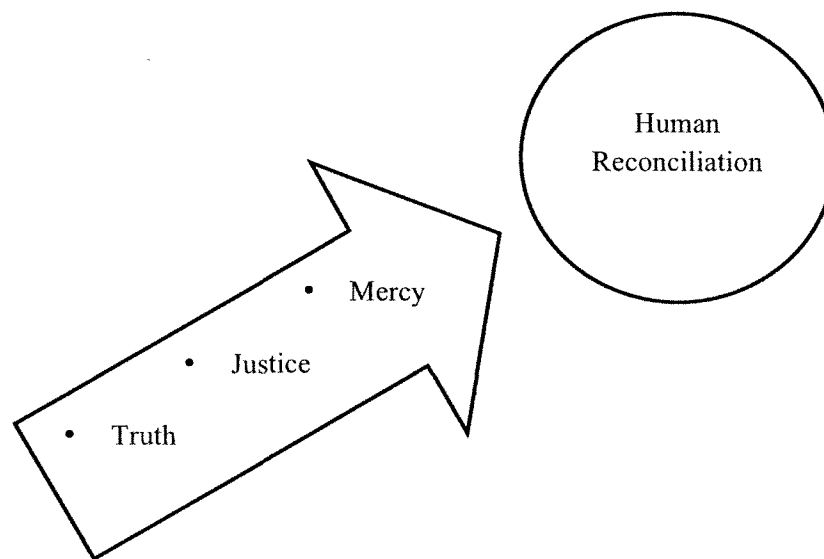


Figure 2. Human reconciliation from truth telling through justice and mercy

The difference between figures 1 and 2 illustrates the gulf between human and divine reconciliation. Human reconciliation is temporal, incomplete, and progressive, and if people move people too quickly into forgiveness or merciful acts, re-traumatizing can occur. Divine reconciliation lies beyond this life, and efforts to bring justice can trigger revengeful acts, or individuals can become discouraged by their imperfect attempts at reconciliation.

## APPENDIX B

### THE CONFESSION OF 1967

An example from Presbyterian history highlights the tension between divine and human reconciliation. Presbyterianism is a confessional denomination; Presbyterians are guided by written historical documents called “confessions.” These confessions are contained in the *Book of Confessions*, and one is the “Confession of 1967” that grew out of the twentieth-century civil-rights movement in the United States.<sup>1</sup> The document is built on the idea of reconciliation and the scriptural passage: “In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself” (2 Cor. 5:19 NRSV).

The three parts of the Confession of 1967 are titled: “God’s Work of Reconciliation,” “The Ministry of Reconciliation,” and “The Fulfillment of Reconciliation.”<sup>2</sup> The document advocates reconciliation, but disagreements around the document reveal Presbyterians do not agree on all definitions. The Lay Committee is a more conservative group of Presbyterians that opposed the Confession of 1967 on doctrinal grounds. This happened when it became clear that the Confession of 1967’s

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<sup>1</sup> Edward A. Dowey, *A Commentary on the Confession of 1967 and an Introduction to the Book of Confessions* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968), 130-131.

<sup>2</sup> Office of the General Assembly, *The Book of Confessions* (Louisville, KY: Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church USA, 1999), 252.

stance on reconciliation in society provided theological sanction for the church's critical corporate stance on race, war, poverty, and other social concerns.<sup>3</sup>

A critique of the Confession of 1967 by Yale scholar Brevard Childs clarifies the theological issue, and he bases his critique on comments by E. A. Dowey, the chair of the committee that wrote the confession.<sup>4</sup> Childs says that Dowey argues reconciliation reflects two movements: "God to man and man to man." He points out that the support for the first movement is 2 Corinthians 5:19. Childs disagrees with Dowey's finding support for the second movement in the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus and Paul's use of the word reconciliation. He writes that Dowey misrepresents what Paul meant in 2 Corinthians by making it about human action, rather than divine action:

What is particularly astonishing and disturbing in the document is Dowey's explicit appeal to Calvin for support. Yet Calvin's interpretation of 2 Cor. 5:19 makes exactly that opposite point. Reconciliation is a gracious movement from God to human activity, which can only be received: "Be reconciled to God." The ministry of reconciliation does not consist in any human extension of Christ's reconciliation, but the application consists entirely of the preaching of the Gospel.<sup>5</sup>

Childs concludes,

The Confession of 1967 once again illustrates the crucial importance of the church's understanding of the doctrine of reconciliation. In this case, by means of a highly contrived exegesis of the New Testament, a sharp break was effected with the Reformed tradition, and the Presbyterian Church was persuaded to

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<sup>3</sup> Jack Rogers, *Presbyterian Creeds: A Guide to the Book of Confessions* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 214.

<sup>4</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 527.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 527-528.

endorse a radically different understanding of its mission, now largely in terms of social action.<sup>6</sup>

This example demonstrates the potential for disagreement and dissension, and yet this dissertation places reconciliation at the center of both divine and human action.

Reconciliation describes divine and human action and movement toward God and humanity.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.



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