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THE SOCIAL MEANING OF RECONCILIATION⁽¹⁰⁾

By Miroslav Volf

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"The best catechists, those who filled our churches on Sundays, were the first to go with machetes in their hands," said a Roman Catholic bishop from Rwanda. The observers take the comment to speak for most Rwandan churches in those fateful months of 1994 during which a million people were killed. "There is absolutely no doubt that significant numbers of prominent Christians were involved in the killings, sometimes slaughtering their own church leaders," writes Ian Linden (Linden, 1997, 50). What is particularly disturbing about the complicity of the church is that, as John Martin points out, "Rwanda is without doubt one of Africa's most evangelized nations. Eight out of ten of its people claim to be Christians. Moreover, thanks to the East African Revival in the 1930s and a spontaneous movement of the Holy Spirit in the majority Roman Catholic churches in the 1970s, Rwanda has been held up as one of the jewels in the crown of charismatic Christianity" (Martin, 1995, 1).

By singling out Rwanda's churches, I do not mean either to deny that many Rwandan Christians courageously opposed the killings or to suggest that the complicity of Rwandan churches is an exception to an otherwise impeccable record of churches' functioning as agents of peace. Rather, Rwanda's genocide demonstrates with particular force the church's disturbing propensity to be an accomplice in social strife. It was not a complicity of a church whose Christian commitments functioned merely as a cultural resource, easily misused by politicians in a way that runs at cross-purposes to the deep grammar of these commitments, as in the case of Orthodoxy in former Yugoslavia. To the contrary, the Christian commitments of the Rwandan churches, like those of the Irish evangelicals, seemed strong and genuine; they were presumably a force that had shaped the lives of the believers. The issue is not simply, How could churches have been accomplices in the most heinous crimes? Much more disturbing, the issue is, How could the members of churches which had emerged from what was described as a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit--the Spirit of communion and the Spirit of life--how could *they* either participate in the genocide or turn their eyes the other way during that genocide?

I want to explore here some reasons for this kind of church complicity in social strife and propose an alternative way of approaching Christian social responsibility that would help churches function as agents of peace. Of course, many churches in diverse context have not been

complicit, but faithful. To them I want to offer theological resources to better equip them for the arduous and treacherous task of peacemaking.

Churches and Conflict

Why are churches, the presumed agents of peace, at best impotent in the face of their people's conflicts and at worst perpetrators of the most heinous crimes? Some scholars, like Maurice Bloch in *Prey into Hunter*, argue that Christian faith fosters violence because Christian faith is a religion, and religions are by their very nature violent. The "irreducible core of the ritual process" involves "a marked element of violence or ... of conquest ... of the here and now by the transcendental" (Bloch, 1992, 4-5). In everyday life, ritual violence mutates into social violence, argues Bloch. Other scholars, like (by implication) Regina Schwartz in *The Curse of Cain*, try to explain the Christian faith's complicity in violence by pointing not to the general features of the phenomenon of religion, but to the specific character of the Christian faith. Along with Judaism and Islam, Christian faith is a monotheist religion and therefore an exclusive religion that divides people into "us" and "them"; such monotheistic exclusivism is bound to have a violent legacy (Schwartz, 1997). "We" have on our side the one true God who is against "them," infidels and renegades. This is no place to enter a debate with critics over the violent character of religions in general or monotheist religions in particular. I just note that I remain unpersuaded. These proposals to explain complicity are unable to account for that fact that the churches are often approached to mediate in situations of conflict, and even less for the fact that they are sometimes successful in their efforts.

In my estimation, rather than the character of the Christian faith itself, a better explanation of why Christian churches are either impotent in the face of violent conflicts or actively participate in them derives from the *proclivities of its adherents* which are at odds with the character of the Christian faith. One way to describe these pernicious proclivities is to speak of *confusion of loyalty*. Though explicitly giving ultimate allegiance to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, many Christians in fact seem to have an overriding commitment to their respective cultures and ethnic groups. Hence in conflict situations they tend to fight on the side of their cultural group and employ faith as a weapon in struggle. The empirical research on the churches' reaction to ethnic conflicts conducted by Ralph Premdas in a number of countries in the southern hemisphere has shown that the "inter-communal antipathies present in the society at large are reflected in the attitudes of churches and their adherents" (Premdas, 1994, 55). Though the clergy are often invited to adjudicate, "the reconciling thrust quickly evaporates after the initial effort" (55f.). The most important reason for failure, he notes, is the "inter-locking relations of church and cultural section which spill into partisan politics marked by the mobilization of collective hate and cultivated bigotry" (56). Along with their parishioners the clergy are often "trapped within the claims of their own ethnic or cultural community" and thus serve as "legitimizers of ethnic conflict" (56), despite their genuine desire to take seriously the Gospel call to the ministry of reconciliation.

Churches find themselves unable to act on the Gospel call to the ministry of reconciliation because their commitments are wrongly ordered--universal claims of the Gospel of Jesus Christ are subordinated to the claims of the particular social groups they inhabit instead of the claims of particular social groups being subordinated to the universal claims of the Gospel. But why this confusion of loyalties? Of the many reasons that can be given, I want to explore in this paper one that I consider particularly significant: it consists of misconceptions about the "ministry of

reconciliation." Ralph Premdas concludes his compelling article with the following recommendation:

The leaders of the churches will have to take the issue of ethnic conflict more seriously. Of utmost importance is a better understanding of the social, political and theological factors involved. The churches will have to appoint committees that investigate the historical origin of the conflict, examine the social scientific literature on ethnic conflicts, study the theory and practice of conflict resolution, and devise instruments of popular education that raise people's awareness of the issues at stake and communicate the biblical message of reconciliation. (Premdas, 1994, 56)

Premdas, a sociologist, rightly calls churches to take seriously the Gospel call to the ministry of reconciliation by studying the nature of conflicts and the possibilities for their resolution, and then by educating people about how to engage in peace-making. He simply assumes that everything is in order with the message of reconciliation itself; that message only needs to be communicated. He is too charitable with the theology of the churches, however. As a theologian, I want to suggest that merely communicating the message of reconciliation will not do. A prior task needs to be undertaken which consists in *explicating theologically the social meaning of reconciliation*.

Theology of the Social Meaning of Reconciliation

Since reconciliation is a central theological category, one would think that explications of its social meaning would abound. This is, however, not the case. We face not so much *mistaken explications* of the social meaning of reconciliation as a deeply disturbing *absence* of sustained attempts to relate the core theological beliefs about reconciliation to the shape of the church's social responsibility. In "A Theological Afterword" to the book *The Reconciliation of Peoples* (1997), one of its editors, Gregory Baum, writes,

The authors [of the essays in the book] realize that the church's theological tradition offers very little wisdom on the social meaning of reconciliation. It is symptomatic that even in the most recent *Handbook of Catholic Theology*, published by Crossroad in 1995, the long, scholarly article on reconciliation makes no reference whatever to the reconciliation between peoples. *The New Dictionary of Catholic Social Thought*, published by Liturgical Press in 1994, contains no article on reconciliation. Reflection on this topic is only beginning in the church. (Baum, 1997, 187)

A Catholic theologian, Baum points to a deficiency in Catholic reference works. The problem is equally acute in Protestant reference works. The more or less "liberal" *Dictionary of Ethics, Theology and Society* (Routledge in 1996) has no listing under "reconciliation." With the notable exception of the *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology* (InterVarsity Press, 1995), articles on "reconciliation" found in evangelical theological and ethical dictionaries concentrate on reconciliation between human beings and God. The entry in *Baker's Dictionary of Christian Ethics* (ed. by Carl F. Henry)--written by a New Testament scholar!--is symptomatic. Toward the end the author notes that "in recent time some have thought that reconciliation ought

to be seen in what we may term a horizontal rather than a vertical direction.... Reconciliation then becomes a way of enabling men to live together in meaningful community." Tellingly, the author adds a concession that "there is, of course, some truth in this." But then the text goes on to emphasize the significance of the right order between reconciliation with God and reconciliation between human beings: first vertical and then, as a consequence, horizontal. The author made the comment on the social dimension of reconciliation as a side remark, to indicate the path not to be taken rather than the path to be explored.

There are two basic ways in which the social agenda of the church has been isolated from the message of reconciliation. The first way reduces the doctrine of reconciliation to the *reconciliation of the soul with God* and is favored by pietistic or socially conservative evangelicals. This approach rests on the correct core belief that all persons are sinners before God and are called to repent and receive forgiveness and new life in Christ. The fateful move comes when this core belief is combined with an almost exclusive emphasis on private morality conceived of as the ethical consequence of the reconciliation of a person with God and with a thoroughly a-political stance based on the persuasion that the church and the state have distinct spheres of authority. Reconciliation then has a theological and personal meaning, but no wider social meaning. "Souls" get reconciled with God and persons get reconciled with one another, but the wider social world ridden by strife is left more or less to its own devices. The obvious problem with such a retreat from public responsibility is that it ill befits the sons and daughters of the Old Testament prophets and the followers of Jesus Christ.

The second way in which social issues have been isolated from the message of reconciliation has been tacitly to concede the truncated understanding of reconciliation that I have just sketched, to critique social withdrawal, and then to place at the center of the Christian social agenda the *pursuit of freedom and the struggle for justice*. This approach is favored by more "liberal" groups who wish to remain, in Nietzsche's phraseology but not with Nietzsche's meaning, "faithful to this earth." They have effectively left the message of reconciliation to the "otherworldly" pietists and evangelicals, and taken up the pursuit of liberation as the only appropriate response to social problems. Reconciliation between people, they believe, can take place only after liberation is accomplished; peace will emerge only after justice is done.

The pursuit of liberation as a prior task to reconciliation is beset with two major problems. First, though it rightly takes social responsibility seriously, it divorces the character of social engagement from the very center of the Christian faith--from the narrative of the cross of Christ which reveals the very character of the Triune God. Second, it is suited only to situations of manifest evil in which one side is only the victim and the other only the perpetrator. Most social conflicts are, however, not so clean. Especially after conflicts have been going on for some time, each party sees itself as the victim and perceives its rival as the perpetrator, and has good reasons for reading the situation in this way. As a consequence, each can see itself as engaged in the struggle for liberation and the pursuit of justice, and thus the Christian faith ends up providing primarily legitimation for the struggle. Reconciliation is not even attempted--at least not until "our" side has won.

These two ways of shying away from explicating the social meaning of reconciliation -- two ways that mutually reinforce each other -- have left churches with no resources in situations of conflict. They find it difficult to help foster reconciliation, even to resist being pulled into the vortex of conflict; indeed, often they are nothing more than vengeful combatants on the one side

with no other thought in their minds but the destruction of their enemies. This dire deficiency of both theology and practice underscores the need to explore in a sustained way the social meaning of reconciliation. As we do so, my proposal is to move away from "justice" as the central and overarching category around which Christian social engagement is organized and to replace it with what I have called elsewhere "embrace" and what can less poetically be called "love." The suggestion is *not*, of course, to give up the struggle for justice or to substitute peace for justice. Rather, the suggestion is to understand the struggle for justice as a dimension of the pursuit of reconciliation whose ultimate goal is a community of love.

In my book *Exclusion and Embrace* I have attempted to retrieve "embrace" as the central category for Christian social engagement and argue for justice as an essential dimension of embrace (Volf, 1996). Elsewhere I have developed Trinitarian underpinnings for the main argument of the book (Volf, 1998). Here I want to explore briefly some biblical bases for "embrace" rather than justice and for reconciliation rather than liberation as the central categories for social engagement.

Paul and Reconciliation

One way to argue for the primacy of reconciliation in the New Testament would be to look at the Gospel accounts of the life of Jesus. This would lead us to highlight grace and forgiveness, which are so prominent in Jesus' encounters with "the sinners" (Williams, 1997) - grace and forgiveness, I hasten to add, that do not stand in opposition to justice and blame, but affirm justice and blame in the act of transcending them. Another way to argue for the primacy of reconciliation would be to examine the ethical appropriation of the basic story of Christ -- his life, death and resurrection -- in the New Testament writings. This would lead us to highlight the narrative of the death of Christ -- the innocent victim -- as the paradigm for the Christian life of self-donation (Johnson, 1996). A third way to argue biblically for the primacy of reconciliation would be to concentrate directly on the theology of reconciliation developed by the Apostle Paul. This is what I propose to do here. I will narrow my focus to a key Pauline text on reconciliation, 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, and explore its overlooked social dimension⁽¹¹⁾ in relation to the origin of Paul's distinctive use of the term reconciliation.

Paul writes,

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (NRSV).

The most notable feature of the passage is the distinctive way in which Paul uses the term "reconciliation," a use which stands in sharp contrast to the prevalent contemporary notions of reconciliation between God and human beings. Explicating the distinctive character of Paul's use, Seyoon Kim writes,

Paul never says that God is reconciled (or, that God reconciles himself) to human beings, but always that God reconciles human beings to himself or that human beings are reconciled to God. It is not, in fact, God who must be reconciled to human beings, but human beings who need to be reconciled to God. Nor is it by people's repentance,

prayers or other good works that reconciliation between God and human beings is accomplished, but rather by God's grace alone. (Kim, 1997, 103)

What Kim notes here about God--the offended party--offering reconciliation to humanity--the offender--is now the standard explication of the passage. What is new in Kim's argument is his account of how Paul came to this unique understanding of reconciliation. He argues persuasively that the origin of Paul's distinct use of the term reconciliation lies in Paul's encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus where he was headed to persecute the early followers of Jesus Christ. Kim concludes,

It is most likely that his [Paul's] use of the metaphor of reconciliation grew out of his own theological reflections on his Damascus road conversion experience. This thesis explains, more plausibly than any other, the fundamental innovation that Paul made in the ... idea of reconciliation--that is, that it is not human beings who reconcile an angry God to themselves ... rather, it is God who reconciles human beings to himself through the atoning death of Jesus Christ. For on the Damascus road, Paul, who came to see himself as God's enemy in his activities before Damascus, experienced God's reconciling action, which brought forgiveness of sins and the making of a new creation by his grace. (122)

If Kim is right, two significant features of a theology of reconciliation emerge with clarity, features of great import for the proper understanding of its social meaning. First, *though grace is unthinkable without justice, justice is subordinate to grace*. As a persecutor of the church, Paul was an enemy of God (or, more precisely, he came to see himself in retrospect as an enemy of God). In conversion, Paul encountered God who was not wrathful, as God should have been, but who instead showed love by offering to reconcile Paul, the enemy, to himself. Paul's conversion was not the result of the pursuit of strict justice on the part of the "victim." Had the "victim" pursued strict justice, Paul never would have become the apostle of the very church he was persecuting.

Inscribed in the narrative of the very event that transformed him from persecutor to apostle was the message which Paul came to proclaim--the message that God "justifies the ungodly" (Romans 4:5), that we were reconciled to God "while we were enemies" (Romans 5:10). At the core of the doctrine of reconciliation lies the belief that the *offer of reconciliation* is not based on justice done and the cause of enmity removed. Rather, the offer of reconciliation is a way of justifying the unjust and overcoming the opponents' enmity--not so as to condone their injustice and affirm their enmity, but to open up the possibility of doing justice and living in peace whose ultimate shape is a community of love.

Though Paul was saved through the gift of divine grace by which God sought to reconcile the enemy, no cheap reconciliation-- which closes its eyes before injustice-- took place on the road to Damascus. The divine voice named the action by its proper name -- "persecution" -- and asked the uncomfortable "why?" "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (Acts 9:4). Jesus Christ himself named the injustice and made the accusation in the very act of offering forgiveness and reconciliation. But though divine justice was an indispensable element of reconciliation, reconciliation was not simply the *consequence* of divine justice carried out.

Second, *though reconciliation of human beings to God has priority, reconciliation between human beings is intrinsic to their reconciliation to God*. If the origin of Paul's message of reconciliation was his encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, then the enmity toward God--the human trespasses which God does not hold against us on account of the atoning death of Christ -- does not consist in isolated attitudes and acts toward God which then, as a consequence, result in enmity toward other human beings. In the account in Acts we read that "Saul was ravaging the church by entering house after house; dragging off both men and women, he committed them to prison" (Acts 8:3). On the road to Damascus, he was "still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord" (9:1). At the same time, the voice from heaven identified itself explicitly as the voice of Jesus Christ: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (9:4-5). So from the start and at its heart, the enmity toward God is enmity toward human beings, and the enmity toward human beings is enmity toward God. Consequently, from the start, reconciliation does not simply have a vertical but also a horizontal dimension. It contains a turn away from the enmity toward people, not just from enmity to God, and it contains a movement toward a community, precisely that community which was the target of enmity. Just as the persecutor was received by God in Christ, so the persecutor was received by the community which he had persecuted. And he in turn sought to give a gift to the community that received him: he became a builder of the very community that he sought to destroy (Acts 9:20).

Consequently, just as grace lies at the core of Paul's message of reconciliation with God, so grace--grace, I repeat,

whose essential dimension is affirmation of the suspended justice--lies at the core of his mission to reconcile Jews and Gentiles (Dunn, 1997; Gundry-Volf, 1997).⁽¹²⁾ Moreover, Paul argued that the pattern of the divine reconciling movement toward estranged humanity is the model of how the followers of Christ should relate to their enemies, whether they are Christians or not (Romans 15:7) (Volf, 1996, 28f.). Hence it is no accident that in the circle around Paul a grand vision of reconciliation was conceived: "For in him [Christ] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross" (Colossians 1:20). The ultimate vision not only for the church but also for the whole of reality is a vision of the reconciliation of all things.

The Pauline vision of reconciliation--a vision that entails a coherent set of fundamental beliefs about the nature of God and of human beings and about the relation between justice and love--lies at the core of the Christian faith. If social engagement is to be properly Christian, it must be governed by this vision. And only if social engagement is governed by this vision will churches have adequate theological resources to resist the temptation to become accomplices in conflicts and instead function as agents of peace.

Reconciliation and Liberation

Many are the reasons why theologians have hesitated to let the Pauline vision of reconciliation govern Christian social thought and practice. One is certainly the dominance of the concepts of "freedom" and "justice" in the political discourse of modernity. Another is a tendency in some conservative Christian circles to embrace a vision of reconciliation as an alternative to the struggle for justice. In the remainder of this paper I want to address this second reason for hesitations about reconciliation. Let me state from the outset: when I argue that "reconciliation" ought to replace "liberation" and love replace justice as the central categories for Christian social thought, *nothing could be further from my mind than the abandonment of the pursuit of justice*. To the contrary. In fact, at times the struggle for justice must be in the forefront of our attention--though never so prominent as to crowd out the framework of "embrace" into which justice must be placed if it is to be properly understood and salutarily pursued. But how should we relate reconciliation and liberation positively?

Consider the critique of "cheap reconciliation" contained in the *Kairos Document*, written before the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa,

In our situation in South Africa today it would be totally unchristian to plead for reconciliation and peace before the present injustices have been removed. Any such plea plays into the hands of the oppressor by trying to persuade those of us who are oppressed to accept our oppression and to become reconciled to the intolerable crimes that are committed against us. That is not Christian reconciliation, it is sin. It is asking us to become accomplices in our own oppression, to become servants of the devil. No reconciliation is possible in South Africa without justice. (Art. 3.1)

The vision described here as "cheap reconciliation" sets "justice" and "peace" as alternatives. To pursue reconciliation here means to give up the struggle for liberation, to put up with oppression. From my perspective, this would amount to a betrayal of the oppressed as well as of the Christian faith. As I read the Christian message, a prophetic strand which denounces economic and political oppression has a prominent place in it. This prophetic strand cannot be removed from it without gravely distorting the message.

Having rejected with the *Kairos Document* a cheap grace of cheap reconciliation, I want to argue against the tendency of the document--a tendency that it shares with much of Christian social thinking in recent decades--either to see reconciliation and liberation as alternatives (from the perspective of the process) or to see reconciliation as subsequent to liberation (from the perspective of the outcome). First, taken seriously, such a "first liberation, then reconciliation" stance is an impossibility. As Nietzsche rightly noted in *Human, All Too Human*, given the nature of human interaction, all pursuit of justice not only rests on partial injustices but also creates new injustices (Nietzsche, 1996, 216). Moreover, all accounts of what is just are to some extent relative to a particular group and therefore invariably contested by the rival group. No peace is possible within the overarching framework of strict justice for the simple reason that no strict justice is possible. Second, "first liberation, then reconciliation" is at odds with the core Christian beliefs inscribed in the narrative of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As I have argued

earlier, the Pauline version of the Christian faith--and the same could be argued for the practice and teaching of Jesus--stands and falls with the idea that grace has priority over justice (grace, again, which does not negate justice but which *affirms* justice in the act of transcending it).

It is noteworthy that the peaceful dismantling of apartheid in South Africa did not follow the schema "first liberation, then reconciliation" advocated by the *Kairos Document*. As John de Gruchy has noted, at the very time the document was being written, tentative secret talks were under way between Mandela and the South African government. It had become abundantly clear to Mandela, de Gruchy goes on to say,

that there was no alternative. Neither the state nor the liberation movement had the capacity to achieve a decisive victory, and the prolonging of the vicious stalemate could only spell disaster for the country as a whole. Seeking reconciliation was, paradoxically, an instrument of the struggle to end apartheid and establish a just social order. The path of reconciliation was not only the goal of liberation but a means to achieve that end. It was an instrument in which the revolutionary struggle, political realism, and moral integrity combined to produce an almost irresistible force. (de Gruchy, 1997, 18)

Notice the highlighting of two essential elements in this account of democratic change in South Africa--both elements rightly emphasized but, from my perspective, inadequately conceived and related to one another. First, struggle for justice was indispensable. In situations of significant difference in power as in the apartheid South Africa, the weaker party must often engage in struggle to bring the stronger party to the point of wanting peace with justice rather than pacification of the oppressed. Second, reconciliation was not simply the result of a successful struggle for justice. Rather, the move toward reconciliation preceded the achievement of justice and was a means toward greater justice. The rightful polemic against "cheap reconciliation" was not allowed to "undermine the potential of reconciliation as an instrument for achieving justice" (22). Apartheid was dismantled, argues de Gruchy, through "a two-pronged attack ... which may be described, in hindsight, in terms of a dialectical understanding of reconciliation," (22) reconciliation seen both as a result of justice and as an instrument of justice.

In de Gruchy's dialectical understanding of reconciliation, *struggle for justice* is not only rightly seen as indispensable, but is also *given preeminence*; liberation towers over reconciliation. The offer of reconciliation was made prior to the realization of justice not because the framework of justice needed to be transcended in principle; rather, the move toward reconciliation was inserted into the framework of justice because no party could achieve a decisive victory. So from this perspective it was "paradoxical," as de Gruchy puts it, that the pursuit of reconciliation functioned as an instrument of the struggle to end apartheid. In his account, the schema "first liberation, then reconciliation" remained intact, only the tactic changed because the assessment of the situation changed. De Gruchy may be right historically about the process by which apartheid was dismantled. Is it adequate theologically, however? Though his "dialectical understanding of reconciliation" represents a significant move in the right direction, I suggest that it still inadequately relates liberation and reconciliation, struggle for justice and striving after peace. I want to argue that there is *nothing paradoxical* in the fact that the pursuit of reconciliation brought about greater justice.

If one sets human relations primarily in the larger framework of justice, in any settlement reached one or both parties will inescapably be left with a feeling of not having received their proper due. Hence the discourse of reconciliation will always remain predominantly the discourse of "principled compromise," understood as "willingness to give ground on what is not essential for the sake of the greater good," as de Gruchy in fact states (18). The need for "compromise" is understandable, and de Gruchy puts it well (though he seems not to see the full implications of his comment): "clearly," he writes, "it would be impossible to make adequate reparations for all the injustice and hurt caused by apartheid and the centuries of colonialism that preceded it" (26), which is what justice would demand. In addition to the call for compromise, the only thing de Gruchy can demand within his framework is that "it is essential that *as much is done as possible* to overcome the legacy of apartheid and redress historic wrongs" (26). The demand is, of course, right; one would not want to demand less justice than what is possible. The trouble is that under the overreaching framework of justice, such a demand will necessarily keep people unreconciled even when it is fulfilled because justice will never have been completely done, because even when we do all that is possible we will not have done enough.

The church will be able adequately to contribute to peace between people *only if we invert the order of priorities between liberation and reconciliation, between justice and love*. Within a dialectical relationship between the two, reconciliation has priority over liberation, and love over justice. It is essential to underscore both the *priority* of

reconciliation over liberation and the *dialectical* relationship between the two. Apart from the priority of reconciliation, the pursuit of liberation will never lead to peace and love between former enemies; but without the commitment to justice within the overarching framework of love, the pursuit of reconciliation will be perverted into a pursuit of cheap reconciliation, a euphemism for perpetuation of domination and oppression. Elsewhere I have tried to express this dual relationship by making three suggestions: (1) that the will to embrace and the movement toward the other for the sake of reconciliation is prior to any reading of the justice of the other; and (2) that full embrace or complete reconciliation can take place only when matters of justice have been attended to. I have also argued (3) that matters of justice will be adequately attended to only when justice is not seen in opposition to love, but love is understood as ultimately the only adequate form of justice (Volf, 1996).

This vision of liberation within the overarching framework of reconciliation is expressed in a brilliant way by Peter Storey, past president of the Methodist Church of South Africa and of the South African Council of Churches and a member of the selection committee for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In a brilliant article entitled, "A Different Kind of Justice: Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa," he argues that the experiences of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission point

beyond conventional retribution into a realm where justice and mercy coalesce and both victim and perpetrator must know pain if healing is to happen. It is an area more consistent with Calvary than the courtroom. It is the place where the guilty discover the pain of forgiveness because the innocent are willing to bear the greater pain of forgiving. (Storey, 1997, 793)

For an exploration on how the struggle for justice can proceed in "an area more consistent with Calvary than the courtroom" I can here only point you to my book *Exclusion & Embrace*.⁽¹³⁾

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