

To Struggle with a Reconciled Heart: Reconciliation and Justice

Mary Grey

Introduction

I begin with a personal story. I was invited by the Women's Commission of EATWOT, (Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians) to gather a small team of European Women Theologians to participate, in December 1994, in an intercontinental dialogue at Costa Rica on the theme of *Women Struggling Against Global Violence: A Spirituality for Life*.¹ So women gathered from Africa, Latin America, Asia and other nations from the south: as northerners we were joined by North Americans, a white South African woman, and a Japanese woman theologian. The black American womanist theologians were in strong solidarity with their African and Hispanic-Latin American colleagues. It became rapidly clear that the unresolved issues between us were political and historical divisions, and mistrust based on deep-seated oppressions. The bitter legacy of imperialism and colonialism emerged in a level of deep resentment and anger. This was for me an overwhelming experience. Any European suffering was a mere drop in the ocean compared with the profundity of oppressions these women represented. When, in an unconsidered moment, I used the word "reconciliation" in a discussion, the retort flashed back:

It is not for you to use words like reconciliation: we will choose the time and the place.

I learnt so much from this: that trust cannot be presumed but must be worked for; that the possibility for reconciliation is inseparable from justice for those who are wronged; that even if my European colleagues and I imagined we were full of good will, this was insufficient grounds for dialogue and real understanding: historically and politically we could not claim innocence, because we are still involved with the legacy of imperialism and colonialism. (Let me be clear: no, we are not guilty of past actions but do share responsibility for the way the issues are now tackled). And thirdly, affirming the inseparability of reconciliation and justice does not guarantee a commitment to either.

¹ See the book resulting from this occasion of the same title: Mary-John Mananzan, Mercy Oduoye, Elsa Tamez, Mary Grey eds., (Maryknoll: Orbis 1996)

But when we begin to tackle these concepts, what strikes us is the lack of agreement as to what they really mean, and the ambiguity and areas of un-truth that surround them. “They create a desolation and they call it peace,” said Tacitus’s Caledonian chieftain before battle, in a critique of the Roman regime that we know was the historian’s own.² Indeed, crying peace when there is no peace seems to be a well-trodden accusation, from the prophet Jeremiah to Martin Luther. The very word ‘reconciliation’ can disguise assimilation, forced agreement, imbalance of power, hypocrisy, or imply a mere temporary cessation of arms. All too often in Church contexts it is individualised with scant recognition of structural issues. From a Jewish and Palestinian perspective the theologian Marc Ellis asks, in the context of what he heard as a triumphalist speech of Pope John Paul II at Santo Domingo in 1992:

... if the Gospel message has merit, can one simply assert its importance and brush aside the massive destruction it brought along with the command to forgive? I wonder why the penchant for Christian forgiveness is almost always an afterthought to victory, rather than a humility that precedes, indeed may forestall, the conquest.³

So, reconciliation may present ostentatious ceremony that is empty of commitment, showing no understanding of the real process that forgiveness entails. It may be an insult to the victim to be asked to forgive some terrible atrocity inflicted on her. The piercing words of Ivan Karamazov from Dostoevsky’s classic come back to haunt us in their rejection of the possibility of forgiveness in the face of the suffering of innocent children.:

I do not, finally, want the mother to embrace the tormentor who let his dogs tear her son to pieces! She dare not forgive him! Let her forgive him for herself, if she wants to ... but she has no right to forgive the suffering of her child ...⁴

Similarly with justice: justice for whom? we have to ask. Distributive justice? But what does this mean in the land question in Zimbabwe at the moment? Does justice mean forgiveness and amnesty? But don’t they compromise justice? Does justice mean hounding the perpetrators of crime to the end, even if they are aged ninety? Does it mean never being prepared to forgive, as in the case of Simon Wiesenthal in his hunting down of former Nazi war criminals?

The gravity of our context, in the seemingly intractable situations that surround us – Iraq, the Middle East, Kashmir, the ‘war against

² Tacitus, *Agricola*, (London: Penguin Classics 1948):80, tr. by H.Mattingly.

³ Marc Ellis, *Ending Auschwitz: the Future of Jewish and Christian Life*, (Louisville: Westminster, John Knox 1994): 72.

⁴ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, (London:Heinemann 1912): Book V,251, tr, Constance Garnett.

terrorism,' Northern Ireland, Zimbabwe, and so on – almost defeats the attempt to tackle the issue. In all humility I offer one possible approach from an area in which I do have some experience and links with the story of Costa Rica told above. How can Feminist theology make sense of reconciliation and justice and what contribution could this make to the current scene?

Part 2 Feminist Theology and Reconciliation

Why does Feminist theology have so many difficulties around the whole area of forgiveness and reconciliation? Of course Feminist theologians share these concerns with psychologists, sociologists, feminist theorists and justice – oriented groups: here I speak as a Christian feminist with a social justice focus. The many difficulties in this area actually rest on deeper ones, lurking in the background, namely the whole cluster of ideas around sacrifice, atonement and Cross-theology – and a lot of disputatious ink has flowed in these areas.⁵ Let me try to give a flavour of the main arguments and then attempt to move the discussion forward. An immense amount of energy in Feminist Theology has rightly gone into what is called 'a passion for justice-making'⁶ across a range of issues, and specifically, as regards our theme tonight, into the Peace Movement. Think of the commitment of the women of Greenham Common in the eighties who resisted the presence of American Cruise Missiles; or the work of the Women's Peace Movement in Northern Ireland across the Catholic-Protestant divide and the efforts to create a culture of peace. There are also active Women's Inter-faith Peace Groups in the Middle East, even in the teeth of the present bitter conflict. But there is still awkwardness and sensitivity around the subject of forgiveness: indeed it is often rejected outright. Of course this sounds shocking when the command of Christ to forgive seventy times seven rings in our ears: we are uncomfortably aware that the injunction to forgive is limitless, and that the ministry of reconciliation remains central for Church and authentic discipleship.

So what is going on here? Why are reconciliation and forgiveness so incompatible with justice? The first difficult area is that of domestic violence and sexual abuse against women. Despite legal progress in many countries this is on the increase. Brutal gang rapes accompany military action in many parts of the world. Trafficking in women and small girls is on the increase since the fall of communism. In my own work in the charity, *Wells for India*, in the desert of Rajasthan, in an educational project for the children of prostitutes, our progress is

⁵ See Mary Grey, *Redeeming the Dream*, (London: SPCK 1989); Sally Purvis; Carol R. Bohn and Joanne Carlson Brown eds., *Christianity, Patriarchy and Abuse*, (New York: Pilgrim 1989).

⁶ The phrase is Carter Heyward's.

blocked by the kidnapping of the girls as soon as they are judged old enough to make money. There are vested interests between government, police, truck-drivers and businessmen that keep it going.⁷ This whole area is now well chronicled not only by writers like Susan Thistlethwaite and Marie Fortune of the Centre for Domestic Violence in Seattle, but now by our own National Board of Catholic Women, and Churches in Scotland, Canada and so on.⁸

The relevance to my argument is, first, that for so long this was tolerated as part of a deeply patriarchal, or kyriarchal, status quo⁹: even violence against women in the Bible – for example, the story of the concubine in Judges 19 – was neither remarked upon nor condemned. Secondly, the Church's response, via the confessional or even counselling has been frequently to order the woman to forgive. Her husband, or the perpetrator 'didn't mean it,' 'didn't know any better.' Or, 'she must have provoked it,' even 'she must have deserved it' – a suggestion that women have often internalised. It is her role to keep the peace in the family, to keep the family together at all costs. Such is the emphasis on forgiveness that reconciliation without justice in this area became the norm. Shockingly, in some cultures wife beating is still an accepted part of the social code: it is even thought necessary for the maintenance of good order. And women can even internalise the practice. A piece of research among middle-class, educated women in Chittagaur, in rural Rajasthan, last year, revealed that these women actually agreed with wife-beating in order to keep harmony in the extended family unit.¹⁰

The very same issues – forgiveness with or without justice have emerged in Bishop Tutu's own piercing account of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* in South Africa.¹¹ They emerged for President Aristide in his all too brief seven months leadership in Haiti: would reconciliation mean amnesty, a sweeping under the carpet, (the original word in Creole means exactly this), or what degree of justice could be striven for? Leslie Griffiths writes:

The fiery priest was very clear that there could be no question of accepting 'reconciliation' understood as 'papering over the cracks of the past' without a clear recognition of the demands of justice.¹²

⁷ For information on this project, Project Asha, see the Newsletter of *Wells for India*, The Winchester Centre, 68 St George's Road, Winchester, SO23, Hampshire.

⁸ For example: *Breaking the Silence on Violence against Women*, Religion and Violence against Women Working Group, Glasgow March 1992; Forum Bulletin on Structural Violence, ed. Fiona Hulbert, Winter 1993/4,

⁹ Kyriarchal the law of domination.

¹⁰ The source is my personal conversation with the sociologist, Dr Komal Ganotra, from the College of Social Science, Udaipur, Rajasthan, who had conducted the research with her students,

¹¹ Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, (London: Rider 1999).

¹² Leslie Griffiths, *The Aristide Factor*, (Oxford: Lion Publishing 1997):73.

Yet this, as Griffiths points out, would come back to haunt him in the last days of his presidency when he seemed to be asking for precisely that.

The second problem is the essentialising of the gender roles to keep this dynamic going. Women are supposed to be *essentially* more eirenic, reconciling, sacrificing, geared to smooth over injustices for the sake of family order. Justice doesn't even come in to it where the issue is holding family unity together, whatever the abuse of power within it. A huge amount of criticism is heaped on women who leave a marriage because of the level of injustice within it. It just doesn't fit the stereotype of fidelity, whatever the cost, and women are often accused of being radical feminists who put self-interest before the good of husband, children and family integrity.

The third issue is the way that suffering and endurance are justified in the name of stability and the preservation of the status quo. Enduring suffering and renunciation of personal happiness – so the argument goes- means becoming increasingly Christ-like and earning a reward in the next world. *Another jewel in the crown. Without suffering there is no maturity in holiness.* No pain, no gain. You are all familiar with these arguments. And what undergirds all of this is a distortion of a Cross theology that persuades women, and any victim group, that enduring suffering, never mind its unjust origins, is identifying with Jesus on the Cross, and obtaining a reward in Heaven. In this line of thought, the path to holiness is the path of endurance, suffering, and sacrifice. It is part of atoning, expiating the sins of the world for which Jesus died. This argument has even been used against the ordination of women to the priesthood. The poet/novelist, Charles Williams, (one of *The Inklings*, with C.S.Lewis and J.R.Tolkien), wrote:

Well are women warned from serving the altar;
Who, by nature of their creature, . . .
share with the Sacrifice the victimisation of blood.¹³

Behind all of this, and most worryingly of all, is the image of God, sanctioning the logic of violence, sending Jesus, the obedient son, to a violent death. An extreme following up on this line of thought would be Rita Nakashima Brock's argument that, in delivering up Jesus, the Divine child, to a violent death, God the Father is a sadist and a sanctioner of child abuse.¹⁴ You may find that idea repugnant – as I do myself- but we have to be able to uncover the roots of what has been described as the logic of sacrifice, somehow sweeping under the

¹³ Charles Williams, *The Region of the Summer Stars*, (London: Editions Poetry 1944):26–27.

¹⁴ Rita Nakashima Brock, 'And a Little Child shall Lead them,' in Brown and Bohn, op cit., pp. 42061.

carpet huge areas of injustice and misery not only for women, but also for undervalued groups of people. All in the name of some supposed greater ideal, like progress, the hidden hand of the market, in a secular context, or participating in the unfinished work of Atonement in a religious one.

How, then, to begin to unravel this nexus of ideas? I begin by going to the heart of the problem and asking, why did Jesus have to suffer and die on the Cross? Secondly, did Jesus actually preach total forgiveness and reconciliation in a way regardless of justice?

Why did Jesus die?

The Gospels tell us that Jesus chose the moment to turn towards Jerusalem:

When the days drew near for him to be received up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem (Luke 9.51)

From the beginning of his ministry he has been in conflict with power unjustly exercised. He has protested against the way the Sabbath law lacked compassion for animals and reached out to rejected categories of people – women, Samaritans and lepers. He has preached endless compassion, giving without limit and deliberately focused on the poorest and most vulnerable people. There is no doubt that Jesus of Nazareth was familiar with crucifixions. He would have grown up all too aware of the humiliation, degradation and brutality of the way the Romans despatched their many victims. Yet, deliberately he sets his face to Jerusalem, to confront power at power's source. His first act in the city is the overturning of the tables of the moneychangers: the sense that he is inaugurating a new order where money ceases to predominate is strong. And this is the beginning of a week of conflict whose seeds were already sown in the Galilean ministry.

I see Jesus' great work of reconciliation not with an anti-Judaistic lens, but in continuity with the mission of the Jewish prophets. This is where reconciliation and justice are inextricably interwoven. In Isaiah's vision, when people return to God in repentance, the desert blossoms, water flows in the wilderness, the blind see, the lame walk, (Is. 35.1–10). In another famous passage, fasting and doing penance for sin are coupled with just action:

Is this not the fast that I choose:
To loose the bonds of wickedness,
To undo the thongs of the yoke,
To let the oppressed go free . . .
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
And bring the homeless poor into your house;

Then shall your light break forth like the dawn,
 And your healing shall spring up speedily;
 Your righteousness shall go before you . . . (Is.58.6–8)

The young Jesus of Nazareth would have grown up nourished by the poet-prophet Isaiah's dreams. Luke saw him in this way, when he pictures Jesus proclaiming the text of Isaiah in the synagogue at the start of his Galilean ministry. (Luke 4.18–30). Matthew, too, makes the link, where John's disciples come to Jesus, asking 'Are you he who is to come or shall we look for another?' Jesus replies:

Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up and the poor have the good news preached to them. (Mt 11.3–5)

Feminist Christologies of justice see this as the Christic pattern of right relation, of earth and humanity held together in a vision of mutual flourishing, only possible where hearts are turned and committed to the justice and peace that is the authenticity of the Kingdom of God, or kin-dom, kinship of right relations. The unity of Jesus with God is revealed through this passionate commitment to the restoration of right relation, a mutual sharing of the yearning for the world's healing, the *tikkun olam* of Jewish mysticism. Obedience in this context then does not mean the conformity – either willing or unthinking -to a pre-arranged script that must end in violent death, to fulfil Scripture and to satisfy the wounded honour of God:(again, I see this as a distortion of Anselm's theory of Atonement). Rather, healing the fractured body of creation demands restorative justice, restoring the relational grain of existence in the concrete restoration of fertility of land, right functioning of bodies wounded and broken through poverty, and spirits crushed with loss of hope; but all of this within a movement of turning to God, the source of life, right relation, love and healing.

It is within this vision of structural justice of right relation that forgiveness finds meaning. David Jenkins argued that forgiveness should never be seen apart from the broader theological issues, or without any realisation of the necessary mediating processes that have to go on in relating these personal categories to structures and institutions.¹⁵ That Jesus was very aware of unjust power structures can be seen by the fact that the forgiveness parables and injunctions are always from the powerful to the less powerful and not the other way round. There is no urging that the battered woman must forgive her abuser, that land-hungry peasants must forgive rapacious landlords. Think of the woman from the town (Luke 7) who is forgiven because she has loved much. Even Peter's famous question as to how often we have to forgive, (Matthew 18) is answered in

¹⁵ David Jenkins, cited in Brian Frost, *The Politics of Peace*, (London: DLT 1991):3.

terms of the parable of the unjust servant, where the forgiveness/debt cancellation went from the powerful king to the powerless servant, not vice versa. This goes some way in reconciling the call to forgive with the emphasis on justice. Thirdly, the initiative for reconciliation must come from the wronged person, the victim: to utter words on someone's behalf is to sow seeds for more injustice, as I was reminded in Costa Rica. As Haddon Wilmer wrote:

In forgiveness the initiative lies with them. The suffering of the oppressed may weld them together into a force capable of breaking powerful regimes. But their real power or powerlessness becomes apparent after their victory: is it the power to reconstruct or to make a society new?¹⁶

So within this understanding of reconciliation as the vision of the structural healing of the world, is it possible to recover a positive theology of sacrifice?

Part 3 Sacrifice and the Path to Justice

I think this is the core of the argument. What Feminist Theology is actually working toward is this restoration of right relation: this is what reconciliation means. To reconcile, Greek *katallassein*, belongs in a semantic field that denotes 'the action by which peace is made between personal enemies,' the work of mediator whose office is 'to make hostility cease', to 'lead to peace'. When it is applied to divine-human relations, it does not mean a change of feelings, writes Ralph Martin, but, an objective change in the relations between God and humanity, and more particularly, a change in humanity itself.¹⁷

Even from this 'broken web' becoming healed creation is possible. But it is only achievable on the basis of restorative justice that demands a level of wholehearted commitment. In the context of globalised unregulated capitalism the only alternative lifestyle in the face of structural injustice – for the sake of the massive suffering of impoverished communities – is a culture of simplicity and voluntary austerity. Is that not sacrifice by another name? This was the message of Rodolfo Cardenal in a Liberation Theology Summer School, Southampton 1996. Using Jon Sobrino's concept of the Cross, referring not merely to Christ, but to the Crucified Peoples of El Salvador, he called for a culture of austerity in their name:

The crucified peoples offer values that are not found anywhere else. The poor have a great humanising potential because they offer community instead of individualism, service instead of egoism, simplicity instead of

¹⁶ Haddon Wilmer, 'Forgiveness and Politics', *Crucible*, July–September 1979:105.

¹⁷ Ralph Martin, Commentary on 2 Cor.5, (World Biblical Commentaries Vol.40, eds., Hubbard, Barker, Watts and Martin, (Waco, TX: Word Books 1986):146.

opulence, creativity instead of cultural mimicry, openness to transcendence instead of positivism and crass positivism.¹⁸

Their openness to pardon, forgiveness and reparation is the crucial feature:

They open their arms to those who offer help, they accept them, and so, without their knowing it, forgive them. They make it possible for the world of the oppressor to recognise that it is sinful, but also to know itself forgiven. So the crucified people introduce a humanising but a very absent reality, grace, whereby one becomes not only through what one achieves, but through what is unexpectedly, undeservedly and gratuitously given to one.¹⁹

This voluntary culture of austerity in the name of the crucified peoples of the world is a similar to that which Mahatma Gandhi made for over twenty years, in his attempt to work for sustainability in Indian villages in a context of non-violence inspired partly by the teaching of Jesus. Another contemporary voice in the context of modern greed and consumerism is Ernst Schumacher and his alternative economics.²⁰ This is also the life-style willingly adopted by thousands of aid workers, often in alliances and coalitions with secular groups, by missionary movements, lay or congregational religious dedicated to eradicating poverty and structural injustice. The coalition of Jubilee 2000 here is a witness to what it means in practice. The focus now is not so much on sacrifice, asceticism, renunciation, (even if these are part and parcel of what follows), but the deliberate adoption of a simpler life-style that does not depend on exploiting poor communities. Sacrifice is probably the wrong word, because the outstanding hallmarks of this lifestyle are, first, that it is not purely altruistic: people actually want to do this. It is part of a joyous affirmation of life for all. Many of you will remember the words of the young laywoman Jean Donovan, who was raped and murdered by the military in El Salvador, along with the MaryKnoll Missionaries. When writing to her parents in Ireland, in the context of increasing danger, she said how happy she was in El Salvador: ‘why, there are even roses in December!’²¹ The same spirit emerges from Arundati Roy’s powerful text, *The Cost of Living*, written as protest against the Narmada Dam scheme in India. A mystical appeal to other kinds of truth, other kinds of dreams than the dominating ones, rings out:

To love. To be loved. To never forget your own significance.

¹⁸ Rodolfo Cardenal SJ, ‘The Crucified People,’ in *Reclaiming Vision: Education, Liberation and Justice*, Papers of the Inaugural Summer School, (Southampton: La Sainte Union 1994):12–18.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ E.Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful*, (1973)

²¹ See the film, (CAFOD)*Roses in December*.

To never get used to the unspeakable violence and the vulgar disparity of life around you. To seek joy in the saddest places. To pursue beauty to its lair. To never simplify what is complicated or complicate what is simple. To respect strength, never power. To try to understand. To never look away. And never, never forget.²²

Following on from this, it is a life-stance that actually brings happiness and flourishing, because it is in truth one that enables survival and peaceful co-existence, over against the dominant global order based on bringing excessive wealth to a small minority. The emphasis on truth is one highlighted in Gandhi's teaching. Arundhati Roy is no Gandhian, but from her text there is a conviction that the realistic facing of the power of truth is the only starting point. As a contemporary Gandhian argues, in an article, "Is Gandhi still relevant?" a new theory of revolution is needed. The concept of *Satyagraha*, the power of truth, he writes, defines this revolution:

... it presupposed a deeper sense of shared humanity to give meaning and energy to its sense of justice. The sense of humanity consisted in the recognition of the fundamental ontological fact that humanity was indivisible, that human beings grew and fell together, and that in degrading and brutalising others, they degraded and brutalised themselves.²³

This deeper sense of shared humanity, is what I mean by the power of right relation and the power that drives to justice and reconciliation. The *satyagrahi* – enlightened one- like the Buddhist *bodhisattva*, – takes upon himself or herself the burden of corporate evil and sustains this by the power of suffering love. The power that *satyagraha* relies on is soul-force rather than brute-force, the power of persuasion rather than coercion, as Gandhi's numerous hunger strikes demonstrate. The *satyagrahi's* endurance of prison sentences is also witness to this power of self-sacrifice.

Gandhi's ideas of truth emerged from the early text *Hind Swaraj*, written in 1909 on the ship taking him back to India after his S. African experiences.²⁴ Although they underwent a considerable evolution, from the beginning they included social as well as personal transformation. *Swaraj*, (which means discipline, then develops to mean freedom and liberation), is linked with the idea of freedom as the inherent possession of human beings. Freedom means the "capacity to "or "power to" act – but always out of the interiorisation of

²² Arundhati Roy, *The Cost of Living*, (New York: The Modern Library 1999):104–5.

²³ Bikhu Praekh, 'Is Gandhi still relevant?' in Copley and Paxton eds., *Gandhi and the Contemporary World*, (Chennai: Indo-British Historical Society 1997): 372–382. Quotation 376.

²⁴ See M.K.Gandhi, *Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, ed. Sriman Narayan, (Ahmedabad: Navjivan Publishing house 1968): 4. The following few lines are indebted to John Chathanatt SJ, 'Upon this Foundation: Gandhian Foundational Bases for Social Transformation,' in *Liberating the Vision: Papers of the Summer School 1996*, ed. Mary Grey, (Southampton, La Sainte Union 1996):35–57.

obligations to others. (In feminist theory this would be seen as “the self-in-relation”). Freedom and truth belong together, grounded in the concrete struggle of the poor for humanity. “I cannot find God apart from humanity” he continually said. But this would develop into a much richer notion of God as truth:

Where there is God there is truth, and where there is truth, there is God.²⁵

Truth is attainable in every heart, it is discoverable in the great religions, and is reflected in the moral order of justice governing the universe. Later he would say, ‘Truth is God’. It is no surprise that the telling of the truth was the highest aim of the S.African TRC. But the pain of allowing the truth to be told meant, said Archbishop Tutu, that the ‘requirements of justice, accountability, stability, peace and reconciliation’ had to be balanced.²⁶

What I try to show here is the inseparability of justice-making from truth and that these are embodied in a lifestyle of suffering love, in shared struggle. In this struggle what gives strength is the power of truth, the heart already reconciled to this truth. (Hence my title – *to struggle with a reconciled heart*). This is what makes the link with Jesus setting his face to Jerusalem. This was the freely-chosen path of suffering love, emerging from a being, totally reconciled with the power and source of life and justice.

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. (2. Cor 5.17)

But Feminist Christology also stresses the community dimension of Christ’s setting his face to confront the power of the system. Christ-and-community embodied the struggle for truth and justice. The struggle that appeared to end with crucifixion was a protest against all crucifixions, against the necessity of the violent putting to death of the innocent, poor and vulnerable. As Beverley Harrison wrote in a widely-quoted passage:²⁷

Jesus’ death on the Cross, his sacrifice, was no abstract exercise in moral virtue. His death was the price he paid for refusing to abandon the radical activity of love . . . Sacrifice, I submit, is not a central moral goal or virtue in Christian life. Radical acts of love . . . are . . . Like Jesus we are called to a radical activity of love, in a way of being that deepens relation, embodies and extends community, passes on the gift of life . . . To be sure, Jesus was faithful unto death, He stayed with his cause and he died for it. He *accepted* sacrifice. But his sacrifice was *for* the cause of radical love, to make relation-

²⁵ Ibid:50–53.

²⁶ Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, (London: Rider 1999).

²⁷ Beverley Harrison, ‘The Power and Work of Love’, in *Making the Connections*, ed. Carol Robb, (Boston: Beacon 1986):18–19.

ship and to sustain it, and above all, to righting wrong relationship, which is what we call 'doing justice'.

In a similar way, Rodolfo Cardenal quotes his Jesuit colleague, Ignacio Ellacuria, murdered by the government soldiers, as saying,

To liberate means to take the crucified people down from the Cross. But the world of oppression and sin cannot tolerate that the people be taken down from the Cross.²⁸

Those women who stood steadfast at the Cross of Christ in the presence of the violence and brutality of the soldiers were ready to receive the empowerment of Resurrection. We cannot escape the fact that these women had already experienced forgiveness and reconciliation within the community of those who struggled in suffering love for a new order of living. They had already accepted a ministry of reconciliation. As such, their resistance to the established order was made possible because empowered by a vision of a world graced with reconciliation. The task now is to explore how this works today.

Part 4 To Struggle with a Reconciled Heart

Let me begin this final section with a quotation illustrating how reconciliation can be embraced politically, within a context of justice. In this case, it is not the South Africa after Mandela's liberation, (which springs to everyone's mind), but Mary Robinson's hopes for the Republic of Ireland on the occasion of her inaugural speech in Dublin Castle 1990:

... as everyone knows, there are only four geographical provinces on this island. The Fifth Province is not anywhere here or there, north or south, east or west. It is a place within each of us, that place that is open to the other, that swinging door that allows us to venture out and others to venture in... While Tara was the political centre of Ireland, tradition has it that this Fifth province acted as a second centre, a necessary balance. If I am to be a symbol of anything, I would like to be a symbol of this reconciling and healing Fifth province.²⁹

Reconciliation is both a symbol of healed creation, a vision that enables and inspires action for a future state of being, and something that one already tastes and lives from now. Something that touches our deepest yearnings. *We struggle with reconciled hearts...* (Originally this phrase came from the Taizé community). Where violence is experienced culturally, politically, economically, sexually and ecologically, resistance to this can never uncouple striving for

²⁸ Rodolfo Cardenal, 'The Timeliness and the Challenge of the Theology of Liberation,' in *Reclaiming Vision: Education, Liberation and Justice*, op cit.,21.

²⁹ Fergus Finlay, *Mary Robinson: A President with a Purpose*, (Dublin: The O'Brien Press 1990): 156.

peace and reconciliation from the justice of the Kingdom of God, the overturning of the order of domination for an order based on right relation between God, all peoples and all creatures of the earth.

In our work with victims of abuse and violence, Feminist theological and pastoral networks engage with forgiveness as a many-staged process. Forgiveness is a word based on 'letting-go' for the sake of moving on, away from bitterness and hatred to a new way of being. Because it should be based on a mutuality which is seldom present or even possible, many say that forgiveness is only possible for God. *To forgive is Divine...* (You have all heard this in the context of the genocide of the Jewish people in the Holocaust or Shoah. Others use it in the context of massive genocide and ecocide in the colonisation of Latin America, the recent ethnic cleansings in Greater Serbia, Kosovo, and so on). The point to hang on to is that it is only possible to move towards flourishing, any concept of a happy life, if we let go of destructive hatreds. In the context of rape and domestic violence, where there is no question of the perpetrator asking for forgiveness, Marie Fortune has proposed a 7-stage process. This involves hearing the victim's story, acknowledging its truth, before moving towards what justice and restoration is possible, bearing in mind that full justice is never possible. The crime can never be undone. Yet, she writes, "forgiveness means acknowledging the humanity of the offender... while never condoning what he did."³⁰ It will be absolutely vital that the victim experiences some form of justice and restitution. If the offender does not repent, the legal system may prove an expression of justice in holding him accountable. But if not, counsellors, school teachers, or hopefully, someone in pastoral authority whom it is possible to trust. Only where there is a possibility of real repentance, of accountability, and healing of the broken trust, can there be any hope of genuine reconciliation.³¹

But how does this work on the wider level of whole communities separated by centuries of bitterness? In the first place, bearing in mind Marc Ellis's critique with which I began, I appeal to the deeper insights of Christian prophetic tradition that peace and reconciliation with justice has remained a priority for marginal groups, even if lost sight of by the wider Constantinian tradition where military violence calls itself the preserver of peace.

Reconciliation in the early Christian communities was always a double process of expelling in order to welcome back. There was a sure instinct for sins that could not be tolerated because they wounded the community- sins such as idolatry, adultery and killing. But, being deprived of community in order to take the time for

³⁰ Marie Fortune, *Sexual Violence; the Unmentionable Sin*, (New York: Pilgrim 1983):209–211.

³¹ There are a range of issues here outside the scope of this paper.

repentance was always followed by the welcome back of the penitent. The narthex of the great Churches is witness that there was always a place for the community of penitents. Secondly, the tradition of fidelity to non-violence, the sense that violence was contrary to the Gospel, has a strong witness from Irenaeus, Tertullian and Justin Martyr onwards, – but tracing this Pacifist tradition fully is outside my scope here.³² It was a movement still glimpsed in the Middle Ages. I give one example because it illustrates the focus on justice for the vulnerable. There was a 10th century Movement in central Europe called the Peace of God, and the Truce of God – eventually becoming institutionalised at the end of the 11th century:

The Peace of God was the protection from military violence won by special groups in mediaeval society. These included the clergy and their possessions: the poor; women, peasants and their tools, animals, mills, vineyards, and labour; and later pilgrims and merchants- in short, most of the mediaeval population who neither bore arms or were entitled to bear them.³³

If we link this with the preaching of Francis, who not only condemned the military, and brought about reconciliation between warring factions in Perugia, but acted out of a love of poverty and simplicity of lifestyle specially in response to a culture of affluence, reconciliation and justice are once more seen as inseparable. In the many examples from the reformed Tradition, such as Quakers and Anabaptists, as well as contemporary movements for Reconciliation – Taizé, Corrymeela, Pax Christi, the inspiration of Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, Coventry Cathedral – I mention two, because they emerge from some of the most painfully violent settings today, where reconciliation seemed an impossible dream. These are the Mennonite tradition of conflict resolution and the work of the community of San Egidio in Rome.

John Paul Lederach, a Mennonite who has mediated between the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and the Yatumas, indigenous peoples of the East coast, declares that reconciliation is based on three paradoxes: it promotes encounters between open expression of a painful past and the search for a long-term viable future. Secondly, it is a place where justice and peace meet. Thirdly, it recognises the need to give time and place to justice and peace, where redressing wrong is held together with a vision of a connected future.³⁴ (This can be seen as a public and communal version of what feminist theologian Marie Fortune worked out in a more personal context). Another Mennonite, Ronald Kraybill, describes a similar process, where Christianity played a part in mediating the transition of Rhodesia to Zimbabwe. Different denominations brought different gifts: CIIR and the Justice and Peace commission represented Catholicism,

³² See Ronald Musto, *The Catholic Peace Tradition*, (Maryknoll; Orbis 1986):31.

³³ *Ibid*:72–3.

³⁴ John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in a Diverse Society*, (UN University 1995):51 ff. A paraphrase is given here.

stressing listening to the victims, the voice of moral conscience and negotiation. The Moral Rearmament movement stressed 'absolute love' involving listening to God', whereas the Quakers wanted to establish solidarity with all parties through disciplined listening.³⁵

But the overwhelming reason why it was felt that religion offers an indispensable quality to the process of mediation and reconciliation, is not so much its record on forgiveness and non-violence, but on the quality of trust. Joseph Montiville writes that into the midst of dehumanised, raped people,

... come religious outsiders, who in varying ways convey a sense of understanding and empathy for their fears, and who have established reputations for honesty, discretion and integrity...³⁶

This is exactly the quality that describes the almost miraculous efforts of the San Egidio community.³⁷ Ten years ago, in a garden in the hills near Rome, they facilitated a reconciliation between the Transport Minister of Mozambique, (Frelimo) and the guerrilla in charge of the rebel army (Renamo). The founder of San' Egidio, Andrea Riccardi, and his companions (including the Archbishop of Beira of Mozambique), had broken through the government's insistence on a cease-fire and the rebel insistence on constitutional changes before laying down weapons. Riccardi invoked their common African heritage, their being Mozambique patriots, and the principle enunciated by Pope John XXIII, 'Let us be concerned with seeking what unites, rather than that which divides'. One breakthrough moment was over the menu. In Mozambique, the head of the table has the right to the head of the fish. But the Italian hosts served up two whole grilled fish so that each could have one!

It was these two fish which pointed towards the parties' mutual recognition, and the moment when the facilitators became the mediators.³⁸

This is a remarkable story, given the background of the genocidal wars in Ruanda and Burundi, the conflicts in the Congo and Angola. The lack of institutional support, the appeal to civil society and the ability to create active links with countries genuinely interested in seeking a peaceful solution, were all crucial aspects.

But the fish story opens up another crucial dimension of reconciliation and justice and this is the question of memory. There is no arena for reconciliation where this is not important. As Archbishop Tutu said:

Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.³⁹

³⁵ Ronald Kraybill, 'The Transition from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe,' in Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Kraybill eds., *Religion: the Missing Dimension of Statecraft*, (New York and Oxford: OUP 1994): 208–257.

³⁶ Cited in above: 332.

³⁷ See Mario Marazitti, 'A Miracle of Two Fish', *The Tablet* 28th September 2002, 6.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Tutu, *op cit*: 31.

All parties bring to the struggle – not yet the table the horror of the memories of atrocities of living memory, and of centuries of violence. Whereas a prophetic individual – a Mandela, or a Gandhi or a Gordon Wilson, with his young daughter murdered at Enniskillen – usually people with years of suffering witness behind them – may rise to the heroic and saintly levels of forgiveness, they are not often able to carry a whole nation with them.

So how to value the painful memories of a wronged nation, or, in the case of Ireland, two wronged nations? Liberation Theology has always honoured the process of dangerous memory that allows an oppressed people to remember their origins. Once they were proud and free, God's people, with a faith, culture and identity. But contexts of reconciliation are dealing with two different peoples who feel they have been wronged. Just how many stories of violence and de-humanising can anyone bear to listen to, without disrupting the fragile hopes of moving forward? This was what the TRC faced in S. Africa. Even people who wanted to forgive said they did not know whom to forgive. In Guatemala this was also the hope: that in the Recovery of Historical Memory Project, (REMHI) the truth-telling of memories of the killings would enable healing. Still a people waits, as even the murder of Bishop Gerardi has not achieved justice. Nicholas Frayling, in a poignant book on N. Ireland, pleads for healing spaces where two opposing peoples, from both sides of the border, can relate memories of suffering and oppression- and begin a process of sharing memories of love of the same land, in a tentative beginning to share a history.⁴⁰ A process that moves from recognising the other as threatening and hostile, to the possibility of becoming once again neighbours. As Miroslav Volf told us, neighbours like the Serbs and Croats, do not turn into enemies overnight.⁴¹

Two points are vital. The first is, as feminist liberation theologians urge, is that remembering is exactly that: *re-membering*. Putting together the painful fragments in a new way, a way that makes just and healed relationship possible. Secondly, it opens up the challenge as to whether those of us who have been part of colonial history, or any form of oppression, are ready to be part of the journey of repentance, and hear the stories that implicate us in the shame of the past, or the responsibility for unjust systems of the present.

John de Gruchy tells a poignant story in the S. African context.⁴² He tells of a white S.African policeman who wanted to do more than tell his story of murdering the son of a black couple. He wanted to tell them personally of his repentance and ask for forgiveness. So he

⁴⁰ Nicholas Frayling, *Pardon and Peace*, (London: SPCK 1996).

⁴¹ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, (Nashville: Abingdon 1996).

⁴² The source is an oral story from the theologian.

visited them – and apparently the event was videoed. The couple, though moved, said they were not ready to forgive yet, and asked him to return. Eventually, they said, yes, they would forgive him – and at that moment a flower vase came flying through the air and hit the policeman on the forehead so that he was bleeding heavily. The younger brother had been watching the video in the next room. In a timely warning of the inter-generational nature of painful memories of atrocities, the message was: his parents might forgive – but he was not ready. Yet through being personally wounded, the policeman felt that somehow he had participated in the suffering of the parents of the murdered man. If we are committed to reconciliation and justice it means bearing the pain of wounded memories in our own flesh and bone. As the young journalist Antjie Krog wrote, while she covered the TRC for radio, and could only make sense of the process by gathering with her fellow journalists around Archbishop Desmond Tutu each night:

Because of you
This country no longer lies
Between us but within . . .

In the cradle of my skull
It sings, it ignites
My tongue, my inner ear, the cavity of my heart
Shudders towards the outline of intimate clicks and gutturals

Of my soul the retina learns to expand
Daily because of a thousand stories
I was scorched.

A new skin.
I am changed forever. I want to say:
Forgive me
Forgive me
You whom I have wronged, please
Take me
With you.⁴³

In a society bent on self-destruction through war, I have argued that our resource is in building counter-cultural communities based on truth, simplicity and austerity, in the name of building restored just relations; that we move, in Miroslav Wolf's words, from exclusion to embrace; that our inspiration in doing so is the Biblical call to reconciliation and forgiveness based on a vision of justice and flourishing of the most vulnerable people and the earth herself. Even if that vision eludes fulfilment at the moment, faith in a God of

⁴³ Antjie Krog, *A Country in My Skull*, (Random House: Vintage 1999):423.

reconciliation is what holds our hope firm. As Canon Naim Ateek of Jerusalem writes – and he has every reason to despair:

Ultimately justice will prevail, the occupation will be over, and the Palestinians, as well as the Israelis, will enjoy freedom and independence. How do I know this will take place? I know because I believe in God.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Naim Ateek, 'Suicide Bombers: what is theologically and morally wrong with suicide bombers?' *Cornerstone*, Sabeel, Issue 25, Summer 2002: 16.