Reconciliation and the Integrity of Mission

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I
Religion and Violence

It requires neither a unique revelatory experience nor expert philosophical or political acumen to understand and establish the fact that violent conflict is a clear and present issue today. Even a cursory glance on the world stage by the casual observer is sufficient to confirm that in recent times conflict has been thrust on to international and regional politics so forcefully that it seems not merely a quirk in the relations between groups or between nations but increasingly appears to be a constant, even inevitable. There is not a continent on this planet that is presently devoid of the throes of suffering and pain occasioned by violent conflict. Though the thesis proposed by Samuel Huntington on 'the clash of civilisations'[1] has many detractors decrying among other things the essentialist caricature of cultures and civilizations, it is proving to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. The new world order is indeed rife with so-called clashes between civilisations. Equally visible is the related reality described by Dieter Senghass in his counter thesis on the 'clash within civilisations'.[2] Violent conflict is not only a matter of west against east but is clearly evident even within nations and cultures within both east and west.

Caught in the middle of this alarming and cruel phenomenon, followers of world religions are confronted with grave and complex dilemmas. Whereas one would expect religion to be a resource for conflict resolution and peace making it appears to be stubbornly complicit in the alarming situation we are in. Indeed religion is often seen as a culprit behind the crisis. For many Islam is seen as comprador par excellence in the recent rise in conflict. Recent horrific events have only confirmed that opinion. To be sure Christianity is also implicated in this malaise. For many in the Muslim world, for example, it is the marauding enemy, symbolised by American and allied military and economic aggression, that is to be vanquished. This stark polarisation is duplicated in other parts of the world involving other religions and isms. Hindu fanatics wage terror against Christians and Muslims minorities in India. Muslim raiders from the north torment Christian and other tribal groups in southern Sudan and the list could go on. Indubitable is the fact that religion has become a significant factor in present day violent conflict. Mark Juergensmeyer astutely remarks:

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[1] Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York; Simon & Schuster, 1998). For a view akin to this see, Benjamin R. Barber and Andrea Schulz, *Jihad vs. McWorld: How Globalism & Tribalism Are Reshaping the World* (New York; Balantine Books, 1996)

[2] Dieter Senghaas, *The Clash within Civilizations: Coming to terms with cultural conflicts* (London, Routledge, 1998)

> Religion…gives moral justifications for killing and provides images of cosmic war that allow activists to believe that they are waging spiritual scenarios. This does not mean that religion causes violence, nor does it mean that religious violence cannot, in some cases, be justified by other means. But it does mean that religion often provides the mores and symbols that make possible bloodshed – even catastrophic acts of terrorism.[3]

It is instructive to recognise here that often religiously sanctioned violence is not necessarily against ir-religion as such, against that which denies its reality. On the contrary it is most often against religion itself, except against another religion. In India for example, some right wing Hindu groups view, not the atheist as the enemy, but rather the Muslims and Christian minorities as the scourge who are to be eradicated from society. The born-again President of America, George Bush sees Islamic fundamentalism, as personified in Osama bin Laden, as the evil one on whom to war is to be waged. *Inter-religious* rivalry we discover begets conflict and is thus a characteristic of contemporary violence. *Intra-religious* violence also seems to be another feature of this phenomenon. The struggle between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland and the warring Tutsi's and Hutu's in Rwanda are two infamous cases we are aware of. More recently also we have come to witness extremist Islamic forces target their ire against their own peoples in Islamic nations. Admittedly the situation is much more complex than this feature alone explains, but nevertheless it does not detract from that assertion. Though the character of violent conflict is multifaceted and complex one thing is certain, religion seems to be a motor that drives this ever more menacing juggernaut.

But, we may ask, is this the complete picture? Is violence a necessary concomitant of religious beliefs and practice? What about the people who are deeply religious but yet do not subscribe to these notions of violence? On the one hand they conform to religious ideals and follow religious precepts but on the other they do not hold to violence as a religiously sanctioned duty and hence eschew the temptation to perpetrate it. They do not seem to fit into categories that some sections of media and popular opinion would want us to hold, of a certain religion characteristically even essentially espousing a particular violent stance. Are they less religious than those who take up arms in the name of God? Is their stance a deviant version of the truth that religion propounds? Evidence suggests that the answer to these questions will certainly be a resounding no. From Mahatma Gandhi to Desmond Tutu and numerous others in between, religion has indeed richly provided both intellectual and social resources to wage peace in situations where violent conflict would otherwise have been a forgone conclusion. For Mahatma Gandhi non-violence was a cardinal principal on which he staked his life and achieved much. The teaching of Jesus Christ fused with wisdom from Tolstoy and sprinkled with Buddhist philosophy enabled him construct *ahimsa* as the hallmark of his spirituality even political action. Non-violence, he said, was his way of realising God in his life; it was his *karma marga* (way of action). This legacy of Gandhi has been influential and has inspired many, including Martin Luther King Jr., the black American leader who campaigned for black civil rights. Similarly Desmond Tutu's yeoman effort to address both apartheid and as it

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[3] Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley/Los Angeles; University of California Press, 2000) pg. xi-xii

was being dismantled, the painful history of black oppression in South Africa in a peaceful manner was founded on his belief in forgiveness and reconciliation exemplified in Jesus Christ. Tutu's *ubuntu* theology, or notion of community where people formed their identity in relationships, which was central to his acclaimed work, was based among other things on the Christian theology of *imago dei*.[4] It appears then that though religion does provide at times the ideology, the motivation and the support networks for violence,[5] often religion also provides the rationale and dynamic for the pursuit of non-violence, even reconciliation. Indeed for many that is what religion is expected to do.

In our analysis it is salutary to recognise this ambivalent role that religion performs vis-à-vis violence.[6] Irrespective of the fact that it may be less arduous a task to equate religion with violence, or perhaps one particular religion with violence, as some often do, it does not reflect genuine ground reality. Often portrayed in such a fashion in the media and popular opinion, religion and violence are not necessarily two sides of the same coin; adopting the former does not imply acceding to the latter. This failure to credibly establish a one to one correspondence between religion and violence is to be underlined. Reality is much more complex and ambivalent and we will be well served if this is recognised.

II
Christians in India: Perpetrators, Victims and Witnesses

Christianity has often been branded as possessing a rich and lengthy heritage of violence. In addition to being a monotheistic religion and all that is allegedly associated with it, particularly its theological exclusivity and the attendant 'them' versus 'us' attitude it encourages, there is the particular history of Christianity. Indeed some like Regina Schwartz controversially suggest that in addition by Judaism, Christianity and Islam have violence inscribed in their very origins. Focusing on Christianity she points out that it is in the Cain and Abel saga that one may decipher roots of violent tendencies found within western nations.[7] It is in God's choice of Abel over Cain, and the consequent jealously it evokes in Cain leading him to murder his brother, that we find the ideology of monotheism that promotes violence. To a certain extent this violent tendency has been borne out in history, which records for us the inhumane and merciless tactics that many Christians adopted in the course of their imperial and religious expansionary forays. From the Crusades to the Holocaust Christians have been at the helm of affairs directing and guiding movements that saw violence in hitherto unknown proportions. Now whether or not they were motivated by that particular ideology is another question, but it seems

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[4] See Michael Battle, *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu* (Cleveland; Pilgrim Press, 1997)

[5] Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, pg. 11

[6] See Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence and Reconciliation* (Lanham, MD; Rowman and Littlefield, 2000)

[7] See Regina Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1997)

only right to acknowledge Christianity' dubious heritage in this regard.[8] Allegedly there is another indirect role that Christianity mission plays in the perpetuation of violence. I do not refer here to direct violence that occurs in the course of so-called Christian mission; like for instance when Spanish 'Christian' explorers wrought mayhem on indigenous populations in India, south America and other places. Rather it is the so-called insidious influence that Christian mission unleashes on hapless populations the world over. It is that symbolic and noetic violence that mission allegedly perpetuates on culture and religion.

One writer who waxed eloquent such views was onetime editor of the *Indian Express* and latter a cabinet minister in the former NDA government in India, Arun Shourie. Though he does pay lip service to the contribution of Christians to the nation, in his controversial treatise on Christian mission, Shourie categorically denounces the theology and practice of Christian mission with its insistence on conversion, as an unacceptable act of violence. Conversion he states, "is central not accidental" indeed it is "the keystone of the Christianity of the Church"[9] and its "principal preoccupation."[10] Hospitals and other humanitarian assistance, he alleges, are simply incidental. "They were the means. The objective was to convert the natives to Christianity".[11] Citing the work of Mother Teresa he says, "…there is no doubt that in her case it is her faith in Jesus which has called forth service of such an order. Yet even to such a saintly effort what would the orthodox doctrine of the Church impart? An anxiety to save souls…" About missionary activity in general, he continues, "the anxiety is beyond our grasp. That the ultimate object …is to convert the man robs from the nobility of the service."[12] For Shourie this violence has not only succeeded in denigrating Hindu culture but also in casting aspersions on the patriotism of Indian Christians. The insurgency in Northeast India he maintains derives its rationale from Christian ideology. In addition to being detrimental to national integration, Shourie alleges that missionaries have "completely destroyed not only self-confidence but also self-respect" of Hindus, who as a result "feel ashamed" of their traditions.[13] Even for dalits who viewed conversion as a mechanism to protest against inhuman conditions they experienced within the caste system of the Hindu fold, it has not helped, Shourie asserts, but has actually encouraged animosity towards Christians and missionaries even among dalits themselves. Give up your conversion agenda, he retorts, and focus instead on living the devout life of Jesus.[14] He then lays down the gauntlet; in the light of calumnies done in the name of mission, new theological thinking which includes the recognition of Biblical errors and its fallibility, the Church should desist from proclaiming that salvation is only found in Jesus and readily, not grudgingly, accept the salvific potential of Hinduism.[15]

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[8] For an insight into contemporary forms of violence perpetrated by Christians see, Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, pgs. 19-43.

[9] Arun Shourie, *Missionaries in India: Continuities, Changes, Dilemmas* (New Delhi; ASA Publications, 1994) pg. 9

[10] *Missionaries* pg.13

[11] *Missionaries* pg. 7

[12] *Missionaries* pg. 8

[13] *Missionaries* pg. 6

[14] *Missionaries* pgs. 37-39

[15] *Missionaries* pg. 228-230

A compatriot of Shourie is Sita Ram Goel, a prolific ideologue of Hindu nationalism. For him communal problems in India stem from western imperialism which drew its rationale and strength from Christianity' theology of salvation, which states that salvation is found in Jesus Christ alone. In an introduction to the republished Niyogi Committee Report on Christian Missionary Activities of 1956, Goel states:

> …the fact remains that the dogma is no more than a subterfuge for forging and wielding an organisational weapon for mounting unprovoked aggression against other people. The sole aim of this apparatus is to ruin Hindu society and culture and take over the Hindu homeland…The fact that every design is advertised, as theology in the Indian context and every criminal euphemised as an Indian theologian, should not hoodwink Hindus about the real intentions of this gangster game.[16]

The background to this, he clarifies, lies in the theology of these religious traditions:

> The Vedic tradition has given the world schools of Sanatana Dharma which have practised peace among their own followers as well as towards the followers of other parts. On the other hand the Biblical tradition has spawned criminal cults such as Christianity, Islam, Communism and Nazism which have always produced violent conflict as much within their own camps as with others and the rest of mankind.[17]

In response, he declares:

> Hindus are committing a grave mistake in regarding the encounter between Hindu and Christians as a dialogue between two religions. Christianity has never been a religion; its long history tells us that it has always been a predatory imperialism par excellence. The encounter therefore should be viewed as a battle between two totally apposed and mutually exclusive ways of thought and behaviour. In the language of the Gita (ch.16) it is war between *daivi* (divine) and *ãsuŕi* (demonic), *sampads* (propensities). In the mundane context of history, it can also be described as war between the Vedic and Biblical traditions.[18]

It is not surprising then that for a large section of society Christian mission is seen as a perpetrator of violence, its theology and its practice contributing to communalism and general angst to the nation. Conflation with colonialism and now the alleged hand-in-glove relationship with American imperialism conspire to further impress these notions on the collective Indian psyche. The contemporary Hindutva movement is but one reaction to this perceived onslaught by Christians. Going much further than the mere war of words, Hindutva activists have sought to violently stem this growing menace of

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[16] Sita Ram Goel, 'Introduction: The Sunshine of Secularism', in *Vindicated By Time: The Niyogi Committee Report On Christian Missionary Activities* (New Delhi; Voice of India, rev. ed. 1998) pg. 3
[17] Introduction, pg. 4
[18] Introduction, pg. 3. Also see Sita Ram Goel, *Defence of Hindu Society*, 3rd rev. ed. (New Delhi, Voice of India, 1994) for his exposition of the two traditions.

Christian missionaries. In a concerted effort they have targeted, often with the aid of official machinery, missionaries, priests and Christians populations in general, killing many, destroying church property and forcefully disrupting worship and other events. Through this concerted pogrom of terror and violence they have succeeded in stamping indelibly their own ambitions on the future of the nation. *One people, one nation one culture* is their vision and rallying cry. Minorities, be they Muslim or Christian are to exist at the mercy of the majority and if they were to survive were required to adopt the cultural parameters that the majority society set for them. This palpable change in ethos further encouraged by state support allows extremists groups to pursue their brand of cultural policing by violent and brute methods, often without fear of prosecution or deference to the rule of law and civil society. Though in one prominent case the accused was later found guilty and sentenced, for the most part either official sanction or selective blindness has facilitated this to carry on regardless. Christians have been victims of mindless and brutal violence all in the name of religious nationalism and in the name of particular version of cultural integrity. An international group of observers commented:

> Attacks against Christians, which have increased significantly since the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party, BJP) came to power in March 1998, point to a disturbing trend of the assertion of Hindu nationalism by governments in power at the state and central level. They are part of a concerted campaign of right-wing Hindu organizations, collectively known as the *sangh parivar*, to promote and exploit communal tensions to stay in power-a movement that is supported at the local level by militant groups who operate with impunity.[19]

In addition to targeting Christians, these fanatics included Muslims in their sights. Immunity from legal accountability encouraged these *sainks*, or soldiers, to unleash what came to be called, 'a blot on the conscience of the nation'.[20] The atrociously horrific series of events that transpired in Gujarat during late February and early March 2002, represents what religious nationalism can descend to. The 58 people killed in the train fire and the ensuing carnage in Godhra and other places in Gujarat where over two thousand lost their lives and thousands more irreparably maimed physically and psychologically, demonstrated the true colours of this religious nationalism. For the most part during this lethal and diabolic pogrom it was the Muslims who were at the receiving end. They were systematically targeted, singled out and attacked surprisingly by middle class urban Hindus, women included, as well as lorry loads of mobs from the countryside. Aided either actively or passively by the police and state governmental machinery,[21] Muslim life and property were equally attractive and vulnerable targets. Anecdotes that confirm this abound. Indeed, it was recognised later that, what transpired

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[19] For a detailed account see, Ebe Sunder Raj, Sam Thambuswamy & Ezra Samuel, *Divide to Rule: Communal Attacks on Christians in India during 1997-2000. Full details, reasons, allegations and answers* (Chennai; Bharat Jyoti, 2000) also *Human Rights Watch Report,* 'Politics by Other Means: Attacks against Christians in India', Oct 1999, Vol. 11, No 6 (C). Also found at http://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/indiachr/
[20] This was the comment of the then Prime Minister, A.B. Vajpayee to the horrors of Feb 2002.
[21] The sociologist Rowena Robinson offered clear evidence for this in a recent lecture, 'Space, Time, and the Stigma of Identity: Gujarat and Mumbai in the Aftermath of Violence', April 22, 2004, Henry Martyn Seminar, Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge, UK.

was not merely communal violence or riots. It was in fact state sponsored genocide, an attempt at ethnic cleansing calculated to dismember or banish a whole community.[22]

As violent mobs ransacked and pillaged, most Christians could do nothing but stand by helplessly. For that matter, not many others were able to stand up against these mobs either, let alone stop the massacre. By and large Christians were thus forced to acquiesce to the agenda of this pogrom.[23] When they did protest they were threatened with dire consequences if they continued. Indeed even before and certainly after this incident, threats and warnings were issued to those who even thought of coming to the assistance to the vulnerable. And that pressure does not seem show signs of abating.[24] A rejuvenated Hindutva cause appears not to suffer from a dearth of articulate ideologues nor from enthusiastic activists and neither from over-zealous extremists. They construct ideology, campaign for and implement it at parliament and on the ground and even beat people into submission. They seem to be of the opinion that their vision for the nation can have no rival; it can tolerate no alternative. Violence and brutal force is their tool and total domination is their goal. But for many others this agenda is suffocating, as it is ominous. Caught in the midst of all this is the Christian community who are seen as the initial perpetrators of violence are paradoxically also victims and mute witnesses to violence.

III
Cultures of Conflict

The pervasive and complex nature of violent conflict both here and in other contexts suggests that such violence it stems not from mere surface irritations and inconveniences; it seems to be much more than a mechanism to vent pent up anger. Such acts of violence cannot be seen as a solitary case nor understood in isolation from the wider context. Indeed an in depth analysis of its character and shape seems to betray a deeper more fundamental base that encourages and nourishes such action. It appears that violent conflict has at its roots a world-view indeed a culture that not only legitimates and authenticates but also empowers and facilitates its eruption. Violent conflict is motivated and supported by a cultural base of ideologies, networks and technologies within society. As Mark Juergensmeyer perceptively noted:

> …it takes a community of support and, in many cases, a large organisational network for an act of terrorism to succeed. It also requires an enormous amount of moral presumption for the perpetrators of these acts to justify the destruction of property on a massive scale or to condone a brutal attack on another life, especially the life of someone one scarcely knows and against whom one bears no

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[22] See the *Human Rights Watch Report* 'We Have No Orders to Save You: State Participation and Complicity in Communal Violence in Gujarat', April 2002, Vol. 14, No 3 (C). Also found at http://hrw.org/reports/2002/india/

[23] The case of the sisters of St Mary's Hospital in Ahmedabad, who offered their premises as a refuge for thousands of Muslims, is one of the few notable exceptions that must be mentioned.

[24] The pressure and harassment that Fr. Cedric Prakash for example, a Jesuit who has been a vocal human rights campaigner, has been facing, before and certainly after the Gujarat events is just one case in point. See http://www.deccanherald.com/deccanherals/jun132004/n11.asp

personal enmity. And it requires a great deal of internal conviction, social acknowledgment, and the stamp of approval from a legitimising ideology or authority one respects. Because of the moral, ideological and organisational support necessary for such acts, most of them come as collective decisions.[25]

It is precisely due to this conflation of 'ideas' and 'social groupings' that Juergensmeyer judiciously opted for the phrase 'cultures of conflict', rather than 'communities' or 'ideologies' of conflict.[26] In doing so he succeeded in underlining the nexus between religion and politics, social vision and social space, community and power, identity and otherness and the list could go on. Understanding these 'cultures of conflict' then is crucial in any analysis related to violent conflict. The discussion here will focus on three elements of these cultures: its sociological patterns, its philosophical position and its strategic policies. Though its theological postures that generate a fecund index of values remains a central feature of these cultures, we will not delve into it here; the discussion above on violence and its religious moorings will suffice for the present.

First then sociological patterns; Among social scientists the German philosopher-sociologist, Georg Simmel stands out as being one who reflected considerably on, among other things, conflict. For Simmel,[27] society consisted of a web of multiple relations between individuals who were constantly interacting with each other. Even structures such as the state, tribe, family, trade unions and so on, despite their appearance of fixity and authority in society were only institutionalised patterns of this interaction. Departing from organic views that stressed close connection between the development of society and our biological and physical nature, and also from idealist views that focused on freedom of the human spirit, Simmel proposed an interactionist approach to the study of sociology. Sociology he advocated enquires about the rules that individuals follow in this interaction, not so much in relation to total reality but more in terms of the patterns of group formation and affiliation and the manner in which individuals are influenced and shaped by these groups. Though they are responsible for their own actions we can nevertheless discover, Simmel stressed, how an individual is shaped by her affiliation with a group and also how that interaction in turn determines the shape of society. Whether it is interaction within a business corporation or in a royal household, similar underlying patterns of sociation are distinguishable. For the student of society then, sociation, or the particular patterns and forms of this interaction, was her subject matter. If society is then seen as the complex and multilayered interaction among individuals, the description of the forms of this interaction will be the task of sociology.

According to Simmel, the forms of interaction found in society are complex and characterised by a plurality. Cooperation and conflict, subordination and authoritarianism, intimacy and distance may all be evident in any given relationship or structure. Furthermore the patterns in which these elements occur may not necessarily be neat and clearly circumscribed. One may have an ambiguous two-way relationship of subordination and authoritarianism in a factory between employer and employee.

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[25] *Terror in the Mind of God*, pg 11
[26] *Terror in the Mind of God*, pg 12
[27] *On Individuality and Social Forms* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1908 & 1971)

Similarly sociation may also entail conflict, for that is one form of interaction between individuals and/or groups. Harmonious and disharmonious interaction, both among individuals and groups, collude to make society what it is. Social order is constituted by sociation and conflict. At times conflict proves to be healthy even conducive for the greater good of society and is to be seen not, to use Simmel's own language, as a 'liability'.[28] But at the same time, Simmel asserts, conflict can also turn violent. He speaks of situations where people assume themselves to be "representative of supraindividual claims of fighting not for themselves but only for a cause." Then conflict takes on a "radicalism and mercilessness… [and] since they have no consideration for themselves, they have none for the others either; they are convinced they are entitled to make anybody a victim of the idea for which they sacrifice themselves."[29]

If, as according Simmel, conflict is the "obverse of cohesion,"[30] it may help to identify the stimulants of cohesion and in them discover any potential that there might be for conflict. In her valuable study Meredith McGuire cites four sources of cohesion and conflict as it pertains to religion.[31] The first deals with social identity and religion, where social identity is integrally related to a particular religious affiliation. Here social cohesion and religious practice and belief go hand in hand and correspondingly when threat to either social mores or threats to religious beliefs are perceived, it is interpreted as a religio-social conflict. The second deals with national identity and religion, where one particular religion is seen as embodying the national spirit and vice versa. To belong to a nation is to adhere to a certain religion. Conflict in either area will inevitably then be interpreted as a religio-national conflict. Influenced by Marxian thought, the third deals with economic status and religion, where both cohesion and conflict can be traced to economic realities. Religious dissent here will be seen as a voice for economic dissatisfaction and economic dissatisfaction will have its roots in ecclesiastical practice. The fourth deals with sources of authority and religion, where religion is often a legitimating power of authority and derives its own power from such a role. Conflict over which authority is final will inevitably involve religion and the rival claimants for power. To be sure, McGuire clarifies that the messiness of conflict does not allow us to posit a clear pattern of cause and effect involving these four dimensions. Patterns in which these elements are involved are complex and at times may involve all four dimensions, and at others may involve varying combinations. However, to note that in conflict these major strands play an important role is a valuable suggestion. For it leads us to agree with McGuire that significant in conflict situations are notions of 'outsiders' and 'insiders', 'we' and 'them', and also consent to her idea that, "religion's significance in socialization enhances its potential for divisiveness." [32]

Whilst sociological patterns may explain the nature of interaction within society that leads to violence, it does not provide the ideological rationale for violent acts. To understand that recognition of n philosophical positions within cultures of conflict will

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[28] *On Individuality* pg. 72. Also see *Conflict: The Web of Group Affiliations* (Glencoe, IL, Free Press, 1955)
[29] *On Individuality* pg. 87
[30] Meredith McGuire, *Religion: The Social Context* (Belmont, CA, Wadsworth, 2002) pg. 209
[31] *Religion: The Social Context,* pgs. 210ff
[32] See her discussion in pgs. 215-220. The quote is taken from pg. 215.

help. Two sets will be all that we discuss here: one an eastern and the other a western. For the former we look to the *Mahabharata*, the Hindu epic where we find the story of Arjuna, the fabled marksman. The great battle of Kurukshetra is underway; Krishna is in control of Arjuna's white horse drawn chariot leading it into the battlefield. Arjuna is conscious that many of his relatives, old friends and kinsmen are among enemy ranks, and is horrified that he is about to kill his loved ones. His conscience fails to support the act he is about to commit. In desperation he asks:

> O Krishna, seeing my kinsmen standing with a desire to fight, my limbs fail and my mouth becomes dry. My body quivers and my hairs stand on end. The bow slips from my hand, and my skin intensely burns. My head turns, I am unable to stand steady, and O Krishna, I see bad omens. I see no use of killing my kinsmen in battle. I desire neither victory, nor pleasure nor kingdom, O Krishna. What is the use of the kingdom, or enjoyment, or even life, O Krishna? …I do not wish to kill my teachers, uncles, sons, grandfathers, maternal uncles, fathers-in-law, grandsons, brothers-in-law, and other relatives who are about to kill us, even for the sovereignty of the three worlds, let alone for this earthly kingdom, O Krishna. O Lord Krishna, what pleasure shall we find in killing our cousin brothers? [33]

In response, his charioteer Krishna, the *avatar* or incarnation of the supreme-being, consoles and reassures him:

> The invisible Spirit (*Atma, Atman*) is eternal, and the visible physical body, is transitory. The reality of these two is indeed certainly seen by the seers of truth. The Spirit by whom this entire universe is pervaded is indestructible. No one can destroy the imperishable Spirit. The physical bodies of the eternal, immutable, and incomprehensible Spirit are perishable. Therefore fight, O Arjuna.[34]

Krishna continues:

> Considering also your duty as a warrior you should not waver like this. Because there is nothing more auspicious for a warrior than a righteous war. Only the fortunate warriors, O Arjuna, get such an opportunity for an unsought war that is like an open door to heaven. If you will not fight this righteous war, then you will fail in your duty, lose your reputation, and incur sin. People will talk about your disgrace forever. To the honoured, dishonour is worse than death. The great warriors will think that you have retreated from the battle out of fear. Those who have greatly esteemed you will lose respect for you. Your enemies will speak many unmentionable words and scorn your ability. What could be more painful to you than this? You will go to heaven if killed on the line of duty, or you will enjoy the kingdom on the earth if victorious. Therefore, get up with a determination to fight, O Arjuna. [35]

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[33] *Bhagavad Gita,* Ch. 1:27-36
[34] Ch. 2:16-18
[35] Ch. 2. 31-37

The philosophy of *Niskama Karma* or disinterested action that Krishna advocates then provides many like Arjuna with a rationale for violent acts. Since it is either for the greater good or is an act expected of the individual as concomitant on his *varnashramadharma*, or duty of ones state and path, the intrinsic ethics of that particular act does not seem problematic. The end justifies the means. To quieten the agitated conscience a whole range of qualifications is provided. Violence is thus furnished with a philosophical base and foundation.

In western philosophical traditions violence similarly appears to have a philosophical base. The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche[36] proposed that basic to human life was the 'will' rather than 'reason' or some such dimension of human life. The 'will to power' he went on to argue gave that skeleton its flesh. As in nature the innate will to ride on the backs of others for self-preservation, continued with humans and was society's guarantee against extinction. Violence was thus inscribed in our very nature, in the way things are. This 'will to power' extended to ideas and interpretations indeed knowledge as well. Since they were not related to transcendentals but rather were our preference for one option over the other, they were in effect our mechanisms to exert our will to power. All that exists are interpretations. With Christianity however one meets a system that provides significance to human existence by seeking providential design in suffering. It forces us to adopt weakness as a virtue and shy away from facing the world as it is. God for him was a pointless negation of the brute facts of nature, the fundamental truth of the will to power and priests were professional liars who lived for the upkeep of a system of slavery. In contrast Nietzsche announced: 'God is dead.' Nihilism then replaced theism and the order that faith in God occasioned was criminalized.

This nihilism he advocated in place of Christianity and other forms of theism, was to be characterised by a 'master morality' over against a 'slave morality'. The former was the action undertaken by the strong and noble in pursuit of power, whilst the latter replaced such aggressiveness with peace and humility. For the former 'good' and 'bad' correspond to strength and weakness, whereas for the latter morality, a contradistinction of 'good' and 'evil,' predominates. In pursuit of master morality, the strong exert their will to power on the weak with violence that inflicts pain. This pain provides a measure of satisfaction and pleasure for the strong in their march to greater power. Violence is thus sanctioned as residing in the very nature of things. Nuanced reading of his thesis may qualify that somewhat, but his idea that Christianity is a religion of pity and that power, even if it meant resorting to violence to assure that, was the only value worth pursuing still holds. Nietzsche provided what could arguably be called a 'realistic' and 'pragmatic' take on the world and this forceful philosophy has led to violence being regarded as a necessarily a constituent of life. Indeed allegations that it gave rise to Nazi power are not few and unconvincing.

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[36] I'm indebted here to Steve Wilkens & Alan Padgett, *Christianity and Western Thought: A History of Philosophers, Ideas and Movements Vol. 2 Faith & Reason in the 19th Century* (Downers Grove, IL; IVP, 2000). For an in depth discussion of Nietzsche' thought see Bernd Magnus and Kathleen M. Higgins, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche* (Cambridge, CUP, 1996)

Equally part of cultures of conflict as sociological patterns and philosophical positions are strategic policies that fund and resource violence. Rene Girard' theory of mimetic desire, or the desire to imitate the rival, offers us a tool to understand violence.[37] Girard explains that the basic act of becoming human is accomplished by learning from others what is good and right, and then by imitating or copying them. Mimicry is the life-blood of human growth. However, as this growth occurs and we increasingly desire to be like the other, the recognition of scarcity of various resources dawns on us. Our attempt to secure objects for ourselves is met with opposition from others who desire the same thing. What was a unsymmetrical relationship now becomes a level playing field where rivalry rears its head and leads to violence. Descent into anarchy is averted when society gangs up on a victim particularly one who spells weakness and vulnerability. They then become the 'scapegoat' for our angst. This scapegoat allows us give vent to these rivalries and subsequently acts to restore societal harmony. As this continues and as rituals are constructed and regularly re-enacted in order to rehearse these acts of violence, this ritualistic repetition is endowed with religious significance. Maurice Bloch went on to read in these religious rituals not only the legitimisation of violence but also its fount. He went on to say that violence was in fact concomitant to religious ritual, for the "irreducible core of the ritual process involves a marked element of violence". This ritual violence he believes translates into social violence.[38] The mimetic impulse it appears funds our practical strategies for growth, rivalry, harmony, oblation and even violence. We constantly live by mimicry and sometimes even die by it.

Girard' mimetic theory leads us to suggest that violent conflict works on at the least by three fundamental notions. The first is the notion of being deprived of and/or being aggrieved by an external entity. Scarcity and rivalry conspire to bring about hurt and pain, when one party wins. Hurt suffered by oneself and ones community or nation therefore lies at the centre of the cycle of violence. Ones own action or stance that may have occasioned this hurt is often easily forgotten or even perhaps not recognised at all. It is the act of violence the other party inflicts, whether it is from the recent or more distant past, it is this action or deprivation that initiates violent conflict. Accordingly reasons for conflict are normally attributed to the other and seldom to oneself. Prior to bombing the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, Osama bin Laden categorically stated that by very their presence and action in the Middle East, the holy land of Islam, America made "a clear declaration of war on God, His messenger and Muslims." His action, however barbaric and irrespective of that fact that most of the people hurt were not directly related to that perceived aggressor, was only a response to that first injustice and violence.[39] Second, aggressive retaliation is seen as the most appropriate means to redress the initial hurt. Rather than taking it lying down, so to speak, returning violence, even if it is symbolic noetic violence, with physical violence is thought suitable. Terms of engagement are circumscribed by violent tactics for nothing less will do as a robust answer. Violence is the best payback for hurt, indeed it is seen as the most appropriate method to extract, not just that pound of flesh lost, but indeed inflict so great a loss to the

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[37] For a good introduction to Girard' thought see James Williams ed. *The Girard Reader* (New York; Crossroad, 1996)
[38] *Prey into Hunter: The Politics of Religious Experience* (Cambridge, CUP, 1992) pg. 4
[39] Cited in Mark Jugernsmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God,* pg 145

perpetrator that nothing similar can be inflicted again. Violence is the only language that will be heard and understood. Other tongues smack of capitulation to the aggressor and a weakness on ones own part. It turns out that in seeking to vanquish the monster victims themselves become monsters. Third, this violence is not merely to get back ones own at the initial perpetrator but to overturn the relationship so as to render the initially aggrieved party the victor even the one who then gains the upper hand in the relationship. Rivalry that leads to violence desires that conflict will reverse the roles of our opponent. We will, as a result, be the one our subordinates mimic.

IV
Reconciliation: Its Imperative and Theology

'Conflict as context' is a notion that few would argue with, nor will religion' role in that malaise be disputed. To get to grips with that context, as we noted, it would necessitate an engagement with those 'cultures of conflict'. Having done that the question we now need to address is: Is there a way forward? If so, what is it? For some the two opposing sides, those who advocate and practice violence and those who suffer as victims including those who stand by helplessly, are the only two options available. Violence is inscribed into the way things are and deal with it we must. Either we use it for our own good or we are exterminated by it. The former ensures that we are not obliterated and the latter, the recourse of the weak, will allow us to succumb to this malevolent reality. The only genuine option we have is to resign ourselves to combating violence with more violence or device cowardly ploys to covertly escape violence and thus prolong life, even if it is lived in servitude. Resignation to the inevitability of violence, in either form, then seems to be the only answer available.

In contrast Christian faith offers a third creative and life-giving option: that of reconciliation. In a bi-linguistic world of violence and victim-hood, Christian faith offers a third language, the language of reconciliation. We do not need to argue at length that the bi-linguistic world of violence and victim-hood will be the cause of our destruction. With ever more technically advanced and lethal weaponry available this disturbing trend can denigrate into a fight that destroys our whole planet. Violence not only breeds more violence it also begets destruction. The imperative for a fresh and effective way to deal with the depth and breadth of this pervasive ethos that plagues the world is never more urgent. The language of reconciliation is never more necessary than at the present, when in the din of violence shouting louder than the other offers no long-term solution. We are in desperate need to stop, unlearn the language of violence and then begin to learn and employ the language of reconciliation.

In the scriptures, though the term reconciliation does not occur frequently, the idea has numerous allusions throughout. When we come to the Pauline corpus though we find this trend reversed. Not only is reconciliation is a central strand in his Christian theological vision the term is also frequently used and most significant. Indeed some scholars have

even argued that it is the primary theme for the Apostle.[40] Four passages stand out as being crucial both for the notion of reconciliation and indeed for the Apostle's theology: Romans Ch 5.10; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, Ephesians 2:14-18; Colossians 1:19-22. Put together these suggest that reconciliation is the language that God has chosen to converse with us. Reconciliation is a divine tongue. The grammar of Divine and human communication is constructed on such reconciliatory principles. Its morphology based on the agenda and acts of God in Christ. In these passages we discover at least three characteristics of a Christian theology of reconciliation. The first, reconciliation is an act that God, in His freedom and grace, initiates towards us, indeed the whole cosmos. In 2 Corinthians 5:19, Paul declares: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself." Reconciliation originates, not from human desire for a relationship with the divine, but is the sovereign act of God not out of compulsion and force, but out of sheer grace. It is God's act not human achievement.[41] If God's act to us ward, it is then a gift of grace. Paul takes great pains to emphasise that it is not by works of the law that we have been made at one with God but by grace through faith (Eph 2:8). When in Romans 5:2 he says, we "stand in grace", he was underlining this reality. The second characteristic of reconciliation is Christ's role in this act of God. The reconciliation that God accomplishes is done through the person and work of Christ. It is that particular history of Jesus Christ that constitutes the central narrative of the process of reconciliation. It is his miraculous birth, exemplary life, incisive teaching, ignominious death and triumphant resurrection that seals for us that reconciliation. The history of Jesus Christ is not incidental to the reconciliation that God accomplishes. Reconciliation is not done by some sovereign divine fiat unrelated to human history. The scandal of particularity of Jesus Christ is indeed a central and non-negotiable element of the Christian theology of reconciliation. It is this specificity that provides its character and indeed its dynamic. Displace that particularity and we will be left with a shallow shell of religiosity, neither Christian nor challenging and effective. The third characteristic of reconciliation is its indicative-imperative dyad, a classic feature of Pauline theology that we find in 2 Cor. 5: 18-19. In the first instance reconciliation that is accomplished by God in Christ is a gift *to* the church. As the church becomes a sacrament of reconciliation, this reality is transformed to a gift given *through* the church to the world. Reconciliation she receives as gift matures to become a gift she then shares with the world. It is in the church of reconciled people that we find both Jew and Gentile, not only set on equal footing, but also jointly made His dwelling place (Eph 2:13-16 & 22) who then communicate and embody this reconciliation in and to the world. This indicative-imperative dyad, is confirmed further when the Apostle clarifies in vs. 18, "…God who reconciled us to himself through Christ gave us the ministry of reconciliation". In the next sentence he asserts further, "…he has committed to us the message of reconciliation." The proclamation and practice of reconciliation, that Paul says is gifted to the church for the world is founded on the reconciliation that she herself has received from her Lord. The church is not just a called

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[40] For example see Ralph Martin, *Reconciliation: A Study of Paul's Theology* (London, Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1981)

[41] Robert Schreiter makes a similar point in his *Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order* (New York: Orbis, 1992) pg. 42 & also in his *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality & Strategies* (New York, Orbis, 1999) pg. 14. See also Miroslav Volf, 'The Social Meaning of Reconciliation,' *Interpretation* No. 54, Vol. 2, April 2000, pgs 158-172, who makes a similar point but adds slightly different nuances to his exposition of the social significance of the 2 Cor 5: 17-21 passage.

people, but more profoundly also a commissioned people as well. In verse 20 Paul goes on to expand on that commission slightly differently when he states, "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us." Paul sees the church as 'ambassadors of reconciliation' who embody and demonstrate both in their own life and action in and for the world, God's compassionate appeal in and to the world.

To these characteristics of reconciliation, we would do well to add two additional senses that are not only central to Paul's thought but also to Christian vision in general. The first is the role of the Spirit in the Christian and the Church and the second, is the significance of the eschaton for the Christian and the Church. Doing so provides us with both the internal dynamic for and the horizon of Christian reconciliation. It must be clarified though that this addition is done not in any arbitrary sense with little concern for the text as it stands. Nor is it done based on a perceived deficiency in that text and hence in need of supplementary aid from outside. On the contrary a brief glance at the first section of Ch. 5 will confirm that even in this passage, Paul does not fail to address these central twin concerns of the 'Spirit' and 'eschaton'. Talking about what is to come he says in vs.5, "Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come". Spirit and eschaton are then not mere appendages to an existing theology of reconciliation but are both crucial and integrative dimensions of that theology. Early in Ch. 5 of Romans Paul explains that the peace of reconciliation and the hope of its completion is made effective by the Holy Spirit who is poured into our lives (5: 1-5). That is to say, the Spirit's work is not confined to making real that reconciliation in our lives but also extends to empowering us for its realisation here and now as well as constituting the guarantee of a final and full reconciliation of the whole cosmos with God in the future. Right from point of receiving that reconciliation, indeed even before that if we accept the Spirit was behind the scenes convicting us of sin, to its consummation, the Spirit is active and at work in and through us. We may say then that the eschaton and the Spirit introduce into the theology of reconciliation a dynamic dialectic of promise and power.

A theology of reconciliation then will have among other elements, these central qualities: a theological basis, a christological character, a pneumatological enabling, an ecclesiological grounding and an eschatological orientation. In other words it will display its origins in God, assert that it is accomplished through the person and work of Christ, clarify that it is made real for us by the Holy Spirit, vindicate that it will be demonstrated in and through the life of the Church and affirm that it is directed towards the future promise of God. We may observe that since this theology implicates all major constituents of theology in general, reconciliation we may say is not a mere appendage to theology nor merely the application of a theology already constructed with other resources. On the contrary it lies at the heart of the Christian theological and missiological vision. That it provides a tool to conceive both God's relationships with humans and inter-human relationships, indeed human relationships with the whole cosmos suggests that it may even be considered a valuable model with which to understand and practice the Christian faith. Yale professor, Miroslav Volf, who has reflected considerably on related themes, suggests that the vision of reconciliation, as explained in 2 Cor. 5: 17-21, "is 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, and lies at the core of the Christian faith." [42]

Besides its fundamental significance for the Christian life the theology of reconciliation, it has to be said, also possesses a comprehensive remit. It deals not only with 'spiritual' dimensions but also social, even cosmic ones. It is a message that impacts life in its totality, indeed its vision is a way of life. That fact notwithstanding for too long theology has had little stimulus to attend to its holistic character. Volf posits that there are two reasons responsible for this malaise.[43] The first is the pietistic approach to reconciliation, which sees this act as pertaining to the relationship of ones soul to God. As sinners all humans need to repent and receive forgiveness from God and thus reconciliation revolves around the individual being set right with God. This perception leads then to a private morality and an a-political stance. Here reconciliation is a theological and personal reality with little social significance. The second is the liberal approach to reconciliation. Though social engagement is encouraged here, it is focused on the pursuit of justice and liberation, which is in turn based on some generally accepted liberal ideas of freedom and justice. If justice and liberation are sought after, they believe, reconciliation will follow. Whilst they are involved in that pursuit, the message of reconciliation and the specifics of the Christian faith, particularly the cross and the nature of the Triune God are almost forgotten. In contrast it would be good to remind ourselves that we've already noted the integral relationship that exists between the theological vision and social embodiment of reconciliation. As Paul announces, almost in one breath, one cannot be conceived without the other. Failure to address the former leaves us with little theological substance, while negating the latter leaves us little social relevance. If reconciliation is to have any meaning and relevance its theological substance and social embodiment are to go hand in hand.

V
Reconciliation and the Integrity of Mission

If fundamental in its significance and comprehensive in its remit, a theology of reconciliation will, to be sure, play a central role in Christian mission. The character of a theology of reconciliation affords us the privilege to see in that act of God the very roots of the imperative placed on us. We will not be required to concoct directives for mission based on a previously and independently established mission theology. The scripture passages we focused on affirm that reconciliation is in and of itself a spiritual-social-cosmic reality. That reality has within itself the resources for mission. Intrinsic rather than incidental to a theology of reconciliation is its missiological themes. No appendices from contextual concerns or cultural resources are necessary to attest its theological and missiological remit. It is profoundly in and of itself a rich missiological category. It offers little threat to the integrity of mission both in it is theology and practice. Indeed, if anything, a theology of reconciliation is at its heart a fecund missiological resource.

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[42] The Social Meaning of Reconciliation, pg. 168
[43] The Social Meaning of Reconciliation, pg. 162

Validity of this notion may be demonstrated by viewing it against a few salient missiological models. When 'mission as *missio dei*' is considered then our discussion of the 2 Cor. 5 passage confirms the correspondence of reconciliation as a model for mission. As the concept of *missio dei* emphasises, in the first instance "mission is not primarily an activity of the church but an attribute of God,"[44] so also we have acknowledged that reconciliation originates in God. We who would hold with the Apostle Paul that, "God was in Christ reconciling the world," recognise that *missio dei* is a *reconciling* mission. It is a reality that brings together, atones, and indeed reconciles rebellious humans with a gracious God. It is furthermore the activity of God reconciling the cosmos to himself as attested in Col. 1:19-22: "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross." God the aggrieved party, the one who was sinned against takes the initiative in reconciliation. It is not God who is reconciled but rather He is the one who reconciles us.[45] It is *His* reconciling mission. This compels us to acknowledge that reconciliation infuses the notion of *missio dei* with a specific shape and particular contours. If *missio dei* is to have a concrete shape in the world, reconciliation could furnish that specificity.

The Christological structure of reconciliation offers the notion of 'mission as proclamation' a valuable resource, for the proclamation of the Lordship of Jesus and the salvation He offers finds in this reality its material substance. In the life and person of Jesus we find embodied the earthly process of this reconciliation. Here we find God's revelation of Himself, the unveiling of His character and being. The nature and shape of His Kingdom is made real for us in His person and ministry. His death and resurrection seals for us that reconciliation. Christ is God's answer, God's remedy for an estranged world. As we noted it is His act to reconcile us to Himself. In turn the reality we are invited to be part of indeed allowed to indwell is God's provision for our flourishing. The ministry of the Holy Spirit makes real for us that reconciled status. We may say then that reconciling this estranged world, indeed cosmos, was therefore the particular mission of the earthly history of Jesus Christ. Christology is the grammar with which we may comprehend and grasp God's language of reconciliation.

If the Christology is the grammar of our proclamation, then 'mission as inculturation' also finds here rich resources. Incarnation was a step in the process of reconciliation and as such feeds into that reality. That the pattern of inculturation in mission is derived from the incarnation, finds in this reconciliation its defining feature. Inculturation is not an end in itself rather it is a process that has reconciliation as goal. The incarnation affirms that bringing near and making visible, creating a home and a specific locus for the reality of God is directed to the particular goal of reconciling the world. The incarnation was not a holiday, but a process by which the reality of God Himself was transformed so as to accomplish reconciliation. Divinity was endowed with humanity and humanity was taken into Divine reality, all for reconciliation. Similarly if 'mission as dialogue' is considered, the conversation that this reconciliatory incarnation facilitated becomes all the more

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[44] David Bosch. *Transforming Mission*: *Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, (New York; Orbis Books, 1991) pg. 390

[45] See Miroslav Volf's discussion of Seyoon Kim's work. 'The Social Meaning of Reconciliation', pg. 166

special and meaningful. The need for reconciling relationships, without which dialogue will utterly fail, cannot be lost on us as we engage in interfaith dialogue. The reconciliation we have experienced is shared with others in dialogue, whether we do that formally or in the midst of the hustle and bustle of life. In so doing we engage in the 'ministry of reconciliation' and also share the 'message of reconciliation', as the Apostle Paul encourages us to do.

When we turn to 'mission as liberation' and its cognates, the broad and expansive sense of reconciliation, we noted comes into its own. A theology of reconciliation urges us to face the brute fact that in the world not only personal relationships are fractured but a fracture is evident amongst the systems that govern our world as well. Whether it is economic or legal, political or social we meet structures that, which though may seem to exist for human and cosmic flourishing, are in effect the very instruments that oppress and enslave. The breaking down of walls that divide, the defeat of powers that enslave, and the transformation of structures that oppress, all worthy aims of mission as liberation will discover that in reconciliation we have a first rate training ground. Here we may develop both a rich imagination and facilitate creative action. Reconciliation of this estranged world to God offers us a fecund and productive model that may guide our thought and action.

Having delineated the cross-connections a theology of reconciliation enjoys with established mission models and demonstrated how the integrity of mission theology is not jeopardised when this theology is given primacy, we now move on to address the dynamics of practical applicability. Among the few programmatic statements that Jesus Christ uttered, the one found in John 10:10 has not played a prominent a role in mission theology. The Great Commission and the Nazareth Manifesto are two candidates that have received its due share unlike this one. Here Jesus announces, "The thief comes only to steal, kill, and destroy: I have come that they may have life, and have it more abundantly." The context of the passage is Jesus' use of a pastoral metaphor, that of the shepherd to portray and explicate his own ministry. The model of a shepherd, one who takes care of his flock, guards them against intruders, leads them in green pastures, calls out to them in a recognisable voice and even lays down his life for them is a most apt description for the ministry that He exercises among His disciples. Jesus the shepherd assures his flock of sustenance and security. They are under His care and are precious to Him. He is even prepared to lay down His life for them. Perhaps more significant than all this for our purposes is the term 'abundant life' that He gives them. In stark contrast to a thief who unlawfully steals that which belongs to us, violates our space and destroys its harmony Jesus does not only refrain from such practices but actually offers us more than we already have. He offers life. Abundant life. Eternal life. His life.

When He prays to His Father in John 17:21, Jesus desires that this life of mutual and self-giving love, the interdependent symbiosis which is often described as *perichoresis*, He shares and enjoys with the Father and the Spirit will incorporate into itself His disciples. His desire is that His followers will also be drawn into that reality; participate in that *perichoretic* Divine communion. The Apostle Paul picks up this thought in his writings. For example, when all through the Pauline corpus we frequently find the phrase 'in

Christ' used to describe and explain the Christian disciple's status (for e.g. see Rom 6:11; 8:1; 2 Cor. 5:17), it refers to the reality Jesus' disciples live inhabit. Being in Christ therefore is a result of the reconciliation God in Christ accomplishes. We are endowed with the Spirit (2 Cor. 5:5) or in other words we are taken up in to His life, divine life. The obverse of the fact that this abundant life indwells us is the reality that we participate in *perichoretic* divine life. Reconciliation does not only make us right with God but perhaps more profoundly makes us one with Him. Paul argues that this is made explicit in the act of baptism (Rom. 6:1-14) when we die with Christ and are resurrected with Him. Our new life is 'in Christ' (Rom 6:11).

If Christian discipleship is then participation in divine life, and Christian mission, one dimension of such discipleship, is living and sharing the reality of that abundant life, it would mean, as Paul urges us (Rom. 6:13), participation in divine life is for the here and now and not in some ethereal domain. Participation profoundly implicates our rooted existence in human society. To be sure it also includes the promise that is to come, but if indeed that promise is the consummation of a presently experienced reality, then the here and now takes on an urgency. In the light of that, what will that mean for our calling as 'ambassadors of reconciliation'? If we are reconciled and as a result participate in divine life, how does that resource our involvement in reconciliation in a world of violence? What is the social shape and nature of the church' existence? How will reconciliation conceive of and affirm the integrity of mission?

Rather than provide a lengthy proposal in response to those questions (and obviously based on the foregoing one may decipher as to where my personal inclination will lead and to predict the trajectory of the rest of this paper), and seeing that we come to study and discuss *together* what reconciliation would mean in contemporary contexts, I would like to offer below three sets of questions. It is done with the hope that it will provide food for thought and stimulate our deliberation.

- If as we saw reconciliation and mission are integrally related, what shape will mission take to accord reconciliation its centrality and how may reconciliation affirm the integrity of mission? For example in a context where Christian mission is itself considered as a violent enterprise, how do we respond?
- If as we saw cultures of conflict, find in religion a resource, how may we through our engagement in mission subvert that notion and propose instead a suitable alternative? What theological and strategic resources do we have for the momentous task of reconciliation?
- If reconciliation is an urgent concern for the contemporary world, what are the significant issues that we will be required to engage with in its pursuit. If we are to embody reconciliation in the contemporary world, what role will notions of forgiveness, justice and partnership play? In other words what are the issues we will have to deal with in 'living reconciliation'? What strategies may we adopt to embody reconciliation?