

HEALING AND RECONCILIATION

For too many people the need for healing and reconciliation has become a matter of survival and ipso facto a matter of survival of the churches. Simple answers no longer do. Many of the traditional Christian responses to the human yearning for health, healing and wholeness are nowadays put to the test.

What answers do we have when we let ourselves be touched by the world in which we live? What then belongs essentially to a mission of healing and reconciliation in the light of the Gospel? How do we transcend the tension, when we aim to do justice to the suffering individual as well as to the wider community? Or how do we overcome the inner conflicts when we become caught in categories, such as victims and perpetrators, friends and enemies, good and evil... when we tend to either proclaim the Word, or rather live it and witness to it through our lives?

More and more committed Christians seem to be struggling with these questions, and from one conference to the next the number of participants in this Mission Study Group is growing. There were some who were participating for the fourth time, and also a good number of newcomers.

The study sessions were triggered off and greatly stimulated and enriched by the presentation of three papers:

- *“Reconciliation and the Integrity of Mission”* by Paul Joshua Bhakiaraj, [see page...](#);
- *“Statement on Mission as Reconciliation”* - Preparatory paper No4 for the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism, to be held in Athens, Greece, 9-16 May 2005 - by Jacques Matthey, [see page ...](#);
- *“Inviting the Spirit to fight the spirits? Pneumatological challenges for missions in healing and exorcism”* by Christoffer H.Grundmann, [see page....](#)

These papers had been available on the IAMS Conference web-site, and we had read and studied them. Yet listening to the brief introductions of the authors made such an impact that we spent considerable time absorbing the content offered. This report on the Mission Study Group can only reflect some highlights that emerged as we moved on from one paper to the next. I hope that these highlights and the quotations offered, will stimulate the study of the full papers, [to be found elsewhere in this journal /or/ to be found on the IAMS Conference web-site](#). There are no further detailed references to the papers in this report as this would interfere with our intention to share the flow and the dynamics of the study group.

1. Reconciliation and the Integrity of Mission. Paul Joshua Bhakiaraj

Our contemporary world suffers from both, inter-religious and intra-religious violence. People even begin to ask themselves whether violence is a necessary concomitant of religious belief and practice, specially in the case of the monotheistic religions. At times religion does provide the ideology, the motivation and the support networks for violence, yet it also provides the rationale and dynamic for the pursuit of non-violence, even reconciliation. Think e.g. of Mahatma Ghandi, Desmond Tutu.

Based on his experience, Joshua reflected further on 'Christians in India: Perpetrators, Victims and Witnesses'. Christians have been accused of causing violence, have also experienced themselves as victims of violence exercised against them, and at other times as witnesses or bystanders observing violence exercised against others, mainly the Muslim population. His studies on the subject, let Joshua to explain that violent conflict has at its roots a culture that not only legitimates and authenticates but also empowers and facilitates its eruption. When social or national identity, economic status or authority and power are related to a particular religion, as is often the case, religion plays a significant role in the process of socialisation and thus enhances a culture of conflict by its potential divisiveness. It can lead to build notions of 'insiders' and 'outsiders', 'we' and 'they'.

We are living with 'conflict as context'. Joshua stated that "in a bi-linguistic world of violence and victim-hood, Christian faith offers a third language, the language of reconciliation." For him a Christian theology of reconciliation based on the Pauline Corpus shows three characteristics: the initiative comes from God who initiates reconciliation towards us and the whole cosmos; the reconciliation is done through the person and work of Christ; it is a gift to the Church who in turn is called to be an instrument of reconciliation.

He understands reconciliation to be at the heart of the integrity of mission. In order to become agents of reconciliation, inculturation in a given context is necessary, together with the ability and readiness to engage in dialogue that may lead to reconciling relationships.

He offered us three sets of questions that further stimulated our deliberations:

- "... 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 cultures of conflict, find in religion a resource, how may we through engagement in mission subvert that notion and propose instead a suitable alternative?..."
- "...what role will notions of forgiveness, justice and partnership play? ... what are the issues we will have to deal with in 'living reconciliation'? What strategies may we adopt to embody reconciliation? "

2. "Come, Holy Spirit, heal and reconcile" - Towards mission as reconciliation.

Jacques Matthey of the WCC presented reconciliation as an emerging paradigm, related to the contemporary world in which globalisation is not only creating new ways to express unity and cross boundaries, but has also led to violent clashes of cultures, religions, and economic interests.

He went on to further develop the features of reconciliation as used by Paul: "Reconciliation is much more than simply a superficial fixing of distortions, the arrival of a status quo of coexistence. Reconciliation looks at a transformation of the present, a very deep-rooted renewal. The "peace" which Paul speaks about is certainly peace with God (cfr. Rom. 5:1-11) but it is also the transformation of human relationships and the building of a community. ... Reconciliation envisions a new creation as Paul so vividly expresses also in 2 Cor. 5:17. The category of "new creation" shows that there is even more in view than a mending of brokenness. Reconciliation is a totally new quality of being."

Jacques elaborated further on reconciliation as both a *goal* and a never-ending *process*. For people who try to live in this new way four aspects are very relevant in the process.

- Truth: Only when the silence is broken, can people come to recognition of what has been hidden, and enter a process of reconciliation.
- Memory: *How* the past is remembered becomes the basis for how we will live and relate to one another and how we will envision the future. Recovering memory has to be closely linked to the truth in order to contribute to healing.
- Justice: Wrongdoers are to be held accountable for their actions. It is the task of the legally constituted state and must lead to retribution and compensation.
- Forgiveness: We are challenged to also incorporate the rich ritual resources of different religions and cultures.

“The Spirit gives gifts of prophecy and boldness today as Christians struggle especially to aid in the process of restorative justice, and work towards the reforms that structural justice require.” As conclusion he reminded us that the Church has an “in between” position, “not to be construed as a value-neutral position but acknowledged as a rather risky and costly position to be in. While taking the sides of the victims, the Church also has the mission of reaching out to the victimisers with the challenges of the Gospel. Mission at the point of “in betweenness” is simultaneously a mission of empowering the powerless by accompanying them and also of challenging the perpetrators of hurt to repent. In this way it becomes a mission of mutual life-giving.”

Sharing her experiences with the Truth Commission in Peru, Birgit Weiler affirmed that the greatest obstacle to find the truth is indeed the denial of the facts. She told us that many people were against such a commission because they were afraid it would further divide the Peruvian society. Yet the commission for truth and reconciliation collected more than 15000 testimonies in public audiences in which the strength of empathic listening became tangible. Of the many groups who had been inflicting atrocities in Peru, only the police forces accepted the challenge. Nevertheless people are hoping that the churches will offer safe places where people can admit their guilt. For that reason the ability to facilitate forgiveness has become an urgent requirement in the formation for pastoral ministries.

With regard to reconciliation and the integrity of mission, Jacques added more questions to our list. Among the most challenging were the following two:

- Whether the struggle for Christian unity will bear fruit could be decisive for the future of our churches: if we as Christians are not able to be reconciled with one another, what then is our message?
- With regard to Christian-Muslim relationships and our missionary methods – is conversion still the goal? Is it still needed? Is it possible?

To end his presentation he made a few remarks on a ‘spirituality of reconciliation’. Cross-bearing, humility and self-emptying are the most important prerogatives of a spirituality of reconciliation for “the ministry of the Holy Spirit – in which the church is privileged to share – is to heal and reconcile a broken world.”

3. Inviting the Spirit to fight the spirits? – Pneumatological challenges for missions in healing and exorcism. Christoffer H.Grundmann

The theme of the IAMS Conference motivated Christoffer for an “in-depth exploration of the question how far and to what extent healings are or can bear a genuine witness to the Holy Spirit”. He saw a great need for this since “issues of spirit-worlds were hardly ever seriously addressed before modern times, let alone by missiology, leaving a vacuum prone to be filled by what anyone pleased.” Missionaries were aware of the religious importance of spirits in the

respective cultures but had a tendency to view them only negatively and therefore to oppose them strongly. In the Churches of the West pneumatological reflection had been missing in missiology and that is why today “pneumatology and demonology remain missiological liabilities”. The enthusiasm by which Christoffer’s paper - with extensive biblical and bibliographical references – was received by the group seems to prove that he is truly responding to a felt need, by beginning to fill that vacuum.

Christoffer states that “while there is no doubt that healings have been perceived as the work of the Holy Spirit since the earliest days of Christianity (1 Cor12,4), it has to be noted that the Gospel accounts have it otherwise as does Acts... There is no talk about the Holy Spirit.” This points to the significant difference in the ministry of Jesus and the Church.

The Church is called to proclaim the Good News and this acclamation needs to be authenticated by actions of faith and hope. But “this does not mean, however, that the Church has to vindicate God or to demonstrate the might of the Holy Spirit by signs and wonders as propagated for instance by representatives of ”Power Evangelism” and especially “Power Healing”... Christians are asked to let God truly be God and to bear witness faithfully, which implies to endure the irresolvable tension between promise and fulfilment without getting desperate... Christians have to cope with the frustration that healing is not at their disposal.”

Some theologians try to establish a distinction or a contradiction between “healing” and “curing”. Christoffer firmly disagrees: “No doubt, the living God avails of the healing faculty inherent in the biological fabric of nature to sustain life.... Since Christians believe – as do Jews and Muslims - that nature originates in God, the Creator, how, then, can a contradiction between healing and curing come about? Any artificial hair-splitting and confusing rhetoric should therefore be done away with. Healing might nonetheless be distinguished as God’s unique work, while all human activity refers to ‘treatments’ applied and ‘therapies’ availed of which should never be disgraced if they are serious efforts to let healing come about.”

Christoffer concludes the reflections in his paper by stating: “Thus it turns out in the end that inviting the Spirit to fight the spirits so that healing gets achieved is not the proper question to ask. The Holy Spirit can never be instrumentalised else it is not the Holy Spirit. The question to ask is *how to bear witness to the Holy Spirit* in such a way that healing - and reconciliation - do really come about.”

The latter was stressed in the group discussions and the concern expressed that “Power Healing” can lead to instrumentalise the Holy Spirit for our own purposes. Several members from Africa, or who had been working as missionaries in Africa, expressed that the biblical view of a world in which spirits are present and acting, resonates a lot with Africans as their world view is similar. In Africa the spirit worlds are a given notion. There was general agreement that theologically it makes no sense to oppose curing and healing while on the other hand it would not be helpful within the healthcare professions to reduce the meaning of healing to a medical and physical understanding of the word. It would help to use the term in a more holistic sense when talking about ‘healing of relationships’ or ‘healing of memories’.

Conclusions. Our sharing and deliberations had been intense and enlightening. They had also been frustrating. The questions that were raised in the beginning still preoccupied our minds. And new questions had been added. We were concerned that reconciliation is often talked about too quickly and too easily, especially in church circles where God is being treated as a *deus ex machina*. In doing so these churches seem to be neglecting the recognition

of evil. We have to be cautious for reconciliation can be prematurely offered/imposed to cover up crimes. We have to avoid big words: the insistence of the church to reconcile with Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam is regarded by non-Christians as a vested effort to make proselytes.

We have to live with these tensions and are called to bring together, or rather to integrate in daily life the best theology possible. We collected some essential elements for such an integration:

- to stay as authentic as we are as persons;
- to use our intellectual capacities and have many questions;
- to be deeply spiritual, and not look for results and immediate achievements.

We were reminded of the fact that we actually know very little. If we look at Ruanda we have to admit that the church in Ruanda does not yet have the tools to build up healing and reconciling communities. Is there anyone who would know how to bring about reconciliation in this country? The church as a healing community is a vision that will never be reached. Our ideas or dreams of a perfect Christian community can even become counterproductive. It can be more powerful to honestly deal with our shortcomings. We were reminded of St. Paul's example: "I have sinned and I was forgiven through the grace of God".

The honest confrontation with our obvious human limitations, made this Mission Study Group a rather sobering yet deeply affirming and possibly purifying experience. In the evaluation the participants brought out that we had actually been struggling with too much content within the time available. Some felt that healing had been somewhat marginalised at the cost of reconciliation, justice or pneumatology. This was particularly true for those who had not been present in earlier conferences where we concentrated more particularly on healing.

It is obvious that for the following conference the focus of this Mission Study Group should be more clearly defined. The participants present took for granted that the IAMS - Interest group *HEALING* would continue to exist in between conferences, if only to keep healing and reconciliation on the agenda for the next IAMS Conference and more importantly for a thorough preparation of the next encounter of those committed to the exploration of healing in the context of mission studies.

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