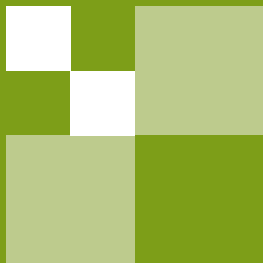





od Is Reconciling the World Through Victims

F. Javier Vitoria





The whole of this book, both the content and the design are subject under license  <<Attribution-NonCommercial-Derivatives>> that you can found in <https://creativecommons.org/>

Cristianisme i Justícia Edition
Roger de Llúria, 13. 08010 Barcelona
Tel. +34 93 317 23 38 / info@fespinal.com
cristianismeijusticia.net/en

ISSN: 2014-6485
Editor: Santi Torres Rocaginé
Translated by David Brooks
Design and Layout: Pilar Rubio Tugas
January 2023

God Is Reconciling the World Through Victims

F. Javier Vitoria

Summary

- 6 Is Reconciliation Possible Between Victims of Murder and Their Executioners?
- 8 The Reconciliation of God from the Perspective of the Victims
- 8 "In Christ, God Was Reconciling the World to Himself"
- 9 God Reconciles by Means of the Death of Jesus
- 12 In the "*Vicars of Christ*" God Continues Reconciling the World
- 13 God Weeps for the Ruin of Humanity in the Slums of the World
- 13 Created in the Image and Likeness of the God Who Weeps
- 15 Reconciliation Changes Our Ontological Nature: New Creatures Capable of Goodness, Conciliation and Brotherhood
- 17 The Ecclesial Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality, "Memoria Passionis" and Praxis

F. Javier Vitoria. Presbyter of the diocese of Bilbao. He lives and shares his faith in the fraternal Kingdom of God in the Christian community of Artxandape (Bilbao). He is a member of the theological department of the Cristianisme i Justícia study centre. He has taught theology at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Deusto and at the Monseñor Romero Centre of the Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas (UCA) in San Salvador. He was a member of the editorial board of the magazine *Iglesia Viva*.

"No one can have clear accounts with him/herself
and with everyone else."

(Joan Carles Melich)

"We rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ,
through whom we have now received our reconciliation."

(Rm 5:11)*

* [Translator's Note]
All passages from
the Bible are
taken from the
Common Bible,
Revised Standard
Version. Collins
(New York, 1973)

Is Reconciliation Possible Between Victims of Murder and Their Executioners?

This is a question which I have asked myself many times from a local perspective during the time in which ETA was sowing terror and, later, when the armed violence came to an end. It happens every time that I think about the theme of reconciliation. A process of recreating within a framework of being able to live together which allows live victims to experience the new and desirable condition of being survivors, seems to me to be quite possible although difficult to obtain. Nevertheless, I have always held that neither the Government nor the Basque Parliament could reconcile the radical victims or those who were assassinated. Nor Herri Batasuna. Not even the Church or the Basque citizenry. Only God is capable of responding to the wailing for their deaths that calls for justice if the murdered are brought back to life. The only thing that remains for us is the responsibility of remembering them so that they are not killed again by being forgotten.

6

Today I am proposing to deal with the same question from a general perspective. The fratricidal tragedy of Cain and Abel continues on in a massive and widespread way into our days. We have failed to respect the mark that Yahweh placed on Cain, the assassin, "lest any who came upon him should kill him" (Gen 4:15). And so it has gone to such an extreme that the world has been converted into an unending geography of death that has consumed our time until it merits the name of "Apocalypse" and has transformed our world into an "extermination camp".

It is not possible to bring to mind here more than a few of the place names: Auschwitz, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Palestine, Chernobyl, New York, South Africa, Serbia, Iraq, Syria, Tijuana, Lesbos, Yemen, the Amazon, etc. Here we have, in its diverse versions: "Mass death, administered death, toxic death, atomic death. It is the provoked death of millions of people, by which not only is the individual killed, but also the history and the future of humankind. It is the death which post-Modernism, with its celebration of the sham of an inexhaustible present, denied and which has now come back, as everything else that is repressed, stronger than ever. Here is the weakness of post-Modern cul-

ture, with all that it was also capable of opening up: that the eternal present of the sham forgot about and denied death, although it walked about it. The culture grasped on to finiteness and fragility, but not on to the death of dying and the death of killing. More concretely, it forgot the distinction between dying and being killed, between finiteness and extermination, between growing old and being assassinated. As Baudrillard intuited, the sham hid the crime. Thus, it prevented us from thinking that the death which we accept today as the past and future horizon of our time, is not that of our condition as mortals, but that of our vocation as assassins. It is a crime; it is assassination."¹

1. M. GARCES, *Nueva ilustración radical* (New Radical Elightenment). Anagrama (Barcelona, 2017), 28-29.

If these words seem excessive to us, we can turn to others. Last week the Basque Minister of the Environment, Territorial Planning and Housing, Inaki Arriola, made a presentation concerning the Basque ecological footprint, that is, the environmental impact generated by the demand of the population on the existing natural resources. Although since 2001 it has dropped by 7%, placing it above that of the European median and of member states such as Germany, Sweden, Norway, Belgium, the Netherlands or Austria, it is still an unsustainable number. The consumption by the Basque population is greater than the biocapacity of which it disposes because it needs 2.69 hectares of the globe per person just to satisfy its current demand. The ecological footprint of Euskadi is 4.32 global hectares per inhabitant while each inhabitant of the planet has available only 1.63 global hectares. The data are indicating to us that we are a "debtor" country in terms of ecological footprint, that we are "parasite" citizens. In an irresponsible way we live at the expense of others without realizing the deadly effects that our way of life produces in the lives of other people.

The words and sources of information like those mentioned question us about our responsibility of being complicit in that "deadly vocation" which it seems that we have accepted as the "past and future horizon of our time", causing millions of human victims and very grave destruction to the world of nature. In the case of our assuming responsibility — and, with respect to myself, I do assume it — what arises in me is the disturbing question: given that reconciling ourselves with "those who are dead because of being killed" is impossible, is there a God who reconciles them and who reconciles us with them? In the case of an affirmative answer to that question, how is that reconciliation accomplished? In what does it consist? How does this concern Christians?

The Reconciliation of God from the Perspective of the Victims

The word “reconciliation” is a term with a variety of meanings which can include from different perspectives religion, ethics, politics and law. I will concentrate on the religious perspective and its Christian version.

The words “to reconcile” and “reconciliation” do not play any part in the Greco-pagan religious literature. The predominant theme there is “to make the gods propitious” with offerings and holocausts. This is because reconciliation is something that can only take place “between equals”.

Neither does the theme of reconciliation appear in the Old Testament except in the Greek text of the Septuagint in the second book of Maccabees (2Macc 1:5; 7:33; and 8:29). Nevertheless, there is cultural language (“expiation” and “purification”. Lev 4:5-16) that seems to prepare for it. Above all, it is the message that the pardon and mercy of God are much greater than His wrath.

8

St. Paul is the first author in all of Greek literature that uses the category “reconciliation” in the theological sense to describe the relationship with God. He makes use of two words (the verb *katalassein*² and the noun *katalage*) which appear thirteen times in the Pauline and deuterio-Pauline writings.

2. *Katalassein* is an active verb, not reflexive, that properly means “to change” or “to reconcile”, but not “to be reconciled”.

“In Christ, God Was Reconciling the World to Himself”

The first characteristic of Pauline reconciliation is that “the subject of the reconciliation always is God”. Thus, the two principal texts that speak about reconciliation make it clear:

“All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the ministry of reconciliation.” (2Cor 5:18-19)

"For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life. Not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received our reconciliation." (Rom 5:10-11)

The reconciliation which is wrought by God is the completed activity that precedes all human work: "While we were enemies, we were reconciled to God" (Rom 5:10). No human work, including the practice of the sacrament of penance, is capable of bringing about reconciliation because it results in God's benevolent "reaction". Rather, what happens is the reverse. Reconciliation is the fruit of the "reaction" of human beings, necessary and required as such by the initial "action" of God. "We beseech you... be reconciled to God." (2Cor 5:20) In other words, God is never "reconciled", but rather He is the one who reconciles. The indicative of the vision of God as forgiving and merciful prevails over the imperative of a change of attitude. Therefore, we are not dealing with a simple "making peace" as if it were a reconciliation between two equal parties, although, as we shall see, there might exist a certain relationship of equality between those reconciled.

9

God Reconciles by Means of the Death of Jesus

Paul affirms that in the crucified Jesus, "God was reconciling the world to himself" (2Cor 5:19), since "we were reconciled with God by the death of His Son" (Rom 5:10). The resurrection of Jesus uncovered for all time that which seemed to be denied or questioned by his crucifixion. In, with and through Jesus, the Son, God was acting in human history, making it his own, with the goal of taking into a safe harbor his proposal of conciliation (of brotherhood) among human beings and of the latter with Nature, something which had been aborted by the forces of separation resulting from the sin of Cain.

At first glance, the Crucified One reveals that the reconciling plan of God suffered the gravest of historical reverses (Lk 20:9-18): the crucifixion of his Son or of his Chosen One. Men despoil God of the principal figure of his project against His will. They bring to naught the one whom God most loves and who most belongs to Him. And God cedes him.³ Or He hands him over,⁴ which is how Pauline theology interprets the death of Jesus. "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?" (Rom 8:32). He ended up by radicalizing that handing over, bringing it to undreamt of

3. Cf. GONZÁLEZ FAUS, José I., *Este es el hombre* Sal Terrae (Santander, 1980), 38.
4. Paul, whose Christology could be characterized as that of Christ handed over (*Christus traditus*), and to a lesser extent John, take the term "handed over" used by Mark and they convert it into a theological category. The evangelist uses the verb "*paradidona*" (to hand over) as the thread that runs through his passion narrative and in a pejorative sense (to betray, to hand over into the hands of others, to reject, to abandon, to kill, etc.). Judas hands him over to the high priests (14:10), the representatives of the Law hand him over to Pilate (15:1) and he hands him over to be crucified (15:15). Jesus is passed over into the hands of his enemies, all of his friends flee (15:40.) and everything indicates that Jesus has been left outside of the hands of God. From the heart of a Jesus who has been condemned comes forth a wrenching cry: "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" (15:34)

limits. "For our sake he made him to be sin who did not know sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (Rom 5:21). In a similar way, the Johannine tradition states: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16)

This "handing over" by the Father clearly shows, on the one hand, the extraordinary gratuitousness of God's love for human beings: "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins" (1Jn 4:9-10).

On the other hand, it shows that the cross of Jesus is the most exorbitant and unimaginable historical "cost" of that gratuitous love of God for human beings. From all eternity, the Father was ready to "pay the price" with the goal of bringing to a good end his plan of salvation in a necessary collaboration with free human beings. And he was continually paying for it. Now, the blind and imposing power of sin in human history demanded the life of Jesus, and God "paid the price", allowing it to be snatched away.

10

The expiatory or satisfactionist theory, having its origins in St. Anselm, which has so deformed the Christian image of God, is given the lie by God himself present on the cross. The cross is not the price that Jesus pays to God in order to satisfy His offended honor in the form of pain and incredible suffering caused by the debt which the human race has contracted with God for its sins. The cross is the very expensive amount of Love, when God intervenes as the agent of reconciliation in this history in which sin has the extraordinary power of placing death and separation at its epicenter.

The cross reveals how God, in His paternal confrontation with the history of the injustice and violence of His children, men and women, put into play and risked not only his highest quality (love), but also his most profound reality: the Only-begotten Son.

This "handing over" or "cession" by the Father manifests his attitude toward the world as reconciliatory and not as condemnatory (2Cor 5:11-21; Jn 3:17). God judges in a condemnatory and definitive way the sin of the world which crucified Jesus as someone who was cursed. Nevertheless, he is not looking for any kind of revenge against the execution-

ers of his Son, but rather he wants to show himself as a merciful Judge with the purpose of being recognized by the sinners. In the crucified Jesus, the Merciful Father offers a liberating affirmation for all the men and women who are victims of sin and of death:

"But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead with our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ ... and raised us up with him and made us sit with him in the heavenly places with Christ Jesus." (Eph 2:4-6. Cf. Rom 5:8; Col 2:13)

"And you who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him." (Col 2:13-15)

We are facing the revelation of a new economy of salvation. God definitively exiles wrath and replaces it with grace, fear gives way to love, the burden of the Law is replaced with the gratuitousness of grace, and personal selection by God with a universal promise. In effect, as Paul would say, "the old is passed away" and "everything is new". (2Cor 5:17)

11

This divine economy obliges us to revise many of our catechetical and pastoral resources. Frequently they cheapen (the possibility of) sin (almost everything can be a sin and its effects seem to be exclusively legal) and they make more costly (the meriting) of the reconciling pardon of God. In reality, God's pardon is gratuitous, and sin, because of its deadly power is very burdensome for someone who has committed it, for everyone else and for Nature. Nevertheless, along with Dietrich Bonhoeffer, we can continue to speak about "costly grace". It is "costly because it calls us to discipleship; it is grace because it calls us to the discipleship of Jesus Christ. It is costly because it condemns sin; it is grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, grace is costly because it has cost God dearly, because it has cost the life of his Son — 'you have been bought at great price' — and because what has cost God dearly cannot end up being cheap for us. It is grace, above all, because God has not considered his Son too costly a price in order to restore us to life, handing him over for us. Costly grace is the incarnation of God."⁵

5. BONHOEFFER, Dietrich, *El precio de la gracia*. Sigueme (Salamanca, 1968), 20.

In the "*Vicars of Christ*" God Continues Reconciling the World

The story of Jesus of Nazareth ended on the scaffold of the cross because we humans killed him. The Messiah of God was burdened not only by the "death of dying" but also by the "death of killing". He assumed not only the expiration of human life, but also the "dying before one's time" of extermination or of injustice. In brotherhood with the innumerable victims of injustice, human history has also walked over the dead body of the Son of God and over the apparent ruin of the hopes for the Messiah. In his Passion, the dark night of injustice struck strongly at the faith of Jesus in the nearness of his God and in the proximity of the Kingdom of the Father, but he died as "the Faithful Witness" (Rev 1:5) of the unprecedented presence of God and of the reconciling eruption of his Kingdom with his descent into the netherworld of unjust death. In his resurrection by the power of the Spirit, God glorified him and he rebelled against the Cain-like logic of the imperial religious system by interrupting it. Moreover, by confirming the faith and hope of Jesus, he revealed how He himself was present in the Crucified One as God "Advent" and "Interrupter" of the history of suffering and of the power of death.

12

The passion of Christ is prolonged historically in all of those who suffer. As Pascal said, "He continues to be in agony until the end of time." In those who suffer here in this "world/concentration camp", Christ continues to suffer, especially in all of the victims of the market economic system that kills: the poor, those who live on the margins, the refugees, the starving children, the child soldiers, the girls who are victims of child prostitution, the abused women, etc.

As tradition refers to them, they are all the "Vicars" of Christ, his representatives, and God is present in them and continues his task of reconciliation, already clearly defined, but yet still pending in history, making "a new creation; the old has passed away" (2Cor 5:17).

That presence allows us to see into, in the words of Miguel de Unamuno, the "anguish" of a compassionate God. As in the case of Jesus, God continues viscerally to embrace the situation and the feelings of his victimized sons and daughters. In this way, he suffers-with-them the suffering of their unjust deaths. Thus, the anguish of God is converted into the expression of his infinite love of the "representatives" of his Son, those crucified ones of history, and in them, the rest of humankind. In the cross, God gets rid of all of the masks with which we have veiled

his face. Pure Act. Immovable Mover. Unchanging Divinity. Impassive Power. The Father is an empathetic God capable of feelings and affection for the feelings of the other. God is changed into the Defender and Savior of murdered victims and into the Father of sinners. The former definitely form a part of the immense multitude that is standing before the throne of God, worshiping him day and night in his Sanctuary (Rev 7); and the latter go from being damned by the wrath of God to being sons and daughters through the love of God.

God Weeps for the Ruin of Humanity in the Slums of the World

Through the prophet Jeremiah, Yahweh warns Judah and Israel (chosen to be his people, 'a name, a praise, and a glory' Jer 13:11) against the temptation to pride that would lead them not to listen to his word and to give themselves over to idols (Jer 13:11-16). But the people did not listen to his warning, and Yahweh, impotent when faced with their disobedience, adds: "But if you will not listen, my soul will weep in secret for your pride; my eyes will weep bitterly and run down with tears, because the Lord's flock has been taken captive" (Jer 13:17).

13

The cross of Jesus is the place of the profound silence of God where the Father weeps because of the pride of the sinners who have silenced his incarnate Word and because of the suffering and death of his Son. The passion of Christ is historically prolonged in all those who suffer. The cries and the weeping of "the victims" of injustice today reach God as did the cry of Jesus in the past. And far from remaining impassive when faced with human tribulation, in the way of the Aristotelian prime Mover, he doesn't pretend to be deaf and instead suffers profoundly with them (Ps 39:13). It comes to the point that God, whose love is greater than all harshness, is the one who weeps when he hears the cries of desperation of his children. His weeping consumes his eyes, his insides boil, because of the ruin of humankind, while children and infants faint in the slums of the world (Lam 2:11).

Created in the Image and Likeness of the God Who Weeps

Some people can always make objections to this image of the Father like this one: the "image of a pathetic God, incapable of holding back his tears but impotent to save his creatures, is that perhaps not the

equivalent of a final and laughable consolation when the atrocious abyss of suffering allows for the most faithful to run the risk of blasphemy?"⁶

This statement loses sight of two decisive points. The first: the tears of God, like his wrath on other occasions, express in an uncontested way God's love for men and women, for the victims and the victimizers. The tears of the Father offer the most radical proof that God loves even up to the final consequences. What has reconciled human beings is a Love so extreme, God himself, that it carries the final consequences of the Incarnation of the Son to the point of allowing the suffering of humanity to reach into the very core of his being.

The second point: The tears of God remind us men and women of the grace and the responsibility of having been created in "his image" (Gen 1:27). For that reason, we human beings, in order to conform to that image inscribed in our hearts, far from turning a blind eye to the present sufferings and the real tragedies of today, should sharpen our attention and awareness of them.⁷ But we note, as has been observed by Pope Francis, that "there has developed a globalization of indifference. Almost without being aware of it, we have become incapable of being compassionate toward the cries of others. We now don't cry when facing the drama of others nor are we interested in taking care of them, as if everything were the responsibility of someone else that does not involve us. The welfare culture anesthetizes us and we lose our sense of calm if the market offers something that we have not yet bought, while all of those lives cut short by a lack of possibilities seem to us a mere show that does not change us in any way" (EG 54).

We have sung it with Mercedes Sosa: "I only ask God that I not be indifferent to pain, that I not be indifferent to what is unjust, that I not be indifferent to war, that I not be indifferent to what is false, that I not be indifferent to the future." All of us are called to give a name to the et cetera of the suspension points. Surely it is a prayer of petition that my friend Andres Torres Queiruga would say is good.

We need empathy with those who suffer, "suffering together" (sympathy), and sharing the lament of those who have been marginalized in order for us to be able to live like God. As Unamuno would say, "A man is as much more of a man, that is, as much more divine, as he has more of a capacity for suffering, or rather for anguish."⁸ Without shedding tears for the suffering of our brothers and sisters, humankind, there will not be reconciliation, as in the case of Joseph and his brothers (Gen 45:2, 14-15).⁹

6. CHALIER, Catherine, *Tratado de las lagrimas. Fragilidad de Dios. Fragilidad del alma*. (Treatise on tears. The Fragility of God. The Fragility of the soul.) Sigüeme (Salamanca, 2007), 42.

7. *Ibid.*, 121-122.

8. DE UNAMUNO, Miguel, *El sentimiento trágico de la vida*. Espasa Calpe (Madrid, 1982), 182.

9. "To cry in facing a gesture of reconciliation, in facing the elevated nobility, for example, of someone 'who transcends self is raised above and beyond prudence and precautions', risking life in order to act in favor of peace, is equally giving way to suffering, ceasing to protect oneself before the other who is either hating or denying him. The defeat of hatred never causes those to cry who are accustomed to it to the point of succumbing to its attractions and finding that no truth can cover up its colors with hope. But it can bring tears of joy to the eyes of those who, without ignoring the vertiginous feats of evil of which men are capable, can let themselves be surprised by the 'fragility of good' that sometimes comes, almost always in an unseen way, to illuminate our lives." CHALIER, *op. cit.*, 175-176.

To become conscious "means to know-with, to feel-with and to suffer-with. Only through pain can living beings come to acquire consciousness of others and of themselves. Living beings become free through consciousness of pain."¹⁰ This consciousness calls for us to place ourselves within the point of view of "faces who look at me and from whom I look at myself." (F. Rosenzweig)

Our indifference impedes us from seeing and being conscious of the reality of those who drown in the Mediterranean, of the children dying of hunger in Yemen, of the "menas" and "jenas", children and young people who wander through our streets with their frightening histories and whom the politicians from Vox are only capable of seeing as delinquents. The faces that look at us are like eye drops (Rev 3:18) that cleanse our eyes and create the conditions in order to see those essential things that had been invisible: the call to the reconciliation of the children of God (Mt 5:8), although we might not know how to take the next step" (J. Haers).

The tears of God place on the back of those who are reconciled by Him the task of bearing the suffering of the world. As Rabbi Moses Cordovero reminds us. "it so happens that the divinity finds Himself 'sick with love' (Song 2:5) and humankind should know that its cure depends on them. God 'became indignant over the misery of [his people]' (Judg 10:16) and humans have to calm this indignation. Consequently, this means that they have to experience how the image of God suffers in the present in this or that person, or in him or herself, and to act in order to alleviate the affliction. Therefore no one can be freed of their emotions with the pretext of 'becoming like God'."¹¹

10. MOLTSMANN, Jürgen, *Trinidad y Reino de Dios. Doctrina sobre Dios. (Trinity and the Kingdom of God. The Doctrine of God.)* Sigueme (Salamanca, 1983), 54.

11. Cited by CHALIER, *Op. cit.*, 30.

Reconciliation Changes Our Ontological Nature: New Creatures Capable of Goodness, Conciliation and Brotherhood

But what is the "new thing" that God offers us when we are reconciled with Him in Christ? What is it that continues to be offered to us in the "Vicars" of Christ?

"To reconcile" is not just to forgive or not to take personal sin into account. The "new thing" about reconciliation is not the result of a divine decree that formally declares us to be God's sons and daughters, but rather of the recreating power of the love of God — of the Spirit —

which does justice, justifying those of us who were not previously so. That is, offering us the capacity for human goodness, conciliation and brotherhood of Jesus, his First-born Son.

From this divine reconciliation derives the awakening of love in us. In Christ, God has changed, in a manner of speaking, the ontological nature of human beings. They now have an "incomparable dignity". As the Fathers of the Church said, God has become a man so that mankind might become God. This ontological nature of equality with God is what allows for the theological use of the verb "to reconcile", because between God and mankind there had been a conciliation (an equality) or previous harmony which was derived from the divine image (Gen 1:22) and from the unification in Christ. It was destroyed by human sin and God reconstitutes it by reconciliation.

In that reconciliation, God overcomes our sinful ego of created men and women "twisted back upon ourselves," and He accomplishes that by creating in us a new [possibility] of relationship with Him and with others. The Spirit of Christ who dwells in us is the one who creates in us a filial relationship with God (Rom 8:15). It gives us the desire to want the same reconciliation that God desires and it capacitates us to live like "men and women for others".

16

We will continue confirming the dramatic part of our human condition, our internal division. Like Paul, we will not understand our way of acting. 'For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate' (Rom 7:15). And we will be able to exclaim with him: "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom 7:24) We should not receive the action of God within us as if we were dealing with the magical power of a super Harry Potter, but rather as His request that we accept a gift which He urges us to receive through Christ (2Cor 5:20).

Those of us who are reconciled continue being at the same time both justified and sinners, sinners in our "flesh" and at the same time persons who are sought by God and forgiven by His love, thanks to the Holy Spirit which has been given to us and which has become real within us (Rom 5:5-6). There will continue dwelling in us the old and the new (flesh and spirit), but we are made capable of walking in the Spirit (Rom 8:1-12). From that also comes forth the joy of the new situation. "We also rejoice in God through Our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have now received our reconciliation." (Rom 5:11)

Reconciliation invites us and gives us the ability to walk in newness of life because we have been inserted into Christ (Rom 6:4, 5; Col 2:12). And that will lead to the statement that we do not now live for ourselves, but rather for the cause of Christ (2Cor 5:15), making the reconciliation very fruitful in our surroundings.

The Ecclesial Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality, "Memoria Passionis" and Praxis

In this way, the reconciling action of God assigns to the Christian the mission of the "ministry of reconciliation" and the message of the "word of reconciliation" (2Cor 5:18-19). The Church is the People of God and therefore each and every one of us Christians are bearers and are responsible for the mission of bearing the good news to all of humankind, that action of God by which He again gathers humankind together in his companionship and friendship. The reconciliation occurring in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is not yet concluded, although it might be definitive, and for that reason the divine prayer bursts forth: "reconciliation with God!" (2Cor 5:20).

17

While our personal reconciliation seems to be resolved (Rom 5:9-11), that is not the case with regard to the world. The reconciliation of the world cannot be reduced to simply overcoming the enmity between God and mankind (Rom 1:18-32), although this might be its principal dimension. All of creation is awaiting salvation as a consequence of the frustration to which it had found itself subjected because of the work of mankind (Rom 8:19-24). The reconciliation of the world will only reach its end when God carries out in Christ the definitive consummation of the universe, the summarizing and final fullness of all things in Christ (Col 1:20; Eph 2:16) whose foundation has already been laid. From the Christian perspective, then, reconciliation would be not only the overcoming of the constituent contradiction of mankind that exists in the individual, but also that which exists in the total human community on a cosmic level and whose ripe fruit is "the fullness of the word Peace."

"For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of the cross." (Col 1:19-20)

Pope Francis says, "This projects us toward the end of time, when the Son will hand over all things to the Father and 'God may be all in all'."

(1Cor 15:28). In this way, the creatures of this world are not presented to us as a merely natural reality, because the Risen One mysteriously envelops them and orients them toward a destiny of fullness. The same flowers of the field and the birds that he contemplated with admiration with his human eyes are now full of his luminous presence." (LS 100)

Thus, then, the reconciliation of the world should include the task given to mankind at creation, "to take care of the garden" (Gen 2:15), or "to make the earth livable" (Gen 1:28-30). Everything points to the enlargement of the task of reconciliation until it reaches nature itself (as is explained to us by G. Duch). When the task of caring for the earth is substituted by one of "human domination" of nature "it generates immense inequality, injustices and violence for the majority of humankind because the resources pass under the control of the first person who gets to them or the one who is more powerful. The winner takes all. The ideal of harmony, justice, brotherhood and peace that is proposed by Jesus is the polar opposite of such a model, and he expressed it this way with respect to the powers of his time: 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant' (Mt 20:25-26)." (LS 82)

18

As is indicated by the program of this course on "Fundamentals for a Culture of Reconciliation", the "ministry of reconciliation" is sending us back to God, to ourselves, to the broken human relationships, to a multitude of fractured scenarios in this globalized world and to the deterioration of the planet, our common home. This panorama changes the task of reconciliation into one that is never-ending.

As a consequence, many times we restate the enormity of the mission that has been given to us as our "taking charge" of the irreconcilable reality of our world, "taking on the burden" of reconciling it, and "burdening ourselves" with the consequences of sin within our work. This divine charge greatly overwhelms our capacity, and any strategy, including one that is far-reaching, is shown to be inappropriate.

Thus, it seems to me to be a good thing to remember with the help of Josep Maria Esquirol that we have not been expelled from any paradise:

"We have always been on the outside. It is true, and luckily so, that here *Paradise is impossible*. Our condition is that of being *outside*. ... Here on

the outside, it takes great effort to move even a few centimeters in the right direction. That is a few centimeters toward the fraternal community which is alive. ... *The human condition* is that of being on the outside of an impossible Paradise. ... If we were to move just a few centimeters, we would still continue to be on the outside (beyond the outside is still outside), but everything would be different. Nevertheless, the movement of those nine or ten centimeters requires such a large effort, or calls for such a special willingness, that it only happens infrequently. Sometimes, yes. The movement is, at the same time, personal, political and religious, and it is referred to in words such as *asceticism*, *revolution* and *conversion*, respectively. The distance of a few centimeters. OK. The decisive distance is really a meter. But doubtless by ourselves we cannot go the whole distance. We have our personal and political horizon set at a few centimeters. There is a continuity between our situation and that of a few centimeters beyond that point. It is important to fix well this "beyond". If we imagine a road, the few centimeters that surround us does not constitute a move forward. If we imagine the perimeter of a circle, a few centimeters are neither a move toward the outside nor the center of the circle. It is a few centimeters toward the inside, toward the rear, toward the deep background. It is a movement which, when it has been accomplished, is never changed into a definitive possession. It soon returns to being something tentative and needs to be repeated. Nevertheless, it is something never done in vain because each time that it occurs, there is some fruit produced. The movement has been made by simple and anonymous people, by humble intellectuals and a handful of philosophers, by revolutionaries and by politically committed people, by people with an authentic spiritual life and, above all, by good people. All of them have contributed to changing the world which, nevertheless, is still in need of change."

"Barely a few centimeters" can seem very little to us. Nevertheless, Josep Maria continues:

"A little is a lot; a little is everything. With reference to eating, almost nothing can be almost everything. We move a few centimeters and we can live some just and fraternal peripheral space right now without violence. We would avoid all of the damage that we do to ourselves, and we would confront in a more unified way the evil that is inevitably linked to our finite and mortal condition. In the past, if everyone had done this, we would have avoided mountains of suffering and victims of violence and injustice. A few centimeters would have been enough to impede the appearance of the worst genocides in history. A few centimeters would have been enough to prevent the outbreak of many wars. A few centimeters and poverty would not have lashed the world in the way that it has and even less would it lash it now."¹²

12. ESQUIROL, Josep Maria, *La penúltima bondad. Ensayo sobre la vida humana* (The penultimate grace. An Essay concerning Human Life). Acantilado (Barcelona, 2018), 7-25.

All this reflection leads me to conclude that the ministry of reconciliation "has more spirituality than strategy". Reconciliation, "means, therefore, in the first place, the cultivation of a relationship with God; it is this medium that makes it possible for reconciliation to become a reality. This said relationship is expressed in a spiritual practice that creates space for truth, for justice, for healing, for the eruption of new possibilities."

The encounter with God who is present in victims reconciling the world allows us the experience of "being burdened by reality" (J. Sobrino). When we take on the burden of an irreconcilable reality, we will understand that it is sin that damages human beings, children of God, and that that sin is hugely transmitted by means of a few structures on which it has stamped its imprint. Whenever we take charge of reality, there will arise the call to denounce sin as did Jesus and the prophets, given that sin tends to be masked and to be justified. When we take charge of reality, we will learn what it means to "take on the burden of sin", that is, to have the fortitude in order to sustain ourselves and to live with its evil when it becomes difficult to eradicate it. But, at the same time, realize that "we are weighed down by reality", because with that, with the victims of injustice, God manifests himself to us by reconciling us with His mercy and forgiveness. To know that we are sinners and forgiven is the only way to deal with the service of reconciliation, not as saviors and superiors, but as grace-filled and thankful individuals.¹³

This spiritual practice generates communities, made up of both men and women who have been reconciled by God, called to be communities of the "memoria passionis", of the world with the goal, on the one hand, of satisfying the rights of victims to receive truth, justice, reparation and adherence to the principle that it will not happen again, and on the other hand, to offer to humankind the hope of a new and reconciled future.

13. Cf. GONZÁLEZ FAUS, *Apocalipsis hoy? Contra la entropía social (Apocalypse today? Against social entropy)*. Sal Terrae (Santander, 2019), 194.



Latest titles

1. *Ten Boats Stranded on a Beach*. José Luis Iriberry
2. *COVID 19: Beyond the Pandemic*. Joan Carrera i Carrera
3. *Diary of a Pandemic*. Various Authors
4. *Forgotten Conflicts*. Various Authors
5. *God Is Reconciling the World Through Victims*. F. Javier Vitoria

The **Virtual Collection** includes materials published exclusively on the web. Here you will find booklets which we have not printed because of their length or their different format and style, but we believe that they possess the same rigor, significance, and quality as the published booklets of CJ. We would like them to be distributed by the internet, and that's why we are counting on you.

You will find the booklets of this collection at:
www.cristianismeijusticia.net/en/virtual-collection



VIRTUAL
COLLECTION

Cristianisme i Justícia

Roger de Llúria, 13, 08010 Barcelona
+34 93 317 23 38 • info@fespinal.com
cristianismeijusticia.net

