



## **Transformed Relationships: Reconciliation as the Central Model for Mission**

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### **Abstract**

This paper argues that reconciliation can function as an integrating metaphor (or model) for Christian mission. The mission of God is for transformed relationships in all dimensions – between humans and God, between humans, and between humans and creation.

Reconciliation is all about setting things right. Used metaphorically in the theology of mission it beautifully covers and draws together a wide range of ideas which, it is argued, are simply facets of the one mission of God for reconciliation.

The paper analyses the role of metaphor in theology. It considers biblical terms related to reconciliation, such as sacrificial atonement, shalom, justice and peacemaking.

It then considers five dimensions of Christian mission to illustrate the integrative power of reconciliation as a governing metaphor for mission: conversion as reconciliation, international peacemaking, reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, reconciliation between Christians and reconciliation with creation.

### **Keywords**

reconciliation, metaphor, shalom, conversion, peacemaking, indigenous peoples, Christian unity, ecological mission

A commitment to reconciliation is common in the practice of Christian mission. In a world full of conflict and broken relationships at every level, it is natural that the Good News of Jesus Christ should be lived out in terms of working for transformed relationships, whether it is between indigenous and immigrant peoples, divided ethnic groups, Protestants and Catholics or estranged marriage partners.

I'd like to suggest that the idea of reconciliation lies at the heart of a theology of mission as well as its practice. Is it too bold to see it as the central metaphor or model for mission (Burrows 1998; Schreiter 1997b)? When we ask ourselves what the mission of God is, and in what ways we are called to

co-operate with God in it, we find ourselves talking about transformed relationships in several dimensions – between humans and God, between humans and between humans and creation.

“Reconciliation” is all about setting things right. Although the literal use of the term refers to human relationships, as a metaphor it beautifully covers and draws together a wide range of ideas which I will argue are simply facets of the mission of God: cosmic reconciliation, the Hebrew notion of *shalom*, the meaning of the cross, the psychological effects of conversion, the work of the Holy Spirit, the overcoming of barriers between Christians, the work of the church in the world, peacemaking, movements towards ethnic reconciliation and the renewal of ecological balances between humanity and its natural environment.

As T. W. Manson said in his classic study *On Paul and Jesus*, “The driving force behind the gospel is the love of God. Its *modus operandi* is reconciliation” (1963: 50). Reconciliation is increasingly being understood as an “integrating” metaphor, helping us to understand both the essence of mission and the way in which we are called to engage with the world.

### **Metaphors and Models**

The role of metaphors in guiding us theologically is crucial. For a start, there is no other way to speak of God than through images, metaphors and models (Soskice 1985: 140). What is more, they lead to a lively sense of what is going on, because of their evocative power. Donald Messer has suggested, amongst other images, that Christians on mission are like bridge builders, global gardeners and fence movers (Messer 1992). John Driver has suggested fifteen biblical images of the church in mission, including being sojourners, a new humanity and salt and light (Driver 1997).

By their nature metaphors invite other metaphors, because by pointing to a reality without claiming to capture it fully they implicitly accept that others will be needed.

Even when a metaphor is developed over time into a model this complementarity remains. Models can be seen as dominant metaphors, developed systematically over time so that they deeply influence the way we think. They show conceptual development and account for a system of relationships (McFague 1983: 103–144). On this definition, reconciliation is certainly not only a metaphor but also a model for mission, because it suggests ways of understanding the various relationships in which we find ourselves enmeshed,

with God, each other and creation. What I am suggesting is that rather than Paul's call in 2 Corinthians 5 for the church to be the servant of reconciliation merely being an isolated metaphor or a fleeting image, it has the potential to be a governing metaphor, a model that shapes our whole approach to mission and resonates on many levels.

In this I agree with Robert Schreiter, who has over the last decade or so written some of the most helpful material on the church's mission for reconciliation, particularly applying it to national and ethnic conflict (1992; 1997a; 1998). Schreiter suggests that whereas the model of mission most common in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth was one of expansion, and the model most common in the second half of the twentieth century was one of accompaniment, the model of mission most needed at the beginning of the twenty-first century is mission as reconciliation (1997b). Reconciliation is the form that the Good News of Jesus Christ most appropriately takes at this stage of history (1997b: 14–15).

To argue that reconciliation is a central and fruitful model for mission is not to say that it is the only appropriate metaphor. But, as Schreiter points out, it is both an enduring biblical metaphor and one which speaks to the world today, where deeply broken relationships are so prominently being played out on the international stage (1997b: 15).

### **Related Biblical Images and Concepts**

The metaphor of reconciliation is more central to the Bible than is immediately obvious. There is a tendency in some Christian circles to limit the notion to one of sacrificial atonement. That was certainly true in my upbringing, where "reconciliation" referred primarily to what Jesus did on the cross and secondarily to the restoration of the divine-human relationship, but hardly at all to dimensions such as personal wholeness, non-violence or ecology, to take just three other possibilities.

Although the New Testament references to sacrificial atonement are not numerous (Rom 3:25, Heb 2:17, 1 Jn 2:2 and 4:10, with references to Jesus as the paschal lamb in Jn 1, Acts 8:32, 1 Cor 5:7 and 1 Pet 1:19), it is clear that the Jewish practice of sacrifice provided a ready metaphor for early Jewish Christians.

As many have pointed out, it would be a mistake to take one metaphor for God's reconciliation in Christ as literal truth, at the expense of other metaphors. John Driver considers a dozen images in his book on understanding the

atonement for the mission of the church, and is representative of many theologians in arguing that we need to take into account the entire range of metaphors for the work of Jesus Christ if we are even to begin to understand its deep mystery (1986: 244). Not only this, but many have questioned the morality and even the sense of the metaphor of Jesus' death as a penal substitution (Baxter 1995: 68–70; Marshall 2001: 59–69).

If we take a wider view, the model of reconciliation becomes very clear in scripture. The classic passages are to be found in Romans 5, where Paul talks of us being reconciled to God through God's great love for us, and 2 Corinthians 5, where Paul writes that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Godself, with Christians called to be ambassadors for this reconciliation. The cosmic dimensions of this restoration of relationships are clear in Colossians 1, which says that Christ has made peace for all things, on earth and in heaven.

The central Christian affirmation is that in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ God has reached out in forgiving and reconciling love. The restoring of friendship and peace is the key image here.

When the link between reconciliation and peace is made, we tap into a very strong motif in the Bible. The Hebrew notion of *shalom*, meaning wellbeing, harmony or wholeness, typically in a social context (Westermann 1992: 21), could be said to be the goal of reconciliation (at least between humans). In other words, whereas reconciliation more often refers to a process, *shalom* is a state (albeit a dynamic one). In its range of uses *shalom* probably goes more widely than the notion of healthy relationships conveyed by reconciliation – it includes physical wellbeing and prosperity (Yoder 1989: 11).

Both *shalom* and reconciliation, however, imply the presence of justice. This is important to say, given the profound inadequacy of an unjust peace or the shaking of hands where relationships have not in fact been restored.

Unlike the Roman idea of peace, the Pax Romana, which amounted to massive military subjugation, *shalom* involves a right ordering of relationships, in which justice leads to peace (e.g., Is 32:16–17, Ps 85:10).

Reconciliation involves a similar reordering of relationships so that justice is involved. Social reconciliation is sometimes seen as a process where forgiveness is encouraged whether or not there are social changes, tribunals or reparations. But as Schreiter argues, reconciliation without justice is a false reconciliation, because it tries to ignore the suffering of the oppressed (Schreiter 1992:18–25). It tries to bury history without dealing with it. Rather than forgiving and forgetting, what is actually required in social and national reconciliation is to “re-member” history, telling the truth, working through the

pain and, where possible, repairing the damage and restoring relationships. There is no reconciliation without liberation.

Michael Lapsley, who lost both hands and sight in one eye when he received a letter bomb in 1990 in response to his opposition to apartheid in South Africa, recounts the way “reconciliation” became the word used by Christians who didn’t want to politically confront the injustice of apartheid. “Religious people wanted to be friends without slaying the monster which stopped us from becoming friends” (Lapsley 1997: 18).

Both *shalom* and reconciliation go further than justice in its usual sense. They require justice but set their sights higher: restored relationships. In society, although justice can be said to be done when a criminal is punished, both the perpetrator and the victim may live the rest of their lives bitter and unreconciled. Their relationship remains broken and there is no reconciliation. Biblical notions of divine justice are more holistic. God’s justice is associated with mercy, forgiveness, righteousness and the reestablishment of right relationships. So biblical justice amounts to genuine reconciliation. It is primarily a restorative rather than a retributive justice. (Even though there seem to be elements of divine retributive punishment in scripture, Christopher Marshall argues that they involve God withdrawing protection from evil running its course; in this sense it is “intrinsic punishment that has an ultimately redemptive or restorative intent” (Marshall 2001: 198).)

I suggested that *shalom* usually refers to a state and reconciliation more usually to a process. That means we can compare the Christian call to be ambassadors of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18) with the Christian call to be peacemakers (Mt 5:9), because the emphasis in making peace is on the process. We are called to live in and towards the multi-dimensional peace of Christ, which derives from God’s gift of new creation, involves justice and *shalom* and ultimately is the same as the kingly reign of God.

In the New Testament “God’s peace” takes on a more defined shape in the person of Jesus Christ. It is through Jesus that our broken relationship with God is restored and we live at peace (*eirene*) with God (Rom 5:1). This is a gift from God, who is repeatedly called the God of peace (Rom 15:33, 16:20, 2 Cor 13:11, 1 Thess 5:23, 2 Thess 3:16, Heb 13:20). The message of Jesus is one of love for enemies, radical forgiveness, overcoming ethnic barriers, upturning social arrangements and new life for those who follow him. The cross is (at least) the consequence of his radical challenge to the social, religious and political arrangements of the day. As the gospels show, Jesus died because of the way he lived.

At a cosmic level, although the atonement remains a divine mystery it seems to be an act of redemptive solidarity where the power of evil was overthrown by God's initiative, in which Christ accepted the consequences of human sin in death on the cross in a representative way and yet was raised in power. Whatever theories of atonement we employ in order to understand this mystery, the restorative intent of God's action in Christ, "reconciling the world to Godself" (2 Cor 5:19) is at the heart. It was not God punishing the scapegoat Jesus, as if Jesus was quite other than God, but the fullness of God in Jesus Christ acting to reconcile all things to God (Col 1:19–20).

What this brief discussion of biblical notions such as *shalom*, justice and atonement illustrates is that God's mission is centrally one of the reordering and renewing of relationships so that humanity may live fully in relationship to God, each other and creation. Jesus is the Messianic Reconciler, the focus of God's reconciling activity in the world. It is clear that a renewed relationship between humanity and God is determinative in the biblical account, but that many other relationships are integrally bound up in this renewal.

If reconciliation is to act as a model for mission, this central insight – that the gospel is all about reconciliation in every dimension – needs to be fruitful in a variety of dimensions of Christian mission. This is indeed so, and several examples follow. Each, of course, can be developed much further, but at least we will show the applicability of thinking in terms of reconciliation in conversion, peacemaking, relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous people, ecumenical relationships and ecological mission.

### **Conversion as Reconciliation**

Christian conversion can be seen as reconciliation in at least three dimensions: being reconciled to God, ourselves and others.

The first follows directly from our observations about the good news of the gospel. Conversion is a work of the Holy Spirit, involving the mystery of divine initiative and human response at the same time. It is a restoration of relationship between us and God which involves a reordering of relationships with others. I am going to assume that conversion can begin with either a moment of discontinuity or a period of growth. I will assume that the term can cover both the once-in-a-lifetime conversion experience of many Christians and the occasional and repeated moments of conscious turning and returning towards God. Because conversion consists of responding to the call to turn our lives around to follow Jesus, it also involves the "turning" that takes

place throughout a Christian life in discipleship. Christian formation is not qualitatively distinct from Christian conversion, and we are never fully converted because we are never fully formed as followers of Jesus (Peace 1999: 316).

The second dimension is discussed less often: conversion as a reconciliation with ourselves. At first sight this is odd. Surely we cannot restore friendship with ourselves. Yet, speaking metaphorically and psychologically, this is precisely what the journey to wholeness involves. The gospel offers us a path towards self-acceptance and integration, in which the inner conflict between our “higher” and “lower” selves is resolved. Continuing to use metaphors (to illustrate their indispensability in psychology as well as theology), we gradually overcome the state of alienation in which we are bound by our “dark side”, wanting to do what is good but governed at times by parts of ourself which lead us to do evil (Rom 7:14–25). Forgiven by God, we can grow towards full self-acceptance, “loving ourselves” instead of being “at war within ourselves”. To fully appropriate God’s forgiveness is to be at peace with oneself, mature and open to God and the world. Conversion is reconciliation with ourselves.

The practical implications of reconciliation as a model for conversion are many. It opens us to the insights of psychology which resonate with this growth to maturity, to *agape* love and to a sense of self-acceptance and infinite worth. It provides us with one of the criteria for discerning good religion from bad – whether it leads to the integrated self or the driven, compulsive, unhealthy self.

It contrasts with models of conversion as believing a set of propositions, as losing oneself, as buying a ticket to eternal life and as switching religions. It puts at the centre a new relationship with God, leading to a new and positive relationship with oneself.

It leads to an approach to evangelism in which Christians help others to become aware of their hunger for wholeness and turn towards the source of this wholeness. Evangelism on this model involves accompaniment on a spiritual pilgrimage (Peace 1999: 310).

The third dimension of conversion, reconciliation with others, is arguably simply the working out of the first and second. That is, part of what it means to be reconciled to God and ourselves is to grow towards a life of love for others. As Dawn DeVries puts it, “Conversion always implies a reorientation to God and to fellow human beings at the same time” (1995: 28).

In order to ground this idea of reconciliation with others, I’m going to consider three areas in which mission can be seen as reconciliation, peacemaking in international affairs, national reconciliation with indigenous peoples and ecumenical relations.

## International Peacemaking

One of the areas in which mission-as-reconciliation would make a radical difference to Christian mission is that of peacemaking. As we saw earlier, peacemaking is nearly synonymous with reconciliation if we exclude the seeking of a hasty peace or peace without justice and take on board the rich meanings of *shalom*.

In my judgement the life and teaching of Jesus clearly calls those who follow him to take the path of non-violent, vulnerable love. He commanded his followers to love our enemies (Mt 5:44). It's difficult to love one's enemies if one is prepared to kill them. He instructed his disciples to take creative non-violent options when facing military might (Mt 5:38–42). Here I'm persuaded by Walter Wink's interpretations of turning the other cheek, giving up one's cloak and walking the extra mile as examples of creative non-violent resistance and not passive non-resistance (Wink 1999: 98–111).

Despite this, mainstream Christianity has not been distinguished by its non-violence for most of Christian history. Indeed, so-called Christian nations have gone to war readily over the centuries, more often than not with the blessing of their chaplains and archbishops. This willingness to kill others is often based on Just War theory. The Just War, however, has always appealed more to "reasonable politics" than the ethics of Jesus. Moreover, it is harder and harder to call any war "just" in an age of weapons of mass destruction and high civilian casualties.

One reason for recovering reconciliation as a model for mission is to nourish a passionate ministry of peacemaking at the international level. The historic peace churches, such as the Mennonites and Quakers, have held the torch for the other Christian traditions, and have developed theologies and programs of peacemaking. They understand the significance of terms such as "peace building", "waging peace" and "peace witness". The world is currently a raging mass of conflicts. Distrust between groups is at a high level. Billions of dollars are being spent on "security" measures at the same time as war and belligerent rhetoric lead to insecurity. As the Suffering Servant songs in Isaiah suggest (e.g., Is 42:1–8, Is 53), the path of one who would work non-violently for peace and reconciliation is often costly and dangerous. Nevertheless there is enormous scope for Christian mission to take the path of peacemaking as a central calling.

The difficult questions of violence and non-violence are raised well in the film *The Mission* (1986). A Jesuit mission in eighteenth century South America is being closed down forcibly. Father Gabriel, the founder of the mission and

a gentle pacifist, argues with a recent novice priest and ex-slave trader, called Rodrigo, who wants to take up the sword in defence of the mission. Gabriel says, “If might is right, then love has no place in the world. It may be so. It may be so. But I don’t have the strength to live in a world like that, Rodrigo. I can’t bless you.” Even the world weary cardinal who is sent to South America to close down the mission has a glimpse of enlightenment at the end. The hardbitten governor says to him, talking about the massacre that occurs at the mission: “We must work in the world. The world is thus.” The cardinal says, “No, thus have we made the world.” Through the life and teaching of Jesus, those committed to non-violence see the possibility of another way and commit themselves to realising it, even against the odds.

### **Reconciliation between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Peoples**

Another arena in which mission seen as reconciliation leads to increased possibilities for mission engagement is that of indigenous reconciliation. Many countries across the world, from Canada to India, find themselves with significant justice issues arising from the forced dispossession of indigenous peoples from their land, beginning centuries ago but in some cases continuing today.

Speaking of my own country, Australia, Christian churches have been largely complicit with governments and commercial interests in the genocide and marginalisation of Australian indigenous people since European settlement in 1788. Indigenous Australians have been treated either as less-than-human or as second-class citizens for most of that time, only gaining the vote in 1967. Indigenous Australians are now the most disadvantaged social group in the country. With the help of Christian missionaries, governments separated indigenous children from their parents for several decades in the twentieth century in the interests of racial assimilation, leading to what is widely called the “stolen generations” (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission [Australia] 1997). The life expectancy of indigenous Australians is twenty years shorter than Australians as a whole, the incidence of diabetes triple the norm and the unemployment rate estimated at over thirty per cent (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation [CAR] 1999: 9). The trend is the same for nearly every indicator of social health, including high rates of poverty, imprisonment and alcoholism and low rates of home ownership, school completion and tertiary qualifications (CAR 1999: 9).

In this case the term “reconciliation” appears almost daily in the newspapers. The majority of Australians sense the appropriateness of both “practical”

and “symbolic” reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. The Australian churches, for the most part, have seen the issue to be central to Christian mission and have been leaders in the public debate, in the ten-year term of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation and in groups such as Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation.

Those who advocate practical reconciliation argue that it is not appropriate to apologise for past mistakes by others and that what is needed is smarter ways to address the health, education and welfare of disadvantaged indigenous people. Those who advocate the inclusion of symbolic reconciliation argue for the importance of a treaty (none has ever been signed), a formal apology (now given by many groups, including most churches, and finally, in 2008, by the federal government), stronger entitlement to land claims and some measure of self-government such as autonomy in distributing government funding.

Most Christians can see that genuine reconciliation involves a change in attitudes. They join others in working for public repentance, restitution and renewed goodwill, usually starting by owning their own complicity and building partnerships with indigenous people. In a book called *Reconciliation: Searching for Australia's Soul* (1999), Norman Habel, a Christian theologian addressing an audience beyond the churches, argues that the struggle for the Australian soul, the spiritual dimension of national identity, will continue until the country resolves the issue of reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. His public engagement arises from a vision of mission as reconciliation.

Similar cases can be found across the world. When the model of reconciliation shapes Christian mission, social and political engagement for indigenous reconciliation can be seen to be integral to mission. By extension, the same can be said for all situations of inter-ethnic and inter-cultural tensions. The dominating reconciliation issue for the apostle Paul was the division between Jews and Gentiles, and similar sets of broken relationships exist the world over.

### **Reconciliation between Christians**

A further illustration of the centrality of reconciliation as a model for mission is the call for Christians to live in unity. I'm afraid we journey with this more as a challenge than an accompanying reality. To take Baptists as an example, I am deeply sorrowful that the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest group

in the Baptist World Alliance, recently pulled out of the Alliance over doctrinal issues, thus fracturing in a major way an already fractured Baptist communion. In my country the Baptist Union of Australia is not a member of either the National Council of Churches in Australia nor the World Council of Churches. In my state Baptists are not formally members of the Victorian Council of Churches (although some of us participate by the grace and welcome of other denominations). It seems as if the ecumenical Baptist, at least, is an endangered species.

Sometimes we distinguish between mission, which is to do with the church's outward engagement in the world, and ministry, which is about the life of the church. While this helps to clarify things sometimes, its usefulness is limited. Mission and ministry overlap a great deal. We know, for example, that the vibrant life of a Christian community which is open at the edges has an evangelistic dimension whether or not its gatherings have an avowedly evangelistic intention. The extent to which the church lives as a sign of the kingly reign of God is the extent to which it points to God's Good News. The church which is a foretaste of the new community *is* good news and therefore *speaks* good news. It is for this reason that in some discipleship traditions, such as the Anabaptist and radical discipleship traditions, community, discipleship and mission are seen as virtually one and the same thing (Gill 1990; Langmead 2002a). By following Jesus together in community we are engaging naturally in mission. By living out a new set of relationships counter-culturally, roughly in the shape of God's Commonwealth, we proclaim the possibility of a new creation where love and justice rule and those on the edge are welcomed into the centre.

By extension the visible unity of those who follow Jesus across the world is a mission issue. The foundational Bible passage of the ecumenical movement still rings with power: John's presentation of Jesus' prayer that his followers may be one "so that the world may believe" (Jn 17:21). If the Christian communion is severely fractured and many sections of it refuse to recognise the validity of other sections, what sort of mission of reconciliation can effectively be carried out to the world beyond the churches? The eucharistic table, at which we remember the reconciling power of Jesus' life and death, has become a symbol of our disunity and unreconciled condition. Few these days want to see a single world church; there is increasing recognition that our vision of what it is to follow Jesus varies widely in theological, historical and cultural terms. The generally accepted aim of ecumenical reconciliation in the World Council of Churches since 1974 has been "reconciled diversity", implying mutual recognition of baptism, eucharist and ministry, and a recognised way

of deciding and acting together (Meyer 1991). But it remains a long way from realisation. As long as we cannot sit in the same council, celebrate the Eucharist at the same table and recognise each other's baptism and ministry, our words to the world are drowned out by our actions.

The many biblical passages about unity, peace and the breaking down of barriers are familiar to most Christians (e.g., 1 Cor 13, Gal 3:28, Eph 4, Phil 4:7, Col 3:14–15, 2 Tim 2:22). Nevertheless, the Christian churches have managed to live with division after division. Repeatedly one group of Christians has been declared heretical by another and is excluded as “not-Christian”. Meanwhile the mission of reconciliation to the world continues, as if there is not a cauldron of unresolved conflict within Christianity. Even allowing for our humanness in preferring one way over another and the hermeneutical differences we would expect with a great variety of contexts, our disunity is a scandal to the gospel.

I've been speaking of world ecumenism, but the same call to be reconciled as Christians applies at other levels of the church as well. If we were to take our mission for reconciliation seriously at the level of the local church, we would work much harder at disagreeing respectfully, “fighting fairly”, ensuring the processes for resolving conflict are developed, and learning to forgive each other as part of our discipleship and mission. We would work harder for reconciliation where we are, rather than too easily escaping to another congregation nearby, only to repeat the conflict the next time differences occur. We would accept that conflict is natural and see the dangers of trying to smooth over differences, only to have them surface in uglier ways later. The day to day realities of relationships being renewed by the reconciling power of the risen Christ affect most churches most of the time.

To see mission more clearly through the lens of reconciliation would have practical implications for the centrality of working towards reconciled diversity in ecumenical and congregational relationships.

### **Reconciliation with Creation**

Our final example of the aptness of seeing mission through the lens of reconciliation is ecological mission. Ecotheology sees reality in terms of relationship and thoroughgoing interdependence. Our alienation from God can be seen, correspondingly, as a break or distortion in our relationships with God, each other and creation. The mission of God, in these terms then, is clearly recon-

ciliation at all levels of existence. This is the essence of an “ecomissiology” (Langmead 2002b), a vision for mission that includes not only a renewal of relationships between humans and God and between humans and humans, but also between humans and their environment.

It arises from a realisation that humanity is more deeply embedded in creation than traditionally thought. Our status as “made from the dust”, we now realise, extends to our inhaling oxygen and exhaling carbon di-oxide while the plants do the opposite. Our intimate interdependence with God’s creation, which (including humans) expresses God’s glory, creativity and love means that our alienation from God affects all dimensions of reality. So the creation groans, not of its own failings, but waiting for human reconciliation with God to redeem all relationships (Rom 8:18–25).

I said earlier that some traditional understandings of reconciliation have focused on sacrificial atonement. This illustrates that to see mission through the lens of reconciliation does not, of itself, lead to the holism of ecomissiology. But a theology of mission which takes into account the many levels of relationship to be healed, including creation, is welcoming to the metaphor of being reconciled to the earth.

## **Conclusion**

At the simplest level, reconciliation in its literal sense evokes the image of two people hugging or shaking hands after sorting out a conflict. In its literal sense it applies to people and groups enjoying restored harmony. I have argued that mission involves reconciliation in the metaphorical sense at all levels, which involves, at times, reconciliation in the literal sense between people and groups. So deep and pervasive is the idea of “becoming friends again” and “overcoming enmity” that we can see the whole of God’s mission in these terms if we choose to, while welcoming other metaphors which enrich our understanding.

In this paper I have not attempted to spell out all the dynamics or the stages of reconciliation (such as truth-telling, forgiveness and reparation), partly because they vary enormously according to the context, but also because the central argument has been a theological and missiological one.

Reconciliation is not only a useful metaphor for the work of the Spirit as we co-operate with God in Christian mission; it is an enduring and potentially governing metaphor for the whole of mission. This is true on biblical and theological grounds, but is especially relevant in a world which more than ever

exhibits brokenness of relationships at every level. So on theological and contextual grounds we can say that reconciliation is the heart of mission.

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### **Des relations transformées : la réconciliation comme modèle central pour la mission**

Cet article soutient que la réconciliation peut fonctionner comme métaphore d'intégration (ou modèle) pour la mission chrétienne. Le but de la mission de Dieu est de transformer les relations dans toutes leurs dimensions – entre les êtres humains et Dieu, entre les humains eux-mêmes et entre eux et la création.

Le but de la réconciliation est de tout remettre droit. Utilisée comme métaphore en théologie de la mission, elle recouvre et rassemble magnifiquement tout un éventail d'idées qui ne sont que des facettes de l'unique mission de réconciliation de Dieu, dit notre auteur.

L'article analyse le rôle de la métaphore en théologie. Il examine les termes bibliques ayant trait à la réconciliation tels que le sacrifice d'expiation, le shalom, la justice, la construction de la paix.

Il reprend ensuite cinq dimensions de la mission chrétienne, pour illustrer la force d'intégration de la réconciliation considérée comme métaphore de la mission : la conversion comme réconciliation, la construction de la paix internationale, la réconciliation entre les peuples indigènes et les non indigènes, la réconciliation entre chrétiens et la réconciliation avec la création.

### **Veränderte Beziehungen: Versöhnung als zentrales Modell für Mission**

Dieser Beitrag behauptet, dass Versöhnung als eine integrierende Metapher (oder Modell) für christliche Mission funktionieren kann. Die Mission Gottes zielt auf veränderte Beziehungen in allen Bereichen – zwischen den Menschen und Gott, zwischenmenschlich und zwischen dem Menschen und der Schöpfung.

Versöhnung bedeutet alle Dinge in die rechte Beziehung zu setzen. Wenn man sie metaphorisch in der Missionstheologie verwendet, schließt sie sehr schön einen weiten Bereich von Ideen ein und bringt sie zusammen, weil sie, so wird behauptet, einfach Facetten der einen Mission Gottes für Versöhnung darstellen.

Der Artikel analysiert die Rolle von Metaphern in der Theologie. Er untersucht biblische Begriffe mit Bezug auf Versöhnung, wie Vergebung durch Opfer, Schalom, Gerechtigkeit, Friedensarbeit.

Dann überlegt der Artikel fünf Dimensionen der christlichen Mission, um die Integrationsfähigkeiten von Versöhnung als Hauptmetapher für Mission zu beschreiben: Bekehrung als Versöhnung, internationale Friedensarbeit, Versöhnung zwischen

einheimischen und nicht-einheimischen Völkern, Versöhnung unter Christen und Versöhnung mit der Schöpfung.

**Relaciones transformadas: La reconciliación como el modelo central para la misión**

Este artículo propone que la reconciliación puede funcionar como una metáfora (o modelo) integrante para la misión cristiana. La misión de Dios se dirige a relaciones transformadas en todas las dimensiones – entre los seres humanos y Dios, entre la gente y entre los humanos y la creación.

La reconciliación tiene que ver sobre todo con articular las cosas de manera correcta. Cuando se la usa metafóricamente en la teología de la misión, ella cubre bellamente y junta una amplia gama de ideas que, según se propone, son simplemente facetas de la única misión de Dios por la reconciliación.

Este artículo analiza el papel de una metáfora en teología. Considera los términos relacionados con reconciliación, como son la expiación sacrificial, shalom, justicia, hacer las paces.

A continuación considera cinco dimensiones de la misión cristiana para ilustrar el poder de integración de la reconciliación como una metáfora central para la misión: la conversión como reconciliación, el trabajo internacional por la paz, la reconciliación entre pueblos indígenas y no-indígenas, la reconciliación entre cristianos y la reconciliación con la creación.