

Reconciliation as Paradigm for Mission

The Revd Pheko Lethale is an Anglican Priest from Lesotho and currently a postgraduate research student at Selly Oak Centre for Mission Studies, Queens Foundation for Theological Education, Birmingham.

Introduction

A need for Reconciliation and peace-building through dialogue in Lesotho is the main concern of this article, as Lesotho experiences terrible brutal deaths due to a wide range of tribal (clans) conflicts, which mainly start over the disagreement on grazing lands, water or firewood. Furthermore, many lives and properties have been lost due to civil conflicts that have been consistently surrounding the national elections.¹

Reconciliation in this article is used as a process of overcoming hostility and conflict between divided people. On the other side, the *dialogue* is been used and viewed as the classical means of dealing constructively with ethno-political conflicts. The term *ethno-political* is used in this essay because political conflicts in Lesotho are somehow related to clans (ethnic) groups. Hence the ethno-political conflict is the most persistent form of conflicts in Lesotho politics, as described below.

The background Context of Ethno-political Conflicts in Lesotho

Lesotho has experienced an unsteady political leadership since its independence in 1966. In 1970, when the ruling party, Basotho National Party (BNP) discovered it was losing to the Basotho Congress Party (BCP) in the election polls, the leader, Chief Leabua Jonathan suspended the Constitution and cancelled the election results. Then the BCP, unsatisfied with what had happened to them, attempted a coup in 1974. However, the BCP was defeated and the prominent members BCP were forced to flee Lesotho. The BNP expelled any remnants of the opposition and many protestors were murdered or forced to exile so that the BNP could harden its control over Lesotho. Dr Leabua Jonathan (Prime Minister) was forced out of office in 1986 by a military coup. Facing the pressure to democratize, the military government called back all those who were forced to exile in 1992/1993. The Basotho people then elected the BCP into power in 1993; however, the BCP met considerable resistance. In 1997, the members of the BCP could not find common ground on party policy; hence Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) was founded in the parliament and became the government.²

Lesotho's bloody social political crises gained momentum after 1998 and 2007 national elections. Opposition parties organised protests and several indirect attacks to government ministers and ruling party executive officials. Moreover, there was assassination attempt on the Prime Minister, Mr Pakalitha Mosisili on the 23rd April 2009.³ Hence SADC appointed the former President of Botswana, Sir Ketumile Masire as a mediator. Unfortunately, Sir Masire declared his resignation with the effect from the 24 July 2010, accusing the ruling Lesotho Congress for Democracy for being obstacle in trying to find a solution to the political crisis in Lesotho. Apparently the Christian Council of Lesotho (CCL) has taken over to restart the dialogue between the government and the opposition parties in preparation to amend electoral acts and constitution of Lesotho.⁴ The question is whether CCL will be able to play its prophetic role leading to reconciliation and peace in Lesotho.

¹ Lesotho is one of the poorest countries in Southern Africa with the third highest country with HIV prevalence in the world, with 23.2% of adults aged 15 to 49. It is entirely surrounded by South Africa. The country's political parties are somehow associated with Churches, for example, Basotho National Party and All Basotho Convention are highly supported by the Roman Catholic Church while Lesotho Congress for Democracy and Basotho Congress Party are linked to Lesotho Evangelical Church.

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pakalitha_Mosisili (Accessed on 28/11/2010)

³ <http://www.lestimes.com/?p=781> (Accessed on 28/11/2010)

⁴ http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_hb1402/is_1_21/ai_n28756291/ (Accessed on 28/11/2010)

The Crisis and paradigm shifts in Mission due to Conflicts

According to Hans Kung, the concept of paradigm shift provides a threefold goal. It provides a structure with a historical foundation; it challenges the present and provides possibilities for the future. Therefore, crisis had been used in this essay as to refer to the combination of danger and an opportunity in ethno-political conflicts.⁵ This is based on rethinking mission, as paradigm shifts imply that there are opportunities for significant reflection, adjustments and radical changes in order to suit the prevailing circumstances. Turning crisis into an opportunity is always possible through a dialogic reconciliation as dialogue presupposes commitment.⁶ Hence dialogue between political parties in attempting to overcome violence and peace-building will play an important part in any form of crisis in Christian mission.

The concept of war in Augustine's teachings was to do with conversion, how to get people to become Christians. Converts were gained by rewarding them, so war was seen as an act of love to the non-converted.⁷ The crisis was used to address the major challenges of Christianity among people who were regarded as pagans. Therefore, paradigm shifts from paganism to Christianity have characterized the growth of Christianity in terms of numbers. Sometimes there is a need for radical shift in Christian mission as to suit the changing situations due to crisis.

Ecumenism cannot become a dominating factor in church relations in Lesotho as long as Churches are strongly involved in party politics resulting into major conflicts between Churches.⁸ However, the churches can take an advantage on prevailing challenges by put more emphasis the goals of mission Dei and work towards stronger unity than before. Hatred, mistrust and division among Basotho had resulted in many new political parties and para-church organisations formed. But the broken relationships can be shifted as means of strengthening and starting the 'intra-Christian ecumenical dialogue' and political parties' coalition.⁹ These will be possible through participation of people in the process of reconciliation as paradigm for mission Dei. Christianity should become more Christian as Hans Kung has noted that 'a massive crisis in Christianity makes a massive answer urgently necessary.'¹⁰

Reconciliation as a Paradigm Shift in Mission

Reconciliation as paradigm for Christian mission is expected to address issues of how people of different communities and various political parties can live together and building bridges towards the society of love, justice and harmony. Christians need to prove that they are followers of Jesus by striving for unity amid diversity as Jesus did (John 17).

David Bosch refers to mission as a term encompassing the sender, sender's messenger, receivers and an assignment.¹¹ He further considered the Triune God as the sender and the primary source of mission in which the Church had been called to participate in the sending of love.¹² Therefore, reconciliation as a paradigm for mission is at the heart of the Triune God and all people in the world are involved in the implementation of reconciliation. This means that the Triune God and people are the participants in mission. For God so loved the whole world in such that He sacrificed Jesus Christ in the world in order to reconcile with all creation (John 3:16).

Reconciliation as a Paradigm for Mission

Kirsteen Kim introduces the reconciliation as an 'inspirational and formative' paradigm for Christian mission in the twenty-first century.¹³ This implies that reconciliation is seen as an inspiring creative paradigm for mission in the present time. Christian mission is based on the Triune God's plan of salvation where reconciliation is considered as a goal of mission. This may be based on the prevailing situations in many countries having Truth and Reconciliation Commissions formed after civil wars and oppressions, especially after 1990s. (Appendix 1)

Robert Schreiter emphasized that reconciliation is primarily and foremost the work of God. He understands Reconciliation starting with God as initiator and completing it within us through Jesus

⁵ David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (London: Orbis Books, 1991) p.3

⁶ David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, page 484

⁷ David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, page 224

⁸ Hincks W. Craig, *Quest for Peace: A Ecumenical History of the Church in Lesotho* (Moriija- Maseru: Moriija Printing Works, 2009) p.587

⁹ Michael Nazir – Ali, *Mission and Dialogue: Proclaiming the Gospel Afresh in every age* (London SPCK, 1995) p.82

¹⁰ Hermann Haring, *Hans Kung: Breaking Through* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1998) p. 138 – 139

¹¹ David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 1991, p.1

¹² David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, page 392

¹³ Kirsteen Kim, *Reconciling Mission: The Ministry of Healing and Reconciliation in the Church Worldwide* (London: ISPCK, 2005) p. IX

Christ.¹⁴ Therefore the role of the churches is to participate in the work of God's revelation in the Christ incarnation, so that reconciliation can start as repentance and forgiveness are experienced by both the victim and offender.

Aspects of the process of reconciliation

The ministry of reconciliation also involves the work for reconciliation among persons and societies in difference. In order to understand what this involvement in God's mission of the reconciliation may mean, we will focus upon aspects (elements) of reconciliation in this subsection of review of literature. It is essential that reconciliation seekers take into consideration the aspects and their meaning in the reconciliation process. The constitutive aspects in the process of reconciliation to be dealt with in this essay are: truth-telling, repentance, justice, healing, forgiveness and peace. However these aspects need not occur in any set order; in some cases, for example, forgiveness comes before repentance.

(a) Truth-telling: A process of reconciliation usually starts with the offender taking the first step to tell the truth about what happened, anticipating that the victim will accept such a motion. A fundamental aspect of reconciliation is the recognition of the grievances suffered and the damages experienced by members of one side at the hands of former antagonists. Truth-telling breaks the silence about the past which had been hidden and allows healing and reconciliation to take place.¹⁵ Truth in reconciliation is greater to the extent that members of the formerly opposing sides share understandings about who has suffered or continues to suffer by whose acts.

(b) Repentance: It is not enough to explain what happened; repentance should normally be accompanied by a request for forgiveness. In some cases the victim refuses to participate in the search for reconciliation and healing. Patience is required in order to find a more opportune moment to re-launch the process. Attempts should be made to discover how confession and truth telling is undertaken in different cultural settings. In some cases, it may involve the use of rituals which employ symbols. Sometimes opportunities to effect reconciliation have been missed because the wrong means have been employed or, worse, imposed.

(c) Justice: Pursuit of justice is also the element of Bible (Amos 5). According to Andrew Kirk, justice is often joined together with peace in creative tension and justice ignored in most cases.¹⁶ It is believed that in creative tension one side may lose while the other wins. Unfortunately justice has been losing and peace winning. However reconciliation attempts to find a way in which both parties in conflicts can manage to live with their tensions without losing. Therefore, reconciliation is considered as a built on justice, and the fruit of justice is peace for all. The church used to emphasis more on love over justice. But, the Church is now balancing its call for both justice and peace in her prophetic voice. It cares for humanity and justice.

(d) Healing of memories: The process of healing and reconciling memories within communities in which conflict has been evident can be undertaken in a number of different ways. What is more important is that memories of the past have to be transferred, so that the pain and the harms can be healed. Victims and offenders should retell their stories of shared events and negotiate for a common history as a step towards reconciliation. Therefore, healing and reconciliation processes are usually connected together or sometimes reconciliation is regarded as a prerequisite to healing.

(e) Forgiveness: It is a key requirement for reconciliation and healing the traumas of the past, but this does not mean that reconciliation must follow the forgiveness. A victim may be able to forgive an offender but that does not mean that the relationship is reconciled automatically. Robert Schreiter in his book called *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality & Strategies*; emphasized that forgiveness is one of the most important parts of reconciliation, hence it plays an important part in the whole process.¹⁷ Therefore, the damage to a relationship cannot be undone but a new kind of relationship may be possible once there is acknowledgment of fault and forgiveness is assumed. Forgiveness is not given automatically; it comes when the victim responds to the request for pardon from the victimizer. Many people who have been harmed are willing to forgive, but the requirements of justice should never be

¹⁴ Robert Schreiter, *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality & Strategies* (New York: Orbis Books, 1998) page 14

¹⁵ Jacques Matthey (Editor), *Come Holy Spirit, Heal and Reconcile* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2008) p.77

¹⁶ Andrew J. Kirk, *What is Mission? Theological Explorations* (London: Darton & Longman, 1999) p. 143

¹⁷ Robert Schreiter, *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality & Strategies* (New York: Orbis Books, 1998) page 55

forgotten - even if the victim does not ask for them. Forgiveness should not be described as amnesty.¹⁸ It should also be borne in mind that forgiveness does not imply that the harm will be forgotten, other people understand it that way.

(f) **Peace (Shalom):** Peace is the final product of reconciliation carrying a comprehensive expression of the inner most and outward peace of individuals and of the nation as whole. Hence the Bible encourages people to be devoted to peace through the ministry of reconciliation with God and humankind (Matthew 5: 23-24). Andrew Kirk argued that building peace through reconciliation is an indispensable part Christian Mission as Christians are actively involved in trying to overcoming the violence. Peace emerges after the breaking the spiral of retaliation and revenge.¹⁹ The Triune God's love (agape) that encompasses reconciliation will be ruling.

Remarks on Reconciliation

God entrusted the Church with the duty and responsibility for bringing God's peace to all people on Earth through the process of reconciliation. In dialogue the participants aim for a conversion of thinking and for building a reconciled community. These are the hoped for effects of dialogue for the person and for humanity.

On the other side Reconciliation has various uncertainties and shortcomings to assist in the journey towards peace-building and political stabilization.²⁰ Sometimes it provokes a tension between the authentic need to look forward, and threat of denying the people damaged by the past a fair justice. This may be interpreted as manipulation and provoke further hostility from victims who find themselves been asked to forgive victimizers while justice is granted by the government.

The process of Reconciliation has also been misused by some political leaders who usually call for amnesty and forgiveness of perpetrators of the violence on the grounds that they caused the damage as a result of fighting for democracy.²¹ This means that perpetrators who want to avoid punishment tend to apologize by indicating that whatever they did was influenced by political grounds.

South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) under the chairmanship of Desmond Tutu did an excellent work which can be taken as a model and a milestone for many commissions to be formed. TRC granted controversial amnesty to victimizers and described that by indicating that they were working towards restorative justice that personifies and embraces both offender and victim, as a primary goal in the healing of old wounds. Restorative justice was used to refer to the contribution by perpetrators to the lives of victims and survivors of apartheid and to rebuilding society. However, TRC has been criticised for providing neither the room nor the conditions in which justice is both done, and seen to be done. The Commission did not address the issues of compensation, restoration and restitution fully. Furthermore if the aspect of amnesty and remorse is not linked to a process of reparations it often fails to provide the healing that is needed but call for revenge.

Tutu brings a theology that "seeks to restore the oppressor's humanity by releasing and enabling the oppressed to see their oppressors as peers under God." This is his Ubuntu theology, so named after an African idea of community. Tutu shows that human beings are defined not by their race but because they had been created in God's image (imago Dei) which brings value and dignity to all people.

The meaning of reconciliation differs with cultural understanding and places. In Africa the peace-building used to be established through slaughtering of an innocent sacrificial animal (scapegoat) in a covenant of reconciliation. Therefore, salvation through Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God has been understood as sacrificing the innocent animal which absorbs conflicts and prevents revenge while bringing an authentic reconciliation. Hence it is important for churches to consider different cultural traditions and understanding for the success of reconciliation.

Reconciliation from Biblical and Theological Perspectives and Missio Dei

Theologically and biblically Reconciliation has been identified by many scholars as the entirely the work of the triune God whereby God reconciled with the whole creation through Jesus Christ's life, death, resurrection and ascension. Hence the Bible has many stories of reconciliation in both the Old Testament and New Testament where people are involved in God's mission (mission Dei).

¹⁸ Kirsteen Kim, *Reconciling Mission*, p. 169

¹⁹ Andrew J. Kirk, *What is Mission?* p. 143-146

²⁰ <http://www.gsdr.org/go/display&type=Document&id=3622&source=rss> (Accessed on 09/12/2010)

²¹ Joshva Raja and et al, *Towards a Reconstruction of Mission Stories* (Birmingham: ISPCK&SOCMS, 2010) p.14

David Bosch, in his *Transforming Mission*, offers a wonderful summary of where and when the term *missio Dei* emanated and how it had undertaken some changes in meaning. He has indicated that it was created at the Willingen Conference of the International Missionary Council held in 1952, whereby mission was considered to be deriving from the very nature of God. *Missio Dei* encompasses the sending of the Son by God the Father, and the Holy Spirit been sent by God the Father and the Son, and the Triune God sending the Church into the world. Therefore, mission was understood as the church's partaking in the sending of Triune God. It was clarified that mission is God's primacy, not the church's enterprise but, the church is participating with the sending God to bring God's love to the whole world.²² Therefore, the Church is a vital part of God's plan to reach the world. Hence it has to be very active in the implementation of the process of reconciliation in a divided society.

The Old Testament addresses again and again the separation between God and God's people and God's longing for reconciliation and restoration of a relationship that was broken and fragmented through humankind arrogance and several kinds of rebellion against the God of life and justice. For example, we have the story of Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25:19 -33:20) and of Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 37 - 45). In African family tradition, the inheritance or blessing from the father is expected to be descended to the elder son who will take the position of his father in family matters. Therefore, depriving him that privilege would be regarded as a great offence which may divide the whole family for ages. Hence forgiveness in such situations plays a vital role; as Desmond Tutu emphasized that there is no possibility of future without forgiveness.²³ Jacob and Joseph from the above mentioned Bible passages would have been hated by their brothers in African context for denying them their birth rights. Therefore, the Church through the reconciliation process should be in a position to intervene in times of such conflicts. A theology of reconciliation is deeply rooted in the New Testament which is full of stories and parables about reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:11 - 21). In the New Testament *Missio Dei* is understood as a way in which God is reaching out to the world (2 Peter 3:9). The Book of Acts tells how Jews and Gentiles were reconciled in one new community. Paul in his letters is anxious that those whom Christ has reconciled in his body should not be divided and that community life should be the first expression of God's plan to reconcile all things. He foresees the unity of not only Jew and Gentile but also of slave and free, male and female in Christ (Gal. 3:28).

People may seek for reconciliation and implement however, the initiative and the effectiveness of reconciliation lies with God (2 Cor. 5:19). Humankind are only receivers of the gift of reconciliation. The Christian narrative of reconciliation is based on and centered in the story of the incarnation, passion, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. The messianic ministry of Jesus of Nazareth links his suffering with the suffering of all humanity, and is therefore an expression of the deep solidarity of God with an agonized, fragmented and tortured world.

The Roles of Churches in the Reconciliation and peace-building

David Bosch regarded peace-making in the contemporary world as the integral to the Christian mission existence.²⁴ He understood the church as sacrament and sign of mediating communication in the world. The church is expected to play its prophetic role as the voice of the voiceless in the reconciliation and peace-building. The church has to be involved in formulation of Truth Commission on Suspicious Deaths to investigate deaths of citizens opposed to past authoritarian regimes in Lesotho.

Churches are recommended to bear witness that Jesus is God's way of reconciliation. This means that all Christians have to accept the idea that they are called as agents of God's reconciliation as Paul understood his mission in life (2Corinthians 5: 17 - 21). Christian churches have to call for the establishment of truth and reconciliation commission in Lesotho as to find true causes of political conflicts since 1970. Church leadership commission was also mandated to make recommendations into ways of preventing the recurrence of such events. Sometimes there is a desire to deal with the situation immediately when countries are faced with ethnic and political conflicts with great human suffering and hurts. Hence the effectiveness of the churches' ministry of reconciliation is undermined when the cause of making God's gift of unity visible is ignored. Therefore, churches should be patient enough for slow progress of inter-confessional dialogue coupled with African theology of Ubuntu to take place in overcoming any kind of conflicts.

²² David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 1991, p 390 - 392

²³ Barbara Butler, *Open Hands: Reconciliation, Justice and Peace work around the world* (Suffolk: Kevin Mayhew, 1998)

p. 10

²⁴ David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 118 - 119

The African Perspective on Reconciliation

The process of reconciliation requires first the cleansing and healing of the nation so that the country moves away from the tendency to engage in conflicts within the families as well as nationally and solve disagreements in a peaceful manner. It is also necessary to heal the wounds that were caused by the conflicts so that whilst we do not forget where we come from, we are able to forgive to make sure that we do not develop the spirit of revenge. This is also in keeping with the African theology of Ubuntu, in which individual person is viewed holistically and is perceived to be well and healthy when the immediate family, the neighbours as well as the community is in harmony. Philosophy of Ubuntu therefore, necessitates forgiveness, peace and reconciliation and could therefore be seen as a unifying factor.

Missio Dei and Reconciliation

Christian Mission refers to our participation in the missio Dei; hence our participation in the reconciliation process through the dialogue is possible. We define reconciliation as mutual acceptance by members of formerly hostile groups of each other. Such acceptance includes positive attitudes, but also positive actions that express them, as circumstances allow and require. The role of the Christian churches in the politics of reconciliation is complex and often discouraging. However all Christians need to pursue Christian missions in such a way that the gospel of Jesus Christ becomes good news for the whole creation. All Christians are called to be mediators between the gospel and the world in which they live.

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