

# RECONCILIATION

*as the Mission of God*



## Christian Witness in a World of Destructive Conflicts

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A 2005 Paper from 47 Christian Leaders  
Across the World

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## INTRODUCTION

This paper presents a theological vision for reconciliation as God's mission in a broken world. While pointing to signs of hope, the paper analyzes how the Christian community is being caught up in many destructive conflicts and divisions across the world today, including by promoting a defective gospel. The paper issues a vision for placing biblically holistic reconciliation at the heart of Christian mission in the 21st century. Its urgent call is to both personal conversion and social transformation, beginning in a critical re-examination of the very meaning of mission, discipleship, evangelism, justice, and even church in relation to God's reconciling mission.

The paper is the outcome of intense work by 47 Christian leaders from six continents and 21 countries—theologians, missiologists, practitioners, pastors, and scholars from some of the world's most conflict-ridden places. They gathered as one of 31 Issue Groups at the September 2004 Forum on World Evangelization in Pattaya, Thailand, organized by the Lausanne Committee on World Evangelization. The Issue Group on Reconciliation included Protestant evangelicals, Pentecostals, and denominational leaders, two Catholic priests, and one Orthodox priest.

The paper was profoundly shaped by a gathering of the group's leadership team in Kigali, Rwanda in July 2004, 10 years after the Rwandan genocide in which many Christian leaders and congregations were implicated. After intense discussions in Thailand, the paper was revised, and endorsed unanimously by all 47 persons in January, 2005.

In Thailand, the group adopted a Pattaya Covenant, pledging to join in on-going mission through forming a global Christian network for reconciliation, and inviting others to join them. Their Thailand journey ended in a dramatic foot washing before the entire 2004 Forum, between Rwandan Hutu and Tutsi; Israeli and Palestinian; male and female; white, black, and Asian; and Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox clergy. This sign of the church on her knees, washing feet across the boundaries of our divided world, is the vision of the kingdom desperately needed in our time.

While the paper does not express the official position of Lausanne, Lausanne joins the endorsers in wishing to share the paper as widely as possible, and to promote a fresh conversation on Christian witness in a divided world. The paper is available on a web-page being developed for the network ([www.reconciliationnetwork.com](http://www.reconciliationnetwork.com)), as well as the Issue Group's Pattaya Covenant, case studies, and information about the emerging network.

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## I. THE VISION OF RECONCILIATION

*“For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in (the Son), and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.”* (Colossians 1:19-20)

*“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: The old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.”* (II Corinthians 5:17-20a)

*“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.”* (Matt. 28:19-20a)

*“But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven.”* (Matthew 5:44-45a)

*“For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”* (Galatians 3:27-28)

## I. THE VISION OF RECONCILIATION

**T**he mission of God in our fallen, broken world is reconciliation. Sacred Scripture witnesses that God’s mission of reconciliation is holistic, including relationships with God, self, others, and creation. This mission has never changed from the Fall to the new creation in Christ to its fulfilment in the coming of Jesus in the eschaton. God’s reconciling mission involves the very in-breaking of the kingdom of God, as realized through Jesus’ incarnation, His life and ministry and preaching, and through His death and resurrection.

God’s initiative of reconciliation through Christ transforms believers into God’s new creation. With all of creation, we await our final and perfect transformation in the end of time. At that time, when Jesus returns, God’s mission will be complete. People of every nation, tribe, and language, gathered as one, will worship the Lamb, the tree of life and its leaves shall be for the healing of the nations, and the new heavens and earth shall make the reign of God a reality with all things reconciled to God (Romans 8:18-39, Revelation 7:9-17; Revelation 21-22:5).

In response to all this, the believer is called to participate in God’s mission of reconciliation. This includes obeying Jesus’ command to humbly make disciples of all nations (Mt. 28:18-20), teaching them to follow the example of Jesus who suffered for a suffering world. The church is called to be a living sign of the one body of Christ, an agent of hope and holistic reconciliation in our broken and fragmented world.

**Reconciliation is God’s initiative, restoring a broken world to God’s intentions by reconciling “to himself all things” through Christ (Col 1:20): the relationship between people and God, between people, and with God’s created earth. Christians participate with God by being transformed into ambassadors of reconciliation.**

A serious impediment to God’s mission of reconciliation in our time is not only the reality of destructive divisions and conflicts around the world, but also quite often the church being caught up in these conflicts—places where the blood of ethnicity, tribe, racialism, sexism, caste, social class, or nationalism seems to flow stronger than the waters of baptism and our confession of Christ.

While the church’s suffering faith is evident in many conflicts, the guilt of Christians in intensifying the world’s brokenness is seriously damaging our witness to the gospel. The church’s captivity is both direct and indirect, whether actively furthering destruction and division, remaining silent or neutral in the face of it, or promoting a defective gospel. This is true of recent and current contexts including legalized apartheid (South Africa), “ethnic cleansing” (the Balkans), genocide (Rwanda), histories of racism and ethnocentrism (U.S.), terror

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and killing of civilian populations, and bitter, unresolved social divisions ranging from “sectarianism” in Northern Ireland, to Dalit “untouchables” and caste in India, to the plight of Aboriginal peoples in Australia, to the Korean peninsula, to Palestinians and Israelis. Christians are often bitterly divided on both sides.

This troubled situation calls for prayer, discernment, and repentance, and a critical re-examination of the very meaning of mission, evangelism, discipleship, and even church in relation to God’s reconciling mission. This is particularly urgent given cases where vast areas of revivals and church planting have become vast killing fields (such as Rwanda, 1994), with Christians slaughtering neighbors and even other Christians.

Yet even in the worst conflicts, signs of the quest for reconciliation can be detected in the church. Christians have shaped many of the world’s most hopeful breakthroughs for reconciliation. In becoming agents of biblically holistic reconciliation, we must learn to name and confess the sins of the past and present and encourage others to do the same, be willing to forgive, and live in new ways of repentance and costly peacemaking. Above all, Christians must be people of hope; hope in God’s victory in Christ and that, over time, reconciliation can break in, because this is God’s mission.

## II. THE CONTEXT OF RECONCILIATION

### The Social & Historical Context of Conflict

God created humanity in God’s image, for natural union and wholeness of life with God, one another, and God’s material creation. The Fall shattered this union, resulting in the estrangement seen in Cain’s murder of Abel. While destructive conflict is rooted in this rupture, it cannot be explained solely in terms of wicked human hearts. Powerful historical and social forces, unjust systems, and “spiritual forces of evil” (Ephesians 6:12) are also part of the world’s brokenness. The transmission of the gospel and the ministry of the church do not run in a pure, separate historical stream, but are carried on inside of and tainted by the world’s poisoned, muddy histories. All the agents of brokenness must be discerned and confronted—personal, social, and spiritual.

**In too many places, the blood of ethnicity, tribe, racialism, sexism, social class, or nationalism flows stronger than the waters of baptism and our confession of Christ.**

In our shrinking and increasingly pluralistic and globalized world, manifestations of social division are intensifying. Destructive conflicts crying out for reconciliation include both open conflict and “quieter” conditions of persistent injustice, division, and separation. Four interrelated dimensions of historical social conflicts must be engaged: the past and its trauma; how that past is named and remembered; how the present is described and engaged; and how the future is imagined.

In terms of the past and its trauma, destructive social conflicts and realities do not drop like meteors from the sky. Behind each trauma are infective histories, particular social, economic, spiritual, institutional, and political factors and powers, and the reality that the oppressed of yesterday often become the new oppressors, repeating cycles of destruction.<sup>1</sup>

Reconciliation is not forgetting the past. Yet naming and remembering the past well is difficult. Sharing a history in every social division are offenders and offended, passive bystanders and active peacemakers, with lines between them rarely agreed upon, and alienated groups and the Christians within them holding tightly to conflicting versions of truth. In response to God’s love and justice, however, Christians are called to fearlessly seek and name the truth of what has happened, guided by repentance and forgiveness. This must involve seeking shared truth across divided lines. Deformed ways of remembering the past include denial, social amnesia, a spirit of unforgiveness, and uncritical affirmation of one’s own group and its history.

In the present where we live, haunted memories, the unresolved past, and

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continuing trauma have a cumulative effect. These forces can so pervade a culture, a people, that they are passed on from generation to generation—perpetuating distrust, fear, bitterness, exclusion, retribution, and the politics and economics which often exploits these realities. Persistent unjust balances of societal power are also a consequence of the unresolved past and present. In the face of all this, divided groups easily resign themselves to separate and alienated communities, jostling for power. If militarism enters as an option of providing some with personal security while neglecting human security for all, conflicts rise to devastating levels.

Against these forces of the past and present, alienated groups cannot even imagine a future of friendship, solidarity, or common life. Instead, they accept and live with permanent categories of another group as aliens, strangers, or enemies: “black” and “white,” Hutu and Tutsi, clean and “untouchable,” South and North Korean, “terrorist” and “terrorized.” Fragmentation becomes normal, acceptable, and even inevitable.

### The Church & Mission Context

When Christians are passive bystanders and refuse to become constructive agents of reconciliation amidst such divisions and destructive conflicts, we are guilty of withholding love to a neighbor, the love of God is not manifested in our lives, and we give life to a defective gospel.

Numerous ideologies of escape steer Christians away from reconciliation and must be named and rejected by the church. These include:

- *Dualistic theologies* which are silent about social problems, name enemies as solely non-human evil spirits, preach the sufficiency of individual salvation without social transformation, or the sufficiency of social involvement without personal conversion in Christ;
- *Ethnocentrism, racialism, sexism, or nationalism* which promote the fallacy of any ethnic, cultural, gender, or national group's self-sufficiency, and promote loyalty to and the self-interest of one's group as an end in itself. Ultimate loyalty is intended for Jesus alone, who calls us to love our neighbor as well as our enemies, and not only “our own”;
- *A false belief in God's creation of essentially different people groups*, justifying permanent boundaries between them. This includes the Hamitic ideology, which teaches that God has cursed the descendants of Ham, Noah's son, creating separate orders of peoples—some inferior and some superior. This is a heresy. Rooted in this ideology

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was racial segregation in the U.S., apartheid in South Africa, and genocide in Rwanda, which many Christians supported, along with believing in their underlying ideology;

- *A spirit of individualism* seen in Christian disunity, competitiveness, or deplorable schisms and splits which infect many denominations, churches, Christian institutions, and ministries. This disunity and egoism blinds our ability to discern the world's need for reconciliation and seriously harms the church's ministry;
- *Adopting numbers of conversions or church plants as a primary measure of Christianity's growth*, allowing churches or ministries to grow with superficial discipleship, homogeneously, or in ways that perpetuate histories and systems of separation and alienation. This tacit approval of permanent boundaries and segregated lives limited to “people like us” falsely blesses the chasm between alienated groups and disables our ability to be self-critical.<sup>2</sup>
- *An underlying message of cheap grace* which encourages shallow resolutions, a superficial discipleship powerless to engage social pain, and reconciliation without repentance.. A biblical theology of the cross and suffering is needed to renew the church's thinking and life.

Against these ideologies of escape, the church must formulate theological alternatives which encourage authentic reconciliation.

Regarding other situations, when sweeping revivals and rapid church growth occur, Christians must restrain from triumphalism. In too many cases, Christians have been implicated in destructive conflict which has overtaken vast areas of revival and church planting. The church has failed to be self-critical or discerning enough, or to adequately answer “How did this happen, and where did Christians fail?”

In addition, Christians cannot be neutral in a time of social crisis. Too often we are silent about destructive conditions occurring around us, or in our world. Any dichotomy between the evangelistic and the prophetic is false. Along with leading believers into personal holiness, the church is charged to have a prophetic social presence. The church must learn to speak the truth to powers. This calls us to “discern the will of God” concerning societal powers and governing authorities which have immense influence over the lives of Christians, our non-Christian neighbors, and destructive conflicts and societal realities.

The capacity to be a prophetic church is being seriously eroded by three stances. A religious *pluralist stance* promotes social transformation without



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personal conversion, losing the uniqueness and lordship of Christ. A *quietist stance* ignores social evil, is silent when people suffer persecution, and preaches the sufficiency of individual salvation without social transformation, losing public social witness. An *assimilationist stance* misuses the Bible to support the status quo of social or political exclusion, or weds Christian interests with particular governing authorities, losing all prophetic distance.

In addition, the church often shares in the sin of comfortable neutrality, the complacency of those who find themselves on the side of social privilege and fail to work vigorously to transform the status quo. This is at least true of those who tend to preside over the levers of theological power and influence. Thus the theology of the church is often in support of the status quo, or asks very few critical questions, losing all prophetic voice and domesticating the gospel.

Yet God's forgiveness in Christ makes possible the church's faithful confrontation of past and present trauma and injustices. As communities of Christians learn to model confession, forgiveness, and costly peacemaking in lives marked by joy, we proclaim a new future and offer a vision of hope to a broken world.

## III. THE HOPE FOR RECONCILIATION

### Biblical & Theological Foundations of Reconciliation

Amidst the world's profound brokenness, God's peace in the risen Christ is now powerfully at work, seeking to reconcile humanity to God's intended purposes for union with God, one another, and the material creation, resulting in the flourishing of all. From Genesis to Revelation, Scripture witnesses to God's total mission "to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven" (Col 1:15-20). The fullness of reconciliation is friendship with God in Jesus Christ, witnessed to in Christ's two-fold command to love God and neighbor (Matt 22:37-40). Christ has prepared the way for reconciliation by abolishing the dividing wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile, making of the two one new humanity, establishing peace (Eph 2:11-18). Reconciliation is a sign of God's presence in the world, of the kingdom of God drawing near.

The wholeness that God seeks to bring to all areas of brokenness is captured by the rich scriptural notion of *shalom*. This is *shalom* as rooted within the full biblical story, and not in any nationalistic or politically partisan sense. From the original wholeness of God's creation, broken by the Fall, to God's response to initiate restoration through covenant, to Christ tearing down the Jew-Gentile barrier, *shalom* proclaims peace as God's peace in distinction to the world's: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you" John 14:27. *Shalom* as God's peace envisions the wholeness, well-being, and flourishing of all people and the rest of creation both individually and corporately in their interrelatedness with God and with each other. *Shalom* as God's peace encompasses all dimensions of human life, including the spiritual, physical, cognitive, emotional, social, societal, and economic. *Shalom* pursues mercy, truth, justice, and peacefulness through both personal conversion in Christ and social transformation.<sup>3</sup>

Because God created all persons in God's image, reconciliation also proclaims God's love for every human being. One crucial implication is that Christians must stand against any destructive or dehumanizing barriers built up by one person or group of people against another, whether they are Christian or not.

**We are led by Christ crucified to fully engage painful historical conditions, and by the risen Christ to explode walls and barriers and build new forms of common life.**

One theological implication of the above three paragraphs is this: God's mission of holistic reconciliation is the overall context for evangelism and making disciples. Reconciliation with God is essential and Christians must be agents of that restoration. However, to stress evangelism without also being

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agents of holistic reconciliation betrays the full truth of the gospel and the mission of God.

In view of all this, Christians are called to faithfully embody God's total reconciling mission. Through new life given in Christ, the Holy Spirit's power, the church's faithful teaching, and on-going Christian practices, people can be deeply transformed toward loving God, neighbor, and enemies. Only in this radical journey of conversion can Christians develop the skills to resist destructive conflicts and live out a way of being which, over time, can heal and reconcile.

The church's ministry of reconciliation flows from a call to *being* a reconciled community. Christ prayed for the visible unity of the church, and intimately connected Christian unity to Christ being known as the One sent from God: "*I pray . . . that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me*" (John 17:20-21).

The church's ministry should also be profoundly shaped by the truth that Jesus is fully human and fully divine. Christian discipleship is led by the crucified Christ to fully engage the painful historical conditions of separation, animosity, and destruction in the earthly realm, refusing "cheap grace" and shallow resolutions. Christian discipleship is also led by the risen Christ to live in ways which explode old walls and barriers and build hopeful new forms of Christian community and just society between divided peoples.

Reconciliation and the quest for justice go hand in hand. There cannot be reconciliation if sin is not named, judged publicly, and condemned. In the face of oppression, to reject vengeance is a double injustice—to the afflicted, and to God's wrath against evil. What is crucial is how we appropriate vengeance: "*Do not take revenge. . . but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge, I will repay,' says the Lord*" (Romans 12:19). In Jesus' death, God judged all sins, abuses, and atrocities. God's forgiveness in Christ "while we were yet sinners" guides our pursuit of justice toward healing. One mark of holistic reconciliation is a commitment to pursuing justice which is primarily restorative rather than retributive, keeping open the hope for future common life between enemies and alienated peoples.

At the same time, we must heed Scripture's exhortation that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood." It is crucial to recognize an unseen, heavenly dimension to the quest for reconciliation in the world, a struggle against certain destructive forces and their ideologies, against "rulers," "powers of this dark world," "spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph 6:10-12). This calls for a deep life of prayer and discernment "in the Spirit" (Eph 6:18) at the center of Christian ministry amidst destructive conflict, and proclaims that reconciliation is ultimately a matter of God's power and victory.

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Difference itself, or differences, are not necessarily the problem calling for reconciliation. In many ways, diversity of peoples and cultures is a gift, such as another language opening up a new world to us, or another culture as a gift to enrich us. Often the problem is how the will to dominate exploits the differences. While God's mission of reconciliation does not obliterate human diversity, it does seek to bring friendship with God and neighbor in a way which transforms human cultures. We must carefully and locally discern where the gospel affirms culture, where it opposes, and where it encourages transformation. Christians are called to lives of hospitality, to open themselves to the stranger, the alien, the outcast, and the enemy. Such openness radically changes one's relationship to one's culture, and how one engages cultures in transforming ways.

The pursuit of reconciliation is an ongoing struggle. This quest should not be expected to end conflict in this world, but rather to transform it. True reconciliation and shalom is only in the eschaton, when all things are reconciled in Christ. While full reconciliation does not happen in this life, there is hope of substantial healing.

#### The Scope of Reconciliation

Every act seeking reconciliation, no matter how small, matters greatly to God. The scope of reconciliation runs from healing in one person's life, to two individuals overcoming animosities, to nations and long-divided peoples seeking to do so.

This work of becoming peacemakers between divided peoples is not secondary or optional, but is central to Christian mission along with planting churches and making disciples. Indeed, this costly work and the persecution it may bring bears witness to some who are otherwise unable to hear the gospel, and is at the core of making disciples who "obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:20).

This peacemaking work must be theologically grounded. In our emerging world, some are seeking a common ground of universality to provide meaning for "one world." Scripture testifies that God in Jesus Christ alone is the center of hope for the world's peace, and also that all of humanity is created in God's image. Following Jesus' definition of our neighbor (Luke 10:25-37), Christians are called to seek truthful engagement, peacefulness, and just community with all people—especially strangers, enemies, the poor, and those considered outcasts both ethnically and religiously.

At the same time, there is a qualitative difference between how reconciliation can be pursued outside versus inside community with Christ. The lordship

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of Christ claims the whole lives of persons and alienated groups, something no other authority including the state can demand. Christ offers a forgiveness and healing which no legal effort or human attempt can effect, and calls His disciples to a repentance and joy which is radical. Christ calls for far more than admitting guilt, but deep contrition, and a costliness and depth to healing broken relationships which goes far beyond tolerance or peaceful coexistence.

This witness begins at home. For the church to make peace, she herself must embody God's peace as a living sign of God's reconciled community. Baptism identifies believers as one church family, the body of Christ. Within their families, local churches, and the larger Christian family and our tragic divisions, Christians are called to a special witness of fidelity, sacrificial love, boundary crossing, and common prayer, seeking to heal conflicts following our Lord's words in Matthew 18:15-20. Wherever Christian leaders will not pray together and seek reconciliation, the church's mission is seriously harmed.

Biblical reconciliation also leads Christians beyond church circles to vigorously analyze, engage, and influence our local communities, nations, and world as witnesses for reconciliation and just community. Without sacrificing our Christian convictions, we should seek to partner creatively with people of good will to promote peace, including with people of other faiths. At the heart of the church's public engagement is a prophetic responsibility to call political authorities to account. Governing authorities are subject to the sovereign Lord for their conduct in ensuring just order and peaceful relations.

Certain legal, governmental, and national efforts can bring a cessation of hostilities and public pursuit of truth and just practices that the church alone cannot bring, and should advocate for. Christian partnership with such efforts can even elevate their outcomes in profound ways (as with South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the 1990's). Yet involvements with governmental efforts should not become the primary end or determinative sphere of the church's reconciling mission. They must be approached carefully, critically, and provisionally. The church must never compromise its identity or prophetic voice.

#### The Process of Reconciliation

Reconciliation is a long and costly process. Reconciliation is not a one-time event, or a linear journey of progress, but addresses multiple causes and relations that intermingle. Christians are called to be intentional and energetic in pursuing reconciliation, to go out of their way to love their neighbor who is difficult to love.

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This costly journey requires hope, nurtured in practices where we listen to God in worship, Scripture reading, and prayer. As we open to the pain of a broken world, we hear God's word that ultimately, in the eschaton, all things will be reconciled in Christ. In the meantime, we do our part. It is this hope that keeps the process moving forward.

In biblical understanding, no one party in a historic conflict—whether majority or minority, powerful or powerless, aggressor or afflicted—has the greater burden to take the first step toward reconciliation. The initiative for reconciliation begins wherever people find the courage to “lose themselves” and take ownership of pain: to no longer deny the conditions of trauma, to embrace the predicament of division, and to join the struggle for transformation by discovering the human face of the “other.”

Too often, we ask forgiveness of God without asking forgiveness of people. Following the example of Jesus' love for enemies and forgiveness for undeserving sinners, Christians are unconditionally called to seek within themselves for and to actively offer both heartfelt confession and genuine forgiveness. We do this without promise that our action will be received or reciprocated, or that justice will occur. Establishing a social atmosphere of relative safety and security is crucial for such actions to become widely possible, especially for those who have been marginalized.

While confession or forgiveness can come from one direction, reconciliation between divided peoples requires a risky, mutual journey of intentional relationship-building in which all groups are transformed and called to costly sacrifices. Reconcilers may be seen as traitors by their own people, and often become a bridge painfully walked on by both sides.

Both perpetrators of destructive conflict and bystanders who remain safely silent and privileged are called to accept responsibility for the condition of those wounded and afflicted. Their confession and sorrow opens a conversation about the conflict, and its genuineness is often tested in a willingness to take actions of reparation to counter the consequences of harm.

One further barrier to reconciliation is the residue of unresolved bitterness towards people and groups who have offended us. There is a need to face the residue and pain inflicted upon us as first steps toward reconciliation. Such courage cannot be forced. Yet many of history's most powerful reconciliation movements have been birthed among Christians of the historically marginalized and afflicted who proclaim Christ's triumph over evil, speak truth without demonizing the other side, pray for and engage their persecutors, seek forgiveness, and work for a future of just community and common life across the lines of division.

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#### Indications of Reconciliation

Only God knows what true reconciliation looks like, and the fullness when a countless multitude from every people and language will worship before the Lamb (Rev 7:9-10). Since reconciliation is an ongoing quest, the challenge is to point out where we are and to mark signs of hope. As reconciliation efforts move forward, conflict and resistance may often increase. Yet indications of reconciliation can become the very signs of God's kingdom breaking into this world. Christians should eagerly seek these indications of hope, from the church living the alternative, to practices of faithfulness, to changes in society.

**The church itself ought to be a key indication of hope, a living alternative, infusing and challenging the social sphere with a more radical vision of God's reconciliation.**

The church itself ought to be a key indication of hope, a living alternative, infusing and challenging the social sphere with a more radical vision of God's reconciliation. Examples of the church visibly living the alternative include: across long-divided lines, Christians form holy friendships, offer hospitality, share meals, pray and read Scripture together, celebrate holy communion, mutually confess and forgive, and forge common mission; unlearn habits of superiority, inferiority, and separation; celebrate together, and praise and worship God while engaging the world's pain and working towards *shalom*; free Christian institutions of discrimination and unjust use of resources; show remarkable joy amidst difficult work; marry across ethnic boundaries and divided lines, with blended families becoming a sign of a new community. At the heart of the church's alternative witness is the birth and perseverance of blended congregations where historically separated peoples share deep, common life.

Christians understand faithfulness as shaped by the cross, as a costly discipleship which re-defines effectiveness. Faithful practices of social engagement, even if they seem to result in no visible change, are also profound indications of hope amidst destructive conflicts. Examples are when Christians forgive persecutors; prophetically challenge unjust situations; aid afflicted neighbors; absorb evil without passing it on; witness to Christ amidst hostilities; offer hospitality across divides; continue seeking peace even when called traitors; suffer, or even die, rather than participate in destruction.

The church should also eagerly work for indications of reconciliation in society. These include: enemy leaders enter dialogue, violence stops, persecution is reduced, or hostilities cease; crimes and destruction by all sides are brought to light in a context of restorative justice; loved ones and the larger society learn

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the fate of victims; deeper truth around a painful shared history is appropriately and communally remembered; a state of tolerance is achieved where estranged groups agree to live peaceably; more just societal structures and practices emerge; children of hostile groups begin to go to school and play together; inter-marriage increases across historic lines of separation; neighborhoods become blended communities of shared, peaceful life.

## IV. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

### Placing Reconciliation at the Heart of Christian Mission in the 21st Century

The alienation of divided peoples and the suffering of the afflicted cries out from our world's brokenness, both open destructive conflicts and the more hidden. These conditions call the church to listen to the pain and to God, to lament the divisions, to repent and forgive where necessary, and to be transformed as agents of healing, Christian witness, and positive change. Thus we invite Christians everywhere to carefully consider the following recommendations:

- *1. To embrace biblically holistic reconciliation at the heart of the gospel and Christian life and mission in the 21st century, and as integral to evangelism and justice.* This involves intentionally embedding this vision into the mission of our churches and institutions, and understanding reconciliation as a long and costly process, requiring hope from God.
- *2. To humbly examine ourselves in the Christian community, seeking to identify and dismantle the escapist ideologies and practices which steer us away from reconciliation.* This is grounded in the hard work of biblical study, social and theological analysis, corporate discernment, conversation with communities we have been divided from, and prayer.
- *3. To cross the difficult divisions, barriers, and borders to talk face to face with and listen to those we are separated from.* This must involve seeking to talk and pray with Christians on the other side, listening to God and each other and praying for the unity Jesus prayed for (John 17:20-21). Christian pastors and leaders should be at the forefront of these boundary-crossing efforts.
- *4. To preach and teach radical discipleship with Christ and costly peacemaking as normative of Christian faith.* This involves presenting discipleship as a journey with God and people which, over time, transforms our desires and opens up radical new ways of loving God, neighbor, and enemies.
- *5. To refuse neutrality or silence in relationship to destructive conditions.* We urge the church to be vigilant to discern conditions of escalating dehumanization and injustice (such as those the church

## IV. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

world-wide failed to name in Rwanda leading to the 1994 genocide), and to engage church, civic, and political leaders as advocates without compromising our biblical convictions. It is a powerful form of protection for national voices of truth and justice when the church outside knows of them and speaks against threats to them, especially from countries of great international power.

- *6. To intentionally shape pastors and congregations able to live the alternative and work toward shalom.* These Christian leaders and communities will need to learn the practices of naming the conflicts and root causes for what they are; to serve, listen, and bear witness across divisions and barriers; to comfort and bind up the afflicted; to seek and celebrate signs of hope through both small and large gestures and measures; to support peacemaking efforts in the larger community; and to bring former strangers and alienated peoples into common worship, friendship, and mission under the lordship of Christ.
- *7. To joyfully and publicly proclaim in our Christian preaching and life God's victory and God's future of reconciling "all things" in Christ.* Amidst profound brokenness and pain, we must learn what it means to be bearers of hope, who faithfully bear witness to what is not seen, to the God who raised Jesus from the dead, defeating sin, evil, and the dark powers of this world.

## V. DEFINITIONS

### Five key concepts in the paper are understood as follows:

**Reconciliation:** Reconciliation is God's initiative, seeking "to reconcile to himself all things" through Christ (Col 1:19). Reconciliation is grounded in God restoring the world to God's intentions, the process of restoring the brokenness between people and God, within people, between people, and with God's created earth. Reconciliation between people is a mutual journey, requiring reciprocal participation. It includes a willingness to acknowledge wrongs done, extend forgiveness, and make restorative changes that help build trust so that truth and mercy, justice and peace dwell together.

**God's mission:** The Christian faith embraces reconciliation as the mission of God in our fallen and broken world, accomplished in the work of Jesus Christ, and entrusted to the church through people who participate by being transformed into ambassadors of reconciliation in a broken world.

**Destructive Conflict:** Conflict is a condition of our broken world after the Fall, and can become either constructive or destructive. Conflict is a disagreement between two or more parties—whether persons, institutions, people groups and communities, or nations—that is rooted in incompatible goals, positions, views, needs, or behaviors. Through either open destruction or quiet persistence of practices and structures, conflict becomes destructive by seriously damaging or dividing people and communities, thus prohibiting them from being neighbors who love one another. Destructive conflict thus becomes a condition of severely broken relationships between people, which becomes embodied and perpetuated historically, personally, and institutionally and employs instruments such as actions, words, ideologies, policies, systems, or weapons to cause physical, psychological, or social damage or division which furthers the world's brokenness. The consequences of destructive conflict range from severely damaged emotions and memories, to socially alienated people groups, to the inability of groups to flourish physically, socially, economically, and spiritually, to death of people and destruction of societies and of God's material creation.

**Shalom:** *Shalom* is a theological concept rooted in Scripture. The biblical witness speaks of *shalom* as a state of wholeness, well being, peacefulness, and flourishing of all that God has created in all of its dimensions and all of its relationships. *Shalom* includes right relationships of human beings with God, within themselves, with one other, and with the created world. *Shalom* is always rooted in justice and holiness.

## V. DEFINITIONS

**Restorative Justice:** Restorative justice is used in this paper as defined by Desmond Tutu in *No Future Without Forgiveness*, "the healing of breaches, the redressing of imbalances, the restoration of broken relationships, a seeking to rehabilitate both the victims and the perpetrators, who should be given the opportunity to be reintegrated into the community he has injured by his offense."

*Note:* All biblical quotations in the paper are from *Today's New International Version*

## VI. THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE PAPER

The following 47 people from 21 countries formed the Issue Group on Reconciliation which shaped the paper together. Their work culminated at the 2004 Forum on World Evangelization in Pattaya, Thailand. The paper was endorsed in its final form in January, 2005.

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### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> The following examples are factors that can be found in past trauma which shapes the present, and should be taken into account: genocide, civil war, or cycles of violence and retribution; entire peoples dispossessed of and forcibly removed from their land; slavery, colonial dominance, economic oppression and injustice, and legalized or culturally-embedded segregation and marginalization; long-standing animosities and the politics of dehumanization and demonization; neutrality and silence in the face of atrocities and social evils; the quiet persistence of structures and practices (economic, social, political) that privilege some groups and marginalize others; bitter church schisms; theories of racial and genetic superiority; lust for power and domination; and trusting in military might more than costly peacemaking and redemptive suffering.

<sup>2</sup> In South Africa, for example, the “homogeneous unit principle” was popular among those who supported apartheid. In India, church growth has often tacitly accepted caste divisions, while the same has happened in the U.S. regarding racial and ethnic divisions.

<sup>3</sup> For examples of the biblical understanding of shalom, see: Leviticus 26:4-6; Psalms 34:14; Isaiah 1:16-17, 32, 11:6-9a, 16-17; Jeremiah 29:10-14; Ezekiel 34:25-31; Amos 5:14-15; Micah 4:2-4. The New Testament carries this vision forward in the Greek concept of *eirēnē* (“peace”): Mark 4:37-29; Luke 4:16-21; Ephesians 2:12-14; Revelation 7:9, 21:1-4.

<sup>4</sup> Desmond Tutu. *No Future Without Forgiveness*. New York: Doubleday, 1999, p. 55.