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Reconciliation: An Imperative for Our Time

Reconciliation has become an increasingly underlined term in Christian theology. L. Gregory Jones' book *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* has been much discussed in the last year or so. And several books by ethicists such as Donald Shriver (*An Ethic for Enemies: Forgiveness in Politics*) as well as Pope John Paul II in his 1997 World Peace Day message have raised the issue of reconciliation in an international political context. And this month the Schocken Books division of Random House will release a new version of the Nazi hunter Simon Wisenthal's *The Sunflower* with commentaries by religious scholars from a variety of traditions (Christian, Muslim, Jewish and Buddhist), myself included, as well as prominent psychiatrists, human rights activists and survivors of the Holocaust and of contemporary atrocities such as Bosnia and Cambodia. In none of these writings, it needs to be underlined, is reconciliation ever equated with "forgetting what happened." Reconciliation is not a question of simply striking the "delete" button on a person's or people's memory bank. While it might involve a certain measure of "letting go," authentic reconciliation cannot occur until a certain measure of personal and group integration of the injury or atrocity is achieved. There is no "cheap" reconciliation any more than there is what the late Paul Tillich termed "cheap grace."

Our thematic essays this issue all attempt to contribute to this ongoing, important discussion regarding the nature of reconciliation both in a personal as well as a social context. Most were originally presented at the 1995 World Mission Institute sponsored by Catholic Theological Union, The Lutheran School of Theology and McCormick Theological Seminary. We are grateful to Professor Steven Bevans, S.V.D., director of the Global Studies Center supported by the three institutions, for providing them to us.

Founding NTR Editor Robert Schreiter, author of the widely discussed work *Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social*

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Order (Orbis 1992) examines what true reconciliation is and is not. He begins by defining what it is not: it is not overlooking or forgetting the violence or trauma that has taken place; it is not an alternative for the struggle for liberation; and it is not merely the arbitration of conflict. It is rather the work of God which helps restore victims' humanity and enables them to once more love others. It involves the "reordering of memories" so that "the past can no longer terrorize the present." It results in the victims becoming new people.

In our second contribution Fr. Michael Lapsley, an Anglican priest from New Zealand, who was a victim of a South African government mail bomb during the apartheid era, describes in poignant fashion his own personal journey of reconciliation. Fr. Lapsley illustrates through his personal story the slow path to reconciliation presented in more descriptive fashion by Professor Schreier.

The final three World Mission Institute papers focus on what the Scriptures may have to offer to the process of reconciliation. Kathleen Billman of the Lutheran School of Theology explores ways in which the biblical tradition of lament as found in such passages as Jeremiah 31:10-20 might provide insight and healing for those who have suffered injury, perhaps even violence. Professor James C. Okoye of Catholic Theological Union draws upon Mark 10:30 as the context for a reflection on the recent violence and suffering in Rwanda. And Dr. Margaret Mitchell explores the implications of 1 Corinthians for the complex dynamics of reconciliation.

Our final thematic essay is a joint effort coming out of the Roman Catholic-Reformed/Presbyterian dialogue by leading ecumenist Jeffrey Gros, F.S.C., and Harold H. Saunders who served for some twenty years on the staff of the National Security Council. Theirs is an analysis of how lay Christians might play an important role in the process of social and even at times political reconciliation. Their thesis is that human dimensions of conflict need to be given as much attention as the institutional and the governmental.

Two of our columns also pick up the theme of reconciliation. Professor Paul Wadell, a regular NTR contributor, does again what he does so very well: examine an issue through the lens of a contemporary novel, in this case Oscar Hijuelos' *Mr. Ives' Christmas*. And Professor Joseph A. Favazza of Rhodes College in Memphis, who is co-authoring a reconciliation sourcebook, looks at possibilities for liturgical moments of reconciliation in this so-called "postmodern" era. He concludes that in a postmodern Church, "sacramental reconciliation will survive as a ritual strategy only if its forms become as plural as the age in which we live."

Our one non-thematic contribution raises issues which closely relate to the issue of reconciliation. We welcome to our pages Professor Hans-George Ziebertz of the faculty of the Catholic Theological University in Utrecht, The Netherlands. Professor Ziebertz, a professor of practical theology, summarizes the criticisms that have caused divisions within Catholicism in recent years. He then presents social scientific data to show how current seminarians in three European countries (Germany, Holland, and Belgium) perceive the Church today. As the U.S. Catholic community pursues the *Common Ground* project launched by the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, the results of Professor Ziebertz's study can serve as valuable comparative data.