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A Theology of Reconciliation in Contexts of Conflict and Change

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Abstract[2]

Conflict is a reality not only in Africa (cf. Libya, Egypt, Uganda, etc.) but also in other parts of the world. Reconciliation is an on-going challenge and ethical imperative of the church. Within the political science and ethical debates of our day, Christian ethics still has a place. After discussing the reality of the revolutionary growth of Christianity in Africa and the statistical predictions of the situation by 2050, I argue that those who do not take religion in Africa seriously will be like those who missed the French Revolution. Christianity and its source documents currently play and will increasingly play an important role in ethical reflection. In the article I then discuss the strategy Paul employs to transform conflict in the congregational context of Corinth. In Paul's strategy, the dynamic relationship between identity, ethics and ethos played a significant role. Reconciliation is one of the main characteristics of Christianity, and nothing less than a missionary imperative for church people in the twenty-first century.

The Growth of Christianity in the global south

We live in radically changing times, amidst one of the most revolutionary eras in the history of the world (cf. global revolution, technological revolution, knowledge revolution). *A profound socio-religious revolution is taking place that is perhaps more significant than the transition between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.* According to sociologist Philip Jenkins (2011), the geography of Christianity is inevitably shifting from the Northern to the Southern Hemisphere, and that will have significant implications for politics, culture and religion.[3] Statistically, Jenkins and others argue that in 1900, almost 83% of Christians lived in Europe and North America. They predict that by 2050, 72% of all Christians will live in Africa, Asia and in Latin America.[4] If Jenkins[5] and others are correct, the stereotypical picture of a Christian being a fair skinned European will by 2050 have changed to the stereotypical picture of a Christian being a 'Ugandan, a Brazilian, or a Filipino.' By the year 2030 there could be more Catholic Christians in Africa than in Europe. Jenkins provides

the following table with the changing distribution of Christian believers from 1900-2050:[6]

Number of Christians (measured in millions)				
	1900	1970	2010	2050
Africa	10	143	493	1031
Latin America	62	270	544	655
Asia	22	96	352	601
Europe	381	492	588	530
North America	79	211	286	333
Oceania	5	18	28	38
Total	558	1230	2291	3188

Table: Adapted from Jenkins[7]

Most would agree that a religious transformation is taking place in one of the most revolutionary times of world history, and that religion will play an important role in the future of world politics and culture. Jenkins' first edition appeared just after 11 September 2001, in which his prediction of the role of religion in world politics became clear. We agree with him that a myopic attitude towards the role of religion in world politics will be 'on a par with a review of the eighteenth century that managed to miss the French Revolution.'[8] We have to take the role of religion seriously, and along with that the interpretation of the source documents of Christianity, since they will play an important role in the formation of religious life, just as they now do in ethical reflection. Those who want to work towards reconciliation will have to focus on the investigation and reception of a theology of reconciliation based on the holy scriptures of all religions, but in our case, it will be the Bible.

Conflict and reconciliation in changing times

Violence and conflict is an unfortunate reality of our day and age, and especially in my home country South Africa. More than 150,000 people have been murdered in South Africa since 2001. According to statistical indices that measure the amount of violence in different countries, South Africa finds itself in the 99th place out of 120 countries.[9] According to the statistics, South Africa compares to countries that are experiencing war.[10] Some other statistical indices reveal that South Africa is one of the most unsafe countries in the world, coming

45th out of the 48 countries that were measured. In fact, South Africa is one of the most unsafe countries south of the Sahara. Van der Watt and Kok are therefore correct that South Africans are daily confronted with the reality of violence and conflict and that this poses tremendous challenges to Christians and non-Christians alike.[11]

In contexts of change and transition, traditional ways of thinking no longer work. New patterns and principles need to be developed. Periods of transition are very often characterized by uncertainty and conflict. One of the challenges in such times is to reframe our basic assumptions in order to manage conflict and the process of reconciliation.

Since 1994 South Africa inevitably spiralled into a sea of change. South Africans had to reconstruct their mindset against the background of a rapidly changing world. All processes of change follow certain broad patterns. Currently South Africans are still navigating their way and searching for a new identity. Conflict and moral dilemmas are also a reality in South Africa. The challenge of restoration and reconciliation is still a reality, especially in our day and age.

In the Dutch Reformed Church in which I am a leader, this phenomenon and its dynamics are clearly seen and experienced. Many church leaders seem to have got lost in the transition. Numerous books have appeared in recent years reflecting this experience of uncertainty and change and the need for discernment in leadership and management of change and reconciliation.[12] Recently (2010) Roxburgh stresses the need to develop new patterns for mission and new skills for leading in times of transition.[13] In 2007 Nelus Niemandt stressed the fact that the mainline churches in South Africa are experiencing tremendous change and that their leaders are often not able to steer their way through this process of change.[14] Recently (2010) Naude[15] argued in favour of a reconciliation between traditional white and black churches in South Africa that has still not taken place more than sixteen years after the end of apartheid. In our context in South Africa this is a sensitive matter and a challenge for which we need thoroughly grounded research, especially from those who specialise in studying the source documents of Christianity.

In times of radical and discontinuous change there is a resurgence of global ideological conflicts. It is very interesting to note that conflict is increasing in

exactly those places where Christianity is believed to be growing in Jenkins's future—places like Nigeria, Sudan and Indonesia.[16] In contexts of conflict, reconciliation is essential. I predict that the theme of healing, restoration and reconciliation will become a dominant one in Jenkins' future of Christianity in the global South, not only because it will be a socio-religious need, but also because of the fact that it belongs to the essence of the Christian Gospel.

Reconciling Mission

The source documents of Christianity still play an important role in the ethical reflection in society, especially in (South) Africa, Latin America and in an increasing way also in Asia. These source documents and their reception need to be studied in order to understand the socio-cultural dynamics of both Western and emerging African societies. Some of the leading scholars in South Africa, like Jan van der Watt, who was named one of the most influential scholars in the history of the University of Pretoria, is of the opinion that the New Testament, and ethics in particular, will play an increasing role in future questions concerning the management of diversity, conflict and reconciliation.[17]

Recently the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung in Germany also acknowledged the need for efforts to enhance interreligious and intercultural dialogue and the process of reconciliation in Africa. In its recent European and International Cooperation report, it referred *inter alia* to one of the focus areas of the African integration efforts and reform initiatives, 'Political dialogue and crisis prevention' in which intercultural and interreligious dialogue was emphasised as strategic focus area (cf. Konrad Adenauer Stiftung Feb 2012).[18] Elsewhere in the European world reconciliation has also played an important role in the last few years. In 2006, the General Assembly of the United Nations proclaimed the year 2009 as the International Year of Reconciliation (cf. resolution 61/17).[19]

In the area of mission, the theme of reconciliation received attention a few years ago in a book by Kim with the title *Reconciling Mission: The Ministry of Healing and Reconciliation in the Church Worldwide.*[20] More recently, Paul Isaak[21] (2011) wrote an article in which he addresses the missional church and its praxis. In his article Isaak discusses 'what God in Jesus Christ together with the Holy Spirit is doing in the world to bring about healing, reconciliation, wholeness, liberation and salvation.' For Isaacs, a missional church should be

especially interested in God's missional praxis, which he sees as being focussed on healing and reconciliation that entails 'serving, healing and reconciling a wounded and broken humanity.'[22] Bevans and Schroeder[23] agree that reconciliation is the most compelling way to express the essential meaning of the Christian message in our day and age.

Robert Schreiter[24] [25] postulated that mission as healing and reconciliation is taking the place of previous mission paradigms, especially within the current global situation of conflict and change in which we find ourselves.[26] [27] Schreiter (2004) gives a number of reasons why the need for healing and reconciliation is one of the greatest needs in the current global environment, which is also relevant for the context of Africa:[28]

1. There is a need for reconstruction and development of specific societies after long periods of totalitarian domination;
2. There is a need on the side of previous communistic regimes to 're-imagine' themselves in the context of economic and social globalisation and the development of ethnicity that had been under pressure many decades;
3. Worldwide a growing awareness is developing about the damage and brokenness that resulted from the process of colonisation, and the need for healing and restoration from these stories of brokenness, pain and humiliation (compare South Africa; Australia; New Zealand; and Zimbabwe);
4. There is the challenge of peaceful unity in the context of a growing global cultural context, in the midst of a diversity of cultures that have to live and work together;
5. In the South African context we find a growing awareness of healing and reconciliation, especially when remembering the worldwide focus on the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission 'after apartheid and the need for healing of the continent from the ravages of poverty, civil wars and pandemics such as HIV/AIDS'[29];
6. The growing occurrence of fundamentalistic faith groups associated with violence (see e.g. 11 September 2001; The American-Iraq war);
7. In terms of predicting the future, Schreiter says that conflict between the different age groups and generations might increase. Schreiter argues that people live longer and that fewer children are being born—especially in Europe—and that at present there is conflict surrounding pension funds. He

also draws attention to the reality of violence in Africa, especially surrounding the younger generation, which is becoming ever more distressing.

As a board member of Kempbisa, an organization striving for the transformation of the city through unity in the church over cultural and denominational boundaries, I often had dealings with church leaders and congregants from Tembisa—a black suburb. These encounters made it clear to me that there is a growing need for cooperation across cultural and denominational boundaries. As a part of Kempbisa's activities, yearly Healing and Reconciliation workshops are organised and held in an attempt to address the pain and hurt of the past. In a recent international conference and think tank on how to facilitate business led by the American organisation *Equip* in 2006, we identified specific 'Giants' that stand in the way of unity, healing, and reconciliation in South Africa. One of these giants is the pain that originates from South Africa's past. In the collective South African psyche, remnants of the pain and discomfort caused by the past are still to be found; meaning that a very long road to healing must still be walked upon before we can really become a nation with unity in the midst of diversity. Recent doctoral studies at the University of Pretoria in South Africa pointed out that the process of healing and reconciliation is far from completed, and should be seen as an ongoing process. Boshoff[30] conducted an empirical study on grief and loss as experienced by members of the Dutch Reformed church after the fall of apartheid in 1994. In his study he employed the research model of G. Heitink[31] to generate new practical theological insights and twelve strategic suggestions for how congregations could make collective mourning part of an on-going healing process towards a rediscovered missional identity. It is interesting to note that in this empirical study missional ecclesiology is at stake when congregations do not meaningfully engage with the process of restoration after significant change and loss have occurred. Healing and restoration leads to a rediscovery of missionary ecclesiology. In this recent study, from within the field of practical theology, once again we see the relationship between mission and restoration with a connotation to reconciliation. *The Gospel message is in essence a message of restoration and reconciliation that forms an essential dimension of what it means to be a missional church.*

Thus, in my opinion, the theme of healing, restoration and reconciliation is a very relevant topic for our current context.

Mission and Ethics in Missiology and Religious Studies?

Renaissance of missional ecclesiology

In a recent study, Nelus Niemandt,[32] my colleague and professor of Missiology and Religious Studies at the University of Pretoria and Moderator/President of the Dutch Reformed Church, argued that studies in missional ecclesiology has emerged as one the most significant trends in mission studies in the last decade or so (cf. Drønen;[33] McNeal[34]). In his paper he refers to the importance in missiological studies of asking what kind of missional theology forms and fuels the renewed interest in missional ecclesiology. In my opinion it is also important for missiologists to turn with fresh perspectives to the New Testament and early Christian writings to answer some of the questions related to the rediscovery of missionary ecclesiology. In his article, Niemandt refers to the significant ecumenical events in 2010 (Edinburgh 2010, World Community of Reformed Churches in Grand Rapids and Lausanne III in Cape Town) and the way in which the theme of missional ecclesiology played an important role at these conferences. According to Niemandt there are several factors that led to the renewed interest in missional ecclesiology with a focus on reconciliation:[35]

- All over Europe and North America and even South Africa, mainline churches are declining rapidly. This reality challenges the church to rethink fresh expressions of missional ecclesiology in a changing context of threatening marginalization and irrelevance;[36]

- In Africa, the ironic situation exists that while traditional mainline churches are rapidly declining, African independent charismatic churches are growing by the day. Metaphorically, and even literally, it could be said that the face of Christianity is changing.[37] This, according to Niemandt,[38] raises the issue of missional ecclesiology within the context of new cultural expressions.[39]

- Very significant for the renewed interest in missional ecclesiology is the impact of major ecumenical events during the last few years. From 2-6 June 2010 for instance, the *Centennial World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh* took place, celebrating the important 1910 meeting in that city. During this conference missional ecclesiological issues were prominent. Furthermore, from 18-26 June 2010, the *Uniting General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC)* took place in Grand Rapids, and from 16-25 October 2010 there was the *Third Lausanne*

Congress (Lausanne III) on World Evangelization in Cape Town. At all these meetings, the matter of missional ecclesiology played an important role.[40]

Here I will briefly refer to the 'Common Call' (quoted by Niemandt[41]) of the Edinburgh 2010 report, and how it relates to the questions of mission, ethics and reconciliation that are investigated in his report.

Hearing the call of Jesus to make disciples of all people—poor, wealthy, marginalised, ignored, powerful, living with disability, young, and old—we are called as communities of faith to mission from everywhere to everywhere. We are called to find practical ways to live as members of One Body in full awareness that God resists the proud, Christ welcomes and empowers the poor and afflicted, and the power of the Holy Spirit is manifested in our vulnerability.

In my opinion the call to live *as communities of faith*, with the purpose *of mission*, implies a holistic and integrated approach, involving the totality of a person's being and doing. In ancient Biblical thinking, action was seen as a reflection of identity.[42] What we do is nothing less than the way we live out our identity in concrete contexts, expressing our group ethos. Fundamental to this way of life is an attitude and constant awareness of the need for humility and the belief that God is the protector and restorer of the poor and afflicted. Naturally, those who are marginalized, are by implication 'judged according to the flesh' (cf. 2 Cor 5:16). Inherent to all groups and in the nature of group identity formation belongs the phenomenon of labelling and distinguishing between the in-group and out-group.[43] In order to focus attention on the fundamental anthropological unity of all people, the report names binary opposites, in particular, the poor *versus* the wealthy, the disabled, marginalised and ignored *versus* the powerful, and the young *versus* the old. The call to 'live as members of One Body' is very clearly in tension with the implicit ethical resistance of pride towards an equally implicit exhortation to humility, for the sake of unity (One Body). In my opinion the report reveals the underlying problem of discord that threatens the unity of the Body of Christ and inhibits the process of reconciliation. This need for ecclesiological and ecumenical unity is also an expression of a particular segment of the missiological movement and represents the ideology of its members.[44] The structure of the discourse also creates the semantic associations and connotations of the blessed and the not-blessed, and in which way people should behave to be counted as those who

are blessed. Those who are proud do damage to the unity of the Body, and the Spirit cannot manifest itself in such a person or context. In fact, God the Holy Spirit, the report states, 'resists' such a person(s). Resisting implies withholding of God's blessings. Therefore, the logical flow of the argument is that those who are humble will not experience the resistance of the Holy Spirit but will experience the 'power of the Spirit,' which will be 'manifested' in their (humble) 'vulnerability.' Only in and through the humble can God the Holy Spirit do great things.

In this small extract and analysis of the report one can see a number of significant theological aspects. One such aspect is the 'Unity of the Body' and the question how this should be manifested and expressed. The report also deals with the implicit ethical requirement of humility which presupposes a certain understanding of one's identity that aligns itself with the self-giving life of Christ, although that is not explicitly stated. It further implies the ethos of regard for others as its underlying ethical principle. The question however, is how regard for others and unity should be expressed and how diversity should be accommodated. It is interesting, and I will illustrate it in my forthcoming book,[45] that values like 'being part of one body,' regard for others or humility are not unique to Christians. They frequently occurred in the philosophical texts of the pagan moral philosophers and contemporaries of Paul.[46] The uniqueness and distinctiveness of the Christian ethos will only be discovered when it is compared to the writings of philosophers who were popular in ancient times.[47]Then we will find out what elements and underlying motives played the most important role in the discourse of early Christian writers like Paul.

The Lausanne III meeting in Cape Town 2010 echoes the same sentiments about missional ecclesiology discussed above:[48]

> We must love all that God has chosen to bless, which includes all cultures. We long to see the gospel embodied and embedded in all cultures, redeeming them from within so that they may display the glory of God and the radiant fullness of Christ. We look forward to the wealth, glory and splendour of all cultures being brought into the city of God—redeemed and purged of all sin, enriching the new creation.

Clearly these sentiments echo New Testament values. Although the major missiological conferences in 2010 focussed on the missional ecclesiological aspect of the Church, in rhythm with the *missio Dei,* the essential implication of the ethical dimension did not receive any attention. In my opinion, one cannot speak of mission without speaking of identity transformation, ethics and ethos. Here I agree with Yale Divinity Scholar of Biblical Studies Wayne Meeks that:

> Early Christianity was a movement of converts. That is, the Christians thought of themselves as people who had turned their lives around, from one state to another profoundly better. Turning around (Greek *epistrophe,* Latin *conversio*) is a metaphor that could have broad and multiple consequences for the way the early Christians perceived their moral possibilities and obligations. [T]hus, our earliest extant Christian writing [that is 1 Thess] wants to root the moral sensibilities of its readers in their consciousness of having turned around.[49]

Elsewhere Meeks[50] argues that making community means making morals. Therefore, when speaking about the missionary dynamics of the early church, one needs to also discuss the dynamics of ethics—that is, the dynamic relationship between mission and ethics. Some Missiologists like Wright[51] would agree: 'Ethics is the purpose of election and the basis of mission.'

Niemandt points out that in the major conferences in 2010, and specifically in Lausanne III (2010), the importance of ethics in mission was also accentuated and deemed as being an important aspect to be discussed in future.[52] It seems that these trends all point to the fact that a thorough investigation into the dynamic relationship between mission and ethics represents a need in the field of missiology/religious studies against the background of recent developments.

Nelus Niemandt has recently pointed out that at the latest World Council of Churches meeting, the theme of healing and reconciliation played a dominant role in theological reflection. As Christians, we are called to be a certain kind of people characterised by, and taken up in the character of God's people participating in the *missio Dei*. We are called to be agents of healing, restoration and reconciliation. In fact, it should be an integrated ethics based on a certain kind of identity understanding. In the following section I will investigate a

theology of reconciliation and discuss Paul's reconciling intervention strategy in a context of conflict and change with specific reference to 1 Corinthians.

New Testament Perspectives on developing a theology of reconciliation

The reality of conflict in the early church

I have recently argued elsewhere that conflict was a reality in the early church and that we should not romanticise the first urban Christians.[53] The early Christian movement was in a process of transition and change. In changing times, conflict often appears as group formation and identity construction takes place. In the early church, Peter and Paul differed from one another with regard to food laws and how pagans could become part of the Christ-following group (cf. Gal 2, Acts 15), if at all. We should also not over-idealise Paul's strategies for conflict resolution, since we know at least of one situation in which Paul and Barnabas had a sharp disagreement and departed ways (cf. Acts 15:36-41). On the other hand, Paul was also a spiritual man and at other times he demonstrated profound wisdom and a strategy for conflict intervention. One of the best examples of this is certainly Paul's first letter to the Corinthian congregation.

According to the ancient Historian Strabo, Corinth was a highly stratified society in Paul's day in which status and the competition for honours played an important role.[54] Paul's church members were not only saints, but also people who lived in the secular context of Corinth and brought many of their worldly problems into the church. It seems that the ethos of everyday life spilled over in the way the fellow believers treated each other—that is, they solved their problems in the same way that the 'world' would do it. For example, some members took other members to court (cf. 1 Cor).

I[55] have also illustrated that the social class difference was one of the reasons for the factionalism in the church that related to the extra-ecclesial status of the believers and the problems that caused within the context of the faith community.[56] One example is that the rich members, aware of their status, treated the poor members of the church in the normal secular way by pushing them to the margins.

As a group in the process of formation and maintenance, the Corinthian congregation was also in a transition period, and in changing times, conflict is often a given sociological reality. One of the reasons that Paul, as a reconciling leader, wrote the first letter to the Corinthians, was so that the believers might be reconciled with one another.

Paul's strategy and theology of reconciliation in Corinth

In 1 Corinthians 1:11 Paul states that he is aware of divisions in the congregation because it had been reported to him by Chloe's people that there were rivalries among the members of the congregation that had led to schism. In the immediate context (1 Cor 1:10), Paul exhorts the readers or listeners as follows:

> I urge you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,
> that all of you agree in what you say,
> and that there be no divisions among you,
> but that you be united in the same mind and in the same purpose.[57]

Paul urged the members actively to focus on unity and the concord that will be found first of all in the realization that their social-theological unity must bind them together in one body (cf. 1 Cor 12), and that the group should be united in a collective focus and purpose. What is very striking in Paul's intervention strategy is that he tries to objectify the conflict and analyse the disunity by drawing the attention of the community of faith to a cognitive framework of corporate solidarity that transcends each particular group and unites them in a common purpose that they all share. This purpose transcends the particularity of time and factions in any given situation. The purpose Paul is alluding to relates to the bigger narrative that the members of the congregation have been taken up into—namely that of God's reconciling mission and His purpose for the world. The will of God is reconciliation and unity. Believers are subject to a narrative that transcends the individual or factious groups and that can shape the identity and the ethos of the believers as a group with a distinct purpose and destiny that will have restorative implications for the world.

In Paul's vision for unity and reconciliation, and in his attempt to address factionalism in the Corinthian congregation, he would in all cases ground his practical solution in a *construction of theological identity* based on a fundamental theological unity. Paul focuses on corporate solidarity and unity

by urging the congregation to be reconciled to their brothers and sisters in times of conflict by means of ethical reciprocity and regard for others, a matter in which he also sets an example. It is only in regard for others and self-sacrificial acts of love that conflict can be transcended and restorative unity be attained. One example is when Paul urged the 'stronger' members in the Corinthian congregation who did not see any problem with eating meat offered to an idol (cf. 1 Cor 8) that they should rather refrain from doing so if it were to have negative effects on the faith of the 'weaker' believers. This is a clear example of regard for others for the sake of unity and the health of the group. Paul was especially concerned with the maintenance and growth of his congregations and with the social and ethical boundaries between the community of faith and the 'world.' It is very interesting to see how he would always steer the believers in the direction of reconciliation, and that he always reminded them of the following very important principles:

1. To realize the indicative of God's reconciling mission to the world (1 Cor 1:1-9; 8:6)
2. To realize that they are partakers or agents of God's restorative mission (1 Cor 3:9, 16)
3. To realize the importance of unity (1 Cor 1:10)
4. To realize the duty of other regard (1 Cor 8:9-13; 10:24)
5. To keep the other or outsider always in consideration (1 Cor 10:33-11:1)

Paul's ethics of reconciliation developed from his theology. In his mind there should not be divisions or unhealthy conflict between Christians because he had a very particular view of God's reconciling mission to the world, one in which believers were called into a new family. In ancient times a family had a paterfamilias, and it was the responsibility of every family member to act in a way that pleased the paterfamilias and the values of the group. Individuality and self-regard had to make room for solidarity and regard for others. In addressing the discord in the Corinthian congregation, Paul as reconciling leader reminded them in the first place of their corporate identity as children in the same family (1 Cor 1:10- cf. ἀδελφοί [brothers]), with the implication that their conduct should be aligned in such a way that it brings honour to the head of the household (1 Cor 1:10- διὰ τοῦ ὀνόματος τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ [in/through the name of the Lord…]). In the world of the early Christians children had to obey their parents and conduct themselves in a way that reflected the

values and ethos of the group they belonged to.[58] Paul accordingly reminded the Corinthian believers of their unique ethos as Christ-followers, a family in which unity, concord and regard for others played a significant role. They were a group that remembered and imitated the ethos of their Lord (cf. 2 Cor 5:18-20; Phil 2:5-10 - Τοῦτο φρονεῖτε ἐν ὑμῖν ὃ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ [The same way of thinking should be in you that is in Jesus Christ]).[59]

Sensitivity and regard for others were not limited to behaviour towards insiders, but extended to include sensitivity towards outsiders as well. In 1 Corinthians 10:30-33 Paul states:

> 30 If I partake thankfully, why am I reviled for that over which I give thanks? 31 So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God. 32 Avoid giving offense, whether to Jews or Greeks or the church of God, 33 just as I try to please everyone in every way, not seeking my own benefit but that of the many, with the purpose that they may be saved.[60]

In the following verse (1 Cor 11:1), he urges believers to be imitators of him as he is an imitator of Christ, and to hold fast to the essential teachings that had been delivered to them and that derived from the teaching of Christ. Note carefully that the sensitivity towards outsiders that Paul is referring to is to be seen against the background of the *missio Dei*—God's vision for reconciliation. Paul explicitly expresses this idea in 2 Corinthians 5:18-20:

> [But] All things are from God, He who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 [against the background of the fact], that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses, and having entrusted to us the word/message of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors on behalf of Christ, as though God were urging by us: we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

In this section the hierarchy of values and implicit structure of Paul's thought and world-view becomes clear:
- God is the *primary subject* of the verb initiating the vision of reconciliation,
- Christ is God's *initial sent agent* of reconciliation

- Believers are *empowered* by God in and through Christ to become like ambassadors with a mission for reconciling the world with God.

In 1 Corinthians, in the context of conflict and division, Paul employs several metaphors to argue for the sake of reconciliation, for instance that of an alternative kinship family and household (1 Cor 1:1, 10, 26; 2:1; 3:1; 4:6; 5:11; 6:5; 10:1;11:33; 12:1; 14:6, 26, 39; 15:1, 6, 50, 58; 16:11, 15-20; etc.), a body (1 Cor 6; 10:16-17; 12:27-28; 15:35-46) and a building (cf. 1 Cor 3:9-14; 8:1, 10; 10:23; 14:3-5, 12, 17, 26).[61] All these metaphors establish the concepts of unity and concord that has as its origin the missional plan of God who reconciled the world to himself through Christ, who died and was raised, and who called (cf. ἐκλήθητε in 1 Cor 1:10) and empowered believers to continue the reconciling mission of God.[62] Believers are called into *participatio Christi* and the missional plan of God—being taken up into the story and plan of God with the world and his people in this world.[63] Being called into this family means being set apart as the 'holy people of God' (ἡγιασμένοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, κλητοῖς ἁγίοις 1 Cor 1:2 [to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, those who are called to be saints]), creating a framework of communal 'ethnic' identity in Christ that transcends ethnic or any other social, economic or class barriers. Paul was their spiritual father, establishing kinship bonds and a certain way of conduct in line with the ethos he proclaims (1 Cor 4:14-17). Both Hanson[64] and Meeks[65] are correct when they observe that in 1 Corinthians and in Paul's other writings, believers constitute a theoretical kinship group and that Paul outlines the identity and the ethos of the group in a way that is very typical of ancient kinship norms, like obedience to the *paterfamilias*, in-group reciprocity, concern for the group's honour and shame and the needs of the group that were seen as more important than that of the individual.[66] [67]

Conclusion

We are called to be agents of healing, restoration and reconciliation. Reconciliation is one of the main characteristics of Christianity, and is nothing less than a missionary imperative for church people in the twenty-first century. The motivation for it should emerge out of a correct understanding of our identity. The New Testament writers focus on the fact that believers were birthed into a new family—that of a reconciling God and his people who are on the same reconciling mission. As members of this family we take the mission of reconciliation upon ourselves as agents of the *missio Dei*. In times of conflict

and change Christians should be the first to promote healing, restoration and reconciliation. These values belong to the heart of the Gospel of Christ. A Christian theology of reconciliation should be characterized by understanding our identity as *agents of the reconciling* missio Dei *within the* alternative family of God, expressed in Christ-following humility and regard for others. Christians are called to show sensitivity towards outsiders, so that they too might be reconciled to God (cf. 1 Cor 10:31-11:1). Contexts of conflict and change create ideal opportunities for Christ's followers to rediscover, embody and express the reconciling mission of God. The future of Christianity is in *our hands*. May we rise up as agents of reconciliation, transforming contexts of conflict in a positive way, and in so doing take part in restorative acts of healing and restoration for the sake of the Gospel of peace.

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ENDNOTES
1. Jacobus (Kobus) Kok is associate professor of New Testament studies at the University of Pretoria, and specializes in the dynamic relationship between mission and ethics in the New Testament and Reconciling leadership in contexts of conflict and change.
2. Some information in this article appeared in an academic journal, especially some perspectives on Paul [cf. J. Kok, "Mission and Ethics in 1 Corinthians: Reconciliation, corporate solidarity and other-regard as missionary strategy in Paul" in HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies 68(1), Art. #1222, 11 pages. http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v68i1.1222], and will also feature in my forthcoming book J. Kok, *The dynamic relationship between mission and ethics in Paul* (Tubingen: Vandenhoeck&RuprechtUnipress, 2013 [forthcoming]). These perspectives were developed from a research project on the dynamic relationship between mission and ethics in the New Testament and Early Christianity (project time 2009-2016) in the department of New Testament Studies at the University of Pretoria in South Africa.
3. P. Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011 [Kindle edition]).
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., pp. ad loc 91/8542.
6. Ibid.

7. Ibid., pp. 2.

8. Ibid., pp. ad loc 91/8542.

9. J. G. Van der Watt & J. Kok, "Violence in a Gospel of love," in P. G. R. de Villiers & J. W. van Henten, *Coping with Violence in the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 151-183, here pp. 151.

10. Cf. http://www.moibrahimfoundation.org/en/section/the-ibrahim-index. as well as Ibid., pp. 151.

11. Ibid.

12. Since the publication of D. J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), Missiology has thought in terms of two paradigms: mission as enculturation, deliverance/liberation, proclamation, dialogue, and etcetera. According to K. Kim, *Reconciling Mission: The Ministry of Healing and Reconciliation in the Church Worldwide* (ISPCK, 2005), pp. xv, Robert Schreiter recently argued that mission as healing and reconciliation is taking the place of previous mission paradigms very quickly, especially within the current global situation in which we find ourselves.

13. A. Roxburgh, *Missional Map-making: Skills for leading in times of transition* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass).

14. C. J. P. Niemandt, *Nuwe Drome vir Nuwe Werklikhede: Geloofsgemeenskappe in pas met 'n postmoderne wêreld*" [New Dreams for New Realities: Communities of Faith in step with a postmodern world] (Wellington: Lux Verbi, 2007).

15. P. J. Naude, *Neither Calendar nor Clock: Perspectives on the Belhar Confession* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

16. Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, pp. ad loc108/8542.

17. J. G. Van der Watt, *Identity, Ethics and Ethos in the New Testament* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), pp. 9.

18. Cf. www.kas.de/wf/en71.4783/ accessed on 8 February 2012.

19. P. J. Isaak, 'God's mission as praxis for healing and reconciliation,' *International Review of Mission* 2011 (100.2) (393), pp.331.

20. K. Kim, *Reconciling Mission: The Ministry of Healing and Reconciliation in the Church Worldwide* (ISPCK, 2005), pp. xv.

21. Isaak, 'God's mission as praxis for healing and reconciliation,' pp. 323-336.

22. Isaak, 'God's mission as praxis for healing and reconciliation,' pp. 323.

23. S. B. Bevans & R. Schroeder, *Constants in context: A theology of mission today* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004), pp. 390.

24. R. J. Schreiter, *Reconciliation: Mission and ministry in a changing social order* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1992), pp. 71.

25. R. J. Schreiter, *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality and strategies* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1998), pp. 13.

26. Kim, *Reconciling Mission*, pp. xv.

27. Cf. Also J. Kok, *Siekte en Gebrokenheid teenoor Genesing en Restourasie in Johannes* [Sickness and Brokeness versus Healing and Retsoration in John] (University of Pretoria: UPeTD, 2008), pp. 33.

28. Ibid.

29. Kim, *Reconciling Mission*, pp. xvi.

30. See W. S. Boshoff, *Gemeentebou en die Begeleiding van Rouprosesse in 'n Konteks van omvattendeVerandering* [Building the local Church and the guidance of processes of grief in a context of radical change] (Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, Department of Practical Theology, University of Pretoria, UPeTD, 2011).

31. G. Heitink, *PraktischeTheologie: Geschiedenis, Theorie, Handelingsvelden*[Practical Theology: History, TheoryandPractices](Kampen: Kok, 1993).

32. C. J. P. Niemandt, "Trends in Missional ecclesiology" in J. Kok & T. Nicklas (eds.), *Sensitivity to Outsiders: Exploring the Dynamic Relationship between Mission and Ethics*(Tübingen: MohrSiebeck, WUNT II, 2013 [forthcoming]).

33. T. S. Drønen, 'What are missiologists studying and for what purposes?' Paper delivered at the Nordic Institute for Missiology and Ecumenism (NIME), 24-27 May 2011, pp. 4 as referred to by C. J. P. Niemandt, "Trends in Missional ecclesiology" in J. Kok & T. Nicklas (eds.), op. cit.

34. R. McNeal, *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009).

35. Niemandt, "Trends in Missional Ecclesiology" in J. Kok & T. Nicklas (eds.), op. cit.

36. C. Van Gelder, *TheMinistry of the Missional Church. A communityled by theSpirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), pp. 16.

37. T. M. Johnson & K. R. Ross, *The Atlas of Global Christianity: Its Findings*. Paper delivered on Theme 7 at Edinburgh 2010, June 2010. <http://www.edinburgh2010.org/en/resources/papersdocuments.html> (2 March 2011) referred to Niemandt, "Trends in Missional Ecclesiology" in J. Kok & T. Nicklas (eds.), op. cit.

38. Niemandt, "Trends in Missional Ecclesiology" in J. Kok & T. Nicklas (eds.), op. cit.

39. One of the study themes for Edinburgh 2010 was indeed *Mission and Unity—Ecclesiology and Mission* (Balia & Kim 2010).

40. Niemandt, "Trends in Missional ecclesiology" in J. Kok & T. Nicklas (eds.), op. cit.

41. Niemandt, "Trends in Missional ecclesiology" in J. Kok & T. Nicklas (eds.), op. cit.

42. J. Kok & E. Van Eck (eds), *Unlocking the World of Jesus* (Pretoria, Biblaridion, 2011).

43. D. G. Horrell, *Solidarity and difference: A contemporary reading of Paul's ethics* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), pp. 116-121; 133-163.

44. Here the term "ideology" is not used in a negative sense but in neutral way, referring to a "form of social cognition shared by social groups" (cf. T. A. Van Dijk, 1998, *Ideology: A multidisciplinary approach* [London: Sage Publications]). On the one hand the ideology of a group functions as the basis of the discourses of the group, but also determines its social representation and ethos—in other words the way the group decides to present itself in their way of looking and doing to the outside world. Within the discourse of ideology there is an inherent hierarchy of social values—some being more important than others, some being a prerequisite for others. In the report for instance, reconciliation and unity cannot be expressed if there is not an awareness of humility. Humility is a prerequisite for unity and regard for others.

45. J. Kok & T. Nicklas (eds.), op. cit.

46. Cf. A. J. Malherbe, *Paul and the Popular Philosophers* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1986) [originally published in 1986 with Fortress Press; Kindle Books electronic version 2006 used here), pp. ad loc 709.

47. Although Paul was indebted to pagan philosophers and their ideas, which clearly influenced him, he did not merely repeat them. He made use of their insights, but significantly adapted them within the framework of his Christ-following faith. Tertullian was one of the early church fathers who acknowledged the parallel between Paul and the popular philosophers, but he wanted to accentuate the uniqueness and distinctiveness of the Christian faith, and claimed that Athens has nothing to do with Jerusalem. Cf. A. J. Malherbe, *Paul and the Popular Philosophers*, pp. ad loc 69 of 3166.

48. Niemandt, "Trends in Missional ecclesiology" in J. Kok & T. Nicklas (eds.), op. cit.

49. W. A. Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 18.

50. Ibid.

51. C. J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God's people. A Biblical theology of mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), pp. 93.

52. Niemandt, "Trends in Missional ecclesiology" in J. Kok & T. Nicklas (eds.), op. cit.

53. J. Kok, "Mission and Ethics in 1 Corinthians," art. cit.

54. A. D. Clarke, *Called to Serve: A Pauline Theology of Church Leadership* (London: T&T Clark, 2008). A. D. Clarke, *Secular and Christian leadership in Corinth: A Socio-historical and exegetical study of 1 Corinthians 1-6* (Eugene, Oregon: Paternoster Biblical Monographs, 2006).

55. J. Kok, "Mission and Ethics in 1 Corinthians," art. cit.

56. Cf. A. D. Clarke, *Secular and Christian leadership in Corinth: A Socio-historical and exegetical study of 1 Corinthians 1-6* (Eugene, Oregon: Paternoster Biblical Monographs, 2006), pp. 6 and J. Murphy O' Connor, *St Paul's Corinth: Texts and archaeology* (Wilmington: Glazier, 1983), pp. 51-53.

57. Translation adapted from *The New American Bible: With revised New Testament.* 1986; Published in electronic form by Logos Reseaarch Systems, 1996 (electronic ed.), Confraternity of Christian Doctrine.

58. J. Kok & E. Van Eck (eds), *Unlocking the World of Jesus* (Pretoria, Biblaridion, 2011), pp. 7-13.

59. J. Kok, "Mission and Ethics in 1 Corinthians," art. cit.

60. *The New American Bible: With revised New Testament.*

61. J. Kok, "Mission and Ethics in 1 Corinthians," art. cit.

62. J. Kok, "Mission and Ethics in 1 Corinthians," art. cit.

63. cf. B. Hansen, *All of you are One* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), pp. 112; as well as J. Kok, "Mission and Ethics in 1 Corinthians," art. cit.

64. B. Hansen, *All of you are One*, pp. 112-113.

65. W. A. Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality*, pp. 12-13; 37-51.

66. Cf. K. O. Sandnes, *A new family: Conversion and Ecclesiology in the Early Church with cross-cultural comparisons*, Studies in the Intercultural history of Christianity 91 (Bern: Peter Lang, 1994), pp. 103-111 as well as K. O. Sandnes, "A Missionary Strategy in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23" in *Paul as Missionary*, edited by T. J. Burke and B. S. Rosner (London: Library of New Testament Studies, T&T Clark, 2011), pp. 128-141.

67. J. Kok, "Mission and Ethics in 1 Corinthians," art. cit.