

Handout for Moule Lecture

June 3<sup>rd</sup> 2019

**Be Reconcilers! by David F. Ford and Sarah Snyder**

## ***A Wisdom of Reconciliation***

### ***Introduction: Be Reconcilers***

Reconciliation is the healing of broken or wounded relationships, in honest recognition of past hurts. This offering is the result of searching for a wisdom of reconciliation that is deeply Christian in order to inspire the healing of relationships with God, with our neighbours, with our enemies, with ourselves, and with the whole of creation. As followers of Jesus Christ, who '**is our peace**' (Ephesians 2:14), we are called to be people of peace and reconciliation, and to collaborate with others who also work for reconciliation. *This is a call, in the face of violence, divisions, and conflicts, to act wisely together for the sake of reconciliation wherever it is needed.*

This is the fruit of a collaboration between a small group of reconciliation theologians and practitioners convened by Canon Sarah Snyder, Advisor for Reconciliation to the Most Reverend Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury. It has been wrestled into being over the course of two years, beginning with a gathering at Rose Castle in August 2017. While we come from a diverse range of church backgrounds, this offering is rooted in the Anglican tradition, with the sincere hope that it will be of relevance as much to those who do not consider themselves Anglican as to those who do.

This *Wisdom of Reconciliation* is addressed first and foremost to all the followers of Jesus Christ involved in the ministry of reconciliation – all those working for reconciliation as part of their calling as disciples of Jesus Christ. Our prayer is that the reflections offered here will resonate with you, enriching, stretching and deepening your thought, prayer and action. We also pray that you will enter into conversation with this vision, adding your wisdom to it as you reflect afresh on your own experiences. This offering is intended to be a living organism, into which new life is breathed with every fresh engagement with it.

Part of this organic growth, we hope, will involve dialogue and collaboration with a range of people far beyond the initial readership – from reconciliation practitioners of other faiths or none, to Christians now unfamiliar with the territory of reconciliation, and many more besides.

As we look around us today, we can be in little doubt about how many ruptured or damaged relationships cry out for healing. Polarised political landscapes are the rule, not the exception. Many families and other communities experience divisions, with children and other vulnerable people among the main casualties of conflict. Evidence mounts by the day of the extent to which we have alienated ourselves from creation, exploiting and abusing it, instead of caring for it. Self-interest and expediency are the

watchwords not only of international political life but also often of individuals. In such an environment, peace is readily exchanged for conflict for the sake of practical advantage, regardless of the cost to relationship.

Into this, in many places throughout the world, the Church is speaking and living the radical alternative of reconciliation. We live in a world in desperate need of reconciliation, but also one in which God is at work to bring reconciliation. The wisdom offered here has been born, not only from reflection, but also from observation of, and participation in, the practice of reconciliation by Christians. From communities offering shelter to the homeless to church leaders acting as intermediaries in national conflicts, examples abound. We have been deeply moved by testimonies from around the world as well as by what we have ourselves witnessed.

We are also conscious of writing as part of a divided Church, which not only is grappling with deep disagreements today but which has, throughout its history, often been a cause of more fracture and division than reconciliation. The need for reconciliation is not only to be found around us but also, firstly, within us. We are not neutral observers of the brokenness in our world, but rather are in continual need of transformation if we are to play a role in healing that brokenness. We are wounded healers who have also inflicted wounds on others.

In this context, the call is threefold.

First, to ***trust and hope in God and God's peace and reconciliation***, learning God's wisdom, and seeing ourselves, the Church, and the world in its light.

Second, to ***repent of our part in alienation and conflict*** – both as individuals and together. Self-awareness and facing the truth, together with a decisive change of direction in commitment to peace: these are essential for becoming reconcilers.

Third, to ***be reconcilers***, in spite of every obstacle in ourselves, the Church and the world. God's presence, forgiveness, love, and energy are new every morning. We follow the risen, living Jesus into one situation after another, as he says 'Peace be with you', shows his wounds, and breathes into us his Spirit of forgiveness, peacebuilding and love (John 20:19-23). We are daily and deeply encouraged by the Spirit of Jesus in our ministry of reconciliation. And this encouragement is increased by the news of many signs of hope, of faithful, daring, and often costly initiatives around the world, and, above all, by knowing people who are committed to them.

We begin, in Part I, by exploring seven pillars of Biblical wisdom for reconciliation: *All this is from God; Identity and Belonging; Refiguring the Past; Breaking Boundaries; Trust and Risk-Taking; Messiness and Surprises; Lament and Hope*. These are not intended to be an exhaustive list but are what we consider to be vital implications of the Scriptural call to be reconcilers. We then move into Part II, in which we explore the 'Therefore': the habits and practices which enable us to be continually formed for this joyful, demanding, surprising, endlessly enriching calling to reconciliation.

## Part I: A Biblical Wisdom of Reconciliation

### 1. *All this is from God*

We start from the premise that reconciliation begins with God, who is continually at work, reconciling all things. Reconciliation is an energy of love at the heart of the one God, the complete relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God is at work in heaven and on earth, reconciling all things to Himself. The calling for human beings is to be caught up in this love and joy, to trust and participate in it. This is an energy given freely and abundantly, which we are invited to allow to take hold of us. God cries out to us to be reconciled and to become reconcilers, to 'seek peace and pursue it' (Psalm 34:14). 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.' (Matthew 5:9)

Our glimpse of reconciliation in this life is, as it must be, at the level of individual moments in time and particular human lives and communities. But it is part of a dynamic energy of cosmic scale and significance. We live in the 'in-between' times, in the ongoing drama between the wholeness of creation and the complete restoration that is to come.

In Genesis, we read of the progressive unravelling of full relationship. Having eaten the forbidden fruit, human beings flee from God, and trust turns to fear. Then the relationship within humanity breaks down. Adam flails around and blames his wife Eve, in whom he had so recently delighted as '**bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh**' (Genesis 2:23). In Revelation we read the vision of the ultimate healing of all of these wounds. The tree of life bears leaves '**for the healing of the nations**' (Revelation 22:2) and there is perfect unity between God and human beings who '**see his face**' and have his name on their foreheads (Revelation 22:4). In between comes the story of God and God's involvement with creation, human history, the people of Israel, and the Church. This is our living story, which we inhabit more fully the more the call to be reconciled and to be reconcilers shapes our being and doing.

Remarkably, God not only authors this reconciliation but embodies it utterly, and enacts it. The person of Jesus Christ is both our model, who calls us into reconciliation, and also the unique, once-and-for-all Reconciler who is 'our peace'. It is from the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus that our reconciliation flows. No one expresses this more eloquently than Paul: '**All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.**' (2 Corinthians 5:18-20)

The depths of this mystery are still being experienced and explored around the world, as they have been century after century. Many volumes have been written on reconciliation and the cross of Christ. Each re-reading of the gospel accounts throws light onto new angles of it: the determination of Jesus to go to Jerusalem to this death; his last

supper with his disciples; his surrender to the will of the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane; how he was flogged, mocked, humiliated; the plea to forgive his condemners; his entrusting of the beloved disciple and his mother to one another; his cry, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Mark 15:34; Matthew 27:46); the temple curtain torn in two from top to bottom; blood and water coming from his side pierced by a soldier's spear; and much, much more. Each rich image that has been used for this event opens up further depths: a victory over the power of sin, suffering, evil and death; a sacrifice; the blood of the Passover lamb, and a new, liberating Exodus; the judge who is judged in our place and freely justifies and accepts us; the friend laying down his life in love; the breaking down of a wall of division, creating a new humanity; and many, many more. Paul once again draws all this together: **'through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross'** (Colossians 1:20).

The next, inseparable dimension of participation in the reconciling work of God comes with the resurrection, when the risen Christ appears to the disciples. **'Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'** (John 20:19-23)

**'As the Father has sent me, so I send you.'** That **'... as ... so ...'** is a double invitation. It stimulates continual reflection on how Jesus was sent, in his life and ministry, death and resurrection, in order to learn how to be his faithful, disciplined, joyful followers. He was sent, as we are, to create signs of abundant life – giving good news, teaching, forgiving, healing, feeding, welcoming, challenging, forming a community of love. And this involved being sent, as we are, into darkness – into situations of sin, suffering, evil and death. So the **'... as ... so ...'** encourages disciples both to go deeper into the meaning of the Gospel and to live inspired by the Holy Spirit he breathes into us, daringly improvising in new situations, free to be as surprising as he was, and following him as he enters one situation after another saying **'Peace be with you'**, breathing his **Spirit**.

It is this Holy Spirit – given 'without measure' (John 3:34) – who, when we cry out for Him and welcome Him, draws us into the ever-flowing reconciling energy of God. 'Come, Holy Spirit!' is the prayer embracing all prayer. It is this Spirit who forms us to be reconcilers, modelled after One who is perfect though we are not. The Spirit invites us into the reconciling life of God, **'who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine'** (Ephesians 3:20).

But we do not respond to this invitation just as individuals: the call is into a community of reconciliation, into a radical commitment to other people, a new identity and belonging. That extraordinary Ephesians 3:14-21 prayer, to which we will return, leads directly into a passionate plea for such a community: **'I therefore, the prisoner in**

**the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.** (Ephesians 4:1-6) Helping to build up such a community is essential to all dimensions of reconciliation – with God, with each other in our diverse communities, with enemies, with creation, and within ourselves.

## ***2. Identity and Belonging***

So, part of this formation by the Holy Spirit involves nothing less than a radical transformation of our very selves in community with others. Earlier in the famous passage from 2 Corinthians about being ambassadors of Christ and ministers of reconciliation, Paul writes **'So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!'** (2 Corinthians 5:17). It is a theme that runs throughout the letters of the New Testament, such as 1 Peter: **'But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God'** (1 Peter 2:9-10).

Despite what we may see or feel, we are a new people, defined wholly by our relationship to God. In a world of competing identities vying for our loyalty, the follower of Jesus Christ is called to detach herself from her original starting point and become part of a new creation. We also need to be continually formed in this new identity, a theme to which we will return in Part II.

The implications of this for reconciliation are profound. It is our identity in Jesus Christ which enables us to become ambassadors of reconciliation. The primary calling is not to stand in one camp or other but to locate ourselves wholly in Jesus Christ, who lived and died in love for all. He is utterly for God and utterly for the world, and his followers are called to be with him in that. The most important distinction is not between a new 'us' and 'them', but between a formerly divided humanity and a newly restored one. Each of our many identities – our gender, race, nation, abilities or disabilities, sexuality, age, education, class, wealth or poverty, health or beauty, political commitments, victim or perpetrator, and even our particular way of being religious – is relativized by our solidarity with all humanity through Jesus Christ.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul writes that Christ **'is our peace...'** (2:14) – it is His identity. And this identity was enacted:

**'... in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us, ... that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it'** (2:14-16). The picture is of a dividing wall, probably referring to the wall separating the part of the Temple in Jerusalem where only Jews could enter from the part

that non-Jews could enter. When this is broken down, all are in the same space, equally in the presence of God. It is a powerful image of **one new humanity** sharing one space, incorporated into one body, related to one God, united to God and to each other by the love of Jesus Christ in dying for all, and by his resurrected presence in the Spirit.

One of the most effective aids to reconciliation is the conviction that those on both sides of a division are equally human and to be respected as such, what John Paul Lederach, in his modern classic on the wisdom of peacebuilding, calls ‘the capacity to imagine ourselves in a web of relationships that includes our enemies.’<sup>1</sup> That recognition of shared humanity is one of the elements that he, during his decades of helping to build peace, has found to be most important. Another is the ability to avoid being trapped in dualistic oppositions – here in Ephesians seen in the breaking down of the dividing wall.

Seeking a Biblical wisdom of reconciliation also brings us face to face with the complexity of our identities as reconcilers and as those needing reconciliation ourselves. Often we are not intermediaries but active participants in conflict. The parable often known as the ‘Prodigal Son’ (Luke 15:11-32) gets to the heart of some of the difficulties. The pivotal moment of reconciliation is the younger son’s realisation that he belongs with the Father and his decision to return to that place of belonging. But the story is not one of full restoration. The older brother has never fully embraced or understood his identity as the father’s son. Nor is he willing to surrender his identity as victim for the sake of reconciliation with his younger brother.

Reconciliation involves receiving and committing to a new identity, with all the sacrifice and uncertainty which that entails. This may be the transition from victim to survivor. (Interestingly, it is much harder to find language to account what new identity is available to a perpetrator through reconciliation.) In all cases, it is an identity which changes our relationship with the other and with ourselves by transforming our relationship with the past.

### ***3. Refiguring the past***

Being made new, or detaching ourselves from our starting point, involves refiguring our history and that of our relationships. *A crucial element of reconciliation is learning to inhabit our past in ways that open up the possibility of an alternative future.*

If we return to Genesis, we see a decisive moment in which Adam and Eve had the choice between healing a past wound or deepening it further. Having disobeyed God and discovered their own nakedness, God nevertheless comes to look for them. ‘**Where are you?**’ He asks (Genesis 3:9). All is not lost! But Adam and Eve, as we have seen, not only hide from God but try to shift the blame onto others. They choose to be defined by their initial transgression. It is so often easier, when we are the cause of conflict or brokenness, either to seek to justify ourselves or to assume that forgiveness is not available – a new

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<sup>1</sup> John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination. The Art and Soul of Building Peace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2005) p.5.

future is not possible. The path of reconciliation found in Scripture is both harder and more hopeful.

We glimpse something of this in the meeting of Jacob and Esau recorded in Genesis 33 after Jacob has tricked his brother out of his birthright. Unlike in the meeting between God and Adam and Eve, here the two embrace and weep. Jacob discerns that there is something of God in this coming together: **'if I find favour with you, then accept my present from my hand; for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God—since you have received me with such favour'** (Genesis 33:10). But it is only Esau who is truly committed to allowing this refiguring of the past to open up a new future. Esau offers the possibility of the longer (harder) journey of reconciliation – **'Let us journey on our way, and I will go alongside you'** (Genesis 33:12) – but Jacob draws back. To confront the past is one thing (and crucial at that), but to find a new way to hold the past as we move forward is quite another.

The wisdom of Scripture is that forgiveness and the healing of the past are long and uncomfortable paths. The same wound may be revisited often. We are to forgive **'not seven times but...seventy-seven times,'** Jesus teaches (Matthew 18:22). This may be seventy-seven different injuries, or the same one which aches seventy-seven times, demanding to be addressed anew. Part of our formation for reconciliation comes through those seventy-seven inward struggles to refigure our past and release those who have wronged us, as well as accompanying others in their seventy-seven.

The hope within this is that, as we face our past, we are held by One for whom the past is not the last word. In the story of Joseph, whose brothers had sold him into slavery and told his father that he was dead, he refigures his past in a most extraordinary way. He declares to his brothers: **'Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today'** (Genesis 50:20) and reconciles with them, welcoming them and providing for their material needs. (It is worth noting that Joseph here is repeating assurances he made to his brothers five chapters earlier. As in the case of Jacob, it was the offender more than the victim who seemed to find it hardest to accept reconciliation.)

For others, addressing the past does not imply that it can be fully 'made sense of' or that we can, or should, accept as good our past actions or those of others. When Peter betrays Jesus by denying him three times, he went out and **'wept bitterly'** (Luke 22:62). There is no hint that he could ever reconcile himself to those events. But he, and his relationship with Jesus, are not forever defined by that night by the fire in the courtyard. God is *for* Peter, as he is *for* each one of us. And he invites (no compulsion here, as there never can be with reconciliation) him to a ministry which will demand everything of him (including his life), but one in full, restored relationship with Jesus Christ Himself (John 21:15-19). Even after very bad history there is the possibility a better future.

#### 4. *Breaking Boundaries*

The work of reconciliation not only calls us to tread the painfully familiar territory of the past but also to venture into places which are entirely unfamiliar. Reconciliation is the pursuit of relationship in the place of fear, indifference, violence and enmity, all of which are sustained by boundaries – of place, identity, history, social norms. To forge relationship in the face of these requires us to find ways through or beyond these boundaries that are barriers. We saw earlier that Christ's death on the cross '**has broken down the dividing wall**', creating one humanity. But Christ breaks dividing walls not only in his death but in his very being.

The incarnation of Jesus Christ is itself a startling permeation of the barrier between heaven and earth. '**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh and lived among us...**' (John 1:1,14). This is mirrored powerfully at that other, very mysterious, extreme of Christ's earthly life: the ascension. In the ascension of Christ, humanity – the essence of human life – is taken up into the Godhead once more, prefiguring the ultimate restoration of relationship between Creator and creation, the complete union of earth and heaven. Part of the meaning of Jesus Christ as Messiah is the coming together of God and humanity in one person. God is free to express and give God's own self freely in Jesus, and does so.

It is this unfathomable reality which enables (and compels) us to see in the face of each person, and above all in the face of the marginalised, the humiliated and the suffering, the face of Jesus Christ himself. '**Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me,**' Jesus says to those who have fed the hungry and visited the prisoner in his picture of final judgement (Matthew 25:40). We see in this echoes of the encounter of Abraham and Sarah who, by showing hospitality to strangers, end up being guests of God himself (Genesis 18:1-15). Love of God and love of neighbour cannot be separated from one another (Matthew 22:40).

This breaking of boundaries goes hand-in-hand with radical openness to the other. The story of the ministry of Jesus is one of continually disrupting physical, mental and social boundaries which inhibit that openness. Jesus' deeply counter-cultural embrace of the Samaritans is one example (among many). As John puts it succinctly, '**Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans**' (John 4:9). The Jews and the Samaritans lived and worshipped separately, and disagreed over their versions of history, despite sharing the same ancestors. Thus, for Jesus to venture into Samaria, to ask a Samaritan for a drink, to spend time conversing (his longest recorded conversation) with a woman,<sup>2</sup> broke through numerous barriers in one fell swoop.

This radical openness to the other which Jesus demonstrates was not one which swept difference under the carpet or disguised it politely. The conversation is robust and sparky, grappling with their division. But there is a commitment to the encounter itself,

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<sup>2</sup> Note the disciples astonishment at this more than any other feature of the encounter: '**Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman**' (John 4:27)

which enables them to discover the other in their full humanity. In the famous parable which we have come to know as the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), Jesus challenges his followers to venture across the same boundary between Jew and Samaritan, Judea and Samaria, and to discover the humanity of the one they had considered their 'opposed other'.

In that great parable, we are also confronted with one of the most radical challenges we face as we seek the path of reconciliation: the fear of being tainted by association. It is quite probable that the Levite and the priest pass by on the other side for fear of being made unclean by touching a corpse. The pharisees can't understand why Jesus allows himself to be tainted by associating with 'tax collectors and sinners' – that phrase, used by Matthew, Mark and Luke alike, is shorthand for undesirables.

It is this boundary between 'clean' and 'unclean' which Peter is called most radically to cross – flying in the face of his understanding of holiness, righteousness and morality. First he receives a vision in which, to his dismay, the foods Peter has always known to be unclean are declared clean. This prepares the way for his confrontation with an even greater divide, between Jew and Gentile, one that is fundamental to Peter's religious, ethnic, and cultural identity. It happens through his encounter with Cornelius, a Roman centurion. Peter declares to him, **'You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean'** (Acts 10:28), apparently still coming to terms with the full implications of what God has been saying to him. As the encounter unfolds, Peter realises not only that God has called him to break this defining boundary but, astoundingly, that God was on the other side of the boundary all along.

### ***5. Trust and Risk-Taking***

The crossing of boundaries, by its very nature a step into the feared or unknown, cannot be separated from the practice of taking risks. The Samaritan who risked breaching the boundary between clean and unclean was already on dangerous ground. He encountered the half-dead stranger in need on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho – a route infamous for violence and crime. By attending to him, he had no idea what the impact of the encounter would be: would he be the next victim? The path of reconciliation often leads us via the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, where the threats appear to outnumber the comforts and we need a Biblical wisdom of risk-taking.

What is at the heart of a Biblical wisdom of risk-taking? It must surely be trust or faith. 'Do not be afraid' is the command which echoes throughout Scripture (78 times!), from Genesis to Revelation. Lack of faith is the only sin we see which actually impedes the ministry of Jesus (Mark 6:4-6), We are not talking about risk for risk's sake. Nor are we talking about deliberately or recklessly putting ourselves in harm's way. This is taking the risk of restoring relationship in the face of fears of rejection, awkwardness, disappointment – in the trust that God is both with us and already on the other side, to which we are venturing. Wise discernment about what this looks like is part of the continual formation we need for being reconcilers.

The biggest risk of all is perhaps that of putting trust in the other. That is one of the things that is so remarkable about that moving scene between Jesus and Peter on the beach, which we touched on earlier. Jesus knows that Peter has abandoned him in his hour of greatest need and has denied having anything to do with him (despite all of Peter's protestations that he would be faithful). He even knew Peter would do it before it happened. Here – with profound grace and gentleness – Jesus addresses Peter's three denials by asking three times '**Simon son of John, do you love me?**' But, more than that, he entrusts Peter with responsibility: '**Feed my lambs**'; '**Tend my sheep**'; '**Feed my sheep**' (John 21:15-19).

Given all that had gone before, and Jesus' intimate knowledge of Peter's weaknesses, this seems a tremendous risk. Yet it gets to the heart of an uncomfortable, miraculous truth in reconciliation: investing hope and trust in the other is the crucial turning point in the relationship. It is the point at which it becomes possible to talk not only of 'me' and 'the other' but of something resembling 'us'.

There are of course, tragically, many broken relationships where the restoration of trust is made impossible because the one who has ruptured the trust in the first place refuses to acknowledge the fact or to change their actions. Jesus' repeated questions to Peter, '**Do you love me?**', seem particularly relevant here. They lay the vital foundation of the desire for mutual flourishing, upon which any building of trust – however risky – depends. And usually such initiatives require many preparatory relationship-building moves – in this story, Jesus has led up to the conversation by hosting a meal: 'Come and have breakfast' (John 21:12).

## **6. Messiness and Surprises**

A risk is not a risk if there is no possibility that it might go wrong. If reconciliation is risky, it is also untidy, stop-start, unpredictable. A Biblical wisdom of reconciliation does not wrap reconciliation up and neatly define its contours. One of Scripture's greatest consolations and inspirations to us as we seek to be formed as reconcilers is that it testifies to the real, lived experience of attempting to heal relationships between broken, fragile human beings. To seek relationship with the other is to welcome the uncontrollable and to expose ourselves to the unexpected.

The whole gospel is, in many ways, deeply surprising. Jesus says and does surprising things, and people respond to him in surprising ways. The culmination of the story is the shock and surprise of his crucifixion followed by his resurrection. Jesus himself is the ongoing, living surprise, free to relate to new people and situations in the Spirit. Part of developing trust in God and radical openness to the other is making room within ourselves for the possibility of surprise – and learning how to welcome it when it comes. Following Peter's encounter with Cornelius, the Holy Spirit is given to everyone present, including the Gentiles. '**The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles.**' (Acts 10:45)

That reconciliation with God should be offered to the uncircumcised was a profound shock. Having been prepared by his vision and his engagement with Cornelius, Peter is able to embrace this surprise: **'Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?'** (verse 47). Reconciliation cannot be on our terms alone. Openness to the unexpected – to the exceeding of our expectations – is a crucial part of enabling new relationships and developments to happen. It can also be a source of profound joy.

But sometimes reconciliation does not feel as good as we want it to be. No one knew that better than Jonah. He had been sent to the people of Nineveh to urge them to reconcile with God, but when the reconciliation comes about, he feels desolate: **'O Lord! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. And now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live'** (Jonah 4:2). We can get so used to our divisions, oppositions, enmities and even oppressions that they become part of our identity, and ending them is a threat to who we are.

There are resonances in Jonah with the older brother's dismay at the welcome his younger brother receives in Jesus' parable which we explored earlier. We can easily fall into a mentality of scarcity in which we feel that the inclusion of others equates to our own exclusion. This dynamic was at work in much of the resistance to Jesus' engagement with 'tax collectors and sinners'. Sometimes we may be surprised by the emotions of envy or fear stirred within us, even when we believed ourselves to be wholly committed to reconciliation.

There will also be many times when the healing we seek to experience or bring about does not happen. Some with long experience as peacemakers reckon that they fail in over 90% of cases. We see unjust structures which continue to promote exclusion or alienation, and our efforts to effect change make no difference. Relationships remain broken, or they deteriorate. The attempt to have honest conversations produces deeper hurt, rather than deeper understanding. Our relationship with our own selves remains dysfunctional or damaging despite seeking help – where we can only turn to God and seek His mercy. How do we respond to repeated disappointment and even trauma?

## ***7. Lament and Hope***

As reconcilers, we seek to be agents who heal broken relationships, but we do not always have solutions. Sometimes the only appropriate response is to cry out to God in honest expression of our pain and the pain of others. A considerable part of scripture is dedicated to just this practice. The book of Lamentations is an obvious example, going into often graphic detail in depicting the depths of desolation of the writer:

**Cry aloud to the Lord!  
O wall of daughter Zion!**

**Let tears stream down like a torrent  
day and night!  
Give yourself no rest,  
your eyes no respite!  
Arise, cry out in the night,  
at the beginning of the watches!  
Pour out your heart like water  
before the presence of the Lord!  
Lift your hands to him  
for the lives of your children,  
who faint for hunger  
at the head of every street.**

(Lamentations 2:18-19)

Any number of other sections from the book could have been chosen, and similar laments are seen in many parts of the Old Testament in particular. They set an example of honesty with God, and ourselves, which is essential for those immersed in contexts of brokenness and suffering. Lamentations also appeals to a community to ‘**cry aloud**’ together. Being part of a community that can lament, as well as praise, is a meaningful, powerful response to conflict, terror, and deep disappointment.

The book of Job opens up a wisdom tested in the anguish of suffering. He has no easy answers – those with neat, packaged answers, which do not do justice to the depth of suffering and the mystery of God and creation, are the friends of Job, who are shown to be in the wrong.<sup>3</sup> Job faces devastating suffering – acute and chronic physical pain, the

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<sup>3</sup> The friends often draw on statements found in the Bible. This underlines the ways in which the Bible can be abused – foolishly, ignorantly, dangerously, or cruelly. The Bible can be toxic as well as healing. Besides inspiring peace and reconciliation, the Bible has also been appealed to in justification for hatred, war, injustice, inhumanity, and many other evils. The Bible itself has been and still is a factor in deep and often violent divisions and enmity. This bitter, ongoing experience has led both Jewish and Christian traditions to develop ways of trying to avoid or correct such uses of scripture. We draw on centuries of interpretation, debate, discernment, and often painful lessons, in trying to learn a biblical wisdom of peace through positive and negative examples. One summary of what is involved in wise biblical interpretation that we find very helpful is Ellen P. Davis and Richard B. Hays (Editors), *The Art of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans 2003). Along with a set of perceptive essays by fifteen authors who spent three years in conversation with each other, it offers ‘Nine Theses on the Interpretation of Scripture’. These are discussed further in David F. Ford, *Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2007) Chapter 2. Wisdom on how to go about reading the Bible in ways that are healing, not toxic, has to be constantly renewed in responding to new situations. There is a ferment of such re-readings going on at present around the world, not least in the Anglican Communion. For example, one that has been written by authors from Africa, South America, the Middle East, Myanmar, and Japan, in preparation for the

deaths of his children and servants, loss of the support of his wife, loss of wealth, status and power, humiliation in private and public, a crisis of meaning and faith, and the bad theology of his friends. His faith, which is affirmed by God at the end of the book, is one that cries out to God and to other people, that asks profound questions and is not satisfied with shallow answers, that is exploratory and daring in imagination and thought, and that never gives up on the desire for God and God's wisdom. That wisdom of faith is a model for us, and leaves many open questions – the great speech of God out of the whirlwind piles one unanswerable question on another.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps counterintuitively, lament and questioning – an engagement with the complex, painful reality around us – are also the vital foundations for hope. This hope is not optimism that all will soon turn out well, but faith and trust in the One whose reconciliation work we are caught up in. It is a love of the people and the world in these 'in-between' times, in assurance of a full restoration that is promised. It is an echo of God's 'yes' to human life and relationships.

In this regard, the Psalms are immensely rich sources for those facing situations of violence, betrayal, injustice, humiliation and many types of trauma. Above all, the Psalms testify to the embracing, ultimate reality of a God of justice, compassion, blessing, love, and peace, grounding a confidence that God, not evil, sin, suffering, or death, has the last word in human history and is the deepest secret of peace.

We take just one, Psalm 34, as an example, with its central invitation and command: **'Seek peace and pursue it'**. This imperative is set in the context of a community whose first priority is sustained love and worship of God. It opens with the desire to be **continually** conscious of God's **name** – who God is: **'I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth... Let us exalt his name together.'** This psalm is about seeking God, crying out to God, and learning how to live before God in all the ups and downs of life, including **troubles, afflictions**, and hatred, trusting in God's judgement on evil: **'The face of the Lord is against evildoers'**.

Of particular importance for work for peace and reconciliation is the presence of God with those who suffer: **'The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit'**. So, to be present in compassion with those who suffer most from the conflicts, divisions, humiliations, and broken relationships in our world is to be near to God. There is a deep interconnection between living close to God, pursuing peace, and solidarity with those whose hearts are broken or spirits have been crushed due to lack of peace and reconciliation. Lamenting with one in pain is more meaningful than any quick fix in expressing the deepest consolation of all (the one God offers us): 'I am with you'.

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2020 Lambeth Conference, brings fresh readings of texts and themes throughout the Bible to bear on reconciliation within the Church, with other religions, and within and between nations, and it has a special concern for issues relating to women and children – see Muthuraj Swamy (Editor) *Reconciliation and Mission. A Book in Preparation for the Lambeth Conference 2020* (London: SPCK forthcoming 2018). We are grateful to Dr Swamy for access to the collection in advance of publication. We want to encourage more such readings through offering our own.

<sup>4</sup> Job Chapters 38-41.

We end where we began, recognising that the territory of reconciliation is holy ground. God was here before us, is here with us, and is our future. It is a journey into the inexplicable and the painful. It is also (sometimes simultaneously) a calling which leads us to joy. Joy signals the fullness of life and peace, and is a mark of forgiveness, freedom, faith, love, hope, and celebration. This joy and peace do not rule out suffering, lament, and even death, and do not depend on the absence of conflict or on everything going well. It is joy in the Lord who 'is our peace', in who Jesus is, in one who went through conflict, suffering and death, and sends his followers as he was sent.

## Part II: Formation for Reconciliation

'... **therefore...**' (Romans 12:1; 1 Corinthians 10:14; 2 Corinthians 4:1, 5:16; Galatians 5:1; Ephesians 4:1, 5:1, 6:13, 14; Philippians 2:12, 4:1; Colossians 2:16, 3:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:11; 2 Timothy 2:10; Hebrews 2:1, 3:7, 4:1, 6:1, 12:1, 12; James 5:7, 16; 1 Peter 1:13, 2:1, 4:1, 19, 5:6; 2 Peter 1:10, 12, 3:14; Revelation 3:18)

We have explored what a Biblical wisdom for reconciliation today might look like. We also need to be formed in habits and practices of relating well with God, other people, enemies, ourselves, and all creation. These are the practical patterns which help our interior and social lives to be formed as reconcilers by the Holy Spirit. Each of us will be best nurtured by different patterns, and the New Testament letters show these already being developed, often signalled by '... **therefore ...**'. What follows is an exploration of formational practices for reconciliation which have stood the test of time across the centuries and continue to be fruitful around the world today. These are among the deepest sources of constant nourishment and inspiration that we have found being practised among Christians committed to being reconcilers.

Given the centrality of reconciliation, peace, forgiveness, love, and the healing of relationships to God's purposes and to the Gospel, it is not surprising that these are simply basic Christian practices, with a specific focus on their importance for reconciliation.

### 1. *Reading (and being read by) Scripture*

We are seeking here a *biblical* wisdom of reconciliation. That is not a one-off undertaking but involves being formed by continual engagement with scripture, which is crucial in underpinning and framing our understanding of who God is and what it means to reconcile and seek peace. Below are some thoughts about practices we have found to be helpful in reading the Bible as formation for reconciliation.

#### *i. Reading and rereading the Gospel accounts*

The life of Christ, as we have seen, is pivotal to resourcing us as reconciled reconcilers. We come to know and follow Jesus better by reading and rereading constantly the four Gospel accounts, separately and together. They tell the story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus in different ways, each with its wisdom. There is no substitute for immersion in what they say, engaging with it prayerfully, intelligently, imaginatively, emotionally, and corporately, open to the Holy Spirit leading us further into its truth and into its practical implications now. In several Christian traditions, every year during Holy Week the passion and death of Jesus are entered into, centred on listening to the Gospel accounts, intensified by relevant music, ceremony, foot-washing, meditation and teaching. And this pattern of attending to scripture on the last supper, passion and death of Jesus is repeated regularly through the year in celebrations of the Eucharist, as will be explored further below.

ii. *Holistic engagement*

The life and teaching, the passion and death, the resurrection and ascension of Jesus: these three always need to be understood in relation to each other. Christian history has many examples of one or two of them being over-emphasised or under-emphasised.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, as he struggled to understand and resist Hitler and Nazism, became acutely aware of how vital it is to do justice to all three together, and his *Ethics* is a classic statement of theological wisdom on this. The incarnation and the life and teaching of Jesus are vital in affirming the goodness of natural life given by God – God’s ‘Yes’ to all creation, and the importance of worldly life, and all that helps it to flourish, from food, health, and wine at weddings to radical concern for the weak, the marginalised, and the poor. Then come two ultimate events. The death of Jesus is an ultimate, radical ‘No’ to all that is against love and God’s good purposes. The resurrection is also an ultimate, a radical ‘Yes’ giving new life, hope and joy. This wisdom of incarnation, death and resurrection together is there in Baptism, through which, for most Christians, our core identity is given. We also enter into it afresh through every hearing or reading of the full Gospel, and through every celebration of the Eucharist.

The story of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection is itself part of a much larger story, reaching back to creation, and forwards to whatever the consummation of history is to be. The Exodus from Egypt, is especially important for the death of Jesus, which took place at Passover, the feast when Jews celebrate their liberation from slavery in Egypt. The meaning found in the death of Jesus is enriched by numerous other parts of scripture. One important habit to learn is that of reading texts alongside each other and allowing them to illuminate each other. These habits then become vital in trying to make sense of our own lives and those of our communities, and being able to play our part in the ongoing drama of God’s purposes.

iii. *Asking questions and seeking wisdom*

Scripture frequently raises deep and difficult issues that have been engaged with over many centuries, and continue to be wrestled with in discussion and prayer. Immersion in reading, discussion, and prayer is part of Christian involvement in reconciliation, feeding into discernment of what is wise in particular situations. It involves facing complex questions. It is an important practice to be continually asking the question: what is the meaning for today, and especially for peace and reconciliation, of each passage of Scripture?

The larger story of God also involves a larger community than the one we happen to be part of today. We are not the first to try to understand the death of

Jesus and its practical implications. The ‘communion of saints’ down the centuries and around the world today has immense wisdom to offer.

The Bible and the Church down the centuries and around the world today also offer many examples of wisdom on biblical concerns coming from beyond the community of faith, sometimes from surprising sources. It is fruitful to attend to the Bible not only within the Church but also in many other settings. These include schools, universities, and other educational communities; meeting with people of many faiths and none with whom we collaborate for the sake of peace and the common good; local community groups and projects; and gatherings with those of other religious traditions who can bring their scriptures into wisdom-seeking discussion.<sup>5</sup> In all these settings, and more, the Bible can help to enable reconciliation and peace, and the practice of reading and discussing it together in the face of division and conflict can inspire fresh hope, insight and action.

## ***2. Community***

We cannot be reconcilers alone. We need to be sustained by, and contribute to, a community. We need others with whom we can engage in the lament and praise we spoke of earlier. And we need people we trust and who trust us. Reconcilers need to model what they try to enable. Christian inspiration and formation are inseparable from being called to be part of a community committed to God and each other for the sake of the world God loves.

The Gospel and Letters of John are generally agreed to be among the later writings of the New Testament, written after much reflection on the Gospel (and probably, too, after reflection on the three other written Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke), and on life in an early Christian community. It is therefore all the more striking that, in the Gospel of John, Jesus gives his longest and richest teaching in what are called his Farewell Discourses (John 13-17), in which he repeats again and again the utter centrality of love in the community of his followers.

The headline for all five chapters is the love of Jesus: **‘Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.’** (John 13:1) The first thing he does is to wash the feet of his disciples and tell them to do likewise. This is given more emphasis than any other instruction, and we will mark its importance by reflecting on it separately below.

The foot-washing leads into the drama of a community soon to be devastated by betrayal, denial, and death (13:21-30, 36-38). But in the face of this Jesus gives his followers **‘a new commandment, that you love one another.’** The theme of love

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<sup>5</sup> One practice many of us have found valuable is that of Scriptural Reasoning, in which members of different faith traditions gather in small groups to study and discuss short passages from their various scriptures on specific themes – see [www.scripturalreasoning.org](http://www.scripturalreasoning.org).

continues in the next chapter (14:15-24). Then in John 15:1-12 Jesus gives a vivid picture of love and unity in community in the parable of the vine, together with a command to make this community the place where our whole lives are centred, united with him and with each other: **'Abide in me as I abide in you.'** It is a fruitful community (**'Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit...'**), a community of meaning (**'if you abide in me, and my words abide in you...'**), of daring prayer in his name, in line with who he is (**'... ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you'**), of love (**'As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love...'**), and of joy (**'I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete...'**).

This leads directly into a further, fuller, deeper version of the new love commandment:

**'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you...'**

So the loving service of foot-washing is joined with the love of self-giving friendship, modelled by Jesus. The centrality of being loved and loving are emphasised again in John 16:26-27, climaxing in the purpose of the whole discourse being peace: **'I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!'** (16:33)

But even that is not all. The culmination of the Farewell Discourses comes in the prayer of Jesus in John 17 which shows, in an unprecedented way, his passionate desire for the unity in love of his community after his death and resurrection. This is the only long prayer of Jesus in the Gospel of John, and it echoes in many ways the Lord's Prayer, the only long prayer of Jesus in the other Gospels, especially the version in Matthew's Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:9-13).<sup>6</sup> Its horizon is that of the Lord's Prayer, **'on earth as in heaven'**, uniting the intimate eternal presence and love of God with human life now: **'As you, Father, 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 17:21). Jesus even shares his glory, the core intensity of his life and love, with those who trust him: **'The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me'** (17:22-23).

That deep longing for unity and love, its peace overflowing towards the whole world, is what draws Jesus to his death. And when, having suffered betrayal, flogging, humiliation, and crucifixion, he appears to his disciples alive, with pierced hands and side,

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<sup>6</sup> The position of each is important: in Matthew, the Lord's Prayer is at the central point of the longest single body of the teaching of Jesus, the Sermon on the Mount, and can be understood as turning of the whole of that teaching into prayer; in John, the prayer of Jesus is at the climax of the longest single body of his teaching in that Gospel, and can be understood as turning the whole of the Farewell Discourses into prayer. To pray the Lord's Prayer in the light of the Sermon on the Mount and of the Farewell Discourses is to open up further its immense importance for reconciliation, including love of enemies and love within the Christian community.

his repeated words are: **'Peace be with you'** (20:19, 21). They are called to be a community of peace, forgiveness, and love, willing to suffer and die for love.

Yet John and his Christian community are acutely aware of how this calling can be ignored, or rejected, or contradicted by how those in the community behave. The Letters of John show a church that knows the Gospel but is needing to relearn the practice of repenting and receiving forgiveness (1 John 1:5-2:2), and above all the practice of love in response to God's love (1 John 2:7-11, 3:1-23, 4:7-5:5:5), in the face of distraction, conflict and division. The passionate appeal to the community is to renew its practice of love, grounded in the very being of God:

**Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.** (1 John 4:7-8)

Likewise, in the Letter to the Ephesians, having written of Jesus who **'is our peace'**, Paul<sup>7</sup> pleads with his readers to live in that peace, which is inseparable from humility, gentleness, patience, energetic effort, and the Spirit (4:1-6). Above all, it is about love: **'speaking the truth in love'**, maturing in love, and each member being part of **'the body's growth in building itself up in love'** (4:15-16).

The rest of the letter lays out the implications for the wise shaping of a long-term peaceful community. There is a special focus on divisive activities and what is required to counteract them, one summary statement being:

**'Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.** (4:31-5:2)

This is a God-centred wisdom, lived as a spirituality of worshipping together in praise and thanks:

**'So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.'** (5:17-20)

There is also a realism about **'cosmic powers of this present darkness'** and **'spiritual forces of evil'** that can grip and dominate people, together with a confidence that these can be combated effectively if we **'take up the whole armour of God... the belt of truth, ... the breastplate of righteousness, ... as shoes ... whatever will make**

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<sup>7</sup> Scholars differ about whether the letter is actually by Paul, or is by someone writing in Paul's name, having been deeply shaped by Paul and his Gospel. Either way, the Letter to the Ephesians is a rich, multi-faceted summary of the faith and practice at the heart of Pauline Christianity that distils its essence with a view to the next generation. This, together with the centrality of peace, makes it well suited as a key text for a wisdom of reconciliation.

**you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace, ... the shield of faith, ... the helmet of salvation, ... the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.'** (6:10-17) The imagery can be translated into modern warfare and its electronic weaponry, and in particular our current profound conflicts around meaning, truth, news, methods of persuasion, control of diverse media, and the formation of minds, imaginations, and decisions through technological, cultural, economic, and political forces.

The single most practical imperative in the face of such conflicts is to be a community centred on God in prayer:

**'Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints.'** (6:18)

And the closing blessing on this community, with all its problems and failings, begins with peace:

**'Peace be to the whole community, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who have an undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ.'** (6:23-24)

*Seeking relationships with others in a community committed to trying to live this out will form us like nothing else for the work of reconciliation.* It can nourish us and offer wisdom in the face of difficulty, and form a space in which we are accountable and responsible to others for the reconciling path we are trying to follow. As is abundantly clear from the letters of the New Testament, it will also confront us with all the challenges that come with humans living interdependently and, in so doing, will deepen our own self-knowledge and ground our pursuit of healing in reality

### **3. Eucharist**

It is a profoundly formative practice to allow ourselves to be shaped by the Eucharist, as communities and individuals. It is not only an encounter and reconciliation with God, but also enacts our communion, and our reconciliation, with one another.<sup>8</sup> This is not about a one-off experience. It is cumulative over many years, in which we are formed through constant interplay between the Eucharist and everything else, as worship and life help to shape each other. We offer just a few brief pointers to how this formation can be continued and deepened.

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<sup>8</sup> The Eucharist has of course often been a source of deep division within the Church. Like toxic uses of the Bible, polemics around the Eucharist (or Lord's Supper, or Holy Communion, or the Mass – the differences in preferred name are often signs of theological differences) cry out for healing wisdom. And just as the remedy for misuses of the Bible involve wiser and deeper biblical interpretation, so the healing of eucharistic controversies can involve wiser and deeper formation through the Eucharist itself – or, for those in whose communities the Eucharist is less central, wiser and deeper formation through the eucharistic ingredients discussed below that are present in other settings besides the Eucharist.

The *Prayer of Preparation* opens our hearts and lives to God, orienting our desires towards God in love.

*Confession* of our sin makes sure that there can be no radical ‘us-them’ division between ourselves and our enemies, or those we differ from most. We are all sinners before God, and the prayer ‘Father forgive’ is for ‘us’ and ‘them’. There needs to be ongoing, often painful, learning of the wisdom of forgiveness, repentance, restitution, and absolution in relation to personal sin, group sin, systemic sin, historic sin, and sin against God, other people and creation. What is and is not sinful, and how to deal with sin in ourselves, in the Church, and in the world: all these are deeply divisive matters, crying out for the wisdom of reconciliation.

The *Collects*, the special prayers for each week and special festival or occasion, distil a profound Christian wisdom into prayer that is appropriate for each time in the annual cycle of the Church year. To take the Collects to heart is to be formed in a God-centred, richly biblical, and balanced spirituality that takes us further into each event and season in turn. The *scripture readings* also follow the Church year, while *sermons* connect scriptures and life. So, in the course of a year, attentive worshippers are formed through the hope and expectation of Advent; the joy of Christmas and Epiphany; the Baptism of Jesus, his ministry and teaching, and his Transfiguration; Lent and its disciplines; the climactic events of Holy Week, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Easter Sunday, Ascension, and Pentecost; the mystery of the One God who is Trinity; the memory of the greater community of All Saints and All Souls; and the final celebration of Christ the King of Peace. Any one of these could take a lifetime to fathom, and each is relevant to peace and reconciliation.

*Prayers of petition and intercession* bring local and global events, conflicts, and urgencies to the congregation’s attention as they cry out to God.

The sharing of *the Peace* is a physical sign of being one body, one family, reconciled to God and each other.

The *Eucharistic Prayer* recalls the drama of the last supper of Jesus, and draws us into it as the key story for our own identity and vocation, within the context of the whole story of creation and God’s involvement with Israel, the Church, and the future of our world. The rich variety of Eucharistic Prayers allows worshippers to enter into the inexhaustible meaning from many angles during the year.

In the *Lord’s Prayer* ‘**your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven**’ sums up the vision of peace and reconciliation, the call to live out the love and justice of God in our human history. ‘**Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us**’ is a very earthy wisdom, making forgiveness as basic and daily a need as bread is in the petition before it.

*Receiving the bread and wine*, the body and blood of Jesus Christ, accepting the invitation to ‘eat and drink in remembrance that he died for you, and feed on him in your hearts by faith with thanksgiving’, is the climactic event for each participant in Holy

Communion, representing union with Jesus Christ and with each other. Its implications for peace and reconciliation, centred on the death of Jesus, are endless, and we have touched on just a few already.

Then there is the great variable, the people in *the congregation*. Who will be there, week by week? What meetings will there be? How will this worship overflow into relationships, and into other areas of the community's life and activity? And no two celebrations are the same, as the formative interplay between the Eucharist and the ongoing drama of our lives continues.

In sum, the Eucharist offers to those immersed in it a continuing education in peace. Through it we can be nourished by Jesus Christ himself to play our parts in the ongoing drama of covenantal living. Involved are all the relationships that are part of the fully biblical peace we long for: with God; with ourselves; with each other in the Christian family; with our communities and societies; with the whole of creation, as materially represented in bread, wine, music, architecture, and more; with the past, present and future; and with other generations. *As we take the Eucharist more and more deeply into our hearts, minds, imaginations and purposes, and make lively and imaginative connections between it and the rest of reality, we are formed into a people of peace, and prepared and inspired for 'waging peace'.*

Those who have come from less Eucharist-centred traditions have recognised how in their communities key elements of the Eucharist are often present in different forms: invocation of the Trinitarian God; confession and forgiveness; worship, intercession, and petition; collects, scripture and preaching; signs of peace, generosity, and sacrificial service; hospitality and communion with Jesus Christ; remembering, rejoicing, and orientation to the future; being loved and sent by God. The many modes of all these within and beyond the Eucharist have illuminated and enriched each other.

There is biblical precedent for this mutual enrichment. The Gospel of John's account of the last supper of Jesus does not, as the other three Gospels do, include the institution of the Eucharist. In Chapter 6 John gives a rich and deep eucharistic theology, but the decisive action of Jesus in John's account of the last supper is his washing the disciples' feet. This sets up a permanent, constantly fruitful interplay between the meaning and implications of Eucharist and of foot-washing.

#### ***4. Foot-washing***

The command of Jesus to his disciples to wash one another's feet is given in John 13 in a way that makes its extreme importance very clear.

The setting is the most important festival of the Jewish year, the Passover, re-enacting the liberation of the people of Israel from slavery through their Exodus from Egypt. It is also the most important time of Jesus' life: **'Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father.'** At stake is the ultimate test and realization of his love: **'Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them**

**to the end'** (13.1), in the face of betrayal (13:2) and death. The divine authority of Jesus is affirmed as strongly as possible: **'And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God ...'** (13:2-3). Then the first thing Jesus does with those hands is something radically surprising: he **'... got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet...'** (13:4-5)

Jesus, utterly identified with God, humbly does the work of a slave, just as he was soon to suffer the torture and death of a slave. It is an action of love and tenderness towards each of those present – to Judas who was to betray him, to Peter who was to deny him, to **'the one whom Jesus loved'** (13:23), and to the other disciples who were to abandon him. This is love of deceitful enemies, faithful friends, and those in between. It is vulnerable love in a divided, fragile, sinful community.

Jesus is insistent that he is setting an example of loving service that is to be at the heart of the ongoing community of his followers.<sup>9</sup> He makes the point in one way after another.

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<sup>9</sup> Jean Vanier is founder of the L'Arche communities, where people with and without learning disabilities share life together. L'Arche has a ritual of foot-washing, and Vanier points to its radical meaning in his commentary on John 13:1-17:  
'All groups, all societies, are built on the model of a pyramid:  
at the top are the powerful, the rich, the intelligent.  
They are called to govern and guide.  
At the bottom are the immigrants, the slaves, the servants,  
people who are out of work, or who have a mental illness  
or different forms of disabilities.  
They are excluded, marginalized.  
Here, Jesus is taking the place of a person at the bottom,  
the last place,  
the place of a slave.  
For Peter this is impossible.  
Little does he realize that Jesus came to transform  
the model of a society  
from a pyramid to a body,  
where each and every person has a place,  
whatever their abilities or disabilities...  
The gospel message is the world upside down...  
[Peter] does not understand that Jesus' answer  
shows that the washing of the feet  
is not a new ritual that we can follow or not  
or that we should accomplish at certain moments.  
It is an essential part of his message of love.'

When Peter resists having his feet washed he is told, **'Unless I wash you, you have no share with me'** (13:8). Having no share at all in the one who is elsewhere in this Gospel identified with light, grace, truth, abundant life, and incomparable love: that shows how crucial foot-washing is.

Jesus insists on this action being required, imperative, an 'ought' that has his full authority: **'You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.'** (13:13-14)

Then he gives vital and challenging guidance for carrying it out: **'For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.'** (13:15) Foot-washing is an example. It may, of course, be followed literally, as many Christian communities do, but an example is something that can inspire many different types of action. The instruction is not to 'do *what* I have done to you' but to **'do as I have done to you'**. This is an example that challenges his followers to discern – in every situation, every relationship, every community, every conflict and crisis – just what might be in the spirit of the foot-washing of Jesus. There is no general answer: this is a daily challenge to read, learn, pray, think, imagine, and then risk acting in loving service, open to doing so in surprising ways. Unless we are being formed like this we are not being inspired by the love of Jesus.

The importance of foot-washing is crowned by a blessing: **'If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.'** (13:17) This blessing and **'Do!'** of foot-washing at the Last Supper in John can be set alongside the blessing of the bread and wine and the **'Take!'** **'Eat!'** **'Drink!'** **'Do this!'** of eating and drinking them in the Gospels of Matthew (26:26-29), Mark (14:22-25) and Luke (22:14-23). The Gospel of John is if anything even more insistent on the importance of the Eucharist in an earlier discourse on it: **'Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them'** (6:56). The later centrality of foot-washing at the Last Supper in John 13, read along with the accounts in the other Gospels, gives a clear message: both Eucharist and foot-washing are to be at the heart of Christian practice. And, therefore, both are profoundly formative in the practice of reconciliation, peacemaking, service in love, and blessing.

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It is the revelation that in order to enter into the kingdom  
we have to become like little children;  
we need to be 'born' from on high  
to discover who God is  
and who we are called to be.  
It is only if we receive the Spirit of God  
that we can understand and live  
this message of littleness, humility and service to others.'

- *Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John* by Jean Vanier (London: Darton, Longman and Todd 2004) pp.227-9.

## ***Conclusion: Learn from Practitioners; Engage Deep to Deep; Pray Like This***

We have been attempting to sound some of the depths of our Christian scriptures, worship and experience, distilling from them a wisdom of reconciliation that inspires our threefold call to *trust and hope in God and God's peace and reconciliation*, to *repent of our part in alienation and conflict*, and to *be reconcilers*.

In Part I we considered seven pillars of Biblical wisdom: *All this is from God; Identity and Belonging; Refiguring the Past; Breaking Boundaries; Trust and Risk-Taking; Messiness and Surprises; Lament and Hope*.

In Part II we considered the habits and practices that can form communities and each of their members in the habits and practices of reconciliation: *reading and being read by the Bible; participation in Christian community; celebration of the Eucharist; and foot-washing*.

There now remain three final, vital things to be said.

### ***1. Learn from Practitioners***

Reconciliation, as we understand it, is the healing of broken or wounded relationships, in honest recognition of past hurts. The relationships are with God, with our neighbours, with our enemies, with ourselves, and with the whole of creation. This is a vast field, and reconciliation therefore comes under many names and takes many forms. It also has many practitioners. These range from individuals struggling to improve relationships in their personal spheres of locality, family or work to international organizations that bring a wide range of expertise to bear on major violent conflicts.

There is a huge amount of valuable experience, skill, knowledge, and wisdom to be learned from these practitioners. There is a variety of courses, methods, histories, academic disciplines, personal and group practices, types of organization, and shining personal examples. There are diverse approaches to different sorts of religion, culture, economy, polity, and legal system. There is, therefore, an immense number of written, visual and oral resources available. Discerning what is most relevant to a particular broken or damaged relationship can be difficult, and we need the help of people whose knowledge and judgement we trust. We need wisdom-seeking communities, organizations and groups that can draw on these resources, test them, share them, and encourage all of us involved in reconciliation to be humble learners and confident fellow-practitioners. *So, to be reconcilers means to learn from wise and experienced practitioners*.

## 2. *Engage Deep to Deep*

We have been trying to sound some of the depths of Christian wisdom about peace and reconciliation. And there are other wisdoms, other depths. There are other religions. There are diverse philosophies and ethical codes; rich cultures in literature and the arts; varied forms of law, politics, economics, and philanthropy; the range of human and natural sciences, and the ways they are applied; and each person is uniquely deep, created in the image of the God of love, wisdom and peace.

We have no overview of all this, but take part with others in the ongoing drama of human history, learning with and from them as we fulfil our callings. We trust that God is involved with them in many ways for their good and for ours, and we give thanks when we see signs of this. We are also acutely aware that the relationships across our differences have often been difficult, confrontational, conflictual or violent, with much tragic and bitter history, continuing into the present. And often the most intractable conflicts involve the deep roots and meaning of our identity, in religion, family, land, tribe, nation, or gender.

In this world of multiple depths and many conflicts, a crucial question is whether the diversity can be peaceful and healthy. We have no choice about the diversity, and we see it going wrong in many ways, resulting in division, discrimination, prejudice, oppression, injustice, humiliation, and violence. If it is to go better, one essential is that we each draw on the best and deepest resources available to us. This is important in order to strengthen opposition and resistance to whatever leads to oppression, violent conflict, and other suffering and evil. But 'No' is not enough: we also need an inspiring 'Yes' – to energise us in order to bring healing, repair damage, and constructively help shape communities and institutions where peace and reconciliation can flourish across generations.

Our vision has been trying to inspire that, seeking Christian depths. *But to enable peaceful diversity, these depths need to be brought into conversation and collaboration with the depths of others.* That is a massive challenge. Can we meet and open up communication, deep to deep, with those with whom we deeply differ? For example, might this Christian wisdom of reconciliation stimulate others to respond with wisdoms of reconciliation rooted in the depths of their own traditions, enabling conversation and mutual learning? Might such conversation lead to new forms of collaboration, cooperating together for the sake of peace? There need be no expectation of complete agreement. The aim is first to enable divisive differences to be faced and better understood, without them leading to further division and violence. The quality of disagreement can be greatly improved, which can be vital to building peace. This can then be the setting for negotiation, and for as much understanding and collaboration as possible for the sake of peace.

But beyond better, non-violent disagreement, and even beyond collaboration that works towards a more healthily diverse world, there are other, daring possibilities. As we have reflected on our own experience and on that of many others, two such possibilities stand out.

The first is daring to make friendships across deep differences. Wherever we have found examples of long term reconciliation we have always found that some on each side were willing to risk making long term friendships across whatever divided them. Only such depth of relationship, nurtured face to face, could enable the quality of healing and reconciliation that were needed. *The call to be reconcilers includes a call to make new friends.*

The second is entering into long term covenantal relationships. The idea of covenant is important in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and in many legal systems, and it has analogies in other religions. At its heart is a commitment that goes beyond encounter, conversation, collaboration, and contractual agreement in an alliance (the French for covenant is *alliance*) that can be between individuals, as in marriage and friendship, and also between smaller or larger groups, communities, or movements. Covenant is about sustained, peaceful relationship year after year, without a time limit, on the basis of agreed values, responsibilities and commitments. *The call to be reconcilers includes a call into new covenantal relationships.*

*The flourishing of relationships across deep divisions through conversation, collaboration, friendship, and covenantal commitment can only be sustained if there is engagement deep to deep.*

### 3. Pray Like This

We return in closing to the comprehensive importance and centrality of God. That is the first part of our call: to trust and hope in God and God's peace and reconciliation, learning God's wisdom, and seeing ourselves, the Church, and the world in its light. It has also been emphasised in the first truth about reconciliation according to the Bible, that 'all this is from God', and throughout our vision. The first practical implication of this truth should always be to pray. But how?

We offer a model of prayer from the Letter to the Ephesians that has already contributed much to our vision. The prayer of Ephesians 3:14-21 is well suited to shape a Christian spirituality and practice of reconciliation. The opening chapter of Ephesians first gives a rich horizon of reality centred on '**the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ**', being called into a community of love and forgiveness, sharing in '**all wisdom and insight**', hoping in Jesus Christ who gathers '**all things**' together, and receiving the Holy Spirit. This leads into a prayer for wisdom, knowledge, hope, and the sort of power and energy seen in God raising Jesus Christ from the dead. Then the second chapter, as discussed earlier, centres on Jesus Christ as '**our peace**', who breaks down the dividing wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles and creates '**one new humanity**'. After the third chapter the '**... therefore ...**' (4:1), as also discussed earlier, leads into guidelines for building up a unified community of love, truth, and peace, combating the forces that resist such peace, and praying '**in the Spirit at all times**'.

So the prayer in 3:14-21 flows out of a comprehensive vision of wisdom, love and peace embodied in Jesus, accompanied by prayer; and it flows into the shaping of a community of wisdom, love and peace, accompanied by prayer. We suggest 3:14-21 as a profound example of how Christian groups, teams, communities, and individuals might pray in union with Jesus Christ, '**our peace**', as we seek to comprehend and practice a wisdom of reconciliation.

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**For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name.**

**I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.**

**I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.**

**Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.**

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That prayer opens up and stretches the heart, mind and imagination.

It begins from God as **Father**, the one who is not only the loving source of all life but is also reliably parental, utterly committed to the flourishing of all things together. It embraces **every family** within a horizon of all humanity, and our partial identities are opened up towards others through this **name**. And **in heaven and on earth** opens up the ultimate horizon of God and all creation.

The concern for **your inner being** opens the depths and riches of interior life – heart, mind, imagination. These can go terribly wrong, and cry out for health and strength **through his Spirit**. That **Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith** means that the inner self is brought into an ongoing relationship of trusting Jesus, **rooted and grounded in** being loved, and inspired to love in response.

This love **surpasses knowledge**, is an endlessly rich, bright mystery, the core secret of reality, and the greatest encouragement in our passion for peacemaking. We have tended to use the language of **depth** in our wisdom-seeking, but this prayer stretches hearts, minds and imaginations in every dimension and direction – **breadth and length and height** as well. That stretching is done in community, **with all the saints** (which in the New Testament means everyone in the Church), embracing all those down the centuries and around the world today who are exercised in loving God with all their hearts, minds, souls and strength. The specific importance of our minds, of thinking, and of wisdom-seeking, is clear in asking for **the power to comprehend**.

Then comes the climax of this desire to **know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge**: it is nothing less than **that you may be filled with all the fullness of God**. This is the amazing, unfathomable ultimate in life, love, compassion, wisdom, joy, glory, peace. Participation with others and with all creation in the **fullness of God**, and in the

superabundant life that God delights to give, is the ultimate orientation of our peacemaking.

And the prayer does not end there. It plunges us back into the ongoing drama of loving, with the ongoing **power** of God **at work within us**. We are to be open to unimaginably good surprises from God, who **is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine**. We cannot conceive of them in advance of them happening, but when they do occur we are to give **glory** to God. This is the horizon of faith, love and hope.

The final horizon is that of time and eternity: **to all generations, forever and ever**. This gives a long term perspective, in which trusting God calls for faithfulness, patience, endurance, and willingness to suffer and even die, as it did for Jesus.

*This prayer, together with the rest of the Letter to the Ephesians, opens up a horizon and orientation within which work for reconciliation makes the fullest sense – broad, long, high and deep – and through which we can be formed as reconcilers to respond to the divine invitation and command: **'Seek peace and pursue it'** (Psalm 34:14).*