

this criteria in its absolute sense, the ideal society would embrace freedom in its most comprehensive form and justice would be practiced in attempts to reach as close as possible to absolute justice. Shariah, as the divine law, is a guiding tool for Muslims, but it does not entail the executive power to hang, kill or stone to death in any part of the world. In reality, the concept of Shariah has become too loosely

used in the West when referring to certain Muslim societies. It has to be studied and understood in a much more elaborate and sophisticated manner than it is currently being studied in the light of modernity.

Islam promotes a just, equal, and harmonious society. It calls for community spirit, mutual respect and understanding while giving floor to disagreements and differences of opinions. However, the

newly revamped and modern understanding of freedom has proven that in a free society where morals and principles have diluted or almost disappeared, there is little hope. A society based on individual desires and whims can only succeed in the short term, and even if it does endure longer, it will not leave a permanent mark in the history of humanity.

Iva BERANEK:

## *War and Peace Start in People's Hearts:*

### *On a Spirituality of Reconciliation*

*Freedom has become a luxury in many countries. Wars and conflicts around the world are changing the face of the Earth, often making it look rather depressing. Amidst the terror, it is generally hard to see hope for our society. As Christians, we regularly pray, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven," but often find it difficult to see the kingdom of God present in our surroundings. In this essay, I will argue that the fear of "otherness," which occurs in conflicts, can be overcome by a change of heart. The starting point is that "changing human hearts and changing human society are not separate tasks, but are as interconnected as the two beams of the cross" (Nouwen, 20). Jesus is the one who teaches us about reconciliation and is a bridge-builder across the divide. If we decided to follow Christ on his road of reconciliation, maybe then we would see the kingdom of God growing among us. In the end, hope for more stability and peace may emerge out of our decision for engagement as well.*

#### **DIVERSITY AS A CHALLENGE FOR PEACE IN THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY**

The Bible tells us that in the beginning was harmony, characterised by trust between humans and God, for the "first two chapters of Genesis affirm the covenantal

relationship of trust between God and humanity and the ontological priority of peace over conflict and violence" (Stevens, 50). In the story of the Fall, however, we see the beginning of human conflict and violence, for

**fundamental in the Genesis story is how alienation from God brings a deep insecurity into human affairs. Fear of the neighbour, rather than trust in God, becomes a governing factor in human relations. The neighbour becomes an oppositional 'other' who threatens us.**

(Stevens, 50)

God created "our common humanity" and our diversity, but it seems that we have forgotten to live united in our diversity, to live in a tension of being so different and unique, personally, culturally and religiously, and still sharing the same condition of being human (Stevens, 50). Not knowing how to live with our diversity, we often decide to build walls between ourselves and others. Alienation happens between individuals as well as between larger groups, even nations. Especially in societies wounded by conflict, like in Northern Ireland, Israel and Palestine, or in the former Yugoslavian countries, alienation of one group from the other becomes common. Even when the conflict is over or is silenced, destruction is still visible on buildings, in the cities and in the environment. In Croatia,

near Vukovar, where the war in the 1990s was severe, there are still mine fields with signs warning "do not walk here." If the wounds and signs of conflicts remain in the physical world, they are even more etched in human souls.

Unfortunately, people have mines in their hearts as well. These inner "mine fields" often carry similar messages of a lack of trust, messages warning "do not come near." Personal mines need to be healed or an incident might happen where someone will step on a mine and they will explode causing even greater damage. Where the wound of conflict is deep, the alienation is rarely temporary. This leads to building walls, first in our hearts and then later in the outside world. Sometimes manifesting the multitude of our inner conflicts results in actual brick walls, like the Peace Walls in Belfast or the wall in Jerusalem, built in order to separate the divided groups (McEwen, 14-16). Walls represent fears, insecurity, and false peace. Though "such 'solutions' lessen the possibility of violence... they are ways of life based on fear and mistrust of the neighbour" (Stevens, 50).

Whenever there is a lack of trust between people, the fear of the other is present, for "One of the central issues we face is how we know ourselves in relation to diversity, which is about the acceptance of 'otherness'; how we view

identity and difference” (Cooper, 22-24). Otherness has become an increasing challenge, as most of the conflicts between

persons, groups and cultures, in that magnetic field where ethnicity, politics, culture and religion oppose one another, are viewed increasingly as configured around boundaries and bonds of identity and relationship with those whom we have come to regard as the stranger (Tombs, 138).

Differences should not be “the cause of division” or conflict, but rather the “enrichment of unity” (Stevens, 53). The challenge is to examine and know who we are, to be stable and integrated in our identity, in order to be able to be embrace towards others as well. With some of the doors of our hearts closed towards those who are different, this ideal of unity will not happen easily. Whenever we recognize our hearts as wounded with walls blocking our freedom to welcome the other, we recognize a need for a new heart and reconciliation.

### **THE CALL FOR INNER CONVERSION**

In the Bible, it is said that “a man is what his heart is, and heart is used to designate the character” (Mk 7:21) (McKenzie 344). A person carrying a cold, reserved, fearful, or violent heart is in need of a change. The Biblical notion and hope is for “an interior regeneration, a change of heart which is a transformation of character” (Ezek 18:31; 36:26) (McKenzie 344). This inner change will influence how we relate to others, for the “biblical vision of the heart focuses on that dimension of us which is most sensitive and open to others” (Kennedy 75). Those who have any portion of their hearts frozen and

walled off will not have the human characteristic of openness.

The promise of a new heart that God gave to Ezekiel is compelling. We hope we will hear the same words spoken to Ezekiel: “I shall give you a new heart, and put a new spirit in you; I shall remove the heart of stone from your bodies and give you a heart of flesh instead” (Ezek 36:26). We need a new heart. The promise and call of a new heart offers the wounded light amid the darkness of pain and despair. Through the eyes of a new heart, diversity becomes a sign of the richness of life. A change of heart brings with itself a change of attitudes and the renewal of our minds. This change cannot be forced or bought.

With his life and death, Jesus reconciled Heaven and Earth; we can enter this kingdom by “another kind of birth” (John 3:5). He calls us to “a profound change of heart (*metanoia*)” (Stevens, 87). It is a challenging call. In the Gospels, we see that Jesus is not only encouraging external change, but also inner conversion, for “conversion in the gospel sense refers to an inner disposition, or an attitude of mind and heart” (McCaffrey, 45). Conversion is a call for a changed perspective on the way we live in the world and it leads us to openness (McCaffrey, 45). Jesus, however, does not call us to walk this path alone; he is there to help us.

### **JESUS AS A ROLE MODEL FOR RECONCILIATION**

Through his Passion, Jesus brings love where there was hatred, hope where there was despair, pardon where there was injury (from the Peace Prayer of St. Francis). Jesus identifies with those who are hurt and wounded and wishes to bring healing and love. Everyone bears

hurts, though the wounds have been afflicted differently. We can all identify with personal woundedness in one way or another. These wounds, however personal and unique, if shared or expressed, would probably “speak most deeply to others” (Nouwen, 74). Jesus identified with us exactly in our woundedness and in our limitations, in order to bring us the fulfilment of a restored relationship with God and with others. Christ’s “bleeding flesh is the tearing of the veil that separated us from God” and each other (Venter, 153). Through the crucifixion of Jesus, “all the enmity, boundaries, barriers and divisions crumble” (Venter, 153).

Jesus, being both God and man, walked the road of reconciliation for us that we may know the way by following his footsteps. He is “the Way, the Truth and the Life” (John 14:6). As God incarnate, he made the interface between God and men a sacred space. In Jesus, the alienation that was between God and humans has been transformed into homecoming. We can follow the call of love that Jesus lived and is inviting us to live and learn by looking to him. We do not have to be perfect or strong to follow his way and accept the love he offers. Embracing our weaknesses and wrongdoings and offering our repentance to God “is a kind of homecoming” (McCaffery, 90). St. Therese of Lisieux set an example in this way; she learned to embrace her humanity and limitations to allow grace to work more profoundly in her (McCaffery 30). In the example of Jesus and the way he lived, as Therese discovered, we can see that God loves us even though we are not perfect; he loves us with all our limitations and weaknesses.

The flame of God’s love coming

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from Christ's pierced heart can heal and melt the frozen condition of our hearts. By deciding to follow his call and by accepting his invitation to discover "the fullness of love which alone is eternity," our hearts are transformed (McCaffery 30). This transformation will affect our being and our actions in the world.

The change of heart is gradual and takes time. It also brings a challenge to become transformers, and not only to be the ones who are undergoing transformation. Journeying with Jesus will lead us on the road he travelled, the road of reconciliation; "Jesus offers us a role model of the one who works for the reconciliation of others" (Schreiter, 71). By accepting the call of Jesus, we accept the challenge to love the way he loved, and live the way he lived. We will become "kingdom people," who are "signs of life and hope to any who turn and trust Jesus for healing and transformation, because the kingdom has come and is working in and through us" (Venter, 141).

In building the kingdom by walking the road of reconciliation, we allow God's grace and love to use us for his purposes. We become sowers of God's love. Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field" (Mt 13:31). Even though it is a very small seed, when it grows "it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree" (Mt 13:32). Our hearts and the hearts of others are like the field that Jesus mentions. Sometimes we cannot see the kingdom of heaven around us, as it is like a small seed, still growing. We are living "between the times," caught in the tension of two ages that overlap, because God's government is both

"already" and "not yet" (Venter, 141). The kingdom grows as God's love grows in and among us; Love grows through love. Love is 'divine' because it comes from God and unites us to God; through this unifying process it makes us a 'we' which transcends our divisions and makes us one, until in the end God is 'all in all' (1 Cor 15:28). (Benedict XVI, 29)

The Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI, in his first encyclical *Deus*



Rachael WEBER:

## "Representative"

Unadorned Representative  
endorsing illusions of reform,  
latent pain, the festering  
of concrete boiling in the sun  
on raceways of pavement  
stretching across aching  
plains and rivers and mountains  
and homes and cities and  
people.

But only the perspicacious notice  
cracks in the coruscating oaths—  
and only they are left to contend  
and reveal the contradictions

of the ballyhoo of beliefs upheld,  
of the promulgation of policies,  
of marriages of morality  
and imperfect mankind.  
Sifting through sounding sycophants and  
cryptic curtains cloaking  
byways of bashing  
trivialities

and the wildness of false  
dichotomies. The vines have  
overtaken the telephone poles,  
wires and willows  
weeping overshadow the road.

They must be trimmed  
by absent highway  
men.

Prison bars glare across the page,  
reflections of rays through blinds,  
print blurs and only the inquiring  
choose to wrestle with wounded hip  
for verisimilitude.

*Caritas Est*, emphasises the need of "a formation of the heart" (Benedict XVI, 47). He speaks of charity workers and the need for them "to be led to that encounter with God in Christ which awakens their love and opens their spirit to others," so that their faith may become "active through love (cf. Gal 5:6)" (Benedict XVI, 47). The same may apply for those working on reconciliation.

Jesus challenges us to embrace those who are very different from us - to embrace "Samaritans" as they are also our neighbours (Luke 12:30f). In the kingdom that Jesus brought, enemies can bring blessings, as a Samaritan brought them to a wounded Jew (Luke 10:29-37). A journey of reconciliation brings uncertainties because "embrace is a risk," similar to love (Stevens, 54). We do not know if the embrace will be accepted or despised, nor if it will bring an enriching encounter and transformation. We must release; the "final act of an embrace is a letting go. The arms must open again. The 'other' remains the 'other'" (Stevens, 54). We are to continue our journey towards understanding our differences and building sustainable peace by trusting each other.

## CONCLUSION

Wars and conflicts start in human hearts (Mk 7:21f). If a heart undergoes transformation, all that a person carries in the heart will undergo transformation

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as well. When a person accepts a call to inner conversion, the Spirit of God will work in the person's heart bringing peace and love in place of the desire for conflict and hate. Fears of differences will slowly diminish and restored trust will emerge (Gal 5:22f).

In the end, we recognise the promise of a new heart and reconciliation as gifts offered to us in Christ. Living out of a new heart will introduce us to "a spirituality of reconciliation that reflects the glory of the resurrection" (Stevens, 82). If we are to follow God's call

to be transformers of broken hearts and societies, our Christian vocation of reconciliation will have to be expressed through an engaged spirituality. Ken Newell once said, "While prayer is vitally important, it is no longer enough to pray without action." It is not enough "to wait for God to send revival when what he clearly demands in scripture right now is the forging of new, healthy relationships and positive Christian attitudes" (Stevens 109). Without these relationships and attitudes, the hope for reconciling our societies has no future.

This message is not only valid for Christians; the language of love is universal. The call to love our enemies and to bless those who curse us, in order that they may be transformed through God's love (that we have received), is also universal. The decision to follow Jesus on the road of reconciliation is ours. However, if we, Christians, who have received the message "first," do not take it seriously and do not allow God's grace to work in and through us, we are not to expect that others will follow also (or instead).

**Bogdan Ioan POPESCU**

## *From Constantinople to Geneva:*

### *The Symphonic Cooperation between Church and State*

*The cooperation between the Church and the State was not only a Byzantine tradition. The old pattern took a different shape, suited to the new reality of the beginning of XVI<sup>th</sup> Century, the Reformation. One of the most interesting patterns concerning the relation between the State and the Church which also had a considerable influence on the construction of the modern society began in Geneva, and was promoted by Jean Calvin. The message of the Gospel was no longer considered a private option, but rather it became the ideology of the state and a source of inspiration for the civil laws. Many scholars related his ideas to the principle of symphony, arguing that a Reformed Byzantium was born in the fragmented Western Europe.*

#### **THE REFORMED COOPERATION**

In his book *Institutio Christianae Religionis*, Calvin promotes the idea of two realms that are interdependent and cannot survive without mutual help. Theology has to influence ideologically the political system and the state must protect its source of inspiration. God is the absolute sovereign and naturally His word also becomes law in the political world.

The Church did not constrain the State to be Christian because this cooperation was thought to be natural and of divine origin. Calvin emphasized the Biblical example of king Saul and the prophet Samuel and argued that force was not necessary to impose this alliance, which is wanted by God. According to Calvin, the tasks of the secular government are to protect external worship, to

defend the purity of doctrine, as well as to guard general peace and tranquility. The earthly power is not incompatible with the message of the Gospel. Without cooperation with the State, Christians cannot fulfill their journey in this world. Only a Christian State, and a Church defended by it, can overcome the anarchy of the wicked. The protection offered by the political power is considered to be one of the elementary needs of this life: "Mankind derives as much benefit from it as it does from bread, water, sun and air and its dignity is far greater than any of them...it prevents idolatries, sacrileges against the name of God, blasphemies against his truth...it makes possible innocent contacts between people."

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