



Seattle Pacific University  
**LIBRARY**  
*Discover, Create, Share*

Seattle Pacific University  
**Digital Commons @ SPU**

---

Winifred E. Weter Lectures

Center for Scholarship and Faculty Development

---

Spring 4-12-2016

# 2016 Reconciliation as Holistic Redemptive Transformation

Mike Langford

Seattle Pacific University, langford@spu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.spu.edu/weter\\_lectures](http://digitalcommons.spu.edu/weter_lectures)

---

## Recommended Citation

Langford, Mike, "2016 Reconciliation as Holistic Redemptive Transformation" (2016). *Winifred E. Weter Lectures*. 31.  
[http://digitalcommons.spu.edu/weter\\_lectures/31](http://digitalcommons.spu.edu/weter_lectures/31)

This Multimedia is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for Scholarship and Faculty Development at Digital Commons @ SPU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Winifred E. Weter Lectures by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ SPU.

# Reconciliation as Holistic Redemptive Transformation

*Michael D. Langford, Ph.D.*

*2016 Weter Lecture*

*Seattle Pacific University*

*April 12, 2016*

## Introduction

In the middle of the 1980s, when I was in the formative years of early adolescence, I learned much of what I needed to know in life after I got home from school. I did this by riding my bike around the orchard-covered hills of my rural hometown in southern California, by escaping into books that would take me to other worlds and away from the anxieties of life, and by laughing with my friends as we conspired on strategies of how to take over the world, or at least our school. But mostly, I learned what I needed to know from after-school television. “G.I. Joe” taught me that knowing was half the battle. “He-Man” taught me about the power of Grayskull. And “The Smurfs” and the miniature blue magic of “la la la-la laa, la la-la laaa” taught me the value of ambiguity. I’m not just talking about the ambiguity of how an entire village of male Smurfs co-existed with exactly one female Smurf. I’m not talking about the ambiguity of why Gilgamesh, the full-sized villain, couldn’t just take a bulldozer to the tiny village where the civil defense consisted merely of one slightly larger Smurf named “Hefty.” What I am talking about is the ambiguity of their language. If you are an English speaker, the Smurfs’ language is exactly the same as yours except for one thing. When they did not have a word to express some concept, they rather unimaginatively used the word “smurf.” As in, “Smurfette, you look really smurfy today.” Or, “Brainy Smurf, you really did that smurfily.” Or, “Papa Smurf, if we don’t get out of the way of that bulldozer, we’re smurfed.”

### *Ambiguity of “Reconciliation”*

Why do I bring up the Smurf language here? Because when it comes to the word “reconciliation,” I think it often functions in the same way as the word “smurf.” It can mean any number of things. “Reconciliation” is often used as a synonym for particular expressions of social justice. Others think of reconciliation as the ending of interpersonal conflict. And still others, when hearing the word, think immediately of our reconciliation with God. We say “reconciliation” quite a bit on this campus and, in research done last year, Dr. April Middeljans found that over the last 10 years or so, the word has been used in nearly 30 different ways in various statements and publications and initiatives by the Seattle Pacific University.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps, at times, the idea of “reconciliation” functions as a Rorschach test in which it represents what we believe the essence or function of Christianity to be.

So what is it? Theologically speaking, does reconciliation denote restored relationship with God, or between individuals, or in society? Some would answer, yes, it is all of that. But if it is some combination of things, why does any one of them often get privileged as *the* work of “reconciliation”? Is there some sort of logical ordering? And exactly what does “restored relationship” mean, anyway? What is it restored to?

There are many answers to those questions. Because reconciliation is entwined with the message of Christianity itself, it is intensely personal. So I will not be providing a definitive answer, nor any official SPU position on reconciliation – aside from the multitude of definitions it has already offered. I merely want to offer some thoughts as grist for our conversation. My hope is

---

<sup>1</sup> April Middeljans, “Map of SPU ‘Reconciliation’ Definitions,” compiled December 10, 2014.

that, together, we might think deliberately, faithfully, and humbly about what lies at the heart of the gospel.

In what follows, I hope to address three different things. First, I want to climb into the biblical meaning of the word “reconciliation” so that we might consider it in a slightly different way. Second, I want to vector out from that meaning into the theological dimensionality of reconciliation so that we might consider its horizons. And third, I want to apply the teleology of reconciliation to these dimensions so that we might consider a few practical implications.

So, first, let’s start with the meaning of the word.

## Reconciliation as Redemptive Transformation: Biblical Foundations

### *English Meaning of “Reconciliation”*

The English word “reconciliation” comes from the Latin “reconciliare,” which means “to bring back together,” thus our common understanding of reconciliation as “restored relationship.” So, according to this definition, reconciliation requires 1) two different entities 2) coming back together. This, of course, assumes that the reconciled parties were originally united, but then separated by conflict. And that tends to be how we use the word when we’re talking about reconciliation between two people. But what about reconciliation with God? Or reconciliation as acts of social justice? Those are not necessarily occasions of *restored* relationship, but rather actualization of *new* relationship. So, literally speaking, they are more instances of “conciliation,” not “reconciliation.” So why do we call some newfound instance of intimacy with God or some aspect of social righteousness “reconciliation”? And if it is just two parties coming together, is reconciliation merely coexistence?

### *New Testament Meaning of “Reconciliation” as Transformation*

Here is where it is helpful to note the biblical and not merely popular meaning of the term. There are a few different words in Scripture that we translate into English as “reconciliation,” but the Greek word in the New Testament that represents its theological meaning is “katallage.”<sup>2</sup> “Katallage” or one of its cognates appears 13 times in six different sections of Scripture, all of them Pauline epistles.<sup>3</sup>

Let’s look at probably the most well-known pericope related to reconciliation, in 2 Corinthians, using the NRSV translation.

---

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 5:24 (NRSV) reads, “[F]irst be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.” Here, “be reconciled” is the Greek verb “diállasso,” which means to change someone’s mind, or to renew friendship. Acts 7:26 reads, “The next day he came to some of them as they were quarreling and tried to reconcile them, saying, ‘Men, you are brothers; why do you wrong each other?’” Here, “to reconcile” is “sunálizō,” which means to gather together or assemble. All of the other uses of “reconciliation” in the New Testament are forms of the Greek words “katállage” (noun) or “katállasso” (verb). All three of these – “diállasso,” “sunálizō,” and “katállage” – come from the same root word, “allos” (cf. Acts 6:14, 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, Galatians 4:20, Hebrews 1:12, Romans 1:23), which means “another,” and its verb cognate “allassō,” which means “to make other than it is.” But while “diállasso” and “sunálizō” are used once each in the New Testament, “katállage” and “katállasso” are used numerous times and seem to bear the weight of what we mean by the biblical notion of “reconciliation.”

To make matters more confusing, the English word “atonement” (literally “at-one-ment”), which is commonly used as a translation for the Hebrew “kippur” and Greek “hilasterion,” has been used as a translation of “katállage” in Romans 5:11, though that verse is more often translated as “reconciliation.” Likewise, in Hebrews 2:17, the Greek “hilaskomai” (a verb form of “hilasterion”) has been translated as “to reconcile,” but more commonly as “to make atonement.” Nevertheless, this occasional overlap shows the connection of meaning between reconciliation and atonement.

<sup>3</sup> These 13 appearances are in Romans 5:10-11, Romans 11:15, 1 Corinthians 7:11, 2 Corinthians 5:18-20, Ephesians 2:16, and Colossians 1:20, 22. “Katállage” also appears twice in the Septuagint, in Isaiah 9:5 and Jeremiah 48:39, and once in the Apocrypha, in 2 Maccabees 5:20.

## 2 Corinthians 5:18-21

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. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

In this passage, some form of the word “reconciliation” – or “katallage” – is used five times, so it’s clearly very important. But what precisely does Paul mean?

“Katallage” is a compound of “allage,” which means “change,” and the prefix “kata,” which can mean a number of things, but here means “down to a point,” or “thorough.” So “katallage,” the word that we translate as “reconciliation,” actually means “thorough change” or “transformation.” So what we read as “reconciliation” actually means a transformation, a radical transformation, an ontological transformation.

What are we then to make of Paul saying that God “reconciled us to himself through Christ”? If “reconciled” means “thorough change,” certainly that does not mean God changed us into God; that would indeed be a radical transformation! Rather, the “to himself” is a reflexive pronoun, “heauto,” that could be translated as “for himself” or “in himself.” Thus, 2 Corinthians 5:18 could read something like, “All this is from God, who, through Christ, transformed us for relationship to himself,” or “transformed us within relationship to himself.”<sup>4</sup> The verse then goes on to say that we have been given the “ministry of katallage.” Based upon our transformation, we are then given the ministry of transformation.

### *Transformation to “New Creation”*

But what does this mean, that we are “transformed” and are then to minister transformation? While “katallage” or “reconciliation” does mean transformation, it’s not just any transformation. It’s not generic change. Sometimes talk about the need for change is not accompanied by reflection on what would evidence *worthwhile* change, as if the opening up of new possibilities is good as long as it is new. This is akin to deconstruction without construction, or striving for “freedom from” without concern for “freedom to.” This is the problem the Modern Era ran into when claims of unbridled progress led to colonialist disasters, fragmentation of communities,

---

<sup>4</sup> “Heauto” could also be taking to mean “within himself,” making the translation something like “All this is from God, who, through Christ, transformed us in relationship within himself.” This would be akin to the theological notion of *theosis*, also called “deification” or “divinization,” a concept familiar to Orthodox Christianity in which the goal of human life is to achieve union with God. *Theosis* is in line with reconciliation as defined here in that it is the result of transformation – achieved through purification and illumination – as we receive and participate in God’s ministrations to us. See John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, trans. Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), and Vladimir Lossky *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* [1944], trans. the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1976).

ecological degradation, and the worst wars humanity has ever seen.<sup>5</sup> Change for the sake of change isn't good any more than stasis for the sake of stasis is.

But the transformation Paul describes with “katallage” is not a generic transformation but rather a very specific sort of transformation. Let's take a gander at the verses immediately preceding the ones we were looking at in 2 Corinthians, now slightly re-translated:

#### 2 Corinthians 5:16-17

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

The “katallage” spoken of here in 2 Corinthians is transformation according to the “new creation,”<sup>6</sup> the “kaine ktisis” in Greek, a term Paul uses elsewhere.<sup>7</sup> Where does he get this idea?

#### *“New Creation” as a Jewish Telos of Redemption*

The idea of new creation has a long history in Jewish thought,<sup>8</sup> going back at least to the words of the prophet Isaiah to those in exile that God will be doing a “new thing” (Isaiah 42:9; 43:19; 48:6), and, even if that new thing is “hidden” (48:6) and not yet come, even now we see and hear the new creation as God brings “former things” (42:9; 43:18) to an end, as paths in the wilderness appear and rivers in the wasteland spring up (43:19).

---

<sup>5</sup> On the myth of inevitable progress, see Oliver Bennett, *Cultural Pessimism: Narratives of Decline in the Postmodern World* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), John Gray, *Heresies: Against Progress and Other Illusions* (London: Granta Publications, 2004), Michael Huesemann and Joyce Huesemann, *Techno-Fix: Why Technology Won't Save Us or the Environment* (Gabriola Island, British Columbia: New Society Publishers, 2011), and Georg G. Iggers, “The Idea of Progress: A Critical Reassessment,” in *American Historical Review* 71.1 (October, 1965), 1–17, Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Form and Actuality*, trans. Charles Francis Atkinson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926).

<sup>6</sup> Note that the final verse of this section as noted above, 2 Corinthians 5:21, says “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” God effected our reconciliation with him so that we might not just be considered righteous, but actually become transformed into righteous people ourselves within our relationality to God.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Galatians 6:15. Paul also speaks of the concept of new creation – a reality intended and actualized by God – in Ephesians 2:10, 2:15, and 4:24. See also T. Ryan Jackson, *New Creation in Paul's Letters* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), and Moyer V. Hubbard, *New Creation in Paul's Letters and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). However, it ought to be noted that the idea of new creation is not only in the Pauline corpus. For instance, both Revelation 21:1-5 and 2 Peter 3:13 speak of “a new heaven and a new earth.”

<sup>8</sup> See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* [1951, 1955] (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology*, Fourth Edition (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), Victor P. Furnish, *2 Corinthians* (New York: Doubleday, 1984), J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969).

In the face of desolation, Isaiah offers a mystical glimpse of a new reality where the enemies of God's destiny are defeated (65:12-15), where old wounds will be forgotten (65:17), where joy and delight replace weeping and distress (65:18-19), where the most vulnerable will be safe (65:20), where those in power will not enslave the poor (65:21-22). It is a holistic transformation.

But this new heaven and earth, as the prophet describes it, is not something we achieve, but rather something we receive. Isaiah declares: "All these things my hand has made, and so all these things are mine, says the Lord" (66:2). The new creation belongs to God. Thus, Isaiah says that to receive and participate in the new creation requires a "humble and contrite" (66:2) spirit, what is sometimes called the "fear of the Lord."<sup>9</sup> Those who have chosen their own ways (66:3) and did not listen (66:4) to the Lord have done evil in God's sight. Even some who believe that they act for God's glory and for the good of others are actually enemies of God (66:6) for they lack the proper posture before the Lord. Great judgment will come against them (66:16). But God will be faithful and make all things new.

#### Isaiah 66:22-23

For as the new heavens and the new earth,  
which I will make,  
shall remain before me, says the Lord,  
so shall your descendants and your name remain.  
From new moon to new moon,  
and from sabbath to sabbath,  
all flesh shall come to worship before me,  
says the Lord.

The new creation of which Isaiah speaks is one in which all things are conformed to reality as it is meant to be; the new creation is the *telos* of all creation. God is God before all, and we see ourselves and each other as the people of that God. That's new creation.

#### *Paul's Understanding of Reconciliation as Redemptive Transformation in Christ*

It is this expansive theme of new creation embedded in Jewish consciousness that Paul takes up in 2 Corinthians. "All this is from God, who, through Christ, transformed us within relationship to himself" (5:18, retranslated). But it is not just any transformation. It is transformation according to the good will of God, transformation according to the new creation. In short,

---

<sup>9</sup> The "fear of the Lord" or "fear of God" is a prominent concept throughout Scripture. There are many different interpretations as to the precise definition of this "fear" in the biblical witness, and precisely what would motivate it, but, regardless, "fear of the Lord" revolves around a posture of humility and contrition before God as one before a great authority. See, for instance, the entry on "Fear of God" in the Jewish Virtual Library ([www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud\\_0002\\_0006\\_0\\_06302.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0006_0_06302.html)), the Jewish Encyclopedia ([jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/6045-fear-of-god](http://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/6045-fear-of-god)), and the Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature ([www.studylight.org/encyclopedias/mse/view.cgi?n=6901](http://www.studylight.org/encyclopedias/mse/view.cgi?n=6901)), and "Fear" in Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology ([www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/bakers-evangelical-dictionary/fear.html](http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/bakers-evangelical-dictionary/fear.html)), in Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible ([www.studylight.org/dictionaries/hdb/view.cgi?n=2023](http://www.studylight.org/dictionaries/hdb/view.cgi?n=2023)) and Dictionary of the New Testament ([www.studylight.org/dictionaries/hdn/view.cgi?n=930](http://www.studylight.org/dictionaries/hdn/view.cgi?n=930)), and the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia ([www.studylight.org/encyclopedias/isb/view.cgi?n=3379](http://www.studylight.org/encyclopedias/isb/view.cgi?n=3379)).



reconciliation is *redemptive* transformation. It is redemptive transformation because it is established by the redeeming God (Isaiah 43:1, 14). “All this is *from God*,” says Paul. It is God who is active, and we are receptive and participatory. Recalling Isaiah’s declaration of the need for a humble and contrite spirit to receive the new creation, just before speaking of reconciliation Paul mentions specifically the “fear of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:11), then stating that we have died to self (5:14) and now live “for him who died and was raised for them” (5:15). We participate in the redemptive transformation of God through a posture of humble reception to and participation in what God has effected through Christ.

Let’s take a quick look at the other passage where Paul relates reconciliation to new creation, in Colossians 1. Here, we are presented with what commentators call the “cosmic Christ,” the one in whom “all things in heaven and on earth were created” (1:16) and in whom “all things hold together” (1:16). It is in Christ that reality resides as it is meant to be, and it is through Christ that wounded reality finds healing. Paul calls him the “firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything” (1:18). And it is to the extent that we are “in Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:17) that we then participate in this new reality.

#### Colossians 1:19-20

For in [Christ] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile<sup>10</sup> to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

In fact, here the verb form of *katallage* takes a prefix “apo” which signifies intensification or completion. We might translate Colossians 1:20 as: “Through Christ God was pleased to thoroughly transform within relationship to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven....” *All things* – “ta panta” in Greek, and once again Paul cribs Isaiah by encompassing the new creation as “heaven and earth” – are radically and redemptively transformed through the work of God, and we, like the rest of reality, apprehend that transformation through Christ.

#### *Three Aspects to Transformation*

So let’s expand our original definition of reconciliation to require *three* things: 1) difference, 2) coming together (or relationality), and also 3) transformation. All three of these are necessary for Christian reconciliation to occur.

First of all, there must be *difference*. Jewish philosopher Martin Buber notes that it is only in encountering otherness that one comes to fully apprehend personal identity. In coming to understand difference represented in someone other than the self, I come to understand better who I am. He says, “Through the Thou a person becomes I.”<sup>11</sup> Technology makes homogeneity increasingly easier to find and remain in,<sup>12</sup> but reconciliation does not occur amidst sameness,

---

<sup>10</sup> Here “to reconcile” is *apokatallasso*. Interestingly, it is the final three times that some form of “katallage” appears in the Pauline corpus (here, in Colossians 1:22, and in Ephesians 2:16) that it takes the prefix “apo.”

<sup>11</sup> Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1958), 30.

<sup>12</sup> I do not want to demonize technology here. Though it has the power to isolate us into silos of individualism and sameness – see, for instance, Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from*

whether sameness of being, of background, of politics, or any other demographic. If you only interact with others like you, that agree with you, that think like you, that are appealing to you, there is no possibility of transformation. Theologian Amos Yong notes that we often think of the “other” as somehow disabled, and we will not truly engage with them until that disability is “healed,” meaning that they become more like me. But to truly encounter the other, we must allow them to maintain the integrity of their identity and not make them more like us first.<sup>13</sup> This is true for understanding God as “other” as well; there can be no reconciliation with God if God is in the image of self.

Second, while maintaining particularity, difference needs to establish *relationality*. It is not enough to be at the same school or same church or same zip code as difference; there has to be genuine encounter with otherness. A new creation of relationality. Actual engagement. Conversations. Time together. Knowing someone. Theologian Hans Reinders calls this engagement with the strange other the birth of “friendship.”<sup>14</sup> But we are often afraid of this sort of encounter, and so we stay in our silos of sameness. Says educator Parker Palmer:

We collaborate with the structures of separation because they promise to protect us against one of the deepest fears at the heart of being human – the fear of having a live encounter with alien ‘otherness,’ whether the other is a student, a colleague, a subject, or a self-dissenting voice within. We fear encounters in which the other is free to be itself, to speak its own truth, to tell us what we may not wish to hear. We want those encounters on our own terms, so that we can control their outcomes, so that they will not threaten our view of world and self.<sup>15</sup>

So, in addition to difference, there must be an authentic interaction where both sides bring their real selves to bear, a mutual self-giving in which I not only receive you for who you are, but also am willing to show myself for who I really am.<sup>16</sup> And presenting ourselves as we really are takes some work, uncovering layers of identity that we may not be aware are there. If we don’t come to grips with the presence of power or privilege or shame or presumption or arrogance or fear or sin, then we will not be bringing our true selves to relationality. And, again, this goes for our

---

*Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011) – it also has the capacity to open us up to community and difference. See Carrie James, *Disconnected: Youth, New Media, and the Ethics Gap* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2014), and Howard Rheingold, *Net Smart: How to Thrive Online* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2014).

<sup>13</sup> See Amos Yong, *The Bible, Disability, and the Church: A New Vision of the People of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011).

<sup>14</sup> See Hans S. Reinders, *Receiving the Gift of Friendship: Profound Disability, Theological Anthropology, and Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008).

<sup>15</sup> Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher’s Life*, Tenth Anniversary Edition (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 37-38.

<sup>16</sup> This can be seen in any sense of reconciliation. In our reconciliation with God in Christ by the Holy Spirit, we are not “absorbed” into God whereby we lose our unique particularity, nor does God stop being God, but rather we become related to each other while maintaining our selves. Similarly, in interpersonal reconciliation, both sides must maintain their authentic difference if their relationality is to be true.

encounter with God as well; in reconciliation with God, we must bring our true selves before the Lord, and, humbly and contritely, receive God for who God is.

And third, there must be *transformation*. Why is it so important to understand reconciliation as transformation rather than just a coming together, or a ceasing of hostilities? In 2012, nurse and theologian John Swinton came to SPU to deliver the Palmer Lecture.<sup>17</sup> The title of his talk was “From Inclusion to Belonging,” and spoke about how, often, we strive for the inclusion of people with disabilities in our communities, but stop short of becoming the sort of communities where they belong, where they are indispensable. This isn’t to say that inclusion is bad. It isn’t. Making space for difference is good. But it is only a first step. What is required for true reconciliation is a transformation into a community of belonging. Swinton says:

When you belong, people long for your presence in the same way the Prodigal Son’s father longed for the presence of the wayward son, in the same way that God longs for us to return to God’s heart. To be included you just need to be present. To belong you need to be missed.<sup>18</sup>

Reconciliation is not just inclusion; it is belonging. Reconciliation is not just bringing two parties close to each other. Reconciliation is the transformation of mutual belonging, of relationality. Reconciliation without transformation is, in the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, cheap grace.

Cheap grace is the mortal enemy of our church. Cheap grace means grace as bargain-basement goods, cut-rate forgiveness, cut-rate comfort, cut-rate sacraments; grace as the church’s inexhaustible pantry, from which it is doled out by careless hands without hesitation or limit. It is grace without a price, without cost. . . . Cheap grace is that which we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is preaching forgiveness without repentance; it is baptism without the discipline of community; it is the Lord’s Supper without confession of sin; it is absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without the living, incarnate Jesus Christ.<sup>19</sup>

As Bonhoeffer intimates, reconciliation is not just two parties coming together; it is the transformation that results.<sup>20</sup> South African theologian John De Gruchy says that reconciliation is “not a justice that separates people into the good and the bad, the ritually clean or ethnically acceptable, but one that seeks to bind them together in mutual care and responsibility for each

---

<sup>17</sup> John Swinton’s 2012 Palmer Lecture, delivered on January 12 of that year, was entitled “From Inclusion to Belonging: A Practical Theology of Disability and Humanness.”

<sup>18</sup> A video file of the lecture can be found online ([digitalcommons.spu.edu/av\\_events/134](https://digitalcommons.spu.edu/av_events/134)).

<sup>19</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey, trans. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss, Vol. 4 of Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 43-44.

<sup>20</sup> During the Reformation, in response to the Protestant emphasis on salvation as justification by grace alone, the Roman Catholic Church critiqued the movement as de-emphasizing our participation in salvation, as making sanctification an afterthought or ultimately disposable addition to salvation. The Catholics called salvation as justification alone a “legal fiction” in which whereby we are declared right before God when, in reality, we are not.

other and for the larger society.”<sup>21</sup> His countryman, Bishop Desmond Tutu, notes that, in the wake of Apartheid, both victim and victor are transformed within their reconciliation.<sup>22</sup>

Reconciliation is radical transformation. Reconciliation without transformation is to deny God as Holy Spirit, God as present and active. Reconciliation is not just being right with God; it is growing in holiness. It is not just a ceasing of conflict; it is mutual embrace. It is not just not killing someone; it is loving them.<sup>23</sup> Reconciliation is not just benign co-existence; it is revolutionary comradeship. It is not just forgiveness; it is friendship.<sup>24</sup> It is not just shaking our heads at global injustice; it is being a mediator of global healing. Reconciliation is not just being aware of difference; it is allowing others to change you, and you to change them. It is not just making sure that white people have a quota of people of color around them; it is the change – the mutual change – that comes from the resulting fellowship.

### *Section Summary*

So, in sum, reconciliation, or *katallage*, means “radical transformation,” and the transformation of which Scripture is speaking is not generic but rather redemptive transformation by which all of reality is accorded to God’s new creation. Thus this transformation is an eschatological activity by which, through Christ, God here and now brings things to their true nature, even as we await fulfillment. And to the extent that we are reconciled to God in Christ, we taste that true nature, even as we share its growing pains. But to participate in it, we must adopt a posture of receptivity to the activity of God in which we participate. Understood in this way, reconciliation requires difference, relationality, and transformation. When it is all three, instead of finding a shallow, self-interested reconciliation of co-existing inclusion, we discover a reconciliation of profound and holistic transformational mutuality.

---

<sup>21</sup> John W. de Gruchy, *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002), 204.

<sup>22</sup> See Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York: Image Books, 2000). Similarly, in the biblical narrative, the relational binding of Naomi and Ruth, and of Jonathan and David, results in the eventual transformation of both particularities. We see similar mutual transformations in New Testament encounters of cultural otherness; the Jewish Jesus and the Roman Centurion (Matthew 8:5-18), and the beaten Jewish traveler and the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37).

<sup>23</sup> Jesus speaks of this understanding of full righteousness in the Sermon on the Mount, making it explicit in his radicalization of the Law. Matthew 5:21-22 (NRSV) says: “You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not murder’; and ‘whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, ‘You fool,’ you will be liable to the hell of fire.”

<sup>24</sup> Patristic theologians such as Clement, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory Nazianzen, John Chrysostom, and Augustine, while prioritizing the grace of God, linked the indispensable work of repentance to our forgiveness. In other words, God’s forgiveness of the sinner was not merely a forensic act, but was one that involved transformation into a state of friendship with God. See Ilaria L. E. Ramelli, “Forgiveness in Patristic Philosophy: The Importance of Repentance and the Centrality of Grace” in *Ancient Forgiveness: Classical, Judaic, and Christian*, ed. Charles L. Griswold and David Konstan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012): 195-215.

## Reconciliation as Holistic Transformation: Theological Foundations

Now I want to move from the meaning of reconciliation to the scope of reconciliation. What are the different dimensions of this radical transformation? In what directions does *ta panta* extend? Does this transformation mean new relationship with God? Others? The world? Is there an order?

*Karl Barth*

Well, to answer questions such as these, I prefer to look to the one who solves all our theological problems. Of course I am speaking of Karl Barth. Barth was a twentieth-century Swiss Reformed theologian, and, when people who know about such things name the most important theological thinkers of modernity, his name is always on the list. Barth was trained in the German Liberal School of theology – in the tradition of Friedrich Schleiermacher and Albrecht Ritschl – where Christianity was increasingly understood as a useful framework for inner peace and social ethics. But, after seeing the futility of this gospel in the working class neighborhood of his parish, Barth began to take seriously the revelation of a transcendent God who has engaged our reality in order to redeem it to its true nature. Barth's brand of theology is sometimes called "Neo-Orthodoxy," a brand-name he never liked because he saw his program as regular old "orthodoxy" – the historic claims of the church in response to revelation – that was answering, and asking, new questions.<sup>25</sup>

Barth's magnum opus is *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik*, or the *Church Dogmatics*, which was written between 1932 and 1967.<sup>26</sup> Spanning fourteen part-volumes and nearly 9,000 pages, it is not a

---

<sup>25</sup> For a summary of Karl Barth's life and theological development, please see Everhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts* [1975], trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1976), Bruce McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), and John Webster, *Karl Barth* (London: Continuum, 2000).

There are many, many books on the theology of Karl Barth, either aspects of it or as a whole. Here are some of the more prominent ones: G. C. Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth: An Introduction and Critical Appraisal*, Second Edition, trans. Harry R. Boer (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956), Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *An Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), Eberhard Busch, *The Great Passion: An Introduction to Karl Barth's Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), Herbert Hartwell, *The Theology of Karl Barth* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1964), George Hunsinger, *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), Robert W. Jenson, *God After God: The God of the Past and the God of the Future, Seen in the Work of Karl Barth* (Indianapolis, IN: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1969), Eberhard Jüngel, *God's Being is in Becoming: The Trinitarian Being of God in the Theology of Karl Barth* [1976], trans. John Webster (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 2001), Bruce McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), Thomas F. Torrance, *Karl Barth: Biblical and Evangelical Theologian* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 2001), Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation* [1951], trans. Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), John Webster, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Bruce McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).

<sup>26</sup> The *Dogmatics* were meant to be five volumes long, though Barth did not fully complete the fourth, and never began the fifth (on the Doctrine of Redemption, in which he was to examine eschatology with special attention given to the Holy Spirit). In honor of Barth's famously long excurses, I'd like to briefly summarize the first three volumes here.

surprise to learn that Barth addressed the concept of reconciliation in the *Church Dogmatics*. What may be a surprise is to learn the role it plays in his theological architecture.<sup>27</sup>

### *Barth's Doctrine of Reconciliation*

Volume IV of the *Dogmatics* is entitled the “Doctrine of Reconciliation.” In many ways, Barth centers his entire theological system here, acknowledging that reconciliation constitutes the crux of the gospel. In 3,000 breathtaking pages, Barth deals with the person of Christ, the nature of salvation achieved by him and received by us, our opposition to that salvation, the nature of the church as the community of God that extends this salvation, and our ethical response to that salvation. All of those things for Barth are “reconciliation.” How so? Barth says:

---

The first volume of the *Church Dogmatics* discusses the “Doctrine of the Word of God,” which lays the foundation for his project by establishing the possibility of theology, or “God talk.” How is it that we, imperfect as we are, even imagine that we can talk about God who exists in infinitely qualitative distinction (an idea he derives from Kierkegaard) from us? Barth answers, like Isaiah and Paul, that we can proclaim truth because it is God who acts first, and we follow along receptively. It is God who speaks to us in his Word – that is, Christ, “the image of the invisible God,” as Colossians 1 says. But God does not stop there, but also Self-reveals in the power of the Spirit through the biblical witness to that Word, and through our verbal proclamation of that witness. All along, God gives us the gift of faith whereby we may subjectively receive that objective Word given to us and proclaim it. Only to the extent that our God-talk accords itself to God’s own God-talk in God’s Word is our theology true theology.

The second volume covers the “Doctrine of God.” God is revealed to us in Christ, and yet, because it is a creaturely medium of revelation, the essence of God is also completely hidden from us in Christ. This dialectic guides Barth’s dogmatics; we can speak about the nature of God, but given who we are and who God is, we must do so humbly. Given that qualification, Barth ventures into describing who God is, what theologians call the “attributes of God,” but what Barth calls “perfections.” These perfections include such things as God’s grace and holiness, constancy and omnipotence, all of which may be summed up as God’s glory, but primarily, Barth says, God may be understood as the one who loves in freedom. By this he means that all that God does is loving, and yet it is not constrained to our notions of love, nor to any boundaries that might be put on it. This is witnessed, of course, in the person and work of Christ. Barth revolutionizes the doctrine of election, saying that in Christ, we see that God has elected to both judge the sin of humanity with a divine “no,” while also electing to graciously bestow new life upon humanity with a divine “yes.” In Christ, we see both God’s love for humanity, and humanity’s sanctified new life in response to it, a new life in which we may participate through the work of the Holy Spirit.

The third volume encompasses the “Doctrine of Creation.” Barth links creation and covenant, saying that while God’s love is the inner basis of the covenant God makes with us, creation is its outer basis; in other words, creation is the theater for God’s covenantal relationship with humanity, the space where the history between God and us may take place. Barth’s theological anthropology is typically Christocentric; it is only in Christ that we see what it is to be truly human, which is characterized as fellowship with both God and others, and maintained by God’s providence. To deny this creaturely reality is sin, which we see judged on the cross. Barth defines sin as “nothingness,” as that which is opposed to God’s reality, and our participation in sin is therefore an “impossible possibility” because, in our embrace of sin, we live a lie. Barth ends the volume with the “ethics of creation,” because all theology must result in action. Good action results when we hear the Word of God and respond, and because it corresponds with the Word of God, it will be action in accordance with God’s reality where God is God and we are God’s creation commanded to live in fellowship with God and others.

<sup>27</sup> For an examination of the centrality of the “Doctrine of Revelation” to Barth’s overall theology, see Adam Neder, *Participation in Christ: An Entry into Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).

It would be possible and quite correct to describe the covenant fulfilled in the work of reconciliation as the heart of the subject-matter of Christian faith, of the origin of Christian love, of the content of Christian hope.<sup>28</sup>

For Barth, reconciliation is the transformation of all things to their intended reality, into new creation, a creation in which God is God and we are God's creatures who live in fellowship with God and others as people of faith, love, and hope. In short, this is the reality of *covenant*, a relationship of mutual commitment in which God is faithful to us, and we are faithful to God and therefore our God-given identity.

But, of course, we do not live according to this reality because of sin in all its pervasiveness. Covenant reality is broken. Our fellowship with God and each other is disrupted. But, in Christ, the covenant is satisfied on both sides. In Christ, God's faithfulness to us explodes into our history, and our faithfulness to God is fulfilled, even unto death. In Christ, God judges sinful unfaithfulness as unreal, and declares a verdict that the covenant-breaker has no future, and that fellowship with God and others is our new reality. We come to see and live out this new reality through the power of the Holy Spirit present in community. And we bear in word and deed this good news of covenant fulfillment, of new creation, in all of its expansiveness into all the world. This is the story of reconciliation.

Barth divides the doctrine into three parts, three different ways that Christ reconciles or transforms us to our true reality. Perhaps the best way to illustrate the expansiveness of reconciliation for Barth is to show how these three aspects work in parallel.

As the Son of God, Christ overcomes our sin of pride, achieving humanity's justification. The Holy Spirit actualizes this by gathering the Christian community, within which disciples are given faith.

As the Son of Man, Christ overcomes our sin of inactivity<sup>29</sup>, achieving humanity's sanctification. The Holy Spirit actualizes this by upbuilding the Christian community, within which disciples are given love.

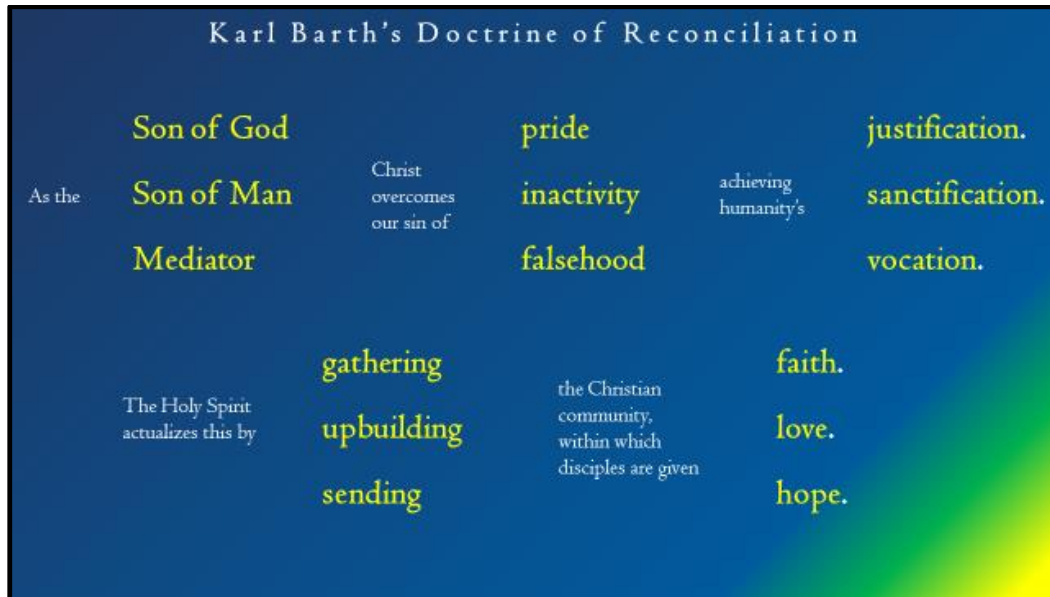
As the Mediator, Christ overcomes our sin of falsehood, achieving humanity's vocation. The Holy Spirit actualizes this by sending the Christian community, within which disciples are given hope.

Portrayed graphically, Barth's doctrine of reconciliation would look like this:

---

<sup>28</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, 4.

<sup>29</sup> Barth actually calls the sin that is overcome in our sanctification, and that militates against love, "sloth."



As you can see, for Barth, reconciliation is extensive. Reconciliation is the work of Christ as the Son of God, the Son of Man, and Mediator. Reconciliation overcomes our sin as pride, inactivity, and falsehood. Reconciliation is the justification, sanctification, and vocation of humanity. Reconciliation is the gathering, upbuilding, and sending of the people of God. And reconciliation is the actualization of faith, love, and hope in the life of the Christian. Nerdy theological types would call the first triad “Christology,” the second “hamartiology” (or doctrine of sin), and the fourth “ecclesiology” (or doctrine of the church). But I want to look at the third and fifth, which together would be “soteriology,” or doctrine of salvation.<sup>30</sup>

### *Objective and Subjective Salvation*

The first of these two triads is what God has achieved in Christ. We might call this “objective salvation,” or that which God has done once and for all. In Christ, God has *justified* humanity. We are made right before God. In Christ, God has *sanctified* humanity. We are made holy before God. And in Christ, God has given humanity their *vocation*. We are called to continue his mission. God has achieved salvation for all humanity in these three ways, accomplished “there and then” in the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is salvation that has been done.

But that is not all there is to salvation. The second of these two triads is what God is achieving in the Holy Spirit. We might call this “subjective salvation,” or that which God is doing in each of us more and more. In the work of the Holy Spirit, God gives us *faith*. We are awakened to our true identity in which we believe and trust in reconciled reality, the new creation. In the work of the Holy Spirit, God gives us *love*. We are quickened to embrace our true identity in which we

<sup>30</sup> However, technically speaking, it would be difficult to separate Christology and ecclesiology from Barth’s understanding of salvation, for salvation is grounded in the person and work of Christ, and it finds its theater in the people of God, the church.



freely give ourselves to each other. And in the work of the Holy Spirit, God gives us *hope*.<sup>31</sup> We are enlightened to our purpose as we embrace the true future set before us. Just as God has achieved salvation in justification, sanctification, and vocation, each of us receives salvation in these three ways. It is salvation that is being accomplished “here and now” in the work of the Holy Spirit. It is salvation that is being done.

As both objective and subjective, salvation is at once finished and in process. Complete and happening. “Already” and “not yet.” Barth uses the terms “de jure” and “de facto,” meaning “in reality” and “in effect.” In Christ, God has already inserted true reality into our history. In the language of Paul and Isaiah, the “new creation” has already come. But, at the same time, we look for that new creation to take full effect in us, in our communities, and in our world. We yearn for the actualization of the truth, the beauty, the goodness, the justice that we glimpsed in Christ. This is the tension of what is sometimes called “inaugurated eschatology.” The new creation – or “Kingdom of God” – has come, and the new creation is still coming.

Barth presents the relationship between objective and subjective salvation in a form analogous to the two natures of Christ. Just as Jesus is fully God and fully human, so our salvation is fully objective and fully subjective, two aspects of salvation that are distinct and yet inseparable. The salvation achieved in Christ two thousand years ago and the salvation received by us today from the Holy Spirit are related to each other as a bipolar relational unity, two distinct aspects that are inseparably joined together.<sup>32</sup> However, this unity is asymmetrical; just as the divine nature of Christ ultimately holds “marginal control”<sup>33</sup> over his human nature in that the former recapitulates the latter, so also objective salvation frames our subjective salvation. In other

---

<sup>31</sup> While it is more evident how “faith” is the actualization of our reconciliation with God, and “love” is the actualization of our reconciliation with each other, how is “hope” the actualization of our participation in the reconciliation of the world? Barth says: “Christian hope is a present being in and with and by the promise of the future, a being which is seized by the promise of God and called. If a man does not seize this hope, apprehend it, conform himself to it here and now as a man who belongs to the future, he is not one who has Christian hope.” Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, 122. In other words, it hope, the Christian is able to perceive the coming Kingdom of God and, in this perception, is able to participate in it. “Jesus Christ is God’s mighty command to open our eyes and to realise that this place is all around us, that we are already in this kingdom, that we have no alternative but to adjust ourselves to it, that we have our being and continuance here and nowhere else. In Him we are already there, we already belong to it. To enter at His command is to realise that in Him we are already inside. To follow His invitation and demand is to find ourselves in the situation already created in Him and in Him already our own situation. That is man’s reconciliation with God in the form of the issuing and receiving of the divine direction.” Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, 100-101. It is for that reason that Barth says the content of our vocation, the objective salvation which hope signifies, is that of *witness*. We are called to be people of hope, people who are living witnesses of the Kingdom of God.

<sup>32</sup> The Council of Chalcedon declared in 461 that Jesus was to be “recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.”

<sup>33</sup> Chemist and philosopher Michael Polanyi defines “marginal control” as the priority that a higher level has over a lower level in any sort of relational unity such that the lower level is subject both to the laws that govern its particularities, and to the laws of the higher level. See Michael Polanyi, *Knowing and Being: Essays by Michael Polanyi*, ed. Marjorie Grene (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), and Michael Polanyi and Harry Prosch, *Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975). In the case of the Incarnation, the “lower level” of Christ’s humanity was subject to physical laws, and was also ultimately subject to the “higher level” of Christ’s divinity, which was not subject to physical laws.

words, as we noted in our examination of the Scriptural witness, our inner transformation is not generic but is rather redemptive according to the reality sealed in Christ. We don't define it, it defines us. We don't achieve it. We receive it and participate in it.

### *Relationalism*

If salvation has a temporal dimensionality of already and not yet, what is its “horizontal” dimensionality, so to speak? What is the extent of *ta panta*? To imagine the horizons of salvation, it is helpful to draw upon the philosophy of relationalism. Relationalism emphasizes the relational structure of reality, our understanding of it, and how we live in it.<sup>34</sup> Relationalism asserts the essential connectedness of all things, a philosophical posture in line with postmodern critiques of traditional assumptions regarding boundaries surrounding particularities. Because of the ontological truth of relatedness, that “reality is relational,” there are epistemological ramifications, namely, that “relationality [is] ontologically prior to rationality,”<sup>35</sup> that is, our relationship to something is necessary (though not sufficient) for our understanding of it. Relationalism is inevitably cross-disciplinary since all realms of discourse are connected. Indian philosopher Joseph Kaipayil, psychoanalyst Carl Rogers, physicists Neils Bohr and Albert Einstein, theologian Thomas Torrance, existentialist Søren Kierkegaard, artist M.C. Escher, chemist Michael Polanyi – all, in their own fields, have noted that understanding is only possible through new rationalities found in openness to the subject matter. Relationality precedes rationality. This is a theological truth as well, of course. We see in the person and work of the Son and the Spirit that God is ontologically oriented toward relationship within God's own Self and in God's interaction with us.<sup>36</sup> And it is only through our relatedness to God in Christ by the Holy Spirit that we might know true reality as defined by God.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> This traces the traditional subdivisions of philosophy: ontology (or metaphysics), epistemology, ethics.

<sup>35</sup> James E. Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 8. Loder's transformational paradigm, emerging out of relationality, is examined more closely below.

<sup>36</sup> Christians confess that God is a community; not a community of separate beings, but rather one Being in which relationality exists. We use the analogical title of “Trinity” to signify this relationality of God, calling the different aspects of this inner relationality the “Persons” of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We know that there is this perichoretic (meaning “mutually interpenetrative”) relationality within God because we witness the perichoretic relationality of God's threefold work among us, also called the “economy” of God. Because God's work of creation, reconciliation, and redemption – work that is appropriated (though not isolated) to the Father, Son, and Spirit – is relationally entwined, so might we conclude that God is similarly relationally entwined because, as famously stated by Karl Rahner, “The ‘economic’ Trinity is the ‘immanent’ Trinity and the ‘immanent’ Trinity is the ‘economic’ Trinity.” Rahner, *The Trinity* [1967], trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 22.

<sup>37</sup> As Christians, we see this logic of relationalism exposed most fully in the work of God in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, a work that establishes relationality between God and humanity that then enables a knowing of God by humanity. Relationship with God – established in the Father's work of creation, realized in the Son's work of reconciliation, and actualized in the Spirit's work of redemption – precedes our understanding of God, which is given and discovered in faith. Barth's tirade against the *analogia entis* – the idea that God can be known through natural structures through inherent human faculties, also called “natural theology” – was born out of the conviction that we can know God only within our relationship with God, or within God's relationality of Father, Son, and Spirit. In other words, we can only come to have God-knowledge within the *analogia fidei*, or the knowledge of faith, which is established in our relationship with God accomplished in the work of God. For further exposition on Barth's stance on this, see Emil Brunner and Karl Barth, *Natural Theology*, trans. Peter Fraenkel (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1946), which is comprised of Brunner's “Nature and Grace” Barth's reply, simply entitled “No!”

God is a relational God who has created a relational reality.<sup>38</sup> And that reality declares that we are inherently relational creatures. We see in Genesis that we are created to be in relationship with God and with others in community;<sup>39</sup> we see the same in the life of Jesus. And, further, we see that we are related to those outside of our immediate communities, to the rest of humanity, what Scripture sometimes calls “the world,”<sup>40</sup> to which we are commanded to go and be neighborly.<sup>41</sup>

### *Eschatological Relational Dimensionality of Reconciliation*

And so, these three relational dimensions of reality – with God, others, and society – are the sites of salvific transformation, a transformation that has happened, but is yet still to fully happen.<sup>42</sup> In

---

<sup>38</sup> For instance, the symbioses described in ecological relationships illustrate how all localities exist within a complex systemic inter-relationship. The work of Yaneer Bar-Yam, president of the New England Complex Systems Institute and author of *Dynamics of Complex Systems* (New York: Perseus Books, 1997), applies complex systems theories to a multitude of issues and disciplines, including economics, ethnic violence, healthcare, management, engineering, education, negotiation, biology, and military conflict. In so doing, he shows not only how issues and disciplines can only be understood in light of their relationships, but also how the relationships *between* different issues and disciplines are helpful for a more robust understanding within any of them.

<sup>39</sup> We see in both Genesis accounts of creation that humanity is not complete without community. In Genesis 1, as a climax of the creation saga, God creates humanity in plural form (1:27), and the first command given to them is to “be fruitful and multiply” (v. 28). In Genesis 2, creation was not complete with only Adam; God declared that “it is not good that the man should be alone” (2:18). Theologically speaking, in both accounts, humans are created to be with others. However, this communal anthropology is grounded in an antecedent relationship with God. In Genesis 1, the creation of humanity is preceded and enabled by the vivifying presence of God’s Spirit, just as it is God who breathes the Spirit into the earth creature in Genesis 2. Further, being created in God’s image (1:26) suggests a correspondence between God and humanity, one that empowers relationality. In other words, we are created to be in relationship with others because we are in relationship with God.

<sup>40</sup> The “world” in Scripture can refer to many things, including the cosmos, the physical earth, and the present or coming “age.” Here, I refer to those times that it refers to people, namely, those who are not of the Christian community and can be opposed to it. See, for instance, John 15:18-19; 17:14-16 and 1 John 3:1; 5:4-5. See Hermann Sasse, “Aion” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964): 197-209, and “Kosmos” in *TDNT*, vol. 3 (Eerdmans, 1972): 867-898.

<sup>41</sup> This is seen in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) in which we are called to make disciples of “all peoples” (“ta ethne”), and when we are called to be witnesses even “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). However, we also see in the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) that our neighbor that we are called to love as ourselves (27) is not only those in “the world” who are not part of our community (here, the Samaritan foreigner rather than the priest or holy Levite), but also that this neighbor minister to us (as the Samaritan cared for the destitute traveler) as much or more than we minister to them. Barth notes that even those that are unknown to us are our neighbors with whom we are in fellowship. “Those with whom he seems to stand in this widest relationship we call his distant neighbours. We might also call them foreigners in so far as he is a member of his own people (those who are closely known to him), though not total, but only partial and relative foreigners, in so far as they are fellowmen.” Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/4, 288.

<sup>42</sup> This is what drives Paul to say, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me” (Galatians 2:19b-20a), and yet, he can also say, “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate” (7:15). Paul believes that his identity is sealed in Christ, and yet he

each, we believe that the new creation has come, and is coming. It is objectively complete, and subjectively in process, two aspects of one reality. Though the new creation has been established in Christ, it is not yet consummated. And though we await the fulfillment of the personal, communal, and social dimensions of reality, even now that reality reaches back into our present, invading it with pockets of the Kingdom of God, of new creation, if we have eyes to see it, ears to hear it, and hearts to receive it.<sup>43</sup>

It is within these relational dimensions of salvation that Barth rehearses the ecology of reconciliation. In our justification actualized in *faith*, we apprehend our reconciliation with God. In our sanctification actualized in *love*, we apprehend our reconciliation with each other in our communities. And in our vocation actualized in *hope*, we apprehend reconciliation in the world. It is each of these, and it is all of these.<sup>44</sup> This is what drives John Wesley to say of salvation: “[F]aith, holiness, and good works [are] the root, the tree, and the fruit, which God has joined, and man ought not to put asunder.”<sup>45</sup>

### *Logical Ordering of Reconciliation*

Note that, for Barth, there are consistently *three* elements within each of the different aspects of salvation. Justification, sanctification, vocation. Faith, love, hope. He presents them in a shape analogous to the three persons of the Trinity, illustrating an “inner logic” to reconciliation. Just

---

grapples with the fact that his present existence is not yet accorded to that reality. Along with Paul, we might say that our present identity is the paradox of “I-not-I-but-Christ.”

The same goes for our communities of faith, our churches. Just as Paul can say “[I]n Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others” (Romans 12:5), he also admonishes others to live out that reality: “I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought” (1 Cor. 1:10). Our communities of faith are one in Christ, and yet they do not live according to that reality. We might say that the present state of our churches is “We-not-we-but-*koinonia*.”

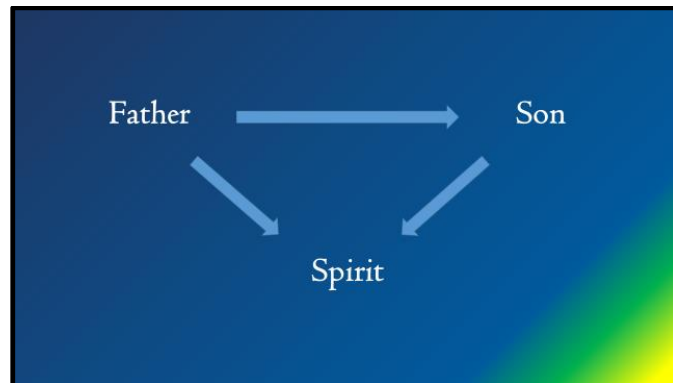
And, the same is true for the world around us. Just as Scripture can declare the reality of there being “neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28), so also does it implore believers that “faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead” (James 2:17). We believe that the new creation has come, and yet it clearly is not yet come. We might say that the present state of our world is “World-not-world-but-Kingdom of God.”

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Matthew 11:15 and Mark 4:9. Jesus notes that apprehension of the Kingdom of God requires an appropriate posture of receptivity. In these statements, Jesus presents the Kingdom of God not as something we create, but rather something that, with God’s help, we encounter as happening around us. Again, it is not a reality we achieve, but one we receive and participate in, which requires a measure of humility and contrition.

<sup>44</sup> So reconciliation is faith – the transformation of our relationship with God into one of rightness. It is not only that, but it is no less than that. Reconciliation is love – the transformation of our relationships with those around us into bonds of self-giving. It is not only that, but it is no less than that. And reconciliation is hope – the transformation of our relationship with the world around us into a mission of vigorous witness to new creation. It is not only that, but it is no less than that.

<sup>45</sup> Written August 29, 1739, in John Wesley’s journal, found in *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, Vol. 1 (London: John Mason, 1837), 209.

as there is one God who is fully understood and actualized as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, so our one salvation is fully understood and actualized objectively as justification, sanctification, and vocation, and subjectively as faith, love, and hope. Further, the doctrine of the Trinity states that the Father begets the Son, and the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son (with, of course, a nod of acknowledgement to our Orthodox brothers and sisters who would describe the Spirit's procession a bit differently). Though all three Persons of the Trinity are co-equal, there is still an ordering in terms of their relationship with each other.<sup>46</sup>



The same is true with the different works of reconciliation. Our reconciliation with God, our reconciliation with each other, and our reconciling efforts in the world are all essential parts of our salvation, and even if there is not a chronological ordering to them, there is a logical ordering. Our reconciling love for one another is begotten of our faith, and our reconciling hope for the world proceeds from our faith and love. In other words, we are made right with God so that we can love one another,<sup>47</sup> and our relationship with God and one another enables us then to go into the world to bear the ministry of reconciliation.<sup>48</sup> This means that our work of reconciliation in the world is preceded by Christology and ecclesiology, that is, it is enabled by our reconciliation with God in Christ, and by our reconciliation with others in our communities.

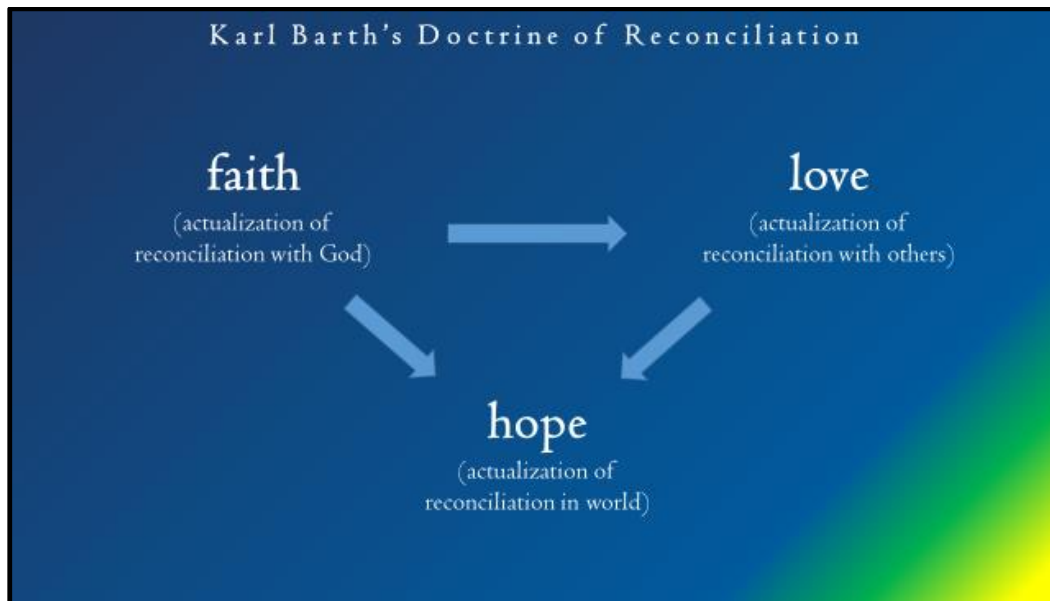
---

<sup>46</sup> The three Persons of the Trinity are identical to each other in all ways except for how they relate to one another. In all ways, for instance, the Father is the Son and the Son is the Father, except for the fact that the Father is unbegotten and the Son is begotten (of the Father). In other words, the only thing that distinguishes the Persons is relationality, meaning that relationality itself is inherent in the Godhead. For a theological account of the relationships of the Persons of the Trinity, see Augustine, *The Trinity* [c. 400-417] trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1991).

<sup>47</sup> “But love to God – to the God who reconciles the world to Himself in Jesus Christ – evokes love to the neighbor and the brother. And love to the man who is made a neighbor and a brother in Jesus Christ follows love to God.” Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, 106.

<sup>48</sup> “It is now actually the case that in [the church’s] particular existence it stands vicariously for the whole world.... Its members are men who can hope on the basis of the promise. But if they hope seriously, they hope in God, and in God for the world – for themselves, too, but for themselves as those who belong to the world which God has reconciled with Himself in Jesus Christ. They hope to see this the case, i.e., to see the world – and themselves with it – fulfilling its being in the service of God.” Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, 152.

True societal transformation requires theological roots glimpsed in faith and apprehended in love.<sup>49</sup>



Does this mean that God only effects the work of reconciliation through Christian communities? Of course not. God is doing all sorts of things all the time outside of our awareness. But, as Christians, we confess that our ability to identify and participate in the work of God's cosmic reconciliation is made possible by our faith in Christ and the love of our communities.

### *Holism of Reconciliation*

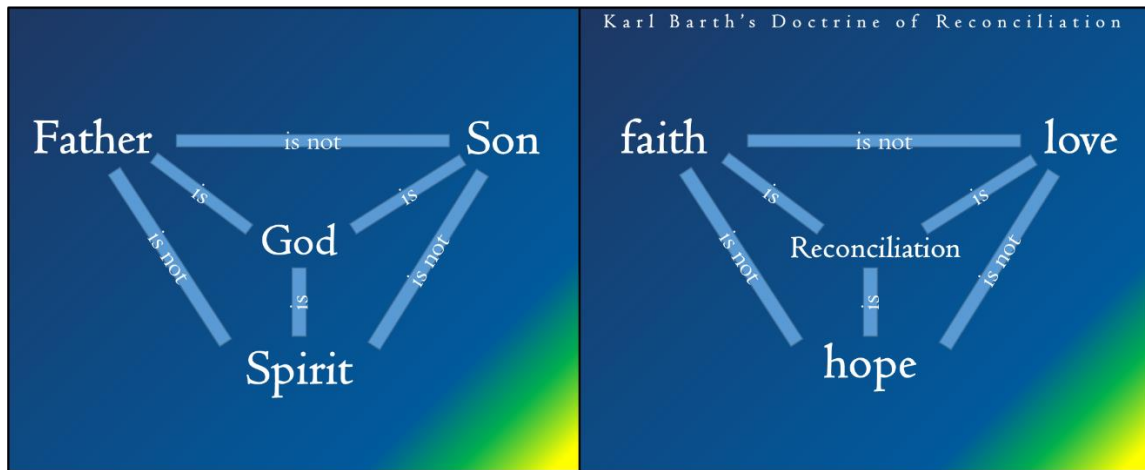
In addition, note another analogy to the Trinity in regards to reconciliation. The doctrine of the Trinity states that God is fully present in the work of any Person of the Trinity.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, salvation is fully present in any of its three aspects. In our understanding of the three relational dimensions of reconciliation, we might say that the reconciling work of God is fully present in our transformed relationship with God, or others, or society. And yet reconciliation is not fully apprehended unless its horizon is extended to include transformed relationship with God, and others, and society. Just as we cannot understand God without understanding God as Father, Son,

---

<sup>49</sup> For Barth, true reconciliation must begin with faith, and is therefore only apprehended within the *analogia fidei*, or "analogy of faith," as discussed above (Note 37). This is counter to those who might say that reconciliation is built upon other foundations, such as policies or self-discipline or even education. That, Barth would say, is attempting to define reconciliation through an *analogia entis*, or "analogy of being," whereby our definition is built upon our own faulty and self-serving understanding of self and creation. Further, Barth would say that true reconciliation is only borne out of Christian community as the locus of empowering love; this would be counter to the claim that Christian reconciliation can use some other insufficient form of empowerment than the ministrations of the Holy Spirit present in Christian community.

<sup>50</sup> The ancient theological dictum "*opera Trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt*," or "the external acts of the Trinity are indivisible," means that God is fully present in God's acts. Even though we "appropriate" acts to Persons of the Trinity (e.g., we attribute inspiration to the Holy Spirit), all of God is present and active in them.

and Holy Spirit, so we cannot understand reconciliation without the presence of faith, hope, and love.



Some prefer to think of reconciliation as merely finding intimacy with God in faith. And it is that. But if it was only that, it would be a privatized faith, not meant to extend outside of an inner experience. Some prefer to think of reconciliation as merely finding oneness in our communities, a set of loving relationships. And it is that. But if it was only that, it would become a self-serving love, one where we seek homogenous communities that believe more or less what we believe such that reconciliation is easy to achieve. Some prefer to think of reconciliation as merely finding the right causes to fight for, working toward what they hope to see in the world. And it is that. But if it was only that, it would become self-defeating hope, driven by political or personal ideologies unhinged from theological and communal grounding.

Just as the Persons of the Trinity are bound together in perichoretic unity, so are the disparate aspects of reconciliation bound together such that, if any is left out, the unity falls apart.<sup>51</sup>

### Section Summary

So, in sum, for Barth, reconciliation is the transformation of reality into its true nature of covenantal fellowship. This reconciled reality is objectively achieved by God in Christ in an ecology of justification, sanctification, and vocation. This reconciled reality is then subjectively received by us in the Holy Spirit's gifts of faith, love, and hope. In the work of the Holy Spirit, we find reconciliation with God, with others, and with the world. These three relational dimensions exist as a unity-in-distinction. And yet, without any ranking, they exist in a logical ordering such that faith begets love, and from faith and love proceeds hope. For it to be *Christian* reconciliation, all three are necessary.

<sup>51</sup> As a thought experiment, we could say that...

- Christian reconciliation with God but not with others (faith without love) is religious formalism.
- Christian reconciliation with God but not in the world (faith without hope) is dead gnosticism.
- Christian reconciliation with others but not with God (love without faith) is shallow emotionalism.
- Christian reconciliation with others but not in the world (love without hope) is parochial sentimentalism.
- Christian reconciliation in the world but not with God (hope without faith) is immature pragmatism.
- Christian reconciliation in the world but not with others (hope without love) is pharisaic legalism.





## Reconciliation as Salvific Transformation: Practical Suggestions

I want to now imagine some ways that, given our theological understanding of reconciliation as holistic redemptive transformation, we might embrace it in our midst.

To review, reconciliation is not merely bringing two things together. Rather, reconciliation is an encounter of two particularities such that there is resultant transformation. For Christians, this transformation is grounded in the already completed work of God in Christ, and has its horizon in the ongoing work of God in the Holy Spirit such that we are accorded to the new creation. We have proposed that this horizon has three relational dimensions of reconciliation with God apprehended in faith, with others in love, and with the larger society in acts of hope. But how does this transformation happen? How can I put myself in a position to receive and participate in these dimensions of reconciliation?

### *Personal Transformation in Faith*

Firstly, redemptive transformation emerges from my reconciliation with God to whom I am bound in faith. In personal transformation, I embrace my reality as, to paraphrase Paul, I-yet-not-I-but-Christ.<sup>52</sup> Within a Spirit-empowered relationality with Jesus, I become more and more who I am created to be. What is the means of this transformation? I look here to the work of theologian James Loder, who describes a five-fold paradigm<sup>53</sup> that undergirds the process of transformation.<sup>54</sup>

*First*, in occasion of transformation, there is “conflict-in-context” in which something happens that unsettles us. It might be an experience, a thought, or a relationship that does not fit the reality in which we have settled. These conflicts are unpredictable and varied, so they must be

---

<sup>52</sup> From Galatians 2:19-20. See Note 42 above. Using the imagery of this passage, James Loder speaks of the dialectical relationality of the “I” and Christ as the *telos* of transformation, the goal of identity formation. “Such a dialectical identity means that the sense of ‘I’ is affirmed, not primarily on the basis of repression and being good, but on the basis of grace, the eternal ‘yes’ of God, that brings a cosmic ordering, loving presence of God, to bear on human life and, in that, confirms the self at a level that is deeper than guilt or shame, deeper than good or evil.” Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit*, 145.

<sup>53</sup> For a summary of the paradigm, see Loder, *The Transforming Moment*, Second Edition (Colorado Springs: Helmers and Howard: 1989), p. 3-4, 37-40.

<sup>54</sup> For Loder, transformation is not merely growth or change, but rather a generative act of the human spirit as it tries to make sense of the world, or some aspect of the world, with which it interacts. “[T]ransformation occurs whenever, within a given frame of reference or experience, hidden orders of coherence and meaning emerge to replace or alter the axioms of the given frame and reorder its elements accordingly.” Loder, *The Transforming Moment*, 229. The human spirit reaches out for order amidst disorder, and will construct it if not found. In this way it is an analogue of the Holy Spirit. Loder sees this constructive capacity as definitive of the human spirit. “[I]n Western culture, the human spirit has been characterized by reason, universality, freedom, personality, love, and creativity. I have taken creativity as the most fundamental and generative of these themes, arguing that the other options all presuppose and depend on a transformational creativity as the central dynamic behind their operations.” Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit*, 107.

understood within their contexts, which often determine the type and extent of resources available for a solution.

*Second*, there is a period of “scanning” in which the human spirit reaches out for a resolution to the conflict in order to re-attain a sense of inner equilibrium. This can be a conscious activity, but more often it is an unconscious sense of “searching” that can last anywhere from a few seconds to a lifetime. Often, even usually, the solution comes from an unexpected source, and therefore its discovery is enabled more by a posture of receptivity than by looking in a particular place.

*Third*, there is a “constructive act of imagination” in which an insight is felt with intuitive force.<sup>55</sup> There’s no way to know when or how this will happen; it could be when we are sitting in class or lying in bed or running errands. But, when it does happen, we sense we have hit on something. In this moment, the human spirit has taken the fragmented coherence and, perhaps in light of a new experience or idea, creatively reconstituted it into new meaning, but without denying any due validity to previous experiences or ideas. In other words, there has been an inner reconciliation.<sup>56</sup>

*Fourth*, there is a “release and openness.” At this stage, energy that has been used to hold together the ruptured inner coherence while searching for answers is released. This “a-ha!” experience of breakthrough can result in a long exhale or laughter or tears. Energy is now available for a new way of seeing reality, what we sometimes call a “new beginning” or “rebirth.”

*Fifth*, there is “interpretation and verification,” in which the solution is applied outward as we go forward, interpreting life along the way to see if it makes sense in light of our new coherence.

---

<sup>55</sup> This act means that we must be open to a new sense of reality that may be foreign or uncomfortable. Theologian Nancy Eiesland says that we must have a “risky imagination” in order to live in a reality in which those who are disabled are deemed to be fully human. Nancy L. Eiesland, “Encountering the Disabled God” in *On Moral Medicine: Theological Perspectives in Medical Ethics*, Third Edition, edited by M. Therese Lysaught, Joseph J. Kotva Jr., Stephen E. Lammers, and Allen Verhey (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012): 587-589, 589. Originally published in the Spring 2004 issue of *The Bible in TransMission*, the journal of the British and Foreign Bible Society.

<sup>56</sup> Loder here follows Søren Kierkegaard’s understanding of the formation of the self. Kierkegaard differentiated the “self” from merely a “person.” Everyone is a person, but not everyone attains selfhood. To become a self is to embrace the relationships that make up who we are, centering on our self-relationship that includes internal contradictions. To hold one’s identity amidst these internal dynamics even in the face of concomitant despair is to attain a selfhood that consists of a sort of eternal self-relating-to-self. See Kierkegaard’s *The Sickness Unto Death*, written in 1849 under the pseudonym Anti-Climacus. For Kierkegaard, we are transformed into a “knight of faith” when we stay committed to our identity in the midst of an ongoing internal interaction with what we see to be true. In existentialist fashion, Kierkegaard points out that our identity is not a static artifact handed to us or objectively postulated by reason, but rather a series of moment-by-moment choices that we make as we live within our selfhood. See *Repetition*, written in 1843 under the pseudonym Constantin Constantius. In sum, since selfhood is found in subjective self-reflection – and the choices that we make in the wake of that self-reflection – proper selfhood is achieved amidst the ongoing encounter with what we believe to be true. Transformation is found in the midst of our encounters of inward relationality.

We may also review past life experiences or ideas, endeavoring to understand them anew.<sup>57</sup> But in either case, the new coherence is being “proven out” to verify its merits. If it fails, then the transformational paradigm begins again.

Note that this paradigm describes generic transformation, change that we experience in any realm, from education to morality to relationships. When our human spirit acts on its own, it is what Loder calls “transformation from below”; solutions found at this level may be helpful, but they will always be provisional until the next conflict.<sup>58</sup> But *redemptive* transformation happens in our interaction with God. When the human spirit reaches out for new creation and apprehends the ministrations of the Holy Spirit, we become reconciled to our intended identity in Christ.

Given Loder’s paradigm, I would like to suggest three ways that we can help foster this sort of redemptive transformation. First, we could continue to create an environment where individuals (at some level) might embrace an openness to redemptive transformation grounded in faith. Do we encourage a gusto for an encounter with the divine Other as much as we encourage other sorts of encounters? Do we see the Holy Spirit as the one who facilitates our foundational reconciliation, that is, with God? Second, we could create situations of “conflict-in-context” whereby the human spirit seeks a solution. Are we prepared for the reality of spiritual discomfort that is the necessary prerequisite to reconciliation? Third, we could provide media by which the Holy Spirit can engage the human spirit with new creation. Do we acknowledge that the Holy Spirit accesses us in myriad ways, including ones to which we may not be accustomed?

Put succinctly: How can we participate in our transformation found in faith?

### *Communal Transformation in Love*

Secondly, redemptive transformation emerges from my reconciliation with others to whom I am bound in love. In communal transformation, we embrace our reality as, to continue the Pauline sense of duality, *we-yet-not-we-but-koinonia*, a Spirit-formed and -empowered way of being. In Christian community, each individual identity is essential; only in expansive diversity are we able to represent the holistic Body of Christ. However, more than just a diverse grouping together of people is needed for *koinonia*. The nature of our interaction with one another must be redemptively transformative, creating a new kind of community in which we are reconciled to one another in love. What is the means of this communal transformation? I return here to the work of theologian and community prophet Dietrich Bonhoeffer.<sup>59</sup> For community to be

---

<sup>57</sup> Loder calls the former, where the imaginative construct is tested publicly and for consensus, “correspondence.” He calls the latter, where the imaginative construct is applied to those elements that contributed to the context of the conflict, “congruence.”

<sup>58</sup> This is what Augustine meant in his famous statement: “You stir man to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.” Augustine, *Confessions* [397-398], trans. Henry Chadwick (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), I.i.1., 3.

<sup>59</sup> The relevant works of Bonhoeffer with bearing on this topic are *Life Together* (1939) and *Sanctorum Communio* (1930). The former book, his doctoral dissertation, sets up a theological-sociological model of Christian sociality. The latter book detailed how he believed a “confessing” community of Christians could live a life together as an alternative to the compromised church of Germany.

*koinonia*, it must be characterized by the presence of Christ mediated one to another such that, corporately, the community might bear that presence to the world. Says Bonhoeffer:

*[T]he concept of the body of Christ ... expresses the presence of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit in his church-community. The concept of the body in this context is not a concept referring to form but to function, namely the work of Christ.... Christ is fully present in each individual, and yet he is one; and again he is not fully present in any one person, but only all human beings together possess the whole Christ.*<sup>60</sup>

This interpersonal presence of Christ 1) in my brothers and sisters to me, 2) in me to them, and 3) in us together to the world, is empowered by the Holy Spirit; we are inhabited and animated by the “Spirit of Christ” (Romans 8:9) as we together are transformed into our intended identity of *koinonia*, a communion known by its love (John 13:35). Bonhoeffer asserts that there is no reconciliation with God except with and through others, and there is no reconciliation with others except with and through God. I need you for Christ to be present to me; you need me for Christ to be present to you, and the world needs us together to be the presence of Christ to them.<sup>61</sup> And because of the comprehensively redeemed humanity of Christ, there must be a wide array of humanity present in community for him to be comprehensively mediated.<sup>62</sup>

Given Bonhoeffer’s theology of sociality, I would like to suggest three ways we can help foster this sort of communal transformation. First, we could remember that each of us is a Christ-bearer to one another in love, and that I need each of you if Christ is to be manifest to me. Do we tell each other how we have witnessed the presence of Christ in them? Second, we must form a diversity of Spirit-empowered individuals such that the presence of Christ might be mediated in a variety of ways. Do we recognize that Christ comes to us even, perhaps especially, through those with whom we do not agree or even like? Third, we need to expose our community to places and people outside our various boundaries such that we might experience ourselves as communally embodying of the presence of Christ. Do we fully recognize how much we bear Christ to the world only as community?

Put succinctly: How can we participate in our transformation found in love?

---

<sup>60</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio* [1930]: *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 1*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss & Nancy Lukens (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 225 (italics original).

<sup>61</sup> Note that we mediate Christ to each other not only in our dispensing of grace, but also in our presentation of need; to allow others to care for us provides an opportunity for others to enact their true humanity of relationality. In “The Judgment of the Nations” in Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus makes clear that the Son of Man is present in the face of the one who needs our love: “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” (v. 40).

<sup>62</sup> We find this sort of diverse communal reality in New Testament depictions of the church. Paul tells us that though the Body of Christ is one (Ephesians 4:4; 1 Corinthians 12:27), it is expressed in the diversity of Jew and Gentile (Ephesians 2:14; 1 Corinthians 12:13); similarly, he tells us that the many diverse gifts of its members are meant for the building up of the one Body (1 Corinthians 12:7). If Christ is mediated to us through others, then the vastness and richness of his presence can only become real to us in a community that is similarly wide and long and high and deep (Ephesians 3:18).

## *Societal Transformation in Hope*

Thirdly, redemptive transformation emerges from the reconciliation of the world to which I am bound in hope. As says activist Bryan Stevenson, “Hopelessness is the enemy of justice.”<sup>63</sup> God gives us a vision of new creation, and in societal transformation, we embrace our reality as world-yet-not-world-but-Kingdom of God.<sup>64</sup> *The Holy Spirit* changes the world, using various means, mostly of which we are unaware, into the reality it is intended to be, a place of beauty and truth and goodness. We see glimpses of this reality in our midst even as we await its final actualization. Because reconciliation is comprehensive, all peoples and places in the world are meant to be restored to their intended state of being. This means that we must be careful to not allow one work of societal reconciliation obscure others. For myself, there are three arenas of social justice to which I tend to be more attentive: the systemic marginalization of the disabled community, the systemic abandonment of adolescents, and the systemic destruction of our natural ecosystem. But I must remember that there are other arenas, too. Conversely, if other quite worthy arenas of societal reconciliation – such as, say, people coming to hear about the saving love of Jesus Christ, or the work of gender or racial reconciliation – silence arenas such as those I tend to see, the work of reconciliation is incomplete at best, oppressive at worst.

What is the means of this societal transformation? That’s really hard to answer, but I can at least suggest a theological avenue in the work of missional theologians Lesslie Newbigin and Darrell Guder.<sup>65</sup> Missional theology describes “mission” not as discrete activities of the church, but rather as the activity of *God* bringing comprehensive reconciliation into all the world’s particular contexts. What are the implications of this? First, we are all “missionaries” to the extent that we participate in God’s great mission, wherever we may be and whatever we may be doing, as empowered by the Holy Spirit in the passions, gifts, and experiences we are given. Second, this great mission is not only radically cosmic in scope, but is also radically particular in actualization. This means we must pray that God shows us where God is working, where God’s reign needs expansion, and how we might join in that. Third, because of the radically cosmic and particular gospel that we carry to the world, and because we all have different passions, gifts, and experiences, we engage our missional identity not individually but communally, and thus our communities must continue to embody the reconciliation they want for the rest of society. As goes the famous saying of Mahatma Gandhi, “You must be the change you want to see in the world.”

---

<sup>63</sup> Bryan Stevenson is the author of *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption*. This quote, however, is from an interview with him. Dean A. Strang, “‘Hopelessness is the Enemy of Justice’: An Interview with Bryan Stevenson,” *The Progressive*, December 2015/January 2016 (Vol. 79, No. 12): 50-53, 51.

<sup>64</sup> The Kingdom of God is a theme that runs throughout scripture in various forms, and is perhaps the main theme of Jesus’ teachings. We might think of it as a happening rather than a place, as an occurrence when the world lines up with God’s will. It is an eschatological reality meaning that it is the “heaven” of the world to come that breaks into the present in bits and pieces.

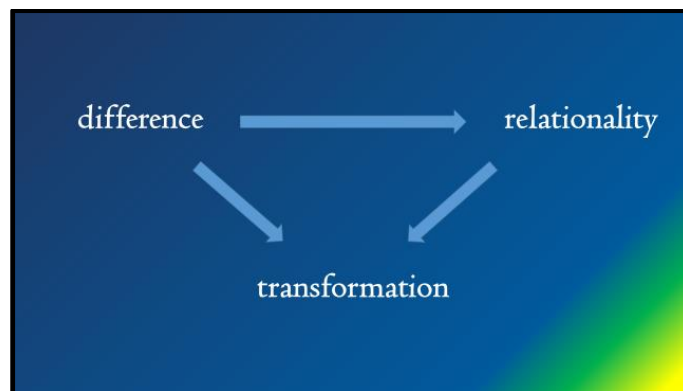
<sup>65</sup> Newbigin was an Anglican churchman, missionary, and theologian; his relevant works here are *The Open Secret* (1978), *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (1989), and *Mission in Christ’s Way* (1987). Guder is the unofficial father of the “Gospel in our Culture Network” that wrestled with questions of the interaction of Christianity and culture, and spawned the missional theology movement. His relevant works here are *Missional Church* (1998) and *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* (2000).

Given the assertions of missional theology, I would like to suggest three ways that we can help foster this sort of societal transformation. First, we could encourage the continued transformation of our community in faith and love such that we might corporately bear the presence of Christ to the world. Do we truly believe that, as Christians, we have something unique to offer, something that the world needs? Do we see growth and faith and community as essential prerequisites to the work of social justice? Two, we could work to become increasingly aware of a diversity of contexts where the work of reconciliation is needed outside of the contexts we ordinarily inhabit – locally, regionally, and globally – so that God might use us there. Are we aware of the unity-in-diversity of God’s ridiculously expansive work of salvation in the world? Three, we could look to how different contexts bear the presence of Christ to us such that, together, we might embody the Kingdom of God. Can we do the hard work of self-examination and vulnerability such that we might see how our own contexts need redemption, and how we need the rest of the world to help us so that we might together image God’s reign?

Put succinctly: How can we participate in our transformation found in hope?

### *Conclusion*

Reconciliation is wildly holistic and redemptive transformation. At the personal level, reconciliation with God without transformation is conversion without repentance, faith without holiness. At the communal level, reconciliation with others without transformation is accompaniment without embrace, inclusion without belonging. And at the societal level, reconciliation in the world without transformation is presence without partnership, observation without engagement. In any of these relational dimensions, when difference comes together in putative unity without the emergence of a transformed reality – a new creation empowered by God – the result is usually some form of spiritual, interpersonal, or social violence or balkanization.



But true reconciliation is when that which God has done in Christ is actualized in us by the Holy Spirit’s work of faith, love, and hope. Across the relational dimensions with God, others, and society, we embrace the encounter with difference that produces radical and salvific change. May we have the eyes to see, ears to hear, and the humble and contrite hearts to receive how we might be reconciled with God, and with one another, so that we may then go and be mediators of God’s holistic, redemptive, transformative work in the world.