

THEOLOGY & CULTURE

From Estrangement to Reconciliation: The Overarching Inclusion between Gen 3:23-24 and Rev 21:1-8

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Introduction

The opening words of the last part of the book of Revelation describe the new heaven and the new earth (21:1–22:5), “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away” (21:1). One could regard this description as forming an over-arching inclusion with Gen 1–3, a narrative account of the first divine act of creation. The seer of visions in Revelation saw that the first heaven and the first earth of Gen 1–3 had passed away (ἀπῆλθαν) and had given way to a new heaven and a new earth (Rev 21:1, 4).

The reason for the fading away of the first creation is because it failed its purpose when the human being disobeyed God’s order and ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:17ff). The consequences were disastrous because disharmony and separation irreparably disturbed the universal order: the human being suffered dissociation from himself/herself, being afraid and ashamed and succumbing to the impulse to hide away from God (Gen 3:10). The serpent and the human being are now set in a state of enmity with each other; and the man has to eat from the sweat of his brow since the rebellious land no longer yields its produce without toil.

Eventually God exposes manifestly the alienation that human beings have occasioned by their disobedience when he shuts them

out from the Garden of Eden. The stationing of the cherubim with the fiery sword to guard the way to the Garden indicates the aggressive character of the separation (Gen 3:23-24).¹ The severity of the separation seems to be devastating and complete, though God gives a glimpse of hope in the promise he makes that the offspring of the woman will eventually crush the head of the serpent, "... he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel" (Gen 3:15b).

This so called *proto-evangelium* is what Rev 12–20 is narrating: the victory of the Lamb over the ancient serpent, the Dragon, the Devil, the Beast who has harassed the people of God (cf. 12:10). Having defeated the arch-enemy, those who follow the Lamb are reconciled to their God in a new heaven and a new earth. Through Jesus Christ complete reconciliation has been accomplished and now God will dwell with human beings in the new heaven and the new earth (21:1-8) having his headquarters in the new Holy City, the heavenly Jerusalem (21:10). The seer of visions in the Book of Revelation, then, has combined two biblical traditions: the Yahwist creation story (Gen 2:4–3:24) and the Jerusalem/ Zion (City of God) tradition which had become the core of Israel's identity.²

In the same intentional stream of thought as that of Revelation, Paul told the Colossians, "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (Col 1:19-20). In between the two texts that form the inclusion, from total separation in Gen 3:23-24 and complete reconciliation in Rev 21:1-8, is the biblical story of attempts to realize the promised removal of the

¹ This article is a developed version of a paper that was presented to a Symposium on Reconciliation at St. Gaspar's College on the 27th June 2013 as part of a preparation for the Golden Jubilee of the foundation of the Congregation of the Precious Blood. Biblical quotations are taken from the NIV. Unfortunately I couldn't access the new book J.R. MIDDLETON, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic 2014 as I was preparing this paper.

² Cf. Ps 48; 87; Isa 54:11-12; 65:17; 66:22; Ezek 40-48; Tobit 13:16-17; Zech 8:3; Heb 12:22-23; 1 Enoch 90:29; 2 Baruch 4:4-5; 5Q15. Cf. M.G. REDDISH, ed., *Apocalyptic Literature: A Reader*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson 1995, 237.

impediment of Gen 3:15b and coming of true reconciliation through Jesus Christ the seed of the woman (Rev 12:10). It is henceforth obvious that the history of salvation is about God who always sought to reconcile humankind to himself even though the human person kept straying away from Him (cf. 2 Cor 5:18-19).

The magnitude of the task of tracing this reconciliation theme in the Scriptures makes it difficult to determine the proper method to be followed. However, since the present paper is a simple contribution to an ongoing reflection on the biblical theme of reconciliation, it will suffice to peruse the Bible with rigor and alertness in order to identify major pertinent texts. Some texts are explicitly dealing with reconciliation, whereas others either imply reconciliation or merely allude to it. Moreover, some biblical books that purportedly deal with the theme of reconciliation shall be examined in their entirety. By means of this procedure, we aim to understand how a narrative theology of reconciliation is developed in the OT and reaches its realization and accomplishment in the NT.

1. Texts

Gen 3:23-24 and Rev 21:1-8 are antithetically parallel and form a great inclusion of the Bible, an inclusion that opens the history of salvation and closes it.

1.1 The Demarcation of the Texts

The basis for identifying the texts is principally the fact that from the literary point of view they share with each other the milieu of creation and corresponding content:

Gen 1:1–3:24	Rev 21:1–22:5
1 Heaven(s) and earth (1:1; 2:1)	New heaven (οὐρανὸν) and new earth (21:1)
2 Light (1:3-18)	God gives light, and the Lamb is the lamp (21:23, 24; 22:5)
3 Sun and moon (1:3)	No need of the sun (22:5)
4 Sea (1:21-28)	The sea is no longer (21:1)

5	Place: Garden of Eden (2:8, 10, 15; 3:24, 25)	Place: Holy City (21:2); cf. Paradise (2:7)
6	Tree of life and of knowledge (2:9), tree of good and evil (2:17), tree in the middle of the garden (3:3)	Tree of life (22:2, 19, 14, 19)
7	A river watering the garden flowed from Eden (2:10)	River of the water of life flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city (22:1, 2)
8	Fruit(s) of the tree (Gen 3:2, 6, 12)	Twelve kinds of fruits from the tree of life (22:2)

It is commonly understood that the background of the language of “a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away” (21:1), was a combination of Isa 65:17 and Isa 66:22.

- Isa 65:17: “For behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth (כִּי־הֵנְנִי בּוֹרֵא הַשָּׁמַיִם הַחֲדָשִׁים וְהָאָרֶץ הַחֲדָשָׁה). The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.”
- Isa 66:22: “As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me, declares the LORD, so will your name and descendants endure.”

It is also suggested that the author used the LXX and not the Masoretic Text (MT) since he does not use the verb to create “*bara*’ – בָּרָא” (Gen 1:1; Isa 65:17); rather he uses the term “*make* – ποιῶ” (21:5); and instead of the plural “heavens” in Hebrew (הַשָּׁמַיִם), he uses the LXX translation for the singular “heaven – οὐρανός” (cf. LXX Gen 1:1; Isa 65:17; 66:22).³

³ As for the background of the idea of recreation and transformation, of a “new heaven and new earth”, D.E. AUNE, *Revelation 17–22*, WBC 52C, Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson 1998, 1116, suggests other Jewish Apocalyptic Literature such as *1 Enoch* 91:16 (Apocalypse of Weeks), “And the first heaven will vanish and pass away, and a new heaven will appear, and all the powers of heaven will shine for ever (with) sevenfold (light)”.

1.2 The Antithetic Parallelism between Gen 3:23-24 and Rev 21:1-8

These two passages are found in a literary context of the beginning of things in Gen 1–3 and Rev 21:1–22:5. Paul develops a similar antithetical or polar parallelism between Adam and Christ in Rom 5:12-21 and 1Cor 15:45-49. Gen 3:23-24 concludes the divine verdict on the serpent, Adam and Eve that began in Gen 3:14. In contrast, Rev 21:1-8 begins John's vision of the passing away of the old creation and the dawn of a new beginning.

	Gen 3:23-24	Rev 21:1-8	
1	God	Separated from man	Dwelling with man
2	Man	Expelled from the garden – special emphasis is indicated by the repetition: v. 23 – sent him forth (וַיִּשְׁלַחֵהוּ) and v. 24 – he drove the man out (וַיִּגְרֵשׁ אֶת־הָאָדָם)	Invited to live with God as his people; the ban is lifted. The radical turn of events is also heavily emphasized by repeating the same vocabulary and prepositions: 1) tabernacle of God (σκηνη τοῦ θεοῦ) is with men (μετὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων); 2) ...and he will dwell (σκηνώσει) with them (μετ' αὐτῶν); 3) [they] will be his people 4) God himself will be with them (μετ' αὐτῶν); he will be their God
3	Heaven and Earth	Heaven as divine dwelling, and the earth as the milieu for man's toil. The temptation and fall resulted in the	New heaven and new earth (not re-creating the old order), to last forever

		earth becoming man's place of toil and death.	– heaven and earth are bound together
4	Garden of Eden	Place of the man and woman's temptation and failure. Only God remained there after banishing man from it	New Jerusalem adorned by God himself, from heaven
5	Tree of life	The way to it is guarded, to eat its fruit is prohibited	Accessible to man and allowed to eat its fruit
6	Ground	Place of toil, pain, and death	No pain, no mourning, no death

1.3 Compositional Structure of Rev 21:1-8

The pericope from Revelation is composed of four distinct parts marked by the description of the main characters and their activities: God, the Seer of the Visions, the Content, and the Addressee.⁴ Parts II and III are declared to all, while Part IV is addressed specifically to John.

	Subject	John's Activity	Direct Object
Part I: vv.1-2	John	Saw (εἶδον)	New heaven and a new earth, without the sea, because the first heaven and earth had passed away (v. 1) The Holy City, the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God (v. 2)
Part II: vv. 3-4	John	Heard (ἤκουσα)	Loud voice from the throne – God dwells among his people (v. 3) He will wipe away every tear... (v. 4)

⁴ D.E. AUNE, *Revelation 17–22*, 1113, proposes two parts: (1) Angelic speech from the throne (21:1-4) and (2) God's speech seated on the throne (21:5-8). However, the proposal does not put into consideration the part played by the seer of the visions.

Part III: v. 5a	Divine voice	Received declaration and directive (ἐἰπέν μοι)	The one sitting on the throne said: "I make all things new" Directive to write (γράψον) the words, for they are trustworthy and true (v. 5a)
Part IV: vv. 5b-8	Divine voice	Received declarations (ἐἰπέν μοι)	It is done; self-identification of God (v. 5b-6a) Beneficiaries of the new order and their status... (v. 6b-7) Non-beneficiaries are the unrepentant and unbelievers who face the second death (v. 8)

The textual analysis of the two texts results in the following contrasting parallels: the gravely disrupted creation of the Yahwist narrative (Gen 2:4b-3:24) is referred to by the author of Revelation as "first heaven and first earth" (Rev 21:1b); whereas the reconciled creation is declared to be "the new heaven and new earth" (21:1a). The "first heaven and first earth" has no sea and passes away (21:1b). The absence of the sea, which was conceived in mythical terms as the dwelling place of the serpent or the dragon/beast (cf. Isa 27:1; Amos 9:3; Rev 13:1ff; 20:2), indicates the end of that which caused the separation between creatures and the Creator.⁵

In the new creation, the first creation's Garden of Eden (Gen 2:8, 10, 15; 3:24, 25) gives way to the Holy City, the New Jerusalem beckoning from heaven, entirely transcendent to what is earthly (Rev 21:2). The New Jerusalem corresponds to the Garden of Eden that consisted only of a part of the land established by God who placed man there to work on it and guard it (cf. Gen 2:8-9, 15). The description indicates that the garden specifically belongs to God, and not to the human being, as God walked around in it (*mithallek baggan* – מִתְהַלֵּךְ בַּגֶּן) as if inspecting his property (Gen 3:8).

⁵ C.C. ROWLAND, "The Book of Revelation: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections", in *New Interpreter's Bible*, XII, Nashville, TN: Abingdon 1998, 720.

In other words, the place is holy. The prophetic condemnation of Ezekiel 28:11-19 – a text that highlights this sanctity of the Garden of Eden – is the closest parallel to Gen 2–3 that one can find in the prophetic literature. When the human being opts to be corrupt, he/she is banned from the Garden because the Garden belongs to God himself who is the All-Holy One.

It was believed, then, that only the pure can stay with God, and that the human being will die if he/she sees God (cf. Gen 32:30; Exod 3:5-6) for the all-holy God cannot cohabit with evil (cf. Lev 15:31; 19:2; 20:7, 26).⁶ This is why when Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden tree, they were banished from the Garden (Gen 3:23-24).

The antithetical parallelism is explicit between the first and the second creation. Negativity characterizes the conclusion of the first creation since the head of creation, the first couple, suffer expulsion from the Garden of Eden, an expulsion that seems quite definitive when God assigns cherubim to guard the way to the tree of life with a flaming sword. Hence the separation from God is total (Gen 3:23-24). The new creation is wonderfully positive. God will dwell with his people (Rev 21:3), and the throne of God and of the Lamb will reside in the Holy City (22:3). A second element of the antithetical parallelism enters the picture: the first couple was expelled from the Garden of Eden with no possibility for re-entry; now not only the pure and undefiled but even those who were expelled are promised access to it provided that they wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb (7:14-15). Thirdly, as a consequence of their disobedience when they succumb to the serpent's insinuation and eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 3:6), Adam and Eve suffer punishment. In the new creation human beings will be allowed to eat of the tree of life (Rev 22:14) and so delight in God's gift.

In short, the central point is the reversal of fortunes, in particular, the dwelling of God among people at the other pole of a history that began with a sharp and bitter separation from this same God. Having culminated with the punitive expulsion of the first couple from Eden because of their disobedience to the

⁶ D.P. WRIGHT, "Holiness, Sex, and Death in the Garden of Eden", *Biblica* 77 (1996) 306-312.

Creator's command, the first creation story finds a complete reversal in the new creation and the joyful reconciliation between the Creator and the human being.

The eschatological reconciliation between the Creator and the human being has a bearing on the other creatures as well. The river brings life and prosperity to all creatures who dwell in its precincts. Of importance is that God did not only restore the order of the first creation; but rather He brought forth a new heaven and a new earth. This is in fulfilment of Isa 65:17 and 66:22. The absence of the sea which was the mythical dwelling place of the underworld beast (cf. Rev 13:1), i.e., of the beast who was the agent of evil and death, denotes a new order that has foreclosed all threats to the human person. Similarly, there no longer exist the shadows or darkness that were associated with sin and evil in the Holy City of Jerusalem since the light of that city will no longer be that of the shadow-evoking sun or moon; rather, God will be its light. Of paramount importance is the fact that unlike the old creation, the new creation comes into existence through obedience unto death and the consequential victory of the Lamb; and not by mere divine utterance.

2. Semantics of Reconciliation

Lexically the term "reconciliation" is a corollary of the theme of "relationship". This relationship is threefold: between God and the human person (vertical dimension), among human beings (ad intra horizontal dimension), and among other creatures (ad extra horizontal dimension). Reconciliation presupposes a disrupted or broken friendly relationship. Friendship means personal attachment to another by feelings of affection or personal regard with the firm, persevering will to do what is necessary for the good of the other person. Friends remain on good terms with each other, assist each other and share similar principles and values. Reconciliation is the act of going back or returning (in Hebrew, *shûb* – שׁוּב) to the original state of a harmonious, friendly relationship.

The most important Greek vocabulary for reconciliation is found in the Pauline Corpus, especially in the so-called reconciliation passages of Col 1:20-22 and Eph 2:16. The word

katallage (καταλλαγή) which derives from the verb *katallasso* (ἀποκαταλλάσσω) is used particularly in a religious sense, with the meaning of giving up anger against another person; thus, to reconcile with another person.⁷ It is used for the reconciliation of human beings with one another (cf. Matt 5:24; 1 Cor 7:11) and for reconciliation between human beings and God which is effected in, through, and by Christ (cf. Rom 5:10; 2 Cor 5:18-20; Col 1:20, 22; and Eph 2:16). Reconciliation means to be restored to friendship with God, and to lead others to enter into friendship with God.

Paul coined another new word for reconciliation *apokatastasso* (ἀποκαταλλάσσω) by adding the preposition ἀπό to the root καταλλάσσω,⁸ which means restoring or bringing back something to its original, former state (Col 1:20). At first, the word was used in non-religious affairs in the sense of the restoration of the sick to good health or the reinstatement of a ruler whose authority had been usurped or who was deposed. In the religious sphere, the prophets used *apokatastasis* for the return from exile. Later in the exilic and post-exilic period they used the word with special theological significance in the announcement of eschatological salvation (cf. Amos 5:15; Hos 2:3; 11:11; Jer 16:15; 23:8; 24:6; Ezek 16:55; Mal 4:6 [3:24]). In the New Testament the word *apokatastasis* is used in both senses: in its original non-religious sense of the restoration of the sick to good health (cf. Mark 3:5 par. Matt 12:13; Luke 6:10) as well as for religious meaning of the fulfillment of the Messianic hope in which Israel expected a restoration to divine favour through the Messiah's personal

⁷ H. VORLANDER – C. BROWN, “καταλλάσσω”, *NIDNT* III, 166-174. The noun “καταλλαγή” (reconciliation) is used by Paul in Rom 5:11; 11:15; 2 Cor 5:18, 19). Cf. I.H. MARSHALL, “The Meaning of ‘Reconciliation’”, in R.A. Guelich, ed., *Unity and Diversity in New Testament Theology*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978, 117-132; S.E. PORTER – K.D. CLARKE, “Canonical-Critical Perspective and the Relationship of Colossians and Ephesians”, *Biblica* 78 (1997) 78-83.

⁸ Cf. H.-G. LINK, “ἀποκατάστασις”, in C. Brown, ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, III, 2nd ed., Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 1986, 146-148. As from here the Dictionary is abbreviated as *NIDNT*.

fulfillment of his destiny (cf. Mark 9:12 par.; Matt 17:11) or the restoration of the kingdom of Israel (cf. Acts 1:6ff).

This divine self-reconciliation with creation (universal reconciliation) is expressed in various terms in Paul: to reconcile all things into himself – ἀποκαταλλάξαι τὰ πάντα εἰς αὐτόν (Col 1:20) or make friendship with/reconcile us to himself – καταλλάξαντος ἡμᾶς ἑαυτῷ (2 Cor 5:18). The initiative is always from God, not from human beings (cf. Rom 5:8). God reconciles creation to Himself for his own glory (cf. Rom 9:23-24; Eph 1:10-12; Phil 2:11) since it is human beings who break their relationship with Him in the first place. God cannot break that relationship for He is always faithful and cannot deny Himself (cf. 2 Tim 2:12-13). The ultimate act of divine reconciliation finds its fulfilment in Jesus Christ's ignominious death on the Cross (cf. Mark 14:24 par; Rom 5:10; Heb 9:14). The opening quotation from Col 1:19-20 is the eschatological conclusion of Paul's treatment of the theme of reconciliation (cf. Heb 9:26).

2.1 Reconciliation Postulates Forgiveness

In Christian tradition reconciliation is often equated with forgiveness; however, reconciliation is only one outcome of forgiveness. Closely related to reconciliation is forgiveness of sins (in Hebrew, *selikhah* – סְלַחַת from the verb *salakh* – סָלַח [Ps 130:4] and *nasa'* – נָשָׂא).⁹ Reconciliation is the consequence of forgiveness. The NT uses the Greek word *aphesis* (ἄφεσις) (Mark 1:4; Luke 1:77; 3:3) from the verb ἀφίημι, which means "to forgive, to release, to remit, to let go, to cancel sins or debt". It is mostly used in terms of the consequence of conversion (*metanoia* – μετάνοια) through or in the blood (*haima* – αἷμα) of Jesus Christ (Matt 26:28; Eph 1:7; Col 1:14; Heb 9:22); or through him/ through

⁹ The OT uses the Hebrew verbal form "*nasa'* – נָשָׂא" with literal meaning of "carrying, lifting up", which connotes the relief which is brought about by being pardoned. This implies that sin is regarded as a burden that weighs down the sinner's soul wherever he/she goes (cf. Gen 50:17; Exod 10:17; 23:21; 32:32; Josh 24:19; 1 Sam 15:25; 25:28; Hos 14:2). Another Hebrew verbal form is "*salakh* – סָלַח - to pardon, forgive" (cf. Exod 34:9; Num 14:19; Deut 29:20; by the Deuteronomistic historian in the books of Kings, Chronicles, and Jeremiah).

his name (Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38; 26:18).¹⁰ Divine forgiveness is related to human forgiveness in so far as God will forgive human beings only if they forgive their fellow human beings (cf. Matt 6:12, 14, 15; Luke 17:3, 4); and indeed human beings forgive because God has forgiven them in the first place (cf. Matt 18:21,35). In a nutshell, human forgiveness mirrors divine forgiveness.

Forgiveness is the inner personal disposition to reach out for reconciliation which gives peace to both protagonists. Therefore reconciliation is a corollary of forgiveness, even though there has been protracted discussion as to what comes first. Indeed, forgiveness renders the person more amenable to the prospect of changing his/her attitude toward the other, a process of metanoia or conversion.

Metanoia is inner repentance, i.e., a reorientation of the person's attitude in life, with the intention to change from a bad to a good relationship. Making reference to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Wabantu Emmanuel sees forgiveness as essentially restorative.¹¹ He also offers a reasonably good summary of the relationship between forgiveness, reconciliation and peace by saying, "True forgiveness is the outcome of the victim's willingness and readiness to abandon his/her rights to revenge and to look forward – with the help of the prevenient grace of God – to repairing broken or damaged relationships and ultimately restoring peace and justice. There can be no forgiveness, reconciliation and thus no peace without the abandonment of one's right, desire and intention to revenge."¹² In other words, one has to imitate Christ in

¹⁰ The Greek verbal noun ἄφεσις and its verb ἀφίημι are used in the NT in connection with forgiveness of sins or metaphorically "debts" and blasphemy (Matt 6:12², 14², 15², 9:2, 5, 6; 12:31², 32²; 18:21, 27, 32, 35; Mark 2:5, 7, 9, 10; 3:28; 4:12; 11:25²; Luke 5:20, 21, 23, 24; 7:47², 48, 49; 11:4²; 12:10²; 17:3, 4; 23:34; John 20:23; Acts 8:22; Rom 4:7; Jas 5:15; 1 John 1:9; 2:12).

¹¹ E. WABANHU, "Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Personal, Interpersonal and Socio-political Perspectives", *AFFER* 50 (2008) 297. Cf. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, rev. ed., Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa 2008, 1468-1469.

¹² E. WABANHU, "Forgiveness and Reconciliation", 285. The author is not clear about the precedence of forgiveness as he sometimes considers forgiveness as the *conditio sine qua non* for reconciliation, but at the same

dying to oneself (*kenosis*) first before reaching out for the other (cf. Phil 2:7-9). Forgiveness renders the person free to accept the other without preconditions (cf. Matt 18:15-17).

Conversely, forgiveness that leads to reconciliation is not one-sided; rather, it should be reciprocal. Not only should one reach out to the wrong-doer, but also the wrong-doer is expected to accept to be forgiven. If one refuses to be forgiven, no true reconciliation takes place. A. De Smet points out that forgiveness is a process: there is a period of grief in which the offender admits his/her guilt – sometimes with an outpouring of emotion – and accepts the truth, an acceptance that at times carries with it a sense of shame and the need to be accepted.¹³ Both parties regret what happened and hence what occasioned the need for forgiveness and repentance. In this process both parties experience empowerment in which they are able to make choices. With the experience of empowerment comes the freedom to offer and accept forgiveness (cf. Luke 17:3). Therefore, the act of forgiving is often the end, not the beginning, of that process. Forgiveness restores a right relationship with God; and forgiveness, healing, truth and reconciliation, freedom and justice are all signs of the kingdom, i.e., that God's forgiveness has brought forth powerfully revitalizing effects.

Both parties need divine grace to effect true reconciliation. Suffice it to cite two notorious people who estranged themselves from Jesus Christ: one was Judas Iscariot who actively betrayed him to his enemies, the Jewish religious authorities (Mark 14:10ff par.); and the other was Simon Peter who denied him before the high priest's housemaids (Mark 14:66ff par.). Both of them committed grave evil towards Jesus Christ, but the aftermath to what they did differed greatly. Judas Iscariot did not accept himself, nor did he even accept Jesus' forgiveness: rather, he

time maintains that forgiveness is the result of reconciliation. Compare his position on page 285 and page 297 where he concludes, "It (*reconciliation*) must lead to forgiveness and ultimately to justice and peace in society".

¹³ A. DE SMET, "Forgiveness: Making Some Connections between Theology and Psychology, Preaching and Pastoral Practice", *The Expository Times* 119/3 (2007) 116-119; cf. F. WATTS, "Shame, Sin and Guilt", in A. McFadyen – M. Sarot, eds., *Forgiveness and Truth: Explorations in Contemporary Theology*, Edinburgh: Clark 2001.

committed suicide (Matt 27:3-5). Simon Peter in contrast cried with remorse but did not succumb to despair; instead, he still placed his hope in Jesus' merciful heart. He knew Jesus would forgive his cowardly betrayal; and indeed the Gospel of John demonstrated this when the risen Lord came back to Simon Peter and asked him three times before the other six apostles whether he loved him more than the others. Simon Peter repeatedly replied, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you". Finally Jesus called him again, "Follow me", indicating total forgiveness and reconciliation (John 21:15-19).

2.2 Kinds of Divisions or Broken Human Relationships

As stated above, the need for reconciliation arises in a milieu of broken human relationships or divisions at the individual level as well as at the group level. Division at the individual or personal level occurs when there is a break in the relationship between two people. Division at the group level occurs when there is a break in the relationship between two groups of people. Denis J. Woods¹⁴ is one of many who explain that not all group divisions are the same and that the chance for reconciliation varies according to the kind of separation that has occurred.

Sociologically speaking, there are three kinds of group divisions: one may label the first *distributive division* whereby people compete for something, such as power, wealth, position, or love. The second one may call *ideological division* whereby people disagree on certain values, for example, cultural, religious, intellectual, political, or moral. The third is what one may refer to as *structural division* whereby social, cultural, religious, political, or economic systems occasion divisions among people. Distributive division is the easiest to dissolve by an effective effort at reconciliation because individual, face-to-face encounter is possible, whereas the second and third are very difficult, for people can be manipulated by those with whom they have no real direct contact and hence they can suffer the various types of

¹⁴ D.J. WOODS, "Reconciliation of Groups", in B.J. Lee – *al.*, *Alternative Futures for Worship, IV: Reconciliation*, Collegeville, MI: The Liturgical Press 1987, 33-39.

discriminations that have plagued the world for centuries: apartheid, the caste system, tribalism, radical violent religious groups, such as Al Qaida, Boko Haram, and Al Shabab – just to mention some.

2.3 The Process of Reconciliation

Reconciliation is essentially returning to or repairing the previous friendly and harmonious relationship that the individuals or groups in question enjoyed before the disruption. The action of going back or restoring relationships involves several conditions. First, the parties involved must recognize and appreciate the importance of good and healthy relationships. Second, the parties involved need to understand the benefits that flow forth from upright relationships, such as love, assistance, strength, health, hope and fullness of life. Third, the parties must have an intelligent awareness of the repercussions that ensue when relationships suffer rupture: loneliness, discouragement, disappointment, hopelessness, despondency, enmity, and death. Finally, the parties involved must live with the abiding conviction that the only healthy relationships are the ones based on faith and trust in each other.¹⁵

The most important step toward reconciliation is the act of forgiving. As already highlighted above, forgiveness is part and parcel of the reconciliation process for it is fundamentally an act of love, truth and trust. John S. Kselman defines forgiveness as “the wiping out of an offense from memory; it can be effected only by the one affronted. Once eradicated, the offense no longer conditions the relationship between the offender and the one affronted, and harmony is restored between the two” (cf. Isa 43:25; Jer 31:34; Ps 25:7).¹⁶

Surely, dissolving an offense from memory is not humanly easy, for memory is not purely a voluntary act. There is need for divine intervention or for the grace that is God’s response to the person’s willingness to forgive and to the person’s act of forthright,

¹⁵ P.J. ROY, “Psychological Dimensions of Reconciliation,” in B.J. Lee – *al.*, *Alternative Futures for Worship, IV: Reconciliation*, Collegenille, MI: The Liturgical Press 1987, 17-31.

¹⁶ J.S. KSELMAN, “Forgiveness”, in D.N. Freedman, ed. – *al.*, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, II, New York: Doubleday 1992, 831-832.

thoughtful prayer. God empowers one to forgive: to err is human, to forgive is divine, and for the human being to be able to forgive, he or she needs divine assistance.¹⁷

Reconciliation is brought about when two parties mutually accept the need to forgive each other and to re-establish the former harmonious relationship. One has to extend his/her hand to give and accept reconciliation. It is not covering up or blanketing the rotten condition beneath the surface; rather, it is to face the truth, render justice (set things right), and exercise willingness to rectify the situation.¹⁸ In other words, forgiveness is not mere indulgence; rather, it should be founded on truth and righteousness. Even the biblical story of Joseph offers a clear example: his guilt-ridden brothers could taste true reconciliation with him, and hence live together confidently and trustfully, only after hearing the word of forgiveness from him (Gen 50:15-21). The narrative about Joseph tells us that forgiveness is giving up the desire for revenge and letting God be the decisive judge. It is the capacity to find God's will even in injury incurred by the victim.

¹⁷ At this juncture E. WABANHU, "Forgiveness and Reconciliation", 298 gives a very good explanation, "From the Christian faith perspective, the work of real forgiveness and lasting reconciliation needs both human effort and above all, God's grace. Any genuine forgiveness is impossible without the grace of God since the act of forgiving the one who wronged us will always remain only to be a human possibility, capacity and necessity." Cf. J. KNOX, *Chapters in a Life of Paul*, rev. ed., London: SCM 1987, 123.

¹⁸ There are two Hebrew words for the act of forgiving: *nasah* (נָשָׂה) - to lift up, to take away, usually the subject is human beings; the idea of "lifting up" implies that in forgiving a burden is lifted from the sinner or aggressor. The Hebrew expression "to lift somebody's face" means "to restore his/her dignity and integrity, to restore to honour (cf. Ezra 9:6; Job 22:26). The obligation to forgive one's neighbour is emphasized in Lev 19:17, "You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbour, and not bear sin because of him." Cf. D. N. FREEDMAN – B. WILLOUGHBY, "נָשָׂה", *TDOT* X, 27-28. The second word is more spiritual: *salakh* (סָלַח) – pardon, normally having God as the subject; and the absolute noun "forgiveness" is *selikhah* "סְלִיחָה" (cf. Ps 130:4). The verb is mostly used in Jer 5:1; 31:34; 38:8; 36:3; 50:20. In fact the root of the Hebrew word is from Akkadian "*salakhu*", which could also be the root of the late Arabic and Kiswahili word "*suluhu*". Cf. J. HAUSMANN, "סָלַח", *TDOT* X, 258-265.

The rupture or broken relationship between two parties is tantamount to sickness, especially the breaking away from God. The side effects of this rupture are always negative: estrangement, sadness, bitterness, remorse, uncertainty, a guilty conscience, and eventually spiritual death. It paralyzes mutual personal development and the effort towards fulfilment among human beings. For this reason forgiveness has also been known as "healing" (*raphah* – רפא), especially because Israel linked sin with sickness (cf. Ps 41:4). Therefore, as the Psalmist wrote, reconciliation is achieved when "mercy (steadfast love) and truth *meet* together; righteousness and peace *kiss*" (cf. Ps 85:10). Relationships recover the health that proceeds from the unity of truth and love.

3. Old Testament: Reconciliation Promised

The biblical history of salvation is a story of a threefold dimensional relationship: vertically, between God and mankind; horizontally, among human beings themselves (*ad intra*); and, horizontally, between human beings and the rest of creation (*ad extra*). Because the vertical relationship was broken from the very beginning, human beings today do not have the opportunity to experience the pristine, forthright relationship that existed between God and the human person in the state of original innocence, the purity and completeness of the communion that existed between the two human persons, and the uprightness of relationships with other creatures.

The harmonious relationships that marked the beginning of human existence are succinctly but dramatically narrated by the Yahwist in Gen 2:4b–3:24. This narrative, in turn, presumes the Priestly account of Gen 1:1–2:4a. The remaining biblical content concerns the reconciling or repairing of the relationships that Adam and Eve, our first parents, ruptured (Gen 3).¹⁹ Therefore the theme of reconciliation is fundamental to comprehending what God reveals.

¹⁹ Consult the exposition of Gen 2–3 on the Original Sin in W. NGOWI, *Introduction to the Pentateuch and Historical Books*, Morogoro: Salvatorianum 2012, 72-83.

3.1 The Original State of Innocence versus the Fallen Sinful State (Gen 1–3)

The creation narrative is a product of Israel's reflection on the human condition which they experienced among themselves and during the Babylonian captivity. They became aware of the common human condition of instability and infidelity, of envy and violence, of lust for power and oppression, of search for prosperity versus the lapse into poverty, of the cruelty of sin and death, of the search for peace and the embrace of eternal life. They recognized that something must have distorted the primitive condition of man which was essentially good (cf. Gen 1:31). This evil condition was not from God for by nature God cannot be associated with evil, as God himself declared repeatedly to Israel, "You are to be holy to me because I, the LORD, am holy" (Lev 11:45; 19:2; 20:26; 21:8; cf. Isa 6:3-4; 3 John 1:11).

Thus, evil would have its source from creation itself (cf. Jas 1:13). Such a situation would involve the human person (Adam) who was ordained to be the head of creation (Gen 1:26-28). But how could this evil come from a creature which was not created evil? The Yahwist, the author of the second creation narrative (Gen 2-3), gave the indication that evil would spring forth from some other creature who managed to entice the human being into this perverse condition. The Yahwist identified this creature as "Serpent, *nakhash* – נָחָשׁ", who according to the Mesopotamian Gilgamesh Epic, and now according to the Yahwist narrative in the Book of Genesis, was considered to be the most cunning and discreet creature (Gen 3:1; cf. Prov 12:16, 23; 13:16; 14:9, 15; 22:3; 27:12).²⁰ This clever creature manipulated Eve's finite knowledge and her desire for eternal life and led her and her partner to break God's commandment (cf. Gen 3:1-5). The serpent was

²⁰ It was the belief of the Ancient Near East people (Mesopotamians, Hittites, Sumerians, Egyptians, Canaanites), that the "Serpent" was the most clever and cunning creature (Hebrew, *'arum* – עָרוּם) who could manipulate human beings. The Egyptian even worshipped it as a god. Cf. H.-J., FABRY, "נָחָשׁ", *TDOT* IX, 361-66, esp. 364; L.K. HANDY, "Serpent," *ADB* V, 1113-1116; See the Epic of Gilgamesh in J.B. PRITCHARD, *Ancient Near East Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed., Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1969, 258-289.

presented as the instigator to evil and the perpetrator of chaos who seeks to pervert the order of creation.

When one analyses the narrative one notes that the shrewd serpent did not repeat the exact words of God; rather it twisted them, and even Eve seemed to have forgotten them as the following parallelism demonstrates:

God's exact command to Adam was:

"You are *free to eat from any tree* in the garden except the tree of knowledge of good and evil. From that tree you shall not eat; when you eat from it you shall die." (Gen 2:16-17)

But the Serpent distorted the command by saying:

"Did God really say, 'You must *not eat from any tree* in the garden?'" (Gen 3:1).

It is clear that the adjective "*any*" is used positively in the divine command (*free to eat*) whereas the Serpent misplaced it negatively (*not eat*) in order to provoke a negative reaction from the woman.

And in reaction Eve removed the adjective "any" completely, thus soothing the force of the prohibition of not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil:

"We may eat fruit *from the trees* in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" (Gen 3:2)

It has been said that reconciliation is only possible in remembrance and truth. When the truth is deliberately distorted, it is impossible to arrive at authentic reconciliation.²¹

3.2 The Nephilim or the Sons of God (Gen 6:1-4)

Another attempt to explain the presence of evil among human beings is found in the story of the sons of God (Hebrew, *benê-haelohîm* – בְּנֵי־הַאֱלֹהִים), who invaded the human world and married their daughters, consequently reproducing corrupt offspring known as Nephilim (נְפִלִים) or giants (Gen 6:4; cf. Numb 13:33). The intermarriage between the sons of God (eternal) and

²¹ Cf. J. LOPRESTI, "The Church as Sinful Reconciler", in R.J. Kennedy, ed., *Reconciliation: The Continuing Agenda*, Collegeville, MI: The Liturgical Press, 1987, 2-3.

human beings (finite) tries to explain man's desire for eternal life. This infuriated God because it was not according to his divine plan.

3.3 Divine Response

The concept of reconciliation begins after the fall of Adam, for the amicable situation of Adam and Eve in Eden suffered interruption with the allurement of the Serpent and consequent contravening of the divine commandment. Adam and Eve became aware of their nakedness, something they were not previously ashamed of (cf. Gen 2:25). Out of shame they hid themselves from God in the bushes (cf. 3:8, 10), signifying that they realized their frail condition of sin, the folly of breaking the divine commandment, and the disturbance they occasioned in their relationship with God. They tried to cover themselves with fig leaves (3:7), indicating the human effort to cover up failure. But it didn't work because they still felt naked, for their shame could only be removed by God himself who dignified them by making garments of skin for them (cf. 3:21).

The story underscores the following points:²² The first act of reconciliation comes from the part of God who searched for and called Adam and Eve from the bush (Gen 3:9). Out of divine steadfast love, out of compassion (*hesed* – חֶסֶד), God reached out to the miserable couple. The second act of reconciliation was enshrined in the divine promise of Gen 3:15, that the offspring of Eve would crush the Serpent's head (*Proto Evangelium*). The serpent could not block God's eternal plan; nor could human disobedience and infidelity unsettle the divine plan in any way. God's choice to make garments of skin for Adam and Eve was the first divine act of reconciliation (3:21). He did not abandon them to their wretchedness.

3.4 Consequences of Original Sin

Reconciliation cannot be obtained by distorting or covering up the truth; rather, both parties must recognize and accept the consequences. God exposed the act of disobedience for what it was and punished the three perpetrators: the serpent, the woman and the

²² Cf. W. NGOWI, *Introduction to the Pentateuch*, 76-81.

man. The short-term effect of their disobedience was the series of radical changes in relationships, changes that took the form of punishments: God punished the Serpent by relegating to him the humiliating fate of moving principally on its belly and eating dust; for the woman she was to suffer cravings for her husband who would dominate her, she would bear children in pain, and she would struggle as one fated to a permanent *enmity* between her and the serpent, between her offspring and the serpent. The man was to endure the punishment of continual labour with sweat for his food and the land was to rebel against him by producing thistles.

The long-term negative effect was the *rupture in relationships*, a rupture that would become contagious and widespread among the offspring of Adam and Eve. Family relationships shattered as Cain proceeded to act on his envy of his young brother Abel by killing him (Gen 4:1-16). Human society at large became corrupt (6:5ff) and even wanted to challenge God's glory and power by building the tower of Babel. Failing to accept the identity God gave them, they wished to make a name for themselves (11:4). God responded by confusing them with linguistic differences and scattering them over all the earth (11:8-8).

The multiplication of languages and the scattering of the people who subjected themselves to hubris denoted separation among human beings, which was the opposite of the divine plan that intended that human beings should live together as His people (cf. Gen 11:1). Even after this division human beings continued with their rebellious, evil ways to the extent that God regretted to have created them (6:7). Consequently, God decided to subject to destruction all creatures on the surface of the earth by the Flood. All creatures suffered punishment on account of the evil deeds of their ruler, the human being (cf. 1:26, 28). Nevertheless, at the end God repented for having punished them thus and made reconciliation through Noah by the Covenant (*Noahic Covenant*) by which he promised not to destroy the world again. The rainbow symbolized the grace and beauty of the covenant (cf. 6:18; 8:21-9:17).

3.5 The Story of Reconciliation in the Patriarchal Promise

It is well known that Gen 1–11 is the meta-historical part of the Bible expressed in a figurative, mythical language that seeks to explain the divine origin of the universe and attempts to defy the God who sustains it: (a) the world, (b) animate and inanimate creatures among whom human beings are primary, (c) the presence of evil in the world, and (d) death as a consequence of defiance. Within this theological narrative we get fundamental truths of revelation: quite significant among these is the nature of the relationship between God and creation.

From Gen 12 onwards the biblical narrative enters into the historical world. Subsequent to the delusions of a humanity that was corrupted by evil and the perversion of relationships occasioned by that corruption, God took the initiative to restore the ruptured relationships. In doing this, God called an unknown man by the name of Abraham from Ur of Chaldea to go to Canaan (12:1). This is the beginning of a long road to reconciliation that would reach its completion in the person of Jesus Christ in the NT.

The biblical story of Abraham underscores several dimensions to the reconciliation that would take place. God takes the first step by calling Abraham and promising him that he would become a great nation and a blessing to all peoples on the earth. Abraham indeed had been seeking God without asking for anything in particular for himself (Gen 12:1-3). Hence Abraham was detached and attentive to the divine call; and in obedience he followed the command without hesitation. He even convinced his household to join him in the enterprise with all its risks (12:4).

God reciprocated Abraham's trust by reiterating his promise (cf. Gen 15:18-21), a promise ratified by the circumcision of all males (cf. 17:10-14). Abraham's trust in God received affirmation when he obeyed God's command to offer his only son Isaac as a sacrifice (the *Aqedah*) in Gen 22:16-18 (cf. Jas 2:21-23). It is this kind of trust that is necessary for true reconciliation. Through the blessing that God showered upon Abraham humanity's estrangement from the Creator begins to be removed; the hope of definitive reconciliation with Him began to blossom and to be eventually

fulfilled in Christ, just as the Blessed Virgin Mary declared in her Magnificat (Luke 1:55-56; cf. Matt 1:1; John 8:56).

3.6 Reconciliation in the Form of Covenant

This reconciliatory process in the OT is guaranteed by a series of *Covenants*. Covenant (in Hebrew, *berît* – בְּרִית) is the affirmation of reconciliation (a relationship of mutual fidelity) between God and his people Israel.

A covenant is an agreement or alliance between two parties (who are superior and inferior to each other, or are equal to each other). It is thought that the Sinaitic covenant (cf. Exod 19-24) somehow imitated the ancient Hittite form of treaties that concluded with elaborate public ceremonies. The covenant normally concluded with sanctions and sacrificial rites, and the sealed scrolls were preserved in shrines in order to be publicly read annually by kings or high priests.²³ Such events were intended to ensure wholehearted fidelity to the reconciliation.

3.7 Experience of Life with God: "Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy" (cf. Lev 11:44, 45; 20:7, 26)

The covenantal relationship between God and Israel required that they be holy people. To be reconciled to God is to be like him. The call to be holy was accompanied by a divine means of establishing this holiness, i.e., *God set them apart for himself*. The Pentateuch manifests a development of what this *separation* entailed: it rendered the *defiled* clean so as to enable Israel to encounter the most holy God for it was believed that one would die

²³ There are various covenants in the OT:

Noahic Covenant	Unilateral/Unconditional	Gen 8:21-9:17
Abrahamic Covenant	Unilateral/Unconditional	Gen 12:1-3
Mosaic Covenant	Bilateral/Conditional	Exod 19–24
Davidic Covenant	Unilateral/Unconditional	2 Sam 7:12-16

Cf. J.H. WALTON, *Ancient Israelite Literature in Its Cultural Context: A Survey of Parallels Between Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 1989, 95-107; W. NGOWI, *Introduction to the Pentateuch*, 50-52.

if he/she approached the Lord in an unclean state (cf. Exod 20:19; 28:35; Lev 8:35; *et al.*). These separations led to the *concept of sacrifice as a means of reconciliation*:²⁴

- **Human separation:** Human race – the choice of the Hebrews – the choice of the Levites – the choice of the Family of Aaron – the choice of the High Priest – the designation of the sacrificial animal – the specification of the animal’s blood – the author of the separations/consecrations: God.
- **Geographical separations:** World – Canaan – Promised Land – Judea – Jerusalem – Temple Mount (Zion) – Temple (three separations) – the Altar – Debir (Holy of Holies) – Ark of the Covenant – God as Lord.
- **Temporal separations:** Seasons – Annual Feasts – Weekly Feasts – Daily Feasts (prayers) – Hours of prayer – God as adored.

3.8 The Deuteronomist: Theologian/ Historian in the Historical Books

The Sinaitic covenant became the cornerstone of Israel’s relationship with God in the Promised Land. Though Israel remained continually unfaithful and walked away from this covenant with God, God did not unconditionally abandon them. If Israel did not adhere to the covenant, she suffered punishment. But the punishment was not an end-in-itself as if it were an act of vengeance; rather, it was meant to bring them to their senses, awaken them to a desire to repent and return to their God. Out of his *hesed* (steadfast compassion/ love) for Israel God always took the first step to reconcile himself to them by sending *judges and prophets* who reminded them of their sin and urged them to repent. The Deuteronomist *historical cycle* is demonstrated in the historical books as follows:

- Keeping the Covenant brings *shalom*, i.e., peace and prosperity (cf. 1 Kgs 3:14).

²⁴ For a more detailed understanding of the holiness dynamism based on separations in the OT see, A. VANHOYE, *Old Testament Priests and the New Priest According to the New Testament*, Petersham, MA: St. Bede’s Publications 1980, 26-36.

- Breaking the Covenant brings *punishment*: famine, oppression, war, deportation.
- The Davidic Covenant is of special note: Because the king was responsible for the maintenance of the covenant, King David became the benchmark for all kings who followed him – if they did not live like David they were considered as failures and disgraced (cf. 1 Kgs 11:33). Rehoboam exemplifies this (14:22). So do Jeroboam (15:3); Ahab (16:30); and Ahaziah (22:52). Asa, on the other hand, manifests the goodness of a king faithful to the God of Israel (15:11).

The Davidic covenant represented a kind of narrowing of the Sinaitic covenant between God and the whole of Israel since, strictly speaking, it was between David's family and God. It is not that the Sinaitic covenant was abrogated; rather, God reinforced the covenant of Sinai by choosing one family who would accomplish what God had in mind at Sinai. These two covenants would go hand in hand from the OT to the NT. The Davidic covenant represented a development of the idea of an eschatological Messianic (in Hebrew, *mashiha* – מָשִׁיחַ) King figure who would definitively reconcile God with Israel and the whole world (cf. Ps 2:2; Isa 61:1-3; Luke 4:18-19).

3.9 The Prophetic Literature

The prophets were always commissioned by God to bring back his people, i.e., to inspire within their hearts the will to reconcile. They geared their message essentially to a revival of the people's conscience and an awakening of a sense of contrition and repentance. With repentance came the hope of salvation, a hope that becomes more and more explicit in the Deportation / Exile experience (cf. Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel).

For example, God intends Hosea's *marriage* to become an analogy of Israel's covenantal relationship with God. Within this analogy, Israel comports herself as the unfaithful wife who falls into idolatry (cf. Hos 1:2-3; 2:1ff). Hosea's reunion with his unfaithful wife represents the divine mercy, the steadfast love (*hesed*) which grounds an unconditional reconciliation with his people (cf. 3:1ff). The message is expressed in 3:5, "Afterward the

children of Israel shall return (שוב) and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings in the last days.”

The Prophetic description of God’s steadfast love for Israel unmistakably affirms a love that is so great that, moved by the dynamism of his very own love, God promises the following:

- He will be the liberating king and Israel will be his own possession: “You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (cf. Exod 19:5-6).
- Although, he, God, is as a farmer who laments over his vineyard that produces wild grapes (cf. Isa 5:1-7), the fruitlessness of the vineyard will not have the final say.
- He will continue to be the husband even if Israel is an unfaithful wife (cf. Hos 1-3).
- He will always be the Shepherd and Israel will be his flock (cf. Pss 23; 28:9; Isa 40:11; Ezek 34:10-24). The intriguing message in Ezek 34:23-24 indicates that God will tend his sheep in the person of a Davidic shepherd, a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ the Messiah (cf. Matt 2:6; John 10:11; Heb 13:20; 1 Pet 2:25; 5:4; Rev 7:17).
- He will engender total reconciliation with Judah. This promise finds historical expression through the prophet Isaiah, the tenth verse of the seventh chapter, in a form of the sign of a virgin who will conceive and bear a son whose name will be “Immanuel – עִמָּנוּאֵל – God with us”.
- He will be ready to allow His Servant (‘*ebed* YHWH – יְהוָה עֶבֶד) to suffer and die for his people Israel, a people who have strayed (cf. Isa 52:13-53:12). This will be a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ’s redemptive death in the NT (cf. Mark 10:45; Phil 2:6-11).
- There will be a new heaven and new earth, foreshadowed by the radical promise of Trito-Isaiah and reiterated in Isa 66:22, to replace the disrupted, fallen creation (65:17). The author of the Book of Revelation (21:1-5) elucidates this new order. The former division between God and humankind will dissolve; God will dwell among his people forever (Rev 21:3). God declares that it will be an age of newness: “I am

making everything new!" (21:5). The age-old separation will be eliminated; and the human person will be readmitted into the presence of God. In a word, God will have effected full reconciliation.

- He will make a *new covenant* with his people (cf. Jer 31:31-34) and put his commandments in their hearts: "I will give you a new heart and put a *new spirit* in you; *I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh*. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws" (cf. Ezek 36:26-2). God wants to be reconciled with his people forever.

3.10 Examples of Interpersonal, Horizontal Reconciliation in the OT

Abraham and Lot (Gen 13): the reconciliation between *Abraham and his cousin Lot* is a classic example. They managed to meet and talk about the matter. Since they wished each other prosperity and all that is good, they agreed on a common solution. Reconciliation must be founded upon truth and benevolence.

Joseph and his brothers: the story of Joseph whom his brothers sold to the Midianites / Ishmaelites (Gen 37) demonstrates that human beings may reconcile with each other. Joseph later told them the truth, forgave them and entered into reconciliation with them, including with his old father, Jacob/Israel (Gen 45). The story highlights the gradual stages required for lasting reconciliation.

Moses and Miriam and Aaron (Num 12): Miriam and Aaron were complaining that Moses was the only prophet! God told them the truth about the uniqueness of Moses, and punished Miriam with leprosy (v. 10). Aaron confessed their guilt before his brother Moses (vv. 11-12); and out of compassion Moses expressed a fully conciliatory attitude and pleaded with God to forgive them and heal his sister (vv. 13-15).

David and Saul: After the disgrace of Saul after failing to abide by the command that was given through the prophet Samuel (1 Sam 15), in depression and jealousy he wanted to kill David (18:9ff). While on the run, David had the opportunity to kill Saul, but he didn't because of the sacrality of the anointed king (24:3-

22). Rather, he sought to forgive him and spared his life, saying, "From evildoers come evil deeds" (24:13). Unfortunately, Saul did not consider seriously David's desire for reconciliation.

Human beings and creation reconciled: The famous passage from Isaiah 11:1-16 that prophecies the return of Israel from the Babylonian exile depicts a new world in which the rift between human beings and the land, between human beings and other creatures evaporates. As mentioned above, one of the consequences of Adam and Eve's disobedience to God's commandment was the cursing of the land and other creatures. The former harmonious relationship between human beings and other creatures had suffered rupture (cf. Gen 3:17-19; 4:12). Isaiah draws a picture of the restoration of the harmonious relationship that had disappeared with the expulsion from Paradise, a relationship that the Messiah, who would be from the stump of Jesse, would now reinstate: "*The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.*" (Isa 11:6-8). The agent of this definitive reconciliation between God and his creatures would be the Messiah who would appear in the person of Jesus Christ in the New Testament (cf. Luke 4:18-21). Paul envisioned creation itself waiting for definitive reconciliation with human beings and with their Creator in the Parousia, the glorious return of the risen Christ (cf. Rom 8:19-23).

Reconciliation in the Psalms and Sapiential Books: The Psalms are the outpouring of the human heart in response to God and his revelation, a revelation that extends to almost the whole history of the salvation of Israel. Similarly, the Sapiential books contain a long tradition of Israel's reflection upon the experience of life before the mystery of God who reveals himself. Therefore, as one would expect, in the Psalms and Sapiential books we find texts rich in the theme of reconciliation. Of great significance in this regard are the Psalms of Reconciliation (Pss 6; 32; 38; 51; 102; 130; and 143). Some scholars hypothesize that these psalms were used on the *Yom Kippur* or the Day of Atonement (cf. Lev 23:27,

28; 25:9ff). The similarity of the structure of these psalms tells all; good examples are Psalms 32 and 51:

Psalm 51	Activity	Psalm 32
vv. 1-2	Invocation; request for forgiveness	vv. 1-2
vv. 3-5	Repentance of sin: recognition of sin (v. 3); contrition for sin committed	vv. 3-5
vv. 5-6	Priest's prayer for the sinner Admittance of sinful condition	v. 6
vv. 7-9	Penitential prayer, forgiveness and re-admittance to the Praying Assembly in the Temple	vv. 7-10
vv. 10-12	Personal prayer asking for divine grace to persevere in keeping God's commandments	
vv. 13-17	Act of thanksgiving	
vv. 18-19	Prayer for the Temple of City of God (Zion), including the mention of sin sacrifices	v. 11

Summary

As stated above, reconciliation is the main leitmotif in the OT since the whole economy of salvation is geared to restoration of the primitive condition of the human being and much more. The OT contains divine promises that point to their future fulfilment in Jesus Christ.

4. The New Testament: Reconciliation Accomplished

In the opening verses of the Gospel of Matthew we meet the genealogy of Jesus Christ, a genealogy that goes back to David and Abraham (1:1-17) and thus serves as an implicit reminder to the reader of the major OT promises that were yet to be fulfilled (cf. Gen 17:6f; 2 Sam 7:12-16). Now with the coming of Jesus Christ,

their son and the unique Son of God, the fulfilment of these promises is imminent. He will be called *Immanuel* (God with us – עִמָּנוּ אֱלֹהִים) because now God is going to be with his people (Matt 1:23; cf. Isa 7:14; 8:8). Luke, for his part, begins his genealogy with Jesus and goes backward in history down to Adam and to God himself (3:23-38). This reminds the reader of the Proto-Evangelium to Adam and Eve in Gen 3:15. Adam and Eve's offspring will defeat the great serpent and bring to full reconciliation the original relationship between humanity and its Creator.

4.1 The Gospels

According to the *Benedictus* of Zachariah (cf. Luke 1:69, 71, 77), the *Nunc Dimittis* of Simeon (2:30), and the declaration of John the Baptist in the Jordan region (3:6), the fulfilment of reconciliation or making peace between God and his people in the NT is synonymous to *Salvation* (*Yeshû 'â* – יֵשׁוּעָה). It is physically described in terms of the Kingdom of Heaven in Matthew and as the Kingdom of God in Mark and Luke. The agent of this process is Jesus Christ or *Yeshû 'â* (cf. Matt 1:21, 25). Jesus fulfils his mission of reconciliation by his life and his teachings.

In his Life

- Jesus was born in poor, humble, human circumstances in order to reconcile all people with God (John 1:12-13; Phil 2:8).
- His birth is the Father's gesture of peace to the world as the heavenly Angels sang during his birth in Bethlehem: "Glory to God in the highest, and on *earth peace to men* on whom his favor rests" (Luke 2:14).
- He offered himself as a sacrifice for all (Mark 10:45; Heb 7:27; 9:14; 10:12); through his suffering, death and resurrection (Col 1:20-22), he reconciled the world to himself.
- The prologue of John 1:1-18 reminds the reader of the creation narrative in Gen 1-3 by revealing that God created all things through the Word (ὁ Λόγος). It is by means of the Logos, who took flesh and pitched his tent (ἐσκήνωσεν)

among human beings, that those who believe in him may become sons and daughters of God (cf. Rev 21:3, 7). It is the Logos who subsequently reconciles the world with God. John the Baptist affirmatively testifies that Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who brings reconciliation by taking away the sin of the world (John 1:29). The same Johannine tradition links to the narrative of creation to elucidate the reconciliation accomplished in Rev 21:1-8. The initiative is emphatically God's who comes down to the estranged human being and not vice versa.

During the *Last Supper* Jesus uttered words for the second cup which were a surprise to the apostles, "This is my *blood of the covenant*, which is poured out for many," with some minor differences in the synoptic parallels (Matt 26:28; Luke 22:20). These words are reminiscent of the words of Moses to the Israelites when he ratified the Sinaitic Covenant with the blood of bulls, "This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words" (Exod 24:8).

Now it is the blood of Jesus himself; it is the blood of him who acts as the high priest and at the same time offers himself as the sacrifice. Unlike the blood of the bulls which was sprinkled on the people, the blood of Christ is to be drunk by his apostles (disciples). It is no longer reserved to a special ethnic group, the Israelites; rather, it is for the many, i.e., for all people. This new covenant is therefore greater; indeed, it is universal. Jesus not only reconciles Israel to YHWH their God; rather, he reconciles all people to God. In other words, he definitively restores the primitive harmonious relationship that existed between God and creation before the fall of Adam and Eve. He is the promised offspring of Adam and Eve (the *Proto-Evangelium*) who would crush the head of the serpent (cf. Gen 3:15b). This is what the celebrant and concelebrants pray in the third Eucharistic Prayer of the Holy Mass, "Look, we pray, upon the oblation of your Church and, recognizing the sacrificial Victim by whose death you willed *to reconcile us to yourself*, grant that we, who are nourished by the Body and Blood of your Son and filled with his Holy Spirit, may become one body, one spirit in

Christ.” Indeed he himself Jesus, the one who is our Reconciler, is himself our Lord and our God (cf., John 20:28).

Jesus acted as the divine agent of reconciliation even during his passion: Pontius Pilate, for instance, reconciled with Herod Antipas during the trial (cf. Luke 23:12). Luke tells us that Herod and Pilate had been in enmity before that moment.

It seems the rift between the two was provoked by Pilate’s arrogant hostile acts against Jews: he had killed Galileans in Jerusalem (cf. Luke 13:1). According to Philo (*Ad Gaium*, 38, # 300), Pilate required Herod to put images of Caesar in his palace, a directive that incited an angry demonstration led by the Herodian princes in Jerusalem. At this juncture Pilate’s act of sending Jesus to Herod was a sign of recognition, which indicated a measure of cooperation. Both of them agreed on the political innocence of Jesus (cf. Acts 4:26-28). It is true that some, for example, Raymond E. Brown, have doubted the historicity of this event. Brown hypothesized that it was a Lucan invention to express his theology of Jesus’ passion as a continuing act of forgiveness and healing. What happened between Pilate and Herod is also a reflection of the LXX Prov 15:38 (MT 16:7), which says, “When a man’s ways are pleasing to the LORD, he makes even his enemies live at peace with him.”²⁵ However, a number of scholars have rejected this hypothesis as untenable: they consider the incident as historical.²⁶

In his Teaching

Matt 5:22-26 Reconciliation before offering: Before offering sacrifice at the altar, one is required to reconcile himself

²⁵ R.E. BROWN, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave. A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels*, I, New York: Doubleday 1994, 773-786, especially 781.

²⁶ D.E. BOCK, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker 2000, 1821-1822. He sees no sufficient reason to deny the historicity of the rift between Herod Antipas and Pilate, for there were some reported historical events that favored such enmity. (The editor notes that there is no indication in the text that would indicate that what happened between Pilate and Herod should be accepted as non-historical; the flow of the narrative, on the other hand, suggests that the evangelist considered it to be historical.)

(διαλλάγηθι) with his neighbour. It does not matter who wronged whom; what matters is to settle matters before approaching God. The importance of fraternal reconciliation before approaching God is universal in scope, beyond the particularity of historical periods and geographical location.

Matt 5:44 Love of enemies and praying for persecutors: this is one of the most exacting teachings of Jesus. In order to call God our Father one has to be reconciled even to his/her enemies. Praying for persecutors means to bring them before God as brothers and sisters! Jesus models this during his crucifixion when he forgives his crucifiers as he hangs on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). In this way he reconciles himself with the crucifiers and with his heavenly Father. And Stephen imitated his master by praying for those who were stoning him, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (cf. Acts 7:60).

Matt 6:12-15 Forgive (ἄφεσις) us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors: The fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer underscores the importance of fraternal forgiveness if the Father is to forgive us. For this reason it is the only petition that is reiterated in vv. 14-15.

Matt 18:15-10 Fraternal correction: Jesus taught his disciples how to bring reconciliation within the community of believers. It was a process of three stages: the ones as yet unreconciled could simply reconcile with each other; if that were not enough, the two could invite a witness into their act of mutual reconciliation; lastly, if they still remained unreconciled, the two could submit themselves to the community authorities. If one chose not to accept correction he should be treated as a pagan. When the community lives as a truly reconciled one, Jesus is among them (Matt 18:20).

Matt 18:22-35 Fraternal forgiveness: This is a necessary condition for divine forgiveness and reconciliation with God. One has to forgive from the bottom of his/her heart (v. 35).

Luke 15:11-32 The Prodigal Son: this is the most celebrated and dramatic parable on reconciliation in the NT. The parable contains the following aspects about reconciliation that may be highlighted:

- The *compassionate love of the father* occasions his forgiveness for his son who has strayed.
- But also the prodigal son was able to seek and accept reconciliation with his father by *confronting the truth*.
- He realized (*remembered*) what he had done was wrong, and he held himself accountable for the misery of his present life in comparison with the comfortable circumstances of love and reconciliation at home (v. 17).
- In *humility he repented* and decided to return home to his father, “I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men’” (vv. 18-19).

Unfortunately the *elder son* responded with anger and jealousy to the father’s desire to celebrate the reconciliation with his younger brother; the older son refused to accept his young brother: he wanted a type of reconciliation that exacts justice in a way that is merciless. True reconciliation, on the other hand, requires a forgiveness that allows justice to give way to mercy. *We may not seek justice at the expense of mercy! Selfishness* blocks reconciliation; but merciful love prevails over justice (the father’s gracious disposition).

Something worth considering: It is important to see how human psychological development interfaces with the process of reconciliation.²⁷

John 3:13-18 The Son of Man is the mediator of reconciliation: In his dialogue with Nicodemus, Jesus reminded him that “No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven, the Son of Man” (v. 13). The meaning of these words is that only Jesus, the Son of Man who comes from heaven as the eternal Son of God, can be the ladder (cf. Gen 28:12) between the Eternal God in heaven and human beings on earth. He combined this leitmotif of the ladder with the image of the serpent in the OT: the tempter of Eve in Gen 3:1-14, the punishing

²⁷ It is interesting to see how the Parable of the Prodigal Son mirrors the analysis of P.J. ROY, “Psychological Dimensions of Reconciliation”, 17-30.

venomous serpents in the desert and the healing bronze snake (Num 21:6-9).²⁸ The healing was not brought about by the bronze snake, but by faith in the word of God. Similarly, it is not the pain-provoking wooden cross which gives life but faith in Jesus who was lifted on it, "that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life" (John 3:15; cf. Wis 16:5-13, esp. 7, 12).

And in his high priestly prayer (John 17): Jesus indicated that his mission in the world was to bring people back to God the Father, so that they be *one* with him and the Father: "that they also may be one in us – ἵνα καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν ἡμῖν ὦσιν" (v. 21). In other words, total reconciliation is accomplished in Jesus Christ (cf. 17:2, 11, 21-23, 26).

4.2 Acts

Acts 6:1-7 The Question of Fair Treatment of Widows: There were complaints that some Hellenistic Jewish Christians widows were overlooked in the distribution of food. Reconciliation was reached after the apostles discussed the matter with the whole congregation and came up with the solution of selecting seven men as deacons who would serve them while they – the apostles – engaged in prayer and the ministry of the word.

Acts 15:1-29 The Ecumenical Council of Jerusalem: The most important passage in the Book of Acts concerning reconciliation is that of chapter fifteen in which the apostles had to overcome the most serious hurdle in the primitive Church: the acceptance of Gentiles without binding them to Jewish traditions of circumcision and dietary laws. Even Paul had opposed and scolded *Peter for his hypocrisy* on this issue (cf. Gal 2:11-21). By confronting and speaking the truth they reconciled themselves to each other and came up with a common position that the Jewish traditions were not necessary for salvation in Jesus Christ.

²⁸ Note the Hebrew word play between snake "*nakhash* – נָחָשׁ" and bronze "*nekhošet* – נְחֹשֶׁת" (Num 21:9).

4.3 Pauline Literature

It is known that Paul seldom uses the aforementioned technical terms for reconciliation (καταλλαγή / ἀποκατάστασις) and forgiveness (ἄφεσις);²⁹ rather, he uses the verb χαρίζομαι which means to give freely or to freely remit somebody what he or she owes. From this emerges the noun χάρις – “grace” (cf. 2 Cor 2:7, 10; 12:13; Eph 4:32; Col 2:13; 3:13). Explaining this surprising shift in terminology, J. Knox says that due to his experience of utter divine forgiveness for his former violent repression of the Way, Paul understood that forgiveness and reconciliation are more an issue of free divine grace, and are not the consequences of what someone has earned by way of merit from some good he or she has done or even by way of sincere repentance or atonement.³⁰ It is still more interesting to note that Paul does not develop much the theme of repentance which is so central to the Gospels.³¹ Instead he wrote, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8; cf. 2 Cor 5:15, 19). Jesus’ gratuitous removal of the barrier of sin through his death has enabled access to genuine reconciliation (cf. Ps 32:2).

One of the most celebrated expositions of Pauline teaching on the issue of reconciliation is found in 2 Cor 5:17-21. The pericope contains most of the vocabulary on both transient and definitive reconciliation in the coming of the new creation. He specifically teaches the Corinthians that the initiative is from God who has

²⁹ Paul mostly uses the term reconciliation (καταλλαγή / ἀποκατάστασις) in the cosmic dimension (Rom 5:11; 2 Cor 5:18; Col 1:22), with the exception of 1 Cor 7:11 and 2 Cor 5:20 where he speaks at the personal level. And interestingly he does not use the words ἀφίημι (to forgive) or ἄφεσις (forgiveness); rather he mostly uses the verb χαρίζομαι “to favor, pardon, to remit” (cf. 2 Cor 2:7, 10; 12:13; Eph 4:32; Col 2:13; 3:13).

³⁰ See J. KNOX, *Chapters in a Life of Paul*, 118-122. He defines grace as “God’s favor toward those who do not deserve it, a favor, indeed, whose reality can be known and whose benefits can be received only by those who know that they do not deserve it...it is God’s grace alone that makes possible our justification as well as our reconciliation”, especially page 120, 122.

³¹ The noun “repentance” (μετάνοια) occurs only three times in Rom 2:4; 2 Cor 7:9, 10 and once in the Deutero-Pauline letter of 2 Tim 2:25; and the verb “repent” (μετανοέω) in 2 Cor 12:21.

always sought to reconcile himself with his people (v. 18a); the vicarious death of Jesus Christ (v. 19a, 21) is what ushers in the definitive reconciliation that brings a new creation (v. 17); and now believers engage in the ministry of reconciliation as ambassadors for Christ (v. 20).³²

Paul expresses the concept of forgiveness by means of two terms: reconciliation, which is essentially a personal term and means the restoration of community or fellowship (κοινωνία),³³ and justification (δικαίωσις), which is essentially a legal term that means acquittal. Reconciliation is to be in Christ Jesus (ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ); and life on earth is a thanksgiving to God for the redemption that has occurred through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Even sufferings are to be understood as an opportunity for communion with Christ rather than simply an occasion for repentance (cf. Phil 3:7-11; Gal 6:14).

³² For a detailed study of 2 Cor 5:17-21 see W.H. GLOER, "Ambassadors of Reconciliation: Paul's Genius in Applying the Gospel in a Multi-Cultural World: 2Corinthians 5:14-21", *Review and Expositor* 104 (2007) 589-601.

³³ Paul uses the term communion or fellowship (κοινωνία) among Christians as a consequence of reconciliation through faith or sharing in the life of Jesus Christ (cf. Rom 15:26; 1 Cor 1:9; 10:16; 2 Cor 8:4; Gal 2:9; Phil 2:1-2; 3:10) or in the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13:14) or in the Gospel (Phil 1:5; 2Cor 9:13). W.H. GLOER, "Ambassadors of Reconciliation", 594 makes a reflective distinction between Paul's soteriological language in relation to its background and proposes "reconciliation" as the most appropriate and meaningful term that expresses the significance of Christ's death today. The first one is "redemption" (ἡ ἀπολύτρωσις) which is a term that comes from the slave market of the first century and implies a release from bondage; yet many in our world have no particular sense of bondage. The second is "justification" (ἡ δικαιοσύνη) that comes from the world of the courtroom, and its juridical emphasis may have little impact where the sense of sin and any sort of accountability before God have vanished. The third is "sacrifice or expiation" (τό ἱλαστήριον) that evokes images of cultic ritual which have little meaning for moderns who are no longer plagued by a dread of the numinous. Finally, the fourth is "reconciliation," (ἡ καταλλαγὴ) which belongs to the sphere of personal relationships: ours is an age which is acutely aware of the alienation between people which exists at every level. Ours is an age hungry for the healing of broken relationships.

It is because of his experience of being forgiven and reconciled with the Christian community that reconciliation becomes the overarching theme of Paul's theology. R.P. Martin hypothesizes that reconciliation provides a suitable umbrella under which the main features of Paul's kerygma and the working out of its practical implications may be set.³⁴ There are many passages in his letters that speak about reconciliation in its horizontal and vertical dimensions as already referred to above. Paul creates a parallel between Jesus Christ and Adam: the first Adam brought sin and death, while the second Adam brought grace and life; thus forgiveness and reconciliation (cf. Rom 5:14; 1Cor 15:22, 45).

There are indeed some concrete examples of reconciliation in the letters of Paul:

One of the unique teachings of Paul was his opposition to the sending of fellow believers to pagan law courts (1 Cor 6:1-11). He exhorted the Corinthians to solve their disputes and reconcile themselves with each other within the Christian assembly and not to seek solutions in the law courts of unbelievers. They should achieve reconciliation with the acknowledgement that they were sinners before they were forgiven and have now found reconciliation through Christ Jesus, "But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God." (1 Cor 6:11; cf. Matt 6:12, 14-15; 18:33-35).

1 Cor 7:12-16. The context of the Pauline Privilege: Those Christians who were married to Gentiles should not divorce their partners, for a spouse could bring salvation to the unbelieving partner. His rationale is "God has called us to live in peace" (v. 15). To live in peace is nothing other than reconciliation as opposed to divorce that separates.

In Eph 2:11-22, we find a scenario of apparently serious division and disharmony among the Ephesians. It seems they were

³⁴ Cf. R.P. MARTIN, *Reconciliation: A Study of Paul's Theology*, rev. ed., Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990; R.P. MARTIN, "Center of Paul's Theology", in G.F. Hawthorne, ed. – *al.*, *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters*, Downers Grove, IL InterVarsity 1993, 94-95.

divided between the circumcised (Diaspora Jewish Christians) and the uncircumcised (Hellenistic Christians). Some thought that the circumcised were the rightful members of the Kingdom of God whereas the uncircumcised were aliens in God's household. This was a serious division because it was an ideological and structural division, which could have become very difficult to heal.

Paul, however, called upon the Ephesians to reconcile themselves with each other because in Christ God had brought them together and was forming them into one building, into one temple of the Lord. Jesus had created one new man out of the two. In this new body of Christ, Jesus was reconciling (ἀποκαταλλάξῃ) both of them to the Father through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. Christ came to preach peace to bring all to the same household of God (vv. 16-17).

The letter to the Colossians which is hypothesized to be a counterpart of Ephesians,³⁵ contains similar teaching, "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile (ἀποκαταλλάξει) to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (Col 1:19-20). Paul exhorts the Colossians to live with moral uprightness according to their new status as children of God, as people who are reconciled with God and with one another.

Philemon and Onesimus: The most celebrated example of reconciliation is found in the letter to *Philemon*. *Onesimus* who was a slave escaped from his master Philemon and went to serve Paul in prison. He was baptized and became very faithful to Paul. In order to clear the problem, Paul sent Onesimus back to Philemon

³⁵ Many scholars have hypothesized that, because the letters to the Ephesians and Colossians have so many similarities with some nuances (e.g. Col 1:23-29 and Eph 3:1-13; the *Haustafel* teaching in Col 3:18-4:1 and Eph 5:21-6:9; Col 4:7-8 and Eph 6:21-22), they must derive from the same Pauline school, a school hypothesized to be at Ephesus where Paul was imprisoned for three years. However, this hypothesis that they are literarily interdependent is not unanimously accepted. Cf. C. E. ARNOLD, "Ephesians, Letter to", in G.F. Hawthorne, ed. – *al.*, *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity 1993, 242-243.

asking him to accept him without punishment. He appealed to the new status of Onesimus as a *true son of Paul in Jesus*, just as Philemon himself was. Their relationship in Christ was no longer between a master and a slave; rather, *they were now reconciled in Christ as brothers* (v. 16).

Aware of his sinful past and how the Risen Lord mercifully called him to his apostolic ministry (Gal 1:11-24; cf. Acts 9; 22; 26), Paul considers the Church and her members as forgiven reconciler(s) or ambassador(s), “We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors (πρεσβεύομεν), as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled (καταλλάγητε) to God” (cf. 2 Cor 5:18-21), for it was the risen Christ, their Lord and their God, who forgave them in the first place, and now intended to send them to be ambassadors of forgiveness and reconciliation: “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you” (cf. John 20:19, 21). James Lopresti has suggested two important principles about the ambassadorial ministry of Christians: the first is that remembering is at the heart of being ambassadors of reconciliation. Remembering means both “*not forgetting* and being made a member once again”. It means reconciliation has to do both with not forgetting who we are and with becoming who we are once again. The second principle, on the contrary, is *alienation* whereby we forget who we are and refuse to become who we are once again... or perhaps are unable to become who we are once again.³⁶

4.4 Hebrews

The main message of the Epistle to the Hebrews is to establish and declare once and for all the new “name” that Jesus Christ has inherited, that of “High Priest” of the People of God (Heb 1:4; 2:12, 17; 5:5-6).³⁷ Whereas in the OT, the dynamic of holiness was based on separations, in Jesus the situation is reversed.

The function of the OT priest was to reconcile God’s people with the holy God, “Every high priest is selected from among men

³⁶ See J. LOPRESTI, “The Church as Sinful Reconciler”, 1-13.

³⁷ A. VANHOYE, *The Old Testament Priests and the New Priest*, 78.

and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people." (Heb 5:1-4; cf. 10:11).

Now in Jesus Christ who is *Immanuel*, "עִמָּנוּ אֱלֹהִים – God with us" (Matt 1:23; cf. Isa 7:14; 8:8) there is no longer separation between God and his people, for in the incarnation God has decided to live among his people (cf. John 1:1-3, 14). The author of Hebrews explicates that Jesus Christ becomes the rightful High Priest because he is both divine Son of God (Heb 1:1-14) and the Son of Man who shares in everything with human beings except sin (2:5-18). The priesthood of Jesus Christ is superior to that of the OT because of his status as Son of God who cannot sin, whereas the Jewish priests were sinful and had to offer sacrifices for themselves and for the people over and over again. Jesus Christ's priesthood is perfect and eternal, after the example of Melchizedek (cf. 4:14-7:28), and he has offered himself as an expiatory sacrifice once and for all. This is enough, therefore, for our salvation (cf. 2:14-18; 10:12).

As stated above, a covenant is a legal form of reconciliation that guarantees continuity and trust. In Jesus Christ, the High Priest, God has established a covenant in his own blood (cf. Heb 8:1-13), a covenant that is superior to that of Sinai, which was sealed by animals' blood (9:12-28; 12:24; cf. Exod 24:6-8).³⁸ The New Covenant in Christ is the guarantee of reconciliation with God; henceforth Jesus commanded his disciples to celebrate it in remembrance of him (cf. Luke 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24-25).

In celebrating the Lord's Supper, Christians understand the liturgical act as "Eucharist", an act of thanksgiving and praise (in Hebrew, *tôdah* - תּוֹדָה), to God the Father (cf. Heb 13:15) who has given us his own Son as atoning and vicarious sacrifice (*hilasmos* - ἱλασμός also *hilasterios* - ἱλαστήριος) (cf. Rom 3:25; Eph 5:2;

³⁸ T.D. LEA – D.A. BLACK, *The New Testament: Its Background and Message*, Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman 2003, 502-506; cf. D.A. HAGNER, *Encountering the Book of Hebrews*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker 2002.

Heb 10:10; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). Now believers in Christ are enabled to approach God with confidence, particularly because God has forgiven them (cf. Heb 10:22); and the divine commandments remain engraved in their hearts (cf. 10:16). This conciliatory sacrifice of Jesus Christ, a sacrifice that has brought complete reconciliation between human beings and God and with each other was offered once and for all (cf. 9:26; 10:10, 12). It is an eternal sacrifice.

4.5 Catholic Epistles

James 2:1-11 Reconciliation between the Rich and the Poor:

St. James offers us one of the most important teachings on reconciliation in the Christian assembly. He repeatedly warned his faithful to avoid discrimination, particularly on the basis of economic status (chap. 2). Discrimination cannot bring reconciliation. The world will continue to have the rich and the poor (cf. John 12:8), but this should not separate the disciples. He gives an enigmatic teaching on the kind of attitudes the poor and the rich must have toward each other: “The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower” (Jas 2:9-10).

Another powerful teaching on reconciliation comes from James 5:16, 19-20. In verse 16 James advises the faithful to confess their sins to one another, and pray for one another, that they may be healed. Confessing sins involves remembrance of former harmony in the community and the harmful effect sins bring to that harmony. The choice to confess sins invites an attitude of repentance and the recognition of the need for reconciliation and peace.

Certainly this is not the sacrament of reconciliation as it is known to the Catholic Church since no ordained minister is involved; rather it is an exercise of spiritual brotherly reconciliation. This is reminiscent of Jesus’ teaching about fraternal correction in Matt 18:15-17 where the community member is encouraged to accept his/her guilt and be reconciled to his fellow brother/sister. In this context Jesus teaches about the process of reconciliation in three stages, whereas in James 5:16 it

is corporate confession and not auricular confession.³⁹ Similarly, in verses 19-20 James encourages the members of his community to help each other to know the truth of their faith. Some of them were misled by false teachings that brought division among them. It was important to bring those in error back to the fold. Even now, most serious divisions in a community are caused by ignorance and misinformation. Knowledge and acceptance of the truth brings freedom, harmony and peace among people.

4.6 Revelation

It is known that the Book of Revelation is a prophecy in visions about the definitive victory of Christ over evil, sin and death (cf. 1:3; 22:7). The book depicts two opposite spheres of influence: the heavenly sphere where God reigns on his throne surrounded by a throng of angels and saints in glory (4-5); and the earthly sphere inhabited by a suffering Church (cf. 1:9) that is seemingly ravaged by the evil one (the dragon, the beast, the harlot). The seven letters (2:1-3:22) contain exhortations to the faithful to be reconciled with God.⁴⁰

The book concludes with the defeat of the evil one and his agents by Almighty God (ὁ παντοκράτωρ) who re-establishes his rule (cf. Rev 17:1-20:15). A new city of Jerusalem descends from heaven, and God lives among his chosen ones, those who have won the battle. In short, the Book of Revelation demonstrates that at the consummation of time, God will reconcile Himself with the redeemed world through the victorious Lamb (cf. 21:1-22:5).

Indeed, the author of Revelation ultimately presents a corrupt human world which is separated from its Creator (cf. Gen 3:23-24) and hence seems to be controlled by the evil one who bears the image of the Serpent, the Dragon or the Beast (cf. Rev 12-20) – an image that evokes the same creature who succeeded in deceiving Adam and Eve in Gen 3:1ff. But the Book of Revelation also reminds the reader of the *Proto-Evangelium* (Gen 3:15b) and the

³⁹ Cf. R.P. MARTIN, *James*, WBC 48, Waco, TX: Word Books 1988, 216.

⁴⁰ The faithful must "remember" where they have faltered and then repent and return to the former love relationship. Cf. D.E. AUNE, *Revelation 1-5*, WBC 52C, Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson 1997, lxxxvii - lxxxviii.

future offspring of the woman who will crush the head of the serpent. The OT promise comes to fulfillment in the Book of Revelation for Jesus Christ, who is the offspring of the Woman, i.e., of the Blessed Virgin Mary (cf. Rev 12) defeats the serpent, and God readmits human beings into the new city of Jerusalem and allows them to eat of the fruit of the tree of life. It is interesting that in order to attain the universalistic vision of the new heavenly Jerusalem, the author has fused the image of old Jerusalem and that of Eden.

God reconciles redeemed human beings to himself and to the whole of creation and lives together with them in the new Eden (cf. Rev 2:7; 22:2). Therefore, the eschatological reconciliation is not only a justification or restoration of the created order, but a new creation. In the vicarious death of Jesus Christ, the old order has ceased; and in his resurrection the whole creation is invited to share in his transformed new life (cf. 2 Cor 5:17).⁴¹

Conclusion

There are many texts in the Bible that develop the theme of reconciliation either explicitly or implicitly and often by way of narratives. It can rightfully be concluded that the Bible as a whole deals with reconciliation between God and human beings and with all of creation. At the same time, it concerns reconciliation between human beings themselves, and between human beings and the rest of creation. The process of reconciliation is a return to the original state of harmony and demands remembrance and forgiveness. Definitive reconciliation is achieved in Jesus Christ. In him the OT promises are fulfilled. The ruptured relationship caused by the sin of Adam and Eve has been repaired (cf. Rom 5:14; 1 Cor 15:22, 45; Rev 2:7; 22:2); and human beings are now friends of God (cf.

⁴¹ The present world and heaven itself would be transformed into a new existence, the New Jerusalem, whereby God and victorious people would live together. Cf. G.K. BEALE – M.S. MCDONOUGH, “Revelation”, in G.K. Beale – D.A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, Michigan, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic – Apollsos 2007, 1081, 1155-1156; D.E. AUNE, *Revelation 1–5*, lxxxvii; *Ibid*, *Revelation 17–22*, 1132-1133; W.H. GLOER, “Ambassadors of Reconciliation”, 599.

John 15:15; 21:5). Indeed, God adopts them as his sons and daughters through Christ: "He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my son" (Rev 21:7; cf. Matt 23:9; Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6). Human beings are now brothers and sisters (Matt 5:47; 23:8). Even the rest of creation, reconciled to God through Christ, is anxiously awaiting its total liberation from the curse of decay (cf. Rom 8:19-22), the decay that was the consequence of the sin of Adam, its head (cf. Gen 3:17-19).

Reconciliation, therefore, shines in the eternal light of grace with the same characteristic brilliance and beauty as salvation – as eternal life. Separation from God, from fellow human beings, from other creatures and from oneself leads to darkness, enslavement, sorrow and death. The forgiveness that leads to reconciliation is the path to freedom, happiness and the fullness of life. This is what Paul expresses in his hymn in his Letter to the Philippians: Jesus Christ emptied himself, showed himself to be fully human by his obedience, suffered the ignominious death of crucifixion, and rose from death so that he may reconcile creation with its Creator (Col 1:15-20; Phil 2:6-11). Ultimately, reconciliation demands the same process of recognizing the other's value, emptying oneself (*kenosis*), and raising the other from the shackles of sorrow and death. Similar to the exaltation of Jesus Christ to whom the heavenly Father gave a name above every other name (Phil 2:9-11), the person who forgives and reconciles others becomes a true victor and ultimately shines in the light of eternal glory.

At this juncture, it is important to recognize the inclusion that encapsulates the whole biblical story: the disordered universe occasioned by the disruption of the harmonious relationship between the Creator and his creation by the tragic fall of our first parents in the old creation in Gen 1–3 vanishes and gives way to a new heaven and new earth through the victory of Jesus Christ, the second Adam. This is the work of God at the end of the book of Revelation 21 (cf. Rom 5; 1 Cor 15:22, 45). True reconciliation is, therefore, preceded by death, by the fading away of the old order, and by the introduction of a new order that gives freedom and life. This is the eschatological kingdom of God, a new life with God where the corrupt world will have no place (cf. Rev 21:8).

Reconciliation is nothing other than a rebirth in the Holy Spirit, for no one can enter the kingdom of God, the Holy City of God, the New Jerusalem, and eat of the tree of life without being born again (cf. John 3:3-7). The Church, therefore, continues perseveringly with Jesus' mission of reconciliation until he comes again. At that juncture, God will be all in all (1 Cor 15:28). Amen.