that arise out of the interaction of the experience of peacebuilding with the resources of the Christian tradition; here, these provide the connection to theory.

The second perspective represents the practices as they are informed by theory. The practices are not simply deduced from the theory. Especially since so much of the work of peacebuilding in its modern form is of recent provenance (for example, efforts to create a national healing of memories), it is important that we stay close to the practices. By staying so close to practices we are also able to see the tradition with new eyes and discover resources heretofore unrecognized.

The third perspective is a link to the larger theory (and practices) of peacebuilding as articulated in other faith traditions and in secular discourse. This is important because so often Christians are not working alone in peacebuilding; they must partner with those of other faiths and with those of no faith. To be able to translate those Christian and Catholic perspectives into terms intelligible to others is important in building the bonds of partnership necessary for effective and sustainable peace.

Thus, a practical theology of reconciliation works in a double spiral: from informed practices back to the Christian tradition, but also from informed practices to the larger non-Christian and secular discourse about peacebuilding.

Second, while the discrete themes of healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation are treated in succession in this chapter, it needs to be understood that reconciliation here is the overarching concept. Reconciliation must be seen both as a goal and a process. Most people begin talking about reconciliation as a goal (although often without a clear idea of just what that goal looks like—other than the end of enmity between the parties involved). Since reconciliation in any complete and absolute sense is rarely reached, they come to despair of any hopes for it. While reconciliation must be seen as a goal or horizon for a different kind of world, it is equally important to concentrate on it as a process with distinctive tasks and steps to be taken. By concentrating on these steps, one is less likely to lose heart in the work of peacebuilding.

The meaning of reconciliation as a concept in itself is contested, admitting of a spectrum of interpretations. This is especially true in its social meanings, as we shall see below. The kind of reconciliation one is envisaging will shape the strategies of peacebuilding that are undertaken. Some people caution against using the language of reconciliation at all—either because it has so often been misused in the past to cover up wrongdoing or because it is too elusive and abstract a goal to even begin to tackle.1

The Christian tradition has developed some distinctive ideas about reconciliation that, at least at the level of a practical theology, continue to inform practices of peacebuilding. The goal of reconciliation is not intelligible without engagement in those practices. Reconciliation so understood holds within itself themes of truth telling, justice, memory, healing, and forgiveness. Hence, the Christian language of reconciliation does not have

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A Practical Theology of Healing, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation

ROBERT J. SCHREITER

This chapter outlines a practical theology of three important elements in Catholic peacebuilding: healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation. In order to do that, four things need to be said at the outset.

First of all, what is being presented here is a practical theology. This concept has had many meanings over the past two centuries, including ideas such as the application of dogmatic principles to actual life situations, and an attempt to redefine those principles in terms of pastoral application. The meaning that I am using here has been developing since the mid-1980s. Practical theology so understood is an ongoing practice of reflection and action that keeps theory and informed practice in constant conversation with each other. Thus theory and practice continue to shape each other; theory always has implications for practice, and any practice is at least implicitly theory-laden.

In this understanding practical theology is a way of doing theology, not a branch of theology that deals with pastoral work (such as catechetics, homiletics, and pastoral care). This is the understanding that informs the International Journal of Practical Theology and the International Academy of Practical Theology, two sites that have emerged from this line of thought.

In the proposal for a practical theology of reconciliation here, the themes of healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation are discussed with three approaches in mind: (1) the resources in the Christian tradition that shape the Christian understanding of the processes of healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation; (2) the practices that embody these understandings; and (3) the analogues these understandings and practices have in the larger, non-Christian public discourse about peacebuilding.

The first perspective is a bit different from the “deep” theology of the tradition as presented by Lisa Cahill, Peter Phan, and Kenneth Himes elsewhere in this volume. The themes discussed here represent “middle axioms”
the absolute pliability it may have in secular usages. In one way, for Christians, the goal of reconciliation can be reached only if certain processes are employed along the way. Thus, themes of healing and forgiveness are seen here as part of that bigger picture, without which reconciliation as a goal cannot be achieved.

Third, thinking about healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation has been developed, especially within Christian theology, with individuals or small groups in mind. Peacebuilding certainly does not ignore concern with individuals and small groups, but its focus is necessarily on larger-scale phenomena such as societies and even international relations. The presentation here tries to include both the individual and small-group dimension and the larger dimension. Meanings shift in some cases between the two, but it is hoped that the continuities will be evident as well. It is a truism that a peace agreement signed by leaders will provide a framework for peace in society but cannot guarantee its implementation. Indeed, agreements at the national level can even exacerbate conflicts at the grassroots level, where enmities have not been addressed, let alone resolved. Builders of peace have to function on all three levels of society: grassroots, mid-level leadership, and national levels.

Fourth and finally, what is said here focuses principally upon one moment in peacebuilding, namely, the post-conflict situation or post-peace agreement phase. The themes of healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation do not apply with the same valence to pre-conflict situations or to mediation in the conflict itself (one cannot heal what has not been injured; one cannot forgive what is still being done). Healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation, on the other hand, are principally (but not exclusively) about coming to terms with the past and creating a “culture of peace,” to use the late Pope John Paul II’s term. Obviously, good post-conflict reconstruction will help prevent conflict in the future; furthermore, the practices of healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation are aimed ultimately at a state of biblical shalom, which is living in right relation with God, our fellow human beings, and with all of creation.

The first part of this chapter articulates five principles of a practical theology of reconciliation. The second part explores healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation in succession.

Five Principles of a Practical Theology of Reconciliation

Christian theology makes a distinction between vertical and horizontal reconciliation. Vertical reconciliation is humanity’s being reconciled to God. Calhoun presents elsewhere in this volume the biblical vision of human sin and how that sin is overcome in Christ, especially in his suffering and death. Because of Christ’s work, human beings are brought back into communion with God. This communion with God, as stated in Gaudium et Spes, is the destiny of all human beings. The biblical touchstone for this is Romans 5:1-11. There, Paul asserts that we have been justified before God and that this has brought about reconciliation.

Most of Catholic teaching about reconciliation that has been developed thus far focuses on this vertical dimension of reconciliation—reconciling the sinner to God. Horizontal reconciliation—reconciliation among human beings, either individually or socially—is rooted in vertical reconciliation, God’s reconciling work. Without the work of God, our capacity to bring about large-scale reconciliation does not reach far enough to undo the damage that conflict, betrayal, and violation have wrought. This does not rule out human agency by any means; it simply recognizes the magnitude of what is involved.

There are two biblical passages that are the touchstones of horizontal reconciliation as understood by Christians:

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything is made new! All of this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Cor 5:17–20)

Remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenant of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. (Eph 2:12–20)

The Corinthians passage sees reconciliation as a “new creation” wrought by God through Christ and proclaims that this ministry of reconciliation has been entrusted to us. The Ephesians passage, looking at the alienation between Gentile and Jewish Christians, announces that this division has been overcome in Christ, who has created a single, new humanity that now
dwell together, formed as fellow citizens in the household of God. The images that guide this understanding of reconciliation are of relationships: relationships with God and with our fellow human beings. The theology articulated here sees our capacity to bring about reconciliation as grounded in God's activity, especially in the death and resurrection of Christ, historical events that have cosmic significance. Because all things and all people are ultimately intended to be in right relationship with one another, everything is connected. Although we may see reconciliation as discrete acts and events, they are all ultimately connected if the world is to be a meaningful place.

Concretely, five principles that guide a practical theology of reconciliation emerge from this biblical understanding.¹ I present each of these principles, noting its linkage to and resonance with the biblical tradition, what practices of reconciliation flow from—and in turn modify—our understanding of it, and the analogues in non-Christian and secular approaches to peacebuilding.

**First Principle: God is the author of reconciliation; we but participate in the work of God.**

This principle clearly is linked to the central insight into reconciliation: it is God who brings about reconciliation, and we participate in that process. This belief is corroborated by much of our experience in rebuilding societies after conflict, oppression, and violations of human rights; the magnitude of the damage is such that the implications of what has happened and what will be needed to overcome the suffering endured are beyond the reach of human comprehension.

What does this mean for Christian practices of reconciliation? It certainly does not mean passive resignation. The Corinthians passage explicitly calls Christians into the work of reconciliation. What it does do, however, is affect our posture and attitudes in working for reconciliation. We realize that reconciliation is not ultimately something we bring about; it is God working through us. Consequently, we struggle to see the situation as much as possible with a more capacious perspective than we are likely to have on our own. This is especially important for builders of peace who come from rich and powerful countries to work in poverty-stricken areas and think they can command the resources to change anything.

What this does is make those working for reconciliation more other-centered and less self-centered. This is extremely important, for working for reconciliation often means being able to “think outside the box,” something that will be discussed more under the third principle below.

For Christians, a spiritual discipline of prayer is important here, because it is in communion with God that we will be the most able to help restore the communion that has been broken around us. The kind of prayer most important here is silent or contemplative prayer, where we wait for God to speak rather than sending up a barrage of words to God. Learning to wait on God in silence also enhances our capacity to listen and to discern small, barely noticeable movements in processes of healing.

Realizing that reconciliation is ultimately God’s work and that we are God’s “ambassadors” also can help lift the onus of building peace from our shoulders in some measure. Psychological exhaustion and burnout are not uncommon in peacebuilding, especially for those who are cast in leadership positions. The spiritual disciplines of prayer are no guarantee that such burnout will not happen, but they can alleviate some of the pressure. Many religious leaders have experienced such exhaustion, despite their best efforts. Bishop Carlos Belo in Timor-Leste, Friar Ivo Markovic in Bosnia, and Father Savo Janjic in Kosovo are examples.¹ Nonetheless, having contemplative prayer in the repertory of preventative measures against exhaustion can not only help relieve stress, but it also helps us keep perspective.

Are there correlates to these ideas about reconciliation as the work of God in other religious, and in nonreligious, discourses about peacebuilding? One common denominator is the notion of an “other-centeredness” as fundamental to successful peacebuilding. Peacebuilders need to find a place outside themselves and outside their own capacities from which to envision peace because prolonged conflict tends to harden opposing positions, and things get “stuck.” Finding a new perspective from outside the situation is one way of getting unstuck. For theologians God again can be seen as the source of peace. For Buddhism the concept of karuna (compassion) for an unenlightened and suffering humanity can serve as the fulcrum. For secular people the concept of a single humanity or of altruism can supply an analogous insight. Disciplines such as meditation and centering can provide a refocusing of attitude, as well as relieve stress. Other-centeredness is vital to being able to imagine a different future, as John Paul Lederach has said.⁴

**Second Principle: In reconciliation, God begins with the victim.**

While it may seem counterintuitive to focus first on the victim and not on the wrongdoer who has wreaked so much havoc on individuals and society, Christian reconciliation turns first to the victim. This is built upon the message of Israel’s prophets and the ministry of Jesus: go first to the orphan and the widow, the prisoner and the stranger. It finds its most clear expression in Catholic social teaching in the preferential option for the poor, discussed by Kenneth Himes in Chapter 10.

This “victim first” approach finds experiential corroboration in the fact that, after a time of conflict and oppression or violation of human rights, the perpetrators of wrongdoing seldom or ever apologize or take responsibility for their actions. Up to his death in 2006, Chilean dictator General Augusto Pinochet not only did not apologize for crimes committed thirty years earlier, but continued to declare himself savior of the nation, despite torture of fellow citizens and at least three thousand documented deaths. If
victims have to wait for an apology or for justice to be done before they can begin to heal, they are held hostage to the past indefinitely—and sometimes forever.

Again, to say that the healing begins with the victims does not mean forgoing the pursuit of justice. It is simply a realization that justice usually takes a long time. Christians believe that God does not suspend the cause of victims in the meantime but finds ways for the healing to begin (more about those processes will be said in the next section). If there is not healing and eventually some measure of justice for victims, a culture of peace will be beyond reach as people harbor resentment and live with unhealed wounds.

The practices that flow from this insight aim at restoring the humanity of the victim, something that has been denied them in the violation of their human rights, as well as through the consequences of overt violence and other forms of oppression. A restoration of communion with God, where God’s presence is experienced as a healing force, is pivotal for the victim’s future. The wrongdoer is not omitted from this picture. By engaging in dehumanizing practices, the wrongdoer has lost some measure of humanity as well and has become separated from the human community. Practices of conversion, remorse, and acts of expiation through punishment or ritual separation from the community will have to be undertaken if the perpetrator’s humanity and membership in the human family are to be restored.

The analogue in public discourse for this principle arises out of the history of how current concepts of peacebuilding have emerged, documented in this volume by Scott Appleby and William Headley. Moving from relief and charity for victims, to development, and now to peacebuilding, has involved not only humanitarian efforts, but also addressing the causes of victimization. In this domain, as in the more specifically Christian and religious one, the victim is not the only focus of concern, but, without focusing upon the victim, the situation can at best be ameliorated but is unlikely to be transformed.

Third Principle: In reconciliation, God makes of the victim and the wrongdoer a “new creation.”

The “new creation” spoken of in this principle is a direct reference to 2 Corinthians 5:17. God’s reconciling work does not restore us to some status quo ante but takes us to a new place. This new place is usually not something that victims, wrongdoers, and those working for reconciliation would have projected on their own. It comes as something of a surprise.

Again, there is corroboration for this in practical experience. People who have suffered grievous harm dream about returning to where they were before all the violence happened. Displaced persons, refugees, and exiles dream of returning to their homes. If they are eventually able to do so, they sometimes find that it is not “home” anymore. Sometimes their domiciles have been destroyed, or the former residents find those who drove them out living there. It is for that reason that resettling displaced persons and refugees is so difficult. (Rwanda has been a clear example of this.) If exiles have been away for many years, they find their homelands so changed by intervening events that they no longer feel comfortable there. That has been the case for those who fled Central and Eastern Europe before the Soviet troops after World War II and for Vietnamese exiles. In these instances they discover that, indeed, you can’t go home again.

In other instances, such as dealing with the consequences of torture or mutilation, or the loss or disappearance of a loved one, there quite simply can be no return to the past; the only way is forward.

The practices of reconciliation that flow from this insight focus on the accompaniment of victims in their path of healing. These may entail physical healing or overcoming the effects of trauma, discussed further in the next section. It may involve the healing of memories. It nearly always entails the rebuilding of severed bonds of trust. As we shall see in the section on healing below, it must begin with recognition of the presence and dignity of victims as human beings, move through the acknowledgment of the wrongdoing and its consequences, and rebuild a world in light of all of this.

The moment of a “new creation” is met with amazement. That South Africa could move from decades of state policy of violation of human rights to its “rainbow” society without further violence and death is one of those amazing stories. For Christians, it is evidence of God’s grace action in the world. For those of other faiths or no faith, it may be ascribed to an inscrutable act of God or to the deep mysteries of humanity. That at some point one cannot remain fixated on the past, but must move into the future, is something all of these perspectives can share.

Fourth Principle: Christians lodge their suffering in the story of the suffering and death of Christ.

Rebuilding after conflict, oppression, and violation inevitably entails dealing with the consequences of suffering, something that Peter-John Pearson outlines clearly in his chapter. Suffering in itself is destructive to the human spirit and can lead to the disintegration of the human person. It seems suffering can be overcome or even positively transformed only if it can be situated in or attached to some cause or reality larger than the person suffering. Some of those attributions to something larger can lead to passivity—such as believing that it is “my lot” to suffer or that God has willed this suffering.

For Christians, placing their suffering in the story of the suffering and death of Christ is a way of making suffering a means of forging something better and stronger than was there before. This is corroborated in the biblical tradition in Philippians 3:10–11, where Paul says that he wishes to be patterned into the suffering of Christ in his own life so that he may come to know the power of the resurrection. Christ’s suffering and death are considered by Christians to be something he did not deserve, and that God has recognized that in raising Jesus from the dead. It is the promise that the
resurrection sets before those who are faithful to Christ that prompts them to unite their suffering to Christ’s in the hopes of experiencing the resurrection. To be sure, the meaning of the death of Christ has been subjected to many interpretations, as Cahill points out in Chapter 11. But however it is construed, Christ’s suffering and death are seen to have cosmic significance that allowed him to enter into death and overcome it.

Christians call the narrative of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ the Paschal Mystery, that is, a path of transformation that leads from suffering and death into an utterly transfigured new state of life. That transformation remains for Christians a paradigm of the process of reconciliation—a transformation that takes us to a new and unexpected place in ways we only partially understand.

In the practices of reconciliation that flow from this belief, finding a way through suffering involves trying to reconstruct the networks and webs of meaning that have been torn apart by traumatic experience. Those webs of meaning must reconnect the self, one’s place in the community, the world, and even God. The narratives of Christ’s betrayal, humiliation, rejection, torture, and death become sites where those experiences of victims can be lodged. The hope is that a new narrative will emerge out of the narrative of suffering, that destructive memories will become redemptive ones.

The religious traditions of the world have different explanations for suffering. For some, it may be a call to endurance and transformation; for others, it may be the invitation to awareness of the impermanence of all things. In contemporary secular thinking it is a call to resistance and to a reassessment of human agency. Overcoming suffering, however, is a theme that runs through all peacebuilding work, however it is approached. Sometimes there is an opening that is widened by resistance and agency; in other instances coping and survival become the paramount concerns. For many poor Christians, traditions of popular piety (discussed in Cahill’s chapter) help provide the resilience that maintains humanity under inhumane conditions.

Fifth Principle: Reconciliation will not be complete until God is “all in all.”

There are references to reconciliation in the Christian scriptures that point to its eschatological character: complete reconciliation will happen only when all people and all things have been reconciled in Christ at the end of time (Eph 1:10; Col 1:20), at a point when God will be “all in all” (1 Cor 15:28).

If indeed everything and everyone are interconnected, the ultimate reconciliation is a cosmic event. That in turn entails that we are unlikely to see full reconciliation in any situation in our own lifetime. This again is corroborated in the experience of working for reconciliation; it is always incomplete and uncompleted. We see this in the decision making that has to be done in transitional justice and the reconstruction of societies. Not only can we not change the past, but we can also only prepare for the future in a limited way. In countries that have suffered extreme loss through protracted war, the suffering to be healed and the physical needs to be met are often overwhelming.

Moreover, as much as we might try to describe the processes and “steps” in reconciliation in a linear way, the process is far from straightforward. Any experience in social reconciliation has to attest to its “messy” character: twists and turns, reversals and setbacks, sudden surges of insight and energy, followed by enervating erosions of carefully constructed schemes. These all remind us again of how little we are actually in control of the processes of reconciliation.

One response to this could be, of course, passivity or giving up on the building of peace at all. For Christians, working for reconciliation engenders hope. Such work teaches the difference between optimism and hope. Optimism is our positive feeling about the future that is generated from our estimation of our own capacity to act. If we come from rich and powerful settings, with a lot of resources at hand, we can be optimistic about how we are going to be able to change things. Hope, on the other hand, is something that comes from God. It is the experience of God drawing us into a reconciled future. Hope often goes against the immediate evidence before us. It is able to discern the moments of grace, able to “celebrate the small victories, because there will never be any big ones,” as a religious sister said to me years ago after the assassination of one of her co-workers in the Amazon basin. Hope arises from discerning the hand of God gently changing things. As a young man said to me in Vukovar some years after the siege had been lifted there, but with that Croatian city still lying in ruins: “Things are much better now. For the first two years after the siege, the birds stayed away from Vukovar. But last year they came back. And this year they have started to sing.”

We find hope in sources outside ourselves, whether God or the concept of humanity or something else. It is those outside sources that draw believers and those of no particular faith forward. We see this fifth principle returning us “full circle” to the first: the source of reconciliation lies outside us, but we are drawn intimately into reconciliation’s workings.

Having sketched out this practical theology of reconciliation, we can turn now to some of the concrete areas of reconciliation, namely, healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation as an overarching process and ultimate goal.

Healing

The healing of wounds inflicted by violence, loss, and deliberate injury is central to building peace. Such healing is directed, first of all, to the past. If the losses incurred in violence (such as loss of loved ones or loss of home or homeland) are not addressed, it is difficult for individuals and societies to move forward. The loss of relationships and of material goods may paralyze the energies needed to rebuild personal lives and societies. The anger
and resentment that spring up from the injuries inflicted upon victims can make them direct their energies toward revenge, which only makes their wounds more toxic.

Healing is also directed toward the future. Healing involves acknowledging loss, lamenting and grieving for those who will now no longer share one’s life, and looking for ways to move forward rather than remaining forever focused on a past one cannot retrieve. What we know about the dynamics of personal grieving after the death of a loved one can be helpful (with some modifications) in the healing process after violent conflict.

This section on healing begins with some brief definitions of individual and social healing. It then takes up a number of themes and practices that contribute to the healing process: dealing with trauma, the healing of memories, the healing of victims and of perpetrators, truth telling, and the pursuit of justice. The intention is neither to treat all these themes and practices in the detail they deserve, nor to provide a guide to carrying out all of these elements of peacebuilding. Rather, the important themes and practices are noted, and the resources of the Christian tradition that address them are then presented. Following what was laid out above about a practical theology, what we are learning about best practices will also pose questions to the Christian tradition in this regard.

Definitions of Healing

Healing of individuals and of societies after violent conflict often involves both physical and emotional, or spiritual, healing. After the conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone, thousands of victims had to come to terms with the loss of limbs that had been hacked off by rebel forces. The rebuilding of homes and livelihoods after armed conflict is a common occurrence that needs to be addressed. Closely linked to rehabilitation and rebuilding is psychological-emotional-spiritual healing. While these dimensions are often sorted out as distinct areas by Western therapeutic schemes (and applied as distinctive by Western-based relief agencies), for much of the world where conflict has raged these constitute a whole. It is on that complex of psychological, emotional, and spiritual healing that this chapter concentrates.

Individual healing might be defined as restoring the dignity and humanity of the victims of violence. Whatever the nature of the loss or injury—loss of loved ones, violence against one’s body (such as rape), the trauma of escaping near-death, ostracism as an enemy of the state—violence denies our basic human dignity and in so doing wrests away from us part of our humanity. In the secular discourse such acts are a violation of human rights. For Christians, the fact that each human being is made in the image and likeness of God (Gn 1:26–27) means that such violation is not only an act against the victim but against God as well. In such violation we are treated as less than human beings. We are treated as objects to which others can be indifferent.

Restoring that dignity not only can help victims feel that what has been taken away from them (dignity, respect, honor) has been returned, but it also creates in them the sense of agency or capacity to act against the injustice that had been inflicted upon them. This restoration of humanity (articulated theologically in the second principle of reconciliation enunciated above) is essential to the healing process.

The gospel stories of Jesus’ acts of healing are indicative of to what extent restoring dignity and humanity are important in any act of healing. The ten lepers, the woman with a hemorrhage, the man born blind—all are cured of their infirmity but are also restored to the human family. To say to those whom he healed, “your faith has made you whole,” is to say that their healing did not come upon them as passive objects of pity or charity, but instead it engaged their deepest capacity as human beings—the capacity to trust. Those who had been objects of pity, scorn, and disgust are now human beings once again connected into a dense web of social relationships.

The dignity of every human person was the central theological message of John Paul II, from his first encyclical, Redemptor Hominis, down to his message for the new millennium, Novo Millennio Ineunte. Practitioners of restorative justice are also recognizing that restoring the dignity of victims is as important to their healing as seeing the wrongdoers punished.

Social healing—of small groups or of entire societies—takes the quality of social relationships as its fundamental building block rather than simply the restoring of the humanity of individuals. Nonetheless, social healing cannot move far without the healing of at least a significant number of individuals within that society. Not only are those who have experienced healing more likely to have a vision of a society healed from the wrongdoing of the past and the rancor that continues to flow from it, but they also constitute symbols of hope to those who are struggling with personal healing. Nelson Mandela remains one of the great examples of how a healed individual can lead a society to peaceful change. Most had predicted that when apartheid fell in South Africa, there would be a bloody civil war, but the man who emerged from Robben Island prison was different from the firebrand who had entered it more than two decades earlier. He was able to lead South Africa through a transition without a single additional loss of life.

Social healing has to take into account the lingering, toxic presence of the past in society; it must diagnose and mobilize the energies of the present; it must sketch out a vision for the future.

Dealing with the past is often the biggest part of social healing. It typically involves three areas taken up in this section: the healing of memories, truth telling, and the pursuit of justice. By taking the past seriously and engaging it accordingly, those who lead in post-conflict situations gain the moral authority needed to move the society forward toward a “new creation” (principle three of reconciliation) and to overcome the illusion that we can somehow return to a now-lost past. The past cannot simply be erased;
to do so makes victims victims once again. It must come to be remembered in a different way. The moral truths learned from why and how what happened serve as building blocks for a new and different kind of society. The exercise of justice makes clear that such injustices will not be tolerated in the future. [For a concrete example, see Peter-John Pearson’s reflections on post-apartheid South African society in Chapter 7.]

Assessing the energy available in the present and mobilizing those energies for social change is the second part of social healing. Typically, this involves dealing with the lingering effects of the trauma that grip a society and keep a society in the thrall of its injuries and its past. The next part of this section takes up those questions of dealing with trauma. Trauma is often thought of as something happening to an individual. There are discernible patterns of social trauma that need to be addressed as part of social healing as well.

Key to mobilizing energies available in the present for the sake of the future are two things. One is the turning of a narrative of defeat and violation into a narrative of redemption and hope. The power of a society’s narrative—the story it tells about itself, both to its own members and to those elsewhere—is the engine for creating new possibilities and not being chained to one version of the past. Changing a narrative requires discovering and sustaining sources of hope (fifth principle of reconciliation).

It is those mobilized energies, fed by wellsprings of hope, that make possible imagining a different kind of future. As John Paul Lederach has sketched so well, such a future must have a place for both victims and wrongdoers. It must not devolve the complexities of life into polarizations that fragment new conflict. It must trust in the creative act. And all those who wish to engage it must be willing to step into the unknown.

The Christian belief that God will indeed reconcile all things in Christ so that one day God will be “all in all” (1 Cor 15:28) provides an eschatological horizon that will find a place for all God’s creatures (Eph 1:10; Col 1:19-20), a place “where every tear will be wiped away, and death will be no more” (Rv 21:4).

Social healing, then, attends to relationships and the patterns of communication that honor and sustain them. The importance that the Colombian bishops have placed upon dialogue among the warring parties in that country is a practice informed by these concerns for social healing, informed by a theological commitment to the dignity of the human person and the need to accord respect. The practices of the “schools of peace” and the Project for Testimony, Truth, and Reconciliation (TEVERE) there are indicative of this.

Dealing with Trauma

Trauma refers to the condition that may ensue after one has been in a life-threatening situation; that is, one has come close to being killed or has seen others killed. The response to this experience involves incapacity to control or to integrate the experience into one’s life. One experiences involuntary flashbacks to the moment with the attendant emotion; one feels helplessness in face of it and is kept from returning to normal functioning. Most people (on the average, about two-thirds of those affected) are able to overcome the experience within six months. For others, however, it can continue for a year or more, and be reignited by parallel experiences (thus, the events of 9/11 awakened traumatic memories of previous trauma for many victims of trauma).

The purpose here is not to explore the dynamics or the therapy for individual trauma. Our concern here is the effects of accumulated individual trauma on society, dubbed social trauma. After the conflict in Timor-Leste, for example, relief workers estimated that two-thirds of the entire population of that little country was suffering from trauma. Just as in social healing, individual healing must be attended to, so also with trauma. Without alleviation of the symptoms and the suffering that goes with them, societies cannot be mobilized either to fight the past or to imagine a different future.

Social trauma manifests itself in how traumatized populations react to the role of the past in the present and in the future. There is indeed a certain trajectory that one can trace over the course of time. In the immediate period following the trauma and the end of conflict, the traumatic experiences are often met with silence. This silence comes from a certain helplessness in the face of what has happened. It is a collective response of many traumatized people together. But this silence is also a deliberate act. Most commonly, a collective silence about what has happened is maintained by victims out of concern for their children, because they do not want them to be burdened with the horrors of the past. Attendant with that is perhaps the thought that if one does not talk about horrific past events, they will go away. Thus, one found very little public discourse about the Holocaust in the first decade after World War II, among either the survivors or those who had perpetrated it. There was a similar silence, until quite recently, following the horrors of the Pol Pot regime and the genocide perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. This silence is sometimes reinforced by the silence of the perpetrators of the past crimes and of bystanders who did nothing to prevent those crimes from happening. These conspire with the silence of victims to shroud the past with a pall of inarticulation.

Gradually, however, the past resurfaces. It often happens when the generation too young to remember the events comes of age and starts to ask questions. One of the driving experiences of the 1968 uprising in Germany among university youth was precisely the question about what their parents were doing during the Nazi period. What follows from this questioning is an airing of the different versions of what happened, a debate that continues for years and even decades. It is during this period that the social trauma as carried by those who experienced the events firsthand as adults is addressed.

One of the results of how social trauma is addressed can be what Vannik Volkan has called “chosen trauma.” Chosen trauma is the narrative that
younger generations take on from their elders about what happened. This chosen trauma can create in those who bear it emotions very close to those experienced by those who endured the trauma firsthand. Chosen trauma is taken out of a fidelity and commitment of solidarity with those who have suffered. It can also perpetuate a sense of victimhood that keeps the trauma alive and unresolved in a society. The narratives of Catholics in Northern Ireland about the series of defeats and persecutions they have experienced in the course of three centuries at the hands of the British government and from Protestants is an example of chosen trauma that flared up again in “the Troubles,” beginning in 1969. The grandchildren of those Armenians who died at the hands of the Ottoman Turks in 1914-15 continued to press the claims of genocide. Responses to chosen trauma can result in measures taken by victims that turn them into perpetrators of violence. The children of those Boers who suffered at the hands of the British during the Boer War at the turn of the twentieth century (some twenty-six thousand Boer women and children died in British concentration camps) became the architects of the apartheid regime that took office in 1948.

A key moment in the trajectory of social trauma occurs as the survivors of the trauma come to the end of their natural lives. They understandably are concerned that their suffering be remembered and also about how it will be remembered. Key to these concerns is the erection of monuments and memorials so that the trauma will be known to future generations and not be forgotten. The proliferation of Holocaust memorials in Europe and North America beginning in the late 1980s is testimony to this. The claims of ethnic Germans forced from their homes after 1945 from lands ceded to Poland and Czechoslovakia are another example.

These trajectories affect the capacity of the successor states to bring about new relations with their erstwhile enemies. They figure significantly in the possibilities of social forgiveness, a theme to be taken up later in this chapter.

How might social trauma be overcome? Most of the models that have been suggested to this point have relied heavily on reparations by the successor governments and (from a Western perspective) therapeutic uses of psychoanalysis. More recently, there has been a turn to look at the symbolic and narrative resources of the victims’ cultures themselves. Here the religious imagination of a people can be drawn upon. For Christians, certainly the story of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus offers such a possibility (fourth principle of reconciliation).

Such an act of religious imagination might be found in a theology of wounds. Central here are the wounds of the crucified Jesus, as they are presented to the disciples after the resurrection. In John 21, Jesus appears to the disciples who have locked themselves in the upper room. His transfigured body is able to walk through the locked door. The glory surrounding his body first frightens them and even disguises Jesus’ identity from them. Then, however, he shows them the wounds from his crucifixion. The lingering of those wounds, even after the transfiguration of his body in the resurrection, is indicative of the experience of traumatic injury. Much can change and be healed, but the traces of the experience always remain. The wounds of that torture now become the basis for healing the relationship of Jesus with his disciples, and especially later in the narrative, with Thomas.

The paradoxical capacity of one’s own wounds to heal those of another remains a central tenet of Christian faith. The Catholic Church, in its liturgy of Good Friday, takes the fourth Suffering Servant song from Isaiah 52—53 to expand upon that meaning of wounds. Wounds are not to be dwelt on for some masochistic purpose. They can become, rather, the source of healing for others, mediating to others the redeeming power of Christ’s own suffering. Cahill provides more theological insight into this in her chapter.

The Healing of Memories

Another key aspect of the healing that is part of a reconciliation process is the healing of memories. This attention to memory underscores how important remembering is to personal and social identity. Without memory our identities are only fragmented and sporadic entities. To forget and to be forgotten can truncate the capacity to form stable relationships in the present and in the future because of unresolved relationships in the past.

Memories of traumatic suffering can obstruct the present and disrupt a process of healing and reintegrating. Local people in Rwanda have noted how each year in April—especially on April 3 and April 4, the dates when the 1994 genocide started—there is an upsurge of violence in their communities. How can memories of traumatizing events come to rest and be healed?

There are two moments in the healing process: witnessing and retelling the story of what happened. Witnessing or testimony refers to the calling forth of memory in a public and shared way. It involves a number of dimensions of the process of memory:

- Witnessing is an act of fidelity toward the dead. It rescues those who have died from the “second death” of being forgotten. In so doing it summons the memory of the dead into the living community.
- Witnessing attests to loss and absence. The acknowledgment of loss is necessary for the grieving process. Absence has been described as the point where the seen and the unseen meet. Witness here takes the form of lament.
- Witnessing begins a quest for the truth—first forensic or objective truth, then other forms of personal and social truth. More is said about this below under the section on truth.
- Witnessing makes memory public and shareable. It is central to building a new, shared narrative of the community that moves from loss to redemption.
Retelling the story is the process of constructing that new narrative. It involves the gathering of testimony of others in the community, engaging in truth seeking and then truth telling in order to produce a narrative that is not fixated on the toxic character of past events but rather provides a horizon for the future—a horizon that takes the landscape of the past into account even as it chooses not to continue to dwell in it. The retelling involves a transformation of the narrative of events from a narrative of loss, humiliation, and defeat to a narrative of recovery, redemption, and new resolve.

Paradigmatic for this healing of memories is the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24:13–33. Here, two disciples of Jesus struggle with the painful memory of what happened to Jesus in Jerusalem and what has meant to them. A stranger approaches them and asks to hear their story. They then tell their story, attesting (witnessing) to those recent events in Jerusalem. The stranger takes their witness and retells the story in the context of God’s entire history of working with Israel. This retelling of a story of painful loss sets their hearts on fire. When the stranger reveals himself to be none other than Jesus, their redeemed story and memory recast the very narrative of their own lives. They race back to Jerusalem—no longer as witnesses to loss and defeat, but as witnesses to hope and new life.

A healed memory need not be a tranquil memory. The German theologian J. B. Metz has spoken of the “dangerous memory” of the suffering and death of Christ. When we place the narrative of our own suffering into the narrative of Christ’s passion and death (principle four of reconciliation), that “dangerous memory” can transform our own memories of loss and defeat into a pointed reminder that God does not forget the suffering of those for whom he cares (cf. Ps 72:14), no more than he forgot the suffering of Christ. The horizon of resurrection stands as an ongoing interruption of stories of suffering that seem to end in loss, defeat, and oblivion.

The Healing of Victims and Perpetrators

The theology of the healing of memories just articulated provides the general shape to the Christian understanding of how victims and perpetrators come to healing. It has already been noted that God begins the healing process with restoring the victim’s humanity (principle two of reconciliation). This awareness grows out of God’s preferential option for the poor, in all the ways being poor and broken are manifested in the world. This is a fundamental principle of Catholic social teaching. Consequently, Catholic peacebuilding looks out in the first instance to those who are most vulnerable, both during and especially after conflict.

If restoring the victim’s humanity is central to the victim’s healing process, the practices of peacebuilding must manifest that. Christians understand that the basis for human dignity and respect lies in the fact that we have all been created in the image and likeness of God (Gn 1:26–27). Consequently, restoring our humanity is about restoring the truth about ourselves, a truth that has been negated by the inhuman treatment victims have received. As Irenaeus, a second-century bishop, put it: “The glory of God is the human being fully alive.” When we most clearly reflect the mercy, truth, and love of God, we are most fully human.

Swedish theologian Maria Eriksson has outlined succinctly the stages of healing for victims. Healing involves three stages: the establishment of safety and respect; remembering and retelling the narrative of suffering and loss so that it might move to a narrative of redemption and hope; and reconnection with oneself, the community, and with God.

Safety is important so that the victim, while exploring painful memories, will not fear being made a victim again—either by being overwhelmed by the painful memory, derided by others (saying their suffering was insignificant), or facing other kinds of recrimination. Feeling safe is the basis for rebuilding a sense of trust, the necessary foundation for all human relationships. Trust is one of the most important things suffered in a victim’s life by trauma; without being able to trust, we cannot build the relationships that are basic to human life and community. Trust translates theologically into the virtue of faith. If one returns to the stories of Jesus’ healing the sick in the New Testament, one sees there how Jesus time and again affirms that the victim’s faith is essential to being made whole once again.

How is that sense of trust restored? It begins with a small group of people who are willing to accompany the victim. Such small groups have come to be called healing circles, privileged social spaces where victims can be accorded trust and respect, can revisit their trauma, retell their stories, and remember the theories of meanings that are foundational to our humanity as interdependent beings. Once again, the model for what happens in the circle is the ministry of Jesus, how he recognized the humanity of those who suffered even when others did not. Healing circles are the crucibles in which individual healing takes place. What the comunidades de base have been for theologies of liberation, healing circles are for the practice of individual reconciliation.

Building upon the experience of safety and trust are practices of recognition. Sarkin and Daly have pointed out that there are three senses of recognition of victims and their suffering that take place in the healing process. In the first sense, recognition means that victims and their suffering are no longer rendered invisible or muted by a culture of silence. Their presence and their worth are acknowledged and affirmed by the community. Second, recognition means sighting something familiar. Those who accompany the victim see mirrored in that victim their own common humanity. This leads to a third form of recognition whereby the story of the victim begins to become “re-cognized,” that is, thought about in a different way. Again, the theology that drives these practices of recognition is found in Jesus’ own ministry—how he recognized in those seeking an alleviation of their own or others’ suffering something that others around him failed to recognize, how his recognition drew forth faith from them, how they (and now the others surrounding those seeking healing) came to think differently about someone they had ignored or despised.
Remembering and retelling the story of suffering has already been outlined in the section on the healing of memories. The master narrative for Christians that gives guidance in this regard is, once again, the story of the suffering and death of Jesus (fourth principle of reconciliation). The experiences of betrayal, rejection, failure, moments of encounter and accompanying, and finally being handed over to death are captured especially poignantly in the Catholic practices of the Stations of the Cross and the reenactment of the passion story itself as a Holy Week observance.!

The point of retelling the story is not to allow it to lapse into silence and oblivion. Just as the dangerous memory of Jesus could not be sealed up in a tomb, so the story of defeat and suffering must turn into a story of redemption and hope. Christians believe that God makes that transition possible (first principle of reconciliation) in a moment of grace bestowed upon the victim, entrusted to those who accompany victims in a ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18). That experience of grace is indeed a “new creation” (third principle of reconciliation) for victims. What remains then is rebuilding the webs of relationship—the skeins of meaning—that make human life possible and full. Often those webs of relationship are expressed in new practices for the victim. They take up works that show forth the nature of their healed relationship or help others in the healing process. Exemplary here are the charges Jesus gives Simon to lead his lambs and sheep after he forgives Simon for having denied knowing him three times (Jn 21:15–19). By entrusting to Simon the most vulnerable members of his flock, Jesus displays his love that trust has been restored and that Simon, who had denied even knowing Jesus, now has the care of nurturing faith in Jesus among those who come to follow him.

How does the healing of perpetrators take place? They too are made in the image and likeness of God but have tarnished that capacity to mirror forth God’s glory profoundly. Less attention has been addressed to that in Catholic theologies of peacebuilding, but the Catholic tradition has a rich history in its sacrament of reconciliation, where penitents are brought once again into the communion of the church. One can reinscribe that tradition and the rituals that accompany it on the practices of contemporary peacebuilding:

- **Confession of sin.** This is a moment of truth telling about oneself. Perpetrators acknowledge their misdeeds and recognize how they have damaged the lives of others and of society. The externalization of inner guilt is the first step in bringing perpetrators back into the fold of human society. Just as witness in the healing of memories makes suffering public and shared—and therefore accessible to the community—so public acknowledgment of misdeeds begins a healing process for perpetrators.

- **Ritual separation and expiation.** In the early church there was an order of penitents, who were separated for a time and carried out acts of expiation to atone for their sinfulness. Perpetrators who are punished, by incarceration or lustration, are in effect separated in contemporary patterns of social reconciliation. Expiation in the contemporary context may be done through loss of freedom (punishment by incarceration) or the perpetrators’ voluntarily taking on forms of service to the community to show true repentance and intent to help rebuild the community for the damage they have done.

- **Act of contrition.** In the Catholic penitential tradition, perpetrators not only publicly acknowledge their wrongdoing, but they also engage in ritual acts that involve how their acts have offended God. The analogue in the healing of perpetrators is apology to victims and seeking their forgiveness. The apology is directed first and foremost to victims, acknowledging the harm that perpetrators have done. It is also a request, however, to rejoin the human family, a family on which perpetrators have turned their backs by their misdeed. Regarding forgiveness, God’s immediate forgiveness in the sacrament of reconciliation attests to the infinite mercy of God toward sinners. In the social situation of healing, victims must acknowledge the apology as genuine and sincere, and engage in a trajectory of forgiveness. More is said about forgiveness below.

- **Purpose of amendment.** In the sacrament, the penitent must agree to live a reformed life. In the healing of perpetrators, they too must agree to live publicly a reformed life in the community. This may involve living under certain restrictions that mirror, however imperfectly, the continuing impediments that victims live under through loss of loved ones, physical impairment, or loss of the means of a full life. Without a public and permanent change in their way of living, perpetrators and their contrition will continue to be mistrusted in the society that they have harmed. The changed way of life is a practice that seals the healing of the perpetrators’ reintegration into the community.

The power of ritual in the processes of reconciliation has been widely acknowledged. Here a rich liturgical and ritual tradition such as Roman Catholicism (along with other similar traditions) has much to offer. A growing edge in the theology of peacebuilding is revisiting some of those sources. At the same time, contemporary experience in peacebuilding might help enrich the theology of the sacrament of reconciliation and lift the sacrament from the moribund state in which it finds itself in certain parts of the world.

**Truth Telling**

In some of the discussions in the 1980s regarding the post-conflict reconstruction of societies, public commissions were set up following the general pattern of the Nuremberg and Tokyo trials as justice and reconciliation commissions. It became evident rather quickly, however, that without first pursuing truth, justice ran the risk of becoming “victors’ justice”—retaliation
and revenge. More commonly now, such commissions are therefore known as truth and reconciliation commissions.

Seeking and speaking the truth are necessary antecedents to any attempt to administer justice. There is an old saying that the first casualty of war is the truth. Combatants on both sides are inclined to distort the meaning of events to their advantage. Authoritarian governments usually develop ways of legitimating their actions by twisting the truth or even celebrating lies as the real truth.

Through experiences of seeking and then telling the truth, it has become apparent that such activities are more than antecedents to justice. Pronouncing the truth in itself can be tremendously healing to a society, especially when victims in those societies have been forced to conceal the truth (such as the location of mass graves) during the time of conflict or authoritarian rule.

This section on truth telling has four parts: on breaking the culture of silence, the role of truth commissions, the four kinds of truth that have a role in the healing of a society, and elements of a practical theology of truth telling.

The beginning of truth telling is often breaking a culture of silence. Cultures of silence are common in authoritarian societies where “narratives of the lie” replace other narratives about the society. They are also common in sociocentric societies, where abuse is often covered up and unpleasant things in general are not spoken about. When authoritarian rule occurs in a society where a culture of silence already prevails, it can be doubly difficult to break through the silence in order to allow the truth to be spoken. In Guatemala, for example, when the bishops’ conference was getting ready to start the Recovery of Historical Memory (REMHI) project after the close of the war there, there first had to be a campaign to encourage and support victims (mainly indigenous people) in breaking through the silence to tell what had happened to them and to their loved ones.

To people coming from individualist cultures, breaking the silence seems a straightforward move toward agency and voice, but in strongly sociocentric cultures, breaking the bonds of silence may mean breaking all the other social bonds that situate a person in society. It can be seen as a total repudiation of the networks of relationships that make a person human at all, that are the basis of belonging in society. Hence, great care and clear patterns of support must be in place when people take the courageous step to break the silence and begin to speak.

Various modalities have been found to help bring the truth forward about what happened during a conflict. What has become apparent is that there is no single way to do this or agreement on how much of the truth about the past needs to be revealed. If a society is still raw from the conflict and the peace agreement is really a truce (because the relations of power have remained largely unchanged), truth telling may simply plunge that society back into conflict. Nor can all of the harm done be uncovered and pursued. What has become apparent is that in seeking the truth about the past, a society must decide how to allocate its energies. How much time and resources should be devoted to the past and how much to building a different kind of future? Certain parts of the truth may be sought out for the sake of building that future. The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the best known and most widely researched of such commissions, tried to build in the prospect of forgiveness as a part of the truth telling process by providing an opportunity to seek amnesty. Archbishop Desmond Tutu framed his work as chairman of the commission in terms of seeking forgiveness.

What kind of truth emerges from such investigations? Most people seek objective truth, the kind of truth that is established in a court of law regarding misdeeds of the past. Especially since the conclusion of the South African commission’s work, however, it has become common to speak of four kinds or dimensions of truth that are sought in the truth-telling process. These are spoken of in several different ways. They all cluster around the following possibilities:

- **Objective or forensic truth.** This is a description of what happened and who was involved. It is the kind of truth that needs to be established before justice can be administered. Objective truth is concerned with the “who,” “what,” and “how” questions.
- **Personal or narrative truth.** This is an existential form of truth that tries to derive meaning from what happened and fit the traumatic events of the past into a larger, coherent picture. Personal truth is concerned with “why” questions.
- **Dialogical truth.** This is a form of narrative truth that struggles to include the narratives of both victims and perpetrators. For example, Boers in South Africa considered themselves victims after their defeat by the British at the beginning of the twentieth century. More than twenty-six thousand women and children perished in the concentration camps set up by the British. The enactment of apartheid legislation was seen by the Boers as their protection from such things ever happening to them again, but in doing so, they became perpetrators. The future recounting of the history of South Africa has to try to bring together the truths experienced by all the parties to the conflict.
- **Restorative or moral truth.** This is the truth that emerges at the end of a process of seeking and telling the truth. It is the truth about a society that stands as a cautionary story intended to keep the conflicts of the past from ever happening again. Efforts by the Federal Republic of Germany to build and legislate for a society in which Nazism could never emerge again is an example of trying to grasp such a moral truth.

As one can see, the dimensions of truth that are sought after and needed in the healing of a society are multiple and complex. Some of them (especially dialogical truth) are very hard to attain. How might a practical theology of truth telling aid in this pursuit of truth?
There is no word in the Hebrew scriptures for "truth" in the objective, forensic sense. The word *emet* conveys a deeper sense of truth as constant, trustworthy, dependable, and reliable. Truth is seen as primarily moral and relational. Thus, God's truth is not propositions about the nature of God, but the very being of God as constant and reliable.

In many ways this is ultimately the kind of truth required for the healing sought through the peacebuilding process. It is reflected in human rights lawyer Daan Bronkhorst's definition of the truth sought in reconciliation processes as that which corresponds to the facts, presented in a way I can understand, and given by someone I can trust. 17

The Gospel of John takes up this Hebrew understanding. Christ reveals to us God, who is truth. We are guided into truth (Jn 16:13) by Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life (Jn 14:6). As his disciples we are consecrated in truth and called to abide in that truth. It is in knowing this truth that we are set truly free (Jn 8:32).

This theology of truth is something in which we dwell. It represents the trustworthiness and constancy that is God, which might be called in more secular terms a quest for a culture of truth. It is from within this moral framework that we can then seek those intellectual, objective forms of truth (a form of truth spoken of also in the Christian scriptures, especially in the deuterocanonical texts). Living in truth is thus part of that spirituality of reconciliation that was spoken of above. It is a cultivation of moral relationships of trust and trustworthiness that constitute the healed society.

The Pursuit of Justice

No part of the healing after conflict stands out more clearly than the need to pursue justice. This is important not only for the victims who have been wronged during the conflict, but also for the reconstruction of society. That reconstruction involves dealing publicly with the wrongdoing that occurred during the conflict and also looking to how injustice may have lain at the basis of the conflict in the first place. Without addressing the root causes of conflict, there is little hope of overcoming it in the future.

Daniel Philpott's contribution in Chapter 4 goes into the various dimensions of the pursuit of justice in more detail. What is addressed here are three things: (1) the different kinds of justice that come into play in the healing and reconciliation process, (2) the limits of the pursuit of justice, and (3) the outlines of a practical theology of mercy and justice.

There are three kinds of justice that figure into the process of healing and reconciliation: punitive justice, restorative justice, and structural justice.

Punitive justice. Punitive justice is justice meted out to wrongdoers as punishment. The purposes of punitive justice may be several: setting aright the wrongs that have been inflicted on victims and, therefore, on society; deterring others contemplating engaging in similar wrongdoing; and alerting everyone that the post-conflict society will not tolerate such deeds in the future. It is important that punitive justice be enacted by a duly constituted authority in society, and that the punishment is measured (that is, not excessive beyond the scope of the wrongdoing). For those working for peace from a religious perspective, the role of punitive justice is to assure that justice is enacted under appropriate conditions so that the enactment of justice itself is not unjust.

Restorative justice. Restorative justice has come to be understood in two ways. One is as distributive justice, that is, assuring that the goods of society are equitably distributed. This is especially important regarding economic goods (land, access to education and employment, and the like), especially if the conflict has caused or aggravated an inequitable distribution. It may also involve reparations being paid over longer periods. Thus, the Federal Republic of Germany paid reparations to the state of Israel for fifteen years after the Second World War because of its predecessor government's role in the Holocaust. Second, restorative justice has come to denote processes of restoring the dignity of victims and working toward the rehabilitation of wrongdoers. These processes began in the criminal justice systems of many countries but have now found their way into peacebuilding processes as well. 18 Restorative justice, as a practice of transitional justice, is an area in which Catholic peacebuilding takes a special interest because of its commitment to the dignity of every human person, and therefore to the justice that is due to every person. 19

Structural justice. Structural justice focuses especially on the social structures of a society as a site where conflict is fed. Economic inequities, discrimination, and lack of equal access to the goods of society all contribute to conflict. Structural justice is aimed at addressing those fundamental issues, through legislation, reallocation of budgets, and other measures to gain greater equity in society. In the wake of the discriminations wrought under apartheid, post-apartheid South Africa drafted a new Constitution that has been hailed as the most inclusive of human rights of any in the world. The progressive measures toward economic cooperation that began in Europe in 1952 and culminated in the formation of the European Union might be seen as a kind of structural justice that was intended to increase prosperity, bind neighboring countries together, and prevent future war between them. Enacting structural justice takes a much longer time than transitional justice of the punitive and restorative type. The stabilizing effects of structural justice may take more than a generation to see.

Full justice can never be enacted. Even if adequate human and economic resources are present, post-conflict societies must decide how much of those resources to commit to the past and how much to put toward the future. Rwanda since the 1994 genocide is emblematic of this dilemma. Even though trials of those who engineered the genocide continue (and trials of those who committed individual murders continue in the traditional gacaca tribunals), the current president has worked especially hard to promote economic growth (Rwanda now has the fastest economic growth rate in Africa) as a way of easing tensions. This investment in the future is intended to be an inclusive one for all three major ethnic groups within the country.
Justice is a central theological category in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim thinking. Justice is one of the defining characteristics of God in all three of these traditions. God looks out especially for the poor and the oppressed—for victims (second principle of reconciliation). Those who say they believe in God must therefore pursue justice, especially for those who are pushed to the margins of society.

Justice is done when all human beings are in right relation with one another and with God. The justice of God is closely linked to God’s steadfast love (hesed) or mercy. The Christian understanding of mercy should not be equated with the Western legal concept of mercy, where mercy means a lessening of punishment. Rather, the Christian concept of mercy is the reflection of God’s love for all creatures and for creation itself. It is that love for finite creatures that makes forgiveness possible (as we see in the next section). The preservation and building up of community are essential for sustaining just relationships.

The Catholic tradition has conventionally focused much on the quality of justice as it pertains to the decisions to go to war and the limits on how to wage war—the just-war theories. The tradition of Catholic social teaching, beginning especially with Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical Rerum Novarum in 1891, has had justice as a central category. This was underscored in the 1971 Synod of Bishops that took justice as its theme. Himes’s contribution in Chapter 10 underscores the centrality of this theme and its development.

Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a word used in post-conflict settings, especially relating to forgiveness among groups of people. It is admittedly derived from religious traditions. To what extent it can even be applied to post-conflict settings remains a topic of discussion.29

In much of Greek and Roman philosophy, forgiveness was not seen as a virtue. The magnanimous person would have no need to forgive, because such a person could not be wounded by lesser human beings. Forgiveness was something that those who were not so self-contained would need to do.30

For Christians, on the other hand, forgiveness is a central theological category. It flows both from the Christian understanding of God as a God of mercy and love and from an understanding of the human being as finite and given to erring. God’s capacity to blot out or cover over human offenses (the two senses of forgiveness found in the Hebrew scriptures) is what makes a new creation possible (third principle of reconciliation). The preaching of forgiveness was a major theme in Jesus’ own ministry, both that God forgives human sin and that humans need to forgive one another. That sense of forgiveness is embedded in a special way in Catholic and Orthodox traditions of Christian faith in the sacrament of reconciliation.

The Christian understanding of forgiveness has been reflected upon most extensively in regard to God’s forgiving human sin and acts of individual forgiveness between two parties. Less attention has been given to social forgiveness. In this section, after beginning with a definition and some basic issues, I touch briefly on individual forgiveness (since this remains for better or worse the paradigm behind social forgiveness). Then I proceed to social forgiveness in its meanings and its rituals, before concluding with some aspects of a practical theology of forgiveness.

Forgiveness between individuals is generally understood as the victim’s giving up resentment against the perpetrator, and then some measure of a restoration of a social bond between the two. In giving up resentment the victim is expressing the desire not to continue to be preoccupied with the wrongdoing or to be poisoned by its toxic consequences. Put another way, there is some measure of healing in the victim, so that the victim ceases to be defined solely by victimhood. The victim’s personal narrative is no longer dominated by the harm or humiliation that the deed caused but is now framed more by the present and future than the past.

Forgiveness in this sense does not necessarily preclude punishment of the perpetrator. Punishment may be required socially (where punishment is seen as a deterrent against similar behavior in the future). John Paul II forgave his would-be assassin, but his assailant, Agca Khan, remained in his Italian jail cell. Although forgiveness might seem to require that the relationship between the two alienated individuals be restored to full friendship, forgiveness only seems to require that the erstwhile victim accord the perpetrator dignity and respect, and not use the deed as a form of power over the perpetrator. That is included in the understanding of giving up resentment.

Robert Enright and his colleagues at the International Forgiveness Institute at the University of Wisconsin have distilled the literature on interpersonal forgiveness and suggest that it happens in four stages:32

- **The uncovering phase.** In this first phase victims begin to explore the feelings of resentment, anger, humiliation, and other emotions provoked by the wrongdoing. At this stage the victim acknowledges the hurt inflicted.

- **The decision phase.** The victim then decides to forgive and makes a commitment to undertake what is necessary to be able to come to forgiveness.

- **The work phase.** The victim then undertakes the work to move toward forgiveness. This involves considering what things need to change in order to be able to come to forgiveness, what is expected of the wrongdoer, and how much the victim is willing to change in order to meet the wrongdoer at some intermediate point.

- **The act of forgiveness.** When the work phase is substantially completed, the victim can forgive the wrongdoer with some measure of authenticity.
What is meant by social forgiveness, then, when warring sides extend and accept forgiveness, or when one country forgives another? The term forgiveness may carry different meanings, such as pardoning offenses, releasing parties from economic indebtedness (debt forgiveness), or extending and receiving apologies. Forgiveness carries all of these meanings at different points. To that extent, the term shares an elasticity with reconciliation, as is seen below. In any event, social forgiveness has at its base a structure similar to individual forgiveness—giving up resentment and repair, in some measure, relationships. Put another way, it involves not letting the past determine the future. Forgiveness is about the transformation of relationships.

What must be done for one group to be able to forgive another? Daly and Sarkin propose that there are three steps the perpetrators must take for forgiveness to become possible: acknowledgment, apology, and atonement. Acknowledgment, they suggest, is “truth-plus.” It is stating the objective truth of what happened but also acknowledging the state’s (or predecessor state’s) responsibility for the act. Taking responsibility for having inflicted pain is central to overcoming alienation and beginning to build a new relationship.

Second, there must be some ritual of apology. Apology works best if that statement of apology has been worked out with the victim. This gives the victim the opportunity to articulate the suffering experienced (itself a dimension of the “witnessing” in the healing of memories discussed above) and to test the authenticity of the perpetrator’s remorse. The United Church of Canada and the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate both constructed their apologies to First Nation Peoples in Western Canada for past acts of abuse and cultural discussion in this manner. Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd’s “sorry” to the Aboriginal Peoples of that country in 2008 is another example. Apology is a ritual act. It cannot undo the past, but it can reframe it in a way that will make a new relationship possible. Sometimes that ritual act happens in an unplanned manner. German Chancellor Willy Brandt’s dropping to his knees at Auschwitz did more to heal German-Polish relations than many documents. John Paul II’s praying at the Western Wall in Jerusalem did the same for Jewish-Catholic relations. Apology is often made permanent by the erection of monuments or the institution of other memorial observances.

At any rate, apology announces that the current government does not find the behavior of the past government acceptable. Atonement seals apology. Atonement here does not necessarily require accepting legal liability for the past deed. It does, though, recognize a moral liability in that it attests to the moral failure in the past. Atonement may involve reparations, special new relationships, or other legislation to seal the apology. Christians believe that the forgiveness of sins comes to us from God, who alone can forgive sins. That forgiveness is mediated to us through the ministry of Jesus, especially through his suffering and death. We, in turn, are given by Jesus the capacity to forgive sin (Jn 20:22-23) and are then enjoined to forgive one another (Mt 18:21-33, Lk 17:3). Forgiveness is thus enshrined as a central Christian practice.

Because forgiveness is so central to Christian ministry and because of the strength of the mandate to forgive (in the Lord’s Prayer, Christians ask God to forgive them in the same way they forgive one another [Mt 6:12, 14-15]), the phrase “forgive and forget” is often found on the lips of Christians, even though this phrase is found nowhere in the Bible. While it may be read as a strong version of giving up resentment, consigning memory of past suffering to oblivion is dangerous both individually and for a society. A certain measure of “forgetting” is necessary for a society to be able to focus on the future rather than dwelling entirely in the past. When we forgive, however, we do not forget; instead, we remember the past in a different way. This is once again an example of the reframing of the past, the recasting of the narrative, that marks reconciliation processes.

Reconciliation

Having looked at dimensions of healing, truth, justice, and forgiveness, we can now return to the theme of reconciliation. In post-conflict situations the term reconciliation is used (and misused) in a variety of different ways. Its misuse occurs most often when perpetrators call for reconciliation—reconciliation meaning that victims should forget about the harm they have suffered and give up their demands for justice. In the victims’ forgetting, perpetrators are released from responsibility for their acts, and society goes on as though nothing has happened. Such actions are hardly reconciling. Similarly, the term is misused when there is a call for reconciliation while the conflict is still raging. Reconciliation in this instance means a cessation of hostilities without taking into account either the causes or the consequences of the hostility.

Across the discourse on reconciliation today, it is possible to discern a spectrum with at least six different meanings:

• The two parties cease fighting and agree to live with differences. That agreement is guaranteed with the establishment of clear boundaries. The Dayton Accords, which created the three ethnic enclaves in Bosnia-Herzegovina, is an example of this.
• The two parties expand the social space and change the climate to permit working together more. Northern Ireland since the Good Friday Agreement, and especially since building a new government in 2007, is an example of this.
• The parties experience a historical realignment that marks a return to some previous state. The union of the two German states after the fall of the Berlin Wall is an example.
• The parties try to create a new, common narrative that overcomes the divisions of the past. This is the “racial reconciliation” that the United
States and Australia have tried to achieve with their African American and Aboriginal populations, respectively. The Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe has a project of rewriting the history books used in the schools of the successor countries of the former Yugoslavia in order to create a less conflictive and more collective narrative of the past.

- The parties create the social conditions so that the violence of the past cannot be repeated. This was the definition of reconciliation that animated the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Chile. It is also behind anti-Nazi legislation put in place in the Federal Republic of Germany after its inception in 1949.

- The parties reach a point where the past is no longer problematic for the present. This is perhaps the point that France and Germany have reached through some sixty years of conscious work at cooperation. The picture of Gerhard Schroeder and Jacques Chirac standing hand in hand at Versailles in 2003 was emblematic of this relationship. Versailles was the place where both countries had celebrated their victories over each other in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; in the twenty-first, it became the site of complete reconciliation.

These six different situations, which all have gone under the name of reconciliation, serve as a reminder that reconciliation is as much a process as it is a goal. Just as a Catholic theology of peacebuilding cannot restrict itself to reflecting solely on the final state of shalom or peace, so a theology of reconciliation must be able to accompany the reconciliation process at all its points along the way. Although a Catholic theology of reconciliation will continue to be animated by the five theological principles outlined in the first part of this chapter, one can see “middle axioms” or intermediate practical theologies supporting these various steps in reconciliation:

- A theology of forbearance, seen as a gift of the Holy Spirit, can help people to accept one another (Col 3:8–10, 12–16) and to live with legitimate difference. From a Jewish perspective, Jonathan Sacks has developed a biblically based approach to difference, taking the Babel story in Genesis 11 as his point of departure.

- A theology of creating safe and hospitable spaces, as outlined above, would support the expanded social spaces and changed climates sought in the second meaning of reconciliation.

- The theology of reconstruction outlined by South African Charles Villa-Vicencio for South Africa could support realignment. Villa-Vicencio used the return from exile in Babylon and the rebuilding of Jerusalem as the central biblical narrative for this theology.

- Building a new common narrative may be illustrated by Ephesians 2:12–20, where Paul presents the Gentiles and Jews, who had formerly been divided, now brought together through the blood of Christ into a common household of God. The wall of hostility had been broken down, and a new narrative based upon the apostles and prophets, with the story of Christ as cornerstone, now informs the reconciled community.

- The completed process of reconciliation is caught in the signature biblical passage for horizontal reconciliation noted above: 2 Corinthians 5:17–20. It is also captured in the vision of the New Jerusalem descending from heaven in Revelation 20.

Conclusion

This chapter has tried to present the outlines of a practical theology to accompany important practices of peacebuilding. Based on five theological principles that give direction to a Catholic understanding of peacebuilding, it had first to describe those practices and then seek out sources of a theology that could not only inform those practices, but also take up the challenges those practices set before Christian faith. What emerged in looking at healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation was that elements of Catholic tradition could contribute to some of the conundrums contemporary peacebuilding practices face. Notable, for example, was how the Catholic penitential tradition might chart a trajectory of healing for perpetrators. At the same time, however, peacebuilding practices pose considerable challenges to Catholic theology to develop further its resources for service to building peace. For example, theologians can contribute to deepening a theology of truth to meet the four different forms of truth telling needed in reconstruction after conflict, expanding a theology of restorative justice, and developing theological insight into the many meanings of reconciliation. Much of the literature and practices appearing on peacebuilding is still relatively new. Theological reflection upon that peacebuilding is even more recent. The challenges ahead are clear enough indeed.

Notes

1 The concept of middle axioms was first articulated by the British philosopher and theologian J. B. Newham in the 1930s. A middle axiom is a kind of working principle that derives from experience and resonates with one’s belief system. It provides a framework for further action. Middle axioms are most useful in bringing together diverse groups who may think differently but find commonality in action. They are thus a kind of theoretical (but provisional) bridge across diverse communities. Within each of those communities they provide a reassurance that there is a fidelity to one’s beliefs yet also allow for common action. Newham developed this in the Faith and Order and other ecumenical movements that converged after the Second World War in the creation of the World Council of Churches.


3 All scripture citations are from the New Revised Standard Version.

The story of Nobel Peace Prize Winner Bishop Belo is well known. The stories of Markovic and Janic may be found in David Little, ed., Peacemakers in Action: Profiles of Religion in Conflict Resolution (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).


Ibid.

One of the best sources for this remains Judith Herman, Trauma and Recovery (New York: Basic Books, 1992). The healing of the effects of trauma is only partially susceptible to psychotherapy. There is indication that differential processes in the mid-brain are central to the experience of sustained traumatic response. See especially the work of Bessel van der Kolk. It should be noted that descriptions of the effects of trauma and how these effects are to be overcome have largely been framed by Western cultural perspectives, inasmuch as most of the research has been done in Western settings. Chapter 8 on ritual and sacrament in this volume touches upon the question of religious rituals of healing.

The use of psychoanalytic categories in trauma healing has been a controversial topic. Many of the scholars who have been most active in studying trauma come to it with training in psychoanalysis. The length of treatment required by classic psychoanalysis makes it unsuitable for treating massive social trauma in impoverished countries. However, the concern of psychoanalysis about linking conscious and unconscious thought patterns, the importance of the symbolic dimension in creating meaning, and the importance of catharsis for healing all contribute to our understanding of overcoming trauma.

Maria Ericson, Reconciliation and the Search for a Shared Moral Landscape: An Exploration Based upon a Study of Northern Ireland and South Africa (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2001).

11 Such circles are described in greater detail, regarding both their practices and their theology, in Stephen Bevans, Eleanor Dodge, and Robert Schreiter, eds., The Healing Circle: Essays in Cross-Cultural Mission (Chicago: Chicago Center for Global Ministries, 2000).

12 Daly and Sarkin, Reconciliation in Divided Societies, 156–57.

The Stations of the Cross devotion is a series of fourteen “stations” (places to stop and stand) that note moments in the passion story as narrated in the Gospels and expanded in popular piety. Many commentaries and meditations continue to appear on them. I have written one related especially to themes of reconciliation, published in Peacebuilding: A Caritas Training Manual (Vatican City: Caritas Internationalis, 2002), 47–52.

14 Lustration was practiced in Poland and the former Czechoslovakia after the end of Communist rule. Those who had served as informers to the state security services were denied the right to hold civil office.

15 On seeking the truth, see especially Martha Minow, Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998); Priscilla Hayner, Unspoken Truths: Confronting State Terror and Atrocities (New York: Routledge, 2001); Daly and Sarkin, Reconciliation in Divided Societies, 140–52.