

DYNAMIC GOSPEL
NEW EUROPE

CONVERSATION
AND GATHERING

June Conversation

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Welcome

Impact Groups can find everything they need for the June Lausanne Europe 20/21 Conversation right here. This month's Impact Group looks at the issue of Reconciliation and introduces the final of the five threads we have wanted to feature in the Conversation: Scripture.

Instructions

1. Introductions

Begin with prayer but if there is someone new to the group, make sure everyone introduces themselves.

2. Reconciliation

As Christians we are called to be agents of reconciliation in a broken world. Yet often, through our words or actions, we fan the flames of conflict. Or through our silence, we perpetuate the injustices in our societies. The last few weeks have seen racial conflict come to the top of the news agenda, so our choice some months ago that the conversation would deal with reconciliation seems almost prophetic.

Given current world events, more than ever we need to think about how the gospel of reconciliation can speak into our broken world. We would ask you to prepare for the Impact Group by reading the following articles. The first two are required and the third is optional.

If you want to dig deeper into the issues of Racial Justice and Reconciliation you might want to [check out these resources from the Lausanne Movement](#).

You should have read the articles in preparation for your Impact Group, so now we would like you to discuss the following questions:

1. "The justification of conflict is always found in real or perceived injustices in the past" (Memory). What examples of this have you observed in your country, region, church or personal relationships?
2. Do you recognise nationalism as a danger for the church in Europe and, if so, how might the church speak to it?
3. Reimer's article set out the steps of Christian reconciliation: knowing the truth about the injustices that have led to the conflict, naming and confessing those hurts, seeking and receiving forgiveness, and

working together to build a new future. How can we apply these principles in our own situations?

4. The tragic death of George Floyd has highlighted the issue of racism and systemic injustice that still exists in many countries today. The foundational documents of the church leave no room for racism: "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). How must the church live out that calling today?

3. Scripture

You should have all read through Paul's letter to the Philippians before the Impact Group. We now want you discuss together the insights that this amazing letter has revealed to you.

Take notes so that you can summarise the conclusions of your Impact Group in the Comments section below.

1. **OBSERVATION:** Concerning this month's theme: **Unity and love in the church**, both direct and indirect. Is there anything that stood out to you?

2. **INTERPRETATION:** What do you think is the **main idea** in Paul's mind around this theme?

3. **APPLICATION:** What are the **implications** for us today as we read these words? Is there anything you can **apply** to your local context? What about Europe?

4. Prayer

- ◆ Pray for God to search our hearts and expose our prejudices as individuals, and as the body of Christ, so that in turn we can repent of our actions of disunity and dishonour towards one another. (Philippians 2:3-5; 21, 3:4-6, 3:18-19)
- ◆ As the Church, may we humble ourselves before God and ask the Holy Spirit to teach us and reveal to us God's will so that we can know how best to demonstrate true love and genuine unity towards each other (Philippians 1:9-11, 2:6-8)
- ◆ Pray for God to grant us the wisdom and attention to discern the spaces we as the Church, are being called to facilitate forgiveness and reconciliation

- ◆ May we allow ourselves as individuals, and as the Church, to sit at the foot of the cross and allow God to reveal His will and intentions in this pandemic season. This will help us gain the wisdom to know what to do to fulfil God's good purposes (Philippians 2:12-13, 4:7-8)

5. Make Your Contribution to the Conversation

We really want to hear back from your Impact Group after each session. Please find a few minutes to summarise what you hear from God, the highlights of the discussion, and any questions that were raised, in the comments box immediately below. See you next month.

[GO TO THE CONVERSATION](#)

Scripture

Over the next year, we will read Paul's letter to the Philippians and reflect on it several times. We will learn from Paul and use the same questions each time to discuss and apply the text as we look at it through different lenses, or perspectives. This month we will do that through the lens of: ***Unity and Love in the Church.***

Jesus prayed for complete unity among his followers so that the world may believe (John 17:23).

One of the greatest barriers to belief is disunity in the church. In politics, the moment a political party becomes disunited, it loses popularity. It happens in the secular world, and even more so in the church. When churches fight each other, people lose interest.

Yet the opposite is also true: when churches unite it is attractive. Unity is powerful. But it is never easy; it is always a huge challenge.

Please prepare by reading the whole letter to the Philippians, all 4 chapters through the lens of:

UNITY AND LOVE IN THE CHURCH

How the gospel effects our relationships, with Christ, with each other and the church.

Please pray before you start reading that the Holy Spirit will guide you to learn new things.

Reconciliation in the Conflicted Continent

By Jim Memory

[Go to the article online](#)

Europe's history is a story of conflict. For centuries, the nations of Europe have fought bloody wars over territory, power and religion. However, since 1945 Europe has experienced an unprecedented period of peace. Of course, that isn't true everywhere. For those living in Cyprus, the Balkans, and Ukraine, conflict is a recent memory and, in the latter case, an ongoing reality. But most Europeans can't imagine what it's like to live in a country at war. And yet, as students of history know, the story of every conflict begins with the events that led up to it.

What signs of tomorrow's conflicts are there in today's Europe? What can we learn from previous generations who have shaped peace in our conflicted continent? And

how can Christians and churches be "peacemakers" (Matt. 5:9) and "agents of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:18) in today's Europe?

The Conflicted Continent

If there is one lesson from Europe's recent history, it is the danger of nationalism. And when nationalism is fused with populism, the danger is even greater. But before we discuss this further, let's take a moment to define our terms.

Nationalism is a discourse around identity and belonging. Fundamentally, it is an opposition between those who are seen to belong to the nation and those who are considered not to belong. Populism, on the other hand,

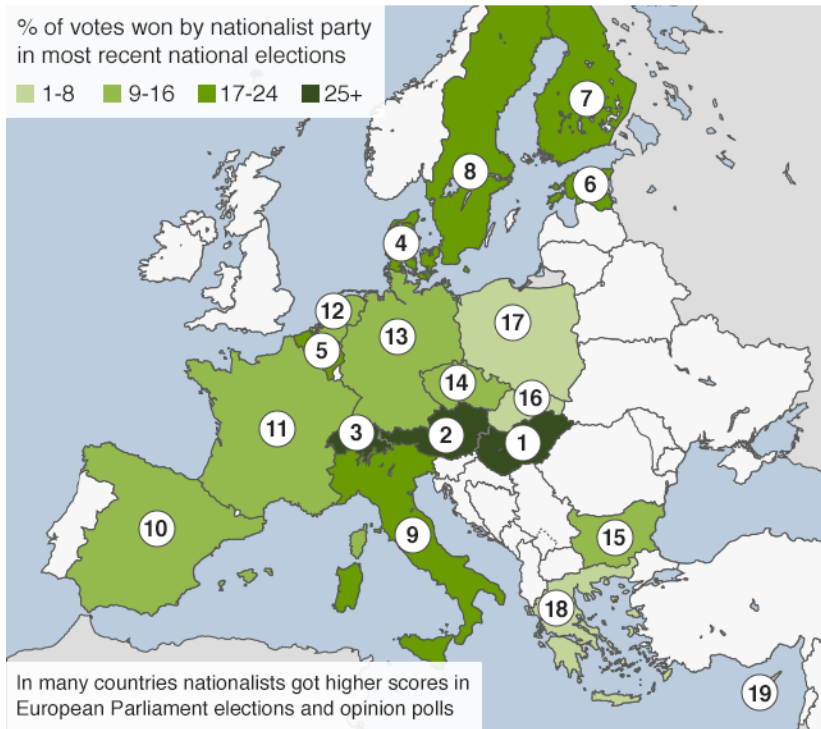
sees “the people” as the victims of oppression by elites, whether in their own government, the media, the EU, ECB or globalist movements. So, we might talk about nationalism as a horizontal opposition between people, whereas populism is a vertical opposition between “the people” and the elites.

Whilst populist movements can be found across the political spectrum, the fusion of nationalism and populism on the political right has given rise to national populist parties that are now to be found in almost every European country.

National populist leaders draw their power from the “4 D’s”: distrust of their politicians, deprivation of people’s economic advantage whether by elites or migrants, destruction of native culture and political de-alignment (Eatwell and Goodwin).

Source: *BBC, Updated Nov 2019*

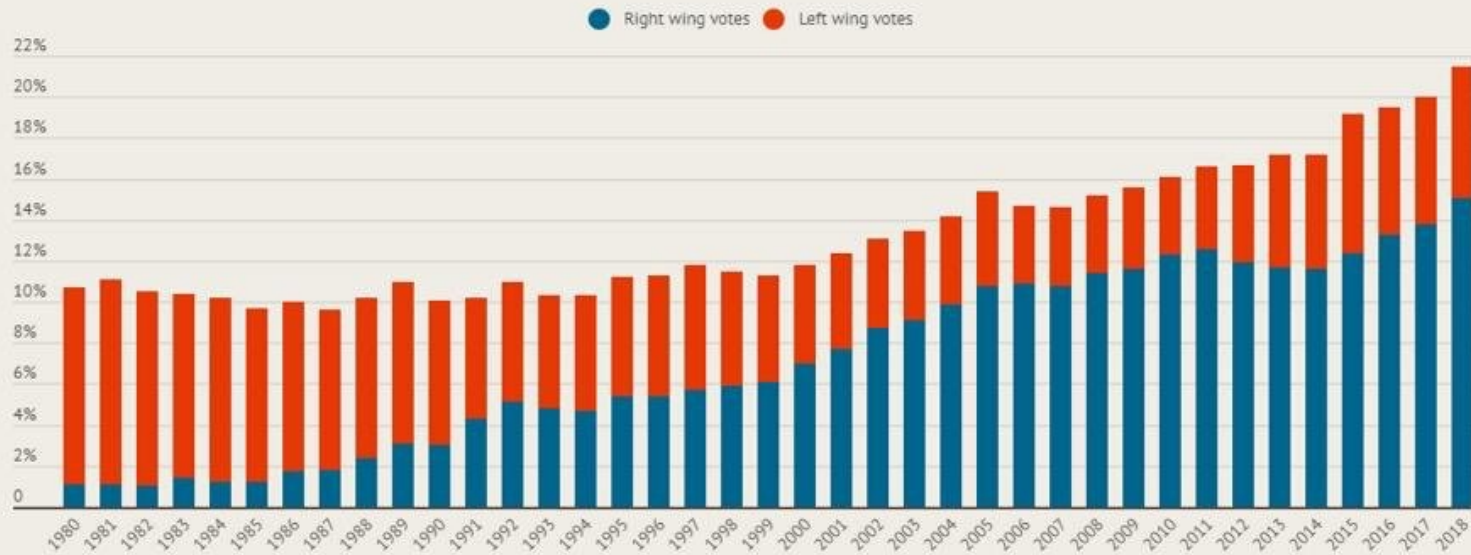
Rise of nationalism in Europe



- | | |
|--|--|
| ① Hungary
Fidesz 49% Jobbik 19% | ⑪ France
National Rally 13% |
| ② Austria
Freedom Party 26% | ⑫ Netherlands
Freedom Party 13% |
| ③ Switzerland
Swiss People's Party 25.8% | ⑬ Germany
Alternative for Germany 12.6% |
| ④ Denmark
Danish People's Party 21% | ⑭ Czech Republic
Freedom & Direct Democracy 11% |
| ⑤ Belgium
New Flemish Alliance 20.4% | ⑮ Bulgaria
United Patriots 9% |
| ⑥ Estonia
Conservative People's Party 17.8% | ⑯ Slovakia
Our Slovakia 8% |
| ⑦ Finland
The Finns 17.7% | ⑰ Poland
Confederation 6.8% |
| ⑧ Sweden
Sweden Democrats 17.6% | ⑱ Greece
Greek Solution 3.7% |
| ⑨ Italy
The League 17.4% | ⑲ Cyprus
ELAM 3.7% |
| ⑩ Spain
Vox 15% | |

Populists are gaining ground

Aggregated populist votes 1980-2018



The average voter support for authoritarian populists in the 33 countries included in TAP is 22 percent. However, since populist parties are more successful in populous countries the total voter support is 26 percent.

Source: *Timbro*

How these dynamics operate can be illustrated by two recent events in European history: Brexit and the Coronavirus outbreak.

The result of the United Kingdom Referendum on EU Membership surprised many, but anyone who travelled

beyond London and the South East could hear Eatwell and Goodwin's 4 'D's in conversation. And the slogan of the Leave campaign, Take Back Control, summed up this frustration perfectly. The argument was clear: Things would be so much better if "we" were in control. So many of our problems are down to "them". Though notionally targeted at the EU and its bureaucrats, in practice, this

anti-European rhetoric made “others” of our brothers from the rest of Europe.

This dynamic of “othering” is also evident in the Covid-19 pandemic. Europeans quickly transitioned from blaming the Chinese to blaming more traditional targets: the Roma, migrants generally and even Evangelicals and Baptists, in the cases of Spain, France and Russia.

Coronavirus has had devastating economic and political consequences, some of which will endure long after the virus has come under control. It was extraordinary to see how quickly the Schengen Area was suspended especially given how essential the value of “free movement” is to the European Union. But more pointedly, the economic impact of Covid-19 brought national interests to the fore as Italy and Spain sought support from the EU for their fragile economies. The resistance of some states within the European Union to the idea of debt mutualisation has a clear message. Despite all the talk of European solidarity, at the end of the day, “you are on your own”. Covid-19 has revealed Europe’s nationalist reflex. Following on from the financial crisis of 2008, the sovereign debt crisis of 2012/13, the migrant crisis of 2015/16 and Brexit, the EU faces a fresh existential crisis

which threatens to put nation against nation as the huge economic and political impact of Coronavirus becomes clear in the years.

A Lesson from Recent History

This edition of Vista coincides with two anniversaries. Seventy-five years ago this week, on the 8th May 1945, the forces of Nazi Germany formally surrendered to Allied Forces in what came to be called VE Day, Victory in Europe Day. But the 9th May is also the seventieth anniversary of a three-minute speech by Robert Schuman, the French Foreign Minister, which is celebrated across the EU as Europe Day for it is seen as having a crucial part in establishing peace in Europe..

The Schuman Declaration, borne out of the pain of WWII, sought to institutionalise the reconciliation between France and Germany by means of a common transnational structure for the administration of coal and steel, the raw materials of armed conflict, so that “any war between France and Germany becomes not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible.”

Whatever our opinion of the European Union, from which the European Coal and Steel Community grew, in our current conflicted state it is good to remember the role that influential Christians like Schuman played in pointing people towards reconciliation and a shared future.

Schuman understood that reconciliation involves the past, present and future. It involves an honest evaluation of the sins of the past: the divisions and inequalities that gave rise to the conflict, and the true nature of the evils committed during WWII. It involves working in the present, in the construction of realities that makes a material difference. And it involves a vision of the future, imagining a future beyond that structure, that would be a blessing beyond itself (note the reference to the “development of the African continent”). Can Christians of today learn from Schuman’s proposal as we seek to be peacemakers today?

Peacemaking in Europe

It was the French Sociologist Hervieu-Léger who first noted that Europeans suffer a collective amnesia about their Christian heritage. I would add that many European Christians are increasingly amnesiac about the dangers of

nationalism. The way that many Christians across Europe are lining up behind national populist politicians simply because they use Christian symbols, or hold traditional positions on certain issues, is very troubling.

The demonisation of the “other”, a defining feature of nationalism, cuts right across the Christian gospel. As the German theologian Jürgen Moltmann reminds us: “The church of Christ is, in its ideal state, on the side of humanity and incompatible with nationalism. When God became human, he became just that, and did not become American or German...every human being, regardless of nationality, is to be respected as an image of God.”

Hospitality to the stranger, to the “other”, is a fundamental biblical value. And for Christian churches, our very constitution in the New Testament will not allow us to build walls of separation, for “there is no Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for we are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). A church that is not both for us and the other is not a Christian church at all.

So how can we be Peacemakers in today’s Europe? By being like sons and daughters of Issachar who understood the times in which they lived and therefore knew what to

do (1 Chron. 12:32). For like Schuman, our task of reconciliation involves both past, present and future.

1. Past. We need to build peace by righting the broken stones of Europe's past. Each new generation needs to be reminded not only of the dangers of nationalism but also the other "sins of the Fathers" that we have committed: slavery, the exploitation of the world's poor and the destruction of the planet. The justifications for conflict are always found in real or perceived injustices in the past. Christians must work to heal and reconcile the past.
2. Present. We need to contribute to building peace in the present. To speak prophetically into our contexts. To challenge those who "other" those in our society in the name of Christ. But more positively to lead local, national and international reconciliation initiatives, as Robert Schuman, Desmond Tutu, and so many others have done.
3. Future. We need to project a vision of peace into the future. Conflicts are often fought to secure a better tomorrow. More frequently, they just store up new grievances that fuel the wars of tomorrow. As Christians

we know what God's purpose is, and it is not war but the reconciliation of all things under Christ (Col. 1:20) – the ultimate 'better tomorrow'. Our vision is of a people of God from every tribe and tongue and nation who together proclaim: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever." (Revelation 11.15).

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Forgiveness – Why Not Europe?

By Johannes Reimer

[Go to the article online](#)

Divided Europeans – A hindrance for the Gospel

There's no question that we, in Europe, need reconciliation. East and West, North and South – our great continent has witnessed numerous wars and conflicts.

Europeans carry enough historical baggage to be mad at each other for another century. The English, French, Spanish, Russians, Germans and other European nations have all built their empires through ruling over the smaller tribes and forcing them to adapt their culture and language accordingly. Just ask the Scots how they see the English, the Catalonians – the Spanish, or the Ukrainians – the Russians.

Most of our European empires have collapsed long since, but the hard feelings against the former ruling nations stay. Collective memory goes way back and shapes the

attitude towards the 'other' even where there are no obvious conflicts today.

Consider the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. For centuries they were occupied by the Russian Empire and later by the Soviet Union. Many Russian-speaking people from all corners of the former empire moved in and made the Baltics their new home. Russification of the nationals from Alexander III's reign (1845-1894) onwards became state policy.(1) National cultural values were suppressed and thus the Russian language, Russianness and the Russians became the most hated neighbors. This story was and is repeated in many European settings, and conflicts become the constant reality that society lives by.

But the same is true for churches. Ethnocentrism and Ethnoconfessionalism are the biggest hindrances for spreading the gospel in Europe today.(2)

“The Church’s task is to promote the kingdom of God and not the kingdoms of certain national majorities”

Unity promotes the knowledge of the Lord in the world, explains Jesus in John 17:21. Disunity, on the contrary, is why people do not see God’s glory in his followers.

During centuries of European conflict, major church denominations viewed themselves as national, even state churches. Supporters of the state church suppressed the smaller ethnic groups. No wonder those ethnic groups sought a different religious identity

Many European denominational divides also go back to attempts to establish the dominance of a singular national identity. Unity forced by the State and to the expense of freedom of others will always result in a culture of strife and hatred.

The Church as Agent of Reconciliation

The Church of Christ is God’s agent of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5. 19-20). She can never be an appendage of the state. Her task is to promote the Kingdom of God and not the kingdoms of certain national majorities. And in the Kingdom of God there will be no concentration of ethnic backgrounds.

The apostle Paul states to the Galatians: “In Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal. 3:28). Jesus is our peace and He made those from afar and those near one body (Eph. 2:14).

Ethnoconfessionalism is, biblically speaking, a no-go. The Church is set to reconcile and not to divide and promote the politically strongest!

This places the European church into a special position. In the midst of conflict and ethnocentric divisions, she will seek for ways to reconcile the people with God and with one another and lead them into God’s kingdom. Stanley Hauerwas summarises the references to peace and mission in the New Testament by claiming that Jesus’

followers are no less than “signs of the kingdom of peace in the world” (3).

How can this be done? What are the instruments of effective reconciliation? How do people who have been collecting hatred for centuries forgive each other and establish new and meaningful patterns of cooperation? What do the Scriptures suggest?

Reconciling – God’s way

Jesus is God’s radical reconciler. He came to reconcile the world with God, the father (2 Cor. 5:18). And he states the principles of radical reconciliation.

First, Jesus claims that people need to recognise the truth in order to be free (John 8:32). Recognition is a process by which people will overcome their prejudice. By looking at what has really happened, they may also discover that their own limited perspective towards other people is distorted by collectively shaped memory. In reconciliation, the two parties will do what the biblical term *catalasso* = reconciliation suggests: they will go back and forth naming and renaming the issues of hurt and injustice until

a common understanding of what has happened is established and the parties agree on it. (4)

“Without knowing the story, no reconciliation is possible”

Without knowing the story, no reconciliation is possible. “You will know the truth and the truth will set you free”, says Jesus. The European Church as God’s reconciler will mediate a process of truth-finding as a first step towards a peaceful co-existence in Europe.

Secondly, where truth is known and agreed upon, where victims and perpetrators are named and injustice is revealed, the mediator may suggest a process of forgiveness. (5) It is important not to compare injustices. No sin is greater or lesser than another- all injustice must be named and people asked for forgiveness. And perpetuation, patterns of privilege and oppression that consciously or unconsciously perpetuate injustice, must be named, as Bishop Tutu rightly claims. (6).

Collective and historic injustice is not a personal thing, and people involved in the process of reconciliation may

not have been directly involved in that hurting and perpetuation. But the victims have identified with the sufferings of their people, accepted the collective hurt and lived accordingly.

As a result, they are eligible to forgive the successors of the perpetrators – the same way that the successors are eligible to ask them for forgiveness. Surely this is a step of humility and grace. And both are God-given. In Jesus, there is freedom for both humility and grace for He is our peace.

“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed,” Jesus says about himself (John 8:36). Both requesting forgiveness and receiving forgiveness is a divine act.

Confession and forgiveness belong together (7) Wherever this act involves the presence of Jesus, true forgiveness is possible, and the negative memory will be transformed into a valuable experience we all can learn from.

Reconciliation, however, is not finished when rivals forgive each other. The third step is equally important: the competitors will have to develop a common future, discussing possibilities and opportunities to work for

better life conditions in their communities, in their countries and beyond.(8)

We Europeans need an idea of what can be done together and what our positive relationships may look like. And Christians are perfectly prepared to draw principles and practices from their kingdom-of-God culture, which establishes a meaningful social space of living in unity by appreciating our diversity. As a matter of fact, the Church herself is called Body of Christ. And nothing is more diverse really than a human body. All parts are different but at the same time they all serve each other and thus establish the most powerful unity under the sun (Eph. 1:23). So the Church must teach the nations those principles. This is her divine calling (Mt. 28:19-20).

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Reconciliation and Coronavirus |

Optional

By Johannes Reimer

[Go to the article online](#)

Maybe it is time for reconciliation

Kathryn Jean Lopez's article in the Catholic News magazine "Our Sunday Visitor" on reconciliation in times of Corona has inspired me deeply.(1) "Maybe it is time for reconciliation" states Lopez to her Catholic readers. Locked in our apartment, each of us has plenty of time to think about God and the world. Life is busy and it has become so easy to forget our creator. Perhaps we should consider spending some time with Him and his word, confess our sin and get ready for the next phase of life after corona. All specialists predict that the time after the pandemic might be much more difficult than what we are experiencing now. It is obviously smart to rid ourselves from all the sinful ballast of the past. Reconciled people are free to start a new full power.

Reconciliation with God leads automatically to restoration of our own identity. The apostle Paul writes, that whoever is in Christ, is a new creation: old things have lost their influence, new things have started to shape our reality (2Cor. 5:17). Reconciliation with God results in reconciliation with oneself. We have plenty of time to think and pray about our own identity. Many Western people live with a growing inferiority complex. They desperately need reconciliation with their own past, their own ways of enculturation and their own position in society. Only people with a healthy self-esteem will be able to stay "above water" in times of crisis. Spend time with yourself, find your own face in the presence of the Lord.

With all this excess time on your hands now, you might also think of people you are still in conflict with. Broken relationships absorb your energy, occupy your calendar and are the greatest hindrances to a meaningful life. You may have separated long ago, but memories don't go away that quickly. Healing of memories is urgently needed if you want to avoid becoming bitter. Now in times of COVID 19 you have the time to take the phone and call your former friend or partner and seek a heart-to-heart talk with the aim of reconciliation. Reconciled people are free to build new relationships and restore the old.

“The Church’s task is to promote the kingdom of God and not the kingdoms of certain national majorities”

You may even look out of your window and take time to commit yourselves anew to caring for God’s good creation. For those with gardens, there is time now to grow flowers and trees in the garden. You could even build a house for the birds. They have been busy all morning singing to you. Have you ever spent time seeing to their welfare or even just admiring them for a moment. God gave you a cultural mandate. You are supposed to care for

the nature around you (Gen. 1:26-28). Do you? If not, is there a pressing need to reconcile with nature?

Maybe Corona provides time for us to reconcile!

How does reconciliation work?

The New Testament word for reconciliation “catalosso” describes a process in which you enroll into a conversation by which you jointly determine: (a) the state you are in and what caused the situation; (b) name abuse, injustice, the victims and perpetrators; (c) confess sin, ask for forgiveness and forgive in the name of Jesus; (d) build a new relationship for a better future.(2)

First, reconciliation looks for truth, because only where we know what really happened, we might become free. Jesus says: “You will recognize the truth and the truth will make you free” (John 8:32). The problem here lies with our memory. We remember our interpretation of the truth. And, our interpretation is colored by our culture, experience and often by our prejudices. We may think we know why God seems so far removed from us, and why we ourselves so often experience bouts of inferiority and our

neighbours create constant conflicts. In reality we work with our own limited perspectives on all of this and some of our so-called experience may have even turned into a lie. Hence, recovery of the truth will probably need the services of a counselor, a neutral mediator who may be a pastor in your local church, a trained Christian psychologist, or just a good Christian friend. Going back and forth on your issues, exercising catalasso, you may soon discover truth, broaden your perspective and understand what really happened between you and God, you and your family and your neighbours.

Secondly, knowing the true story allows you to name the forces of abuse, destruction and conflict. Do not try to cover up but instead open your heart to the truth. This will allow true confession and genuine forgiveness to take place. Sin, both against God and humans, has names. Speak them out and prepare to confess them to God, yourself, your neighbours and even creation.

Third, confess your sin and be prepared to forgive those who have sinned against you be this yourself, or other humans. And you will receive forgiveness out of God's grace. At the same time forgive, if others have abused you, as you been forgiven by God.

And lastly work for justice. Go and pay your share, accept punishment, if this is what your misbehavior has produced. Forgiveness does not remove the question of justice from the table. In fact, forgiveness is a transformational process which enables the forgiven to carry the load of punishment, to restore justice and build just relationships.(3)

For all of this we need time. Reconciliation does not happen overnight. And here is the good news - the awkward situation with the virus, opens up enough time for us.

Corona virus and community mediation

But the difficult time is not only an invitation to personal reconciliation. It opens doors for community reconciliation. Corona does not pick and choose its victims. All humans in the whole world are in danger. Only when we humans unite, will we win the war against the virus. And this forces even enemies to join hands for the time being. Across all religious affiliations, people of good will have to started to support one another, share their masks, food and water.

“The time of crisis is inevitably also a time of opportunity for reconciliation, mediation and a new start.”

And again, Christians should be on the frontlines of such community support actions. Going to the nasty neighbour in times of need and crisis will soften their heart, and open potential doors for settling conflicts and establishing a peaceful community. In a city in Central Asia, for instance, Christians were distributing masks to the Muslims of the community. There has always been a rather difficult relationship between the two faith communities. But now, observing Christians serving the Muslims, their leaders came and apologized for all the problems they created for the Christians.

The time of crisis is inevitably also a time of opportunity for reconciliation, mediation and a new start. The American journalist Kathryn Lopez is right, maybe the corona pandemic calls us to a deeper level of reconciliation. Let's set aside the needed time and find new ways to reconcile with God, ourselves, our neighbors and even creation. This is a wonderful opportunity for us Christians to take the lead in ushering in a renewed and healing world.

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