"From 'the exclusion from' to 'the sharing of' God's Baraka": Genesis 32-33 as a Paradigm for a Theology of Reconciliation for the Mission of the Church in the Democratic Republic of Congo

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Genesis 32-33 as a Paradigm for a Theology of Reconciliation for the Mission of the Church in the Democratic Republic of Congo

A Thesis by

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Presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of
Licentiate in Sacred Theology (S.T.L)

Boston College School of Theology and Ministry (STM)
May 2018

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Acknowledgement

At the end of this essay, my acknowledgements go to a variety of people who made my theological journey possible. I am grateful to the Society of Jesus in the Democratic Republic of Congo and in the United States for their multifaceted support.

The Faber Jesuit Community has served as a place where friendships and companionships played a critical role in developing my thoughts. Each and every member of this community during these two years deserve special thanks.

The School of Theology and Ministry has been a conducive milieu where rigorous thinking and pastoral concerns meet to achieve the formation of both a theologian and a ministerial priest in me. I just hope that this essay reflects the quality of courses and seminar attended during my two years in the School.

Professors Ernesto Valiente and Andrew Davis have been patient with my theological doubts and lameness throughout the process of writing this essay. I feel indebted to them. They deserve a particular appreciation.

Parents, friends and colleagues have also accompanied me in the writing process in a variety of ways. May they also receive these words of gratitude as theirs.

Abstract

"From 'the exclusion from' to 'the sharing of' God's *Baraka*"

Genesis 32-33 and A Theology of Reconciliation for the Mission of the Church in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Reconciliation is based on a change in the attitude of humans toward one another and toward God. Jacob returns to Canaan to obey an order of God and to fulfill his promise. His encounter with God upsets him. His deference to Esau shows a change of attitude that produces a reciprocal effect on his brother. By sharing his wealth, Jacob recognizes the goodness of God who has filled him, accompanied him on his return and touched Esau to welcome him. Esau, also beneficiary of God's generosity, knows how to forget the past and to show himself in favor of his brother. The two brothers are blessed, and they bless each other. This mutual blessing goes beyond the sharing of material wealth. The forgiveness granted and received constitutes a central piece where each protagonist feels lifted up: Jacob recovers his status of a brother (no longer a target to be destroyed), and Esau's face reminds the loving face of God. And I think, this is the moment when reconciliation happens between the two brothers.

The account of Genesis 32-33 provides us with the (historical) example of a process of reconciliation anchored in a spiritual vision, with the participation of God and human beings. These features of Jacob-Esau process of reconciliation can be built upon to foster reconciliation among the estranged individuals and groups in the Congolese and African context.

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INTRODUCTION

The Second Special Assembly for Africa of Synod of the Bishops framed its topic as "the Church in Africa in the Service to Reconciliation, Peace and Justice. 'You are the Salt of the Earth… You are the light of the World' (Mt 5: 13, 14)". We understand such a formulation as a mission received from the Universal Church to bring the Good News of reconciliation to the African territory. The synod underlined the urgency of such a mission on a continent characterized by multiple conflicts, wars, and ethnic and social divisions. In such a context, the mission of peace and reconciliation "has never been more timely in Africa, because of her conflicts, wars and violence."[1] This synod launched a great challenge to our particular African Church and to all its Christians.

By choosing this theme, the bishops wanted to challenge Christians with their responsibility for the advent of a new world in Africa, which necessarily involves reconciliation, justice and peace, inspired by the sermon of Jesus on the mountain. On a continent infamous for its high levels of poverty, abuse of human rights, and disregard for human dignity, a continent torn to pieces by the violence of tribalism and ethnicity, reconciliation emerges as the prevailing theme that should mobilize the energies of the Church in mission.

The call for reconciliation becomes even more incisive in countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo where the resurgences of violence and wars are permanent. A glimpse at the history of this country shows that it has never enjoyed a period of peaceful and harmonious living together. From slavery to successive tribal and ethnic violence, through colonization,

[1] See the Preface of the *Instrument Laboris*.

dictatorships, rebellious wars and mutinies, the history of this country can be identified as a history of divisions and estrangements. In such a context, how can the Church proclaim the Good News of salvation brought by Jesus-Christ? Which resources can she use to make her salvific mission audible to herself and to the world? Finally, which Church should she be for her message of reconciliation to the world to be credible? These are the questions that this paper strives to answer to. It holds that through a Christian appropriation of both the African values of togetherness and the Biblical stories of God's plan of salvation, the Church in the Democratic Republic of Congo and in Africa can deliver a credible message of reconciliation to the world. Moreover, to carry out such a mission, the Church needs to express herself beyond her own borders and deploy in the public arena where it can make an effective contribution to conflict resolution, reconciliation and peacebuilding.

This paper is to be understood as a contribution to this great and complex mission of the Church in Africa. This contribution is done by using spiritual resources and values dug from African traditional Religion in dialogue with the Biblical values. Thus, we are in line with the call made by Saint John Paul II to the Africans when he convened them to look inside themselves, to the riches of their own traditions and to the faith which the church celebrates.[2]

According to the African worldview, when there is conflict, the social cohesion of the entire community is deeply affected. Reconciliation is considered a social obligation of divine origin. No one should neglect it without being punished. This African theology of reconciliation highlights the spiritual forces that help restore relationships within the family and within the social group. It founds traditional practices that produce effective reconciliation among peoples.

[2] John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Ecclesia in Africa*, n° 48.

In this vision of the world, shared by the whole community, reconciliation gives rise to commitments taken before the living, the dead and those to be born. They assume a sacred character which promotes respect.

The interpretation of Genesis 32-33 helps resituate our quest within the history of salvation. More specifically, it provides us with historical of estranged brothers who have been enabled by God's transformation to follow the path of reconciliation and live again as brothers. Following Jacob and Esau, we learn that reconciliation is possible if people are open to God's grace and work towards the uplifting of each other. In this perspective of inculturation, we can therefore recover positive elements of the tradition that join the biblical reflection and which can be used to construct a theology of reconciliation that supports the mission of the Church in contemporary contexts of conflicts.

This paper is developed in three chapters. The first chapter circumscribes the context of the work explores theologically the significance of the reconciliation as it is used subsequently. Reconciliation will be considered both from an African perspective and from the Biblical point of view. In a second moment, this chapter gives a panoramic view of the existing ethnic conflicts in the Congo, analyzes the causes as well as the efforts of reconciliation that have been undertaken. The point we make here is that understanding the nature and the causes of the conflictual Congo would open up the perspectives for their resolutions.

The second chapter is an exegetical attempt of Genesis 32-33. It aims at identifying key features that led Jacob and Esau to a path of reconciliation. Thus, this text can be used as a paradigm of our human estrangements and our tries to live together again. The point is that what helped them to engage in the path of reconciliation can help us today. As for Jacob and Esau, the

openness to God's transforming work in us and the lifting up of one another can make it possible to live as brothers and sisters again.

The third chapter draws from the previous two to suggest criteria that the Church should embody if she wants to actualize her mission a reconciling Church. Theologically, the Church is portrayed as the sacrament of the unity of the human nature, a sign and instrument of reconciliation, as she carries out the reconciling mission of Jesus Christ. But the Church needs to be transformed, in the light of such an honorable mission, to be a legible sign and an effective instrument. What I suggest in this last chapter are propositional provisions. They are not exhaustive, but they represent, in my view, the key areas of growth if the Church in Africa wants to respond to the mission of reconciliation entrusted to her by the Synod.

Chapter One: Framing the borders: Terms and Contexts

This first chapter draws the theoretical and contextual framework from which we will engage our argument on reconciliation. It helps identify the questions and challenges of reconciliation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and opens us to the specific way (s) of addressing them subsequently. It has two sections. The first section of the chapter is dedicated to a theoretical effort to set up conceptual borders of reconciliation as it is used in this paper. The second section is a sociological analysis of the historical conflicts in the Congo. Such an analysis is necessary in order to isolate the issues to be addressed and identify the conditions of the realization of reconciliation in the context that country.

I.1. An Overview on reconciliation

Much has been written on reconciliation and from different perspectives. But there seem to be no agreement on a common understanding of the reality. As John De Gruchy puts it, "not all Christians agree on the meaning of reconciliation, and they disagree most when it comes to relating reconciliation to the political arena."[3] Consequently, the word "reconciliation" can be subject to a diversity of meanings. That is why it appears important, at the beginning of our paper, to present our understanding of reconciliation. Under this overview on reconciliation, we first recall some related concepts, which, sometimes, are used as synonymous to reconciliation. Then, we review the theme of reconciliation in some theological works. Such a quick conceptual tour around the reality of reconciliation helps to frame the borders of the key word of our paper and, subsequently, clarify its use throughout our reflection.

[3] John W. De Gruchy, *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 19.

I.1.1. Harmonics of Reconciliation

Reconciliation has become familiar to the ordinary language and in the socio-political life. One talks about reconciliation after a family or neighborhood dispute, but also of "National reconciliation" after many years of apartheid in South Africa or after the genocide in Rwanda, for example. Beyond the continent of Africa, we refer to the reconciliation between France and Germany as the origin of the (re)construction of Europe. Around the world, peoples, races, cultures express the need for reconciliation. The aspiration to be reconciled with oneself and with one's own history is more vivid today than ever. This aspiration includes reconciliation with the nature and the creation as a whole, inviting the human beings to stop using other creatures savagely. Thus, reconciliation affects multiple relational dimensions of human life in society.

It is undeniable that the word "reconciliation" is more used in the current vocabulary than it used to be in the past. However, like any other widely used concept, the meaning of reconciliation remains fluid as there seem to be no consensus about it. And many authors have shown the imprecisions surrounding the concept while others have detected its false usages.[4] For the purpose of our argument, I would like to discuss, in this first section, the reality of reconciliation against some related concepts, terms, expressions, paradigms or images that will be further used in this paper.

The philosopher and sociologist Edgar Morin uses the French word *reliance* to express the reality of reconciliation, which can be translated as "re-linking" or "re-connecting". He states that

[4] For a brief presentation of both the imprecisions and the falsity in the usage of reconciliation, read Valiente O. Ernesto, *Liberation through Reconciliation: Jon Sobrino's Christological Spirituality* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 10-11.

living in situations of pluralism and differences, through contradictions and uncertainties, we must acknowledge that we are and will be always in in search of reconciliation.[5]

We live in a culture of communication and relatedness. The importance of the relationships and reciprocity between people is asserting itself over the primacy of the individual. The fate of individuals, peoples and continents no longer depends solely on personal or local conditioning. We are interdependent with each other politically, economically, but also for the ecological safeguard of the planet. Then new questions arise. How to reconcile globalization with individual and national interests? How can we avoid a centrifugal tendency within globalization, which leads to the exclusion of those who cannot keep up with the rhythm and who are different? How to combine the openness to the other and the search of identity proper? How, in a situation of generalized pluralism, to avoid the temptation to withdraw into “the self”, which is at the root of all forms of fundamentalism, and dare to take the risk of “the difference”? How to restore bonds after long-lasting wars and clashes?

These fundamental questions portray the “exclusion-inclusion” that characterizes our society today. Contemporary analyzes have familiarized us with the structural mechanisms of exclusion. We talk about those who are “left behind”, those who do not fit in the systems, the forgotten, “those who do not exist”. The marginalized are rejected from the center, which is composed of those who are socially integrated, to the margins of the society. The poor of today are the "excluded": the “homeless”, the “undocumented”, the “voiceless” ... who are "outside" the economic and political circuit. Consequently, these multifaceted exclusions emerge the

[5] Edgar Morin, *Introduction à la Pensée Complexe* (Paris: ESD, 1990), 32.

inevitably the social conflicts and divides that constantly threaten the peaceful living of communities.

In a society that operates on the “in-out” axis, reconciliation is an effort towards the integration and reintegration of the outsiders without erasing the peculiarities. In the attitude towards immigrants for example, and this is to apply to other forms of exclusion, instead of trying to erase the differences of the foreigner and melt it into the hosting culture, reconciliation is a challenge to facilitate the integration while respecting fundamental aspects of each culture. Thus, we approach the project of a "reconciled" society more closely.

The Belgian Sociologist, Guy Bajoit approaches reconciliation as the “dialectic of the self and the other”.[6] He considers that the social bond is a bond of sameness and otherness. Individuals are in solidarity with the same as themselves, and exchange with the others who are different from them. From this point of view, every social actor, individual or collective, knots a diversity of links composed of this dialectical game between the same and the different, between solidarity with the same and openness to otherness. Michel de Certeau[7] expresses such a project of reconciliation through the expression “union in difference”. In his understanding, living together is not about forgetting the disputes or the differences; rather, it is about seeking through conflicts and diversities the paths for a realistic openness to the other in respect of his/her own identity. Reconciliation is then, the difficult and on-going project of composition and recomposition of human and social relationships.

[6] Guy BAJOIT, *Pour une Sociologie Relationnelle* (Paris: P.U.F., 1992), 90-91.
[7] Michel De Certeau, S.J., *L’Etranger ou l’Union dans la Différence* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1991).

In this struggle for (re)conciliation, forgiveness plays the key role. Even though we think that forgiveness is the essential ground for reconciliation, we cannot overlook some synonymous uses of the two concepts, considered interchangeably as social realities and as historical forces that build humanity, beyond any consideration of religion. Speaking of forgiveness, Etty Hillesum, a young Jewish writer who died in Auschwitz in 1943, explores the many facets of it: the search for inner harmony, acceptance of one's own history, forgiveness between peoples, universal communion, and embrace of God. In it dwells this "need to cross all borders and discover the common background to all creatures, so different and opposed to each other."[8] She considers that peace is authentic and lasting only as a result individuals making peace in themselves, extirpating any feeling of hatred for any race or people, or dominating this hatred and changing it into something else, perhaps even in the long run in love.[9]

The evocation of these few harmonics of reconciliation could be extended. Appealing to them shows the complexity and the richness of the concept. At the same time, it allows us to depart from digressed and false understandings of reconciliation. Thus, reconciliation opposes any attempt to negate the differences. It is not a repression of conflicts, nor can it be understood as a soft or even hypocritical consensus, or universalism. It also resists the attempts to be shrunk into a notion with an essentially moral connotation. As envisaged here, reconciliation is approached as a dynamics of interpersonal relation which affects the multiple domains of social and even cosmic reality in which communication is played out. As a dynamics, reconciliation in history is a process, not an event. So, when we say reconciliation in this paper, we mean a

[8] Etty Hillesum, *Une vie Bouleversée: Journal 1941-1943*, trad. Ph. Noble (Paris: Seuil, 1985), 207. (The translation is mine)
[9] Ibid., 128.

dynamics, an attempt, a process of living differences, overcoming enmities, retrieving bonds of solidarity and fraternity. As we will later underline, such an attempt takes place in history, taking on all its imperfections and shortcomings.

I.1.2. Theological Insights

Following the Swiss Reformed theologian Karl Bath, the French theologian Bernard Sesboüé situates the reconciliation at the heart of his synthesis of the history of salvation. For him, revelation is God's self-communication, and the human being, is the privileged event where this free and forgiving self-communication is exemplified. From this perspective, Sesboüé considers that the biblical language of reconciliation is the most revealed foundation suited to the modern category of communication.[10] Recalling that Karl Barth entitled "Doctrine of Reconciliation" the part of his *Church Dogmatics* devoted to soteriology, he makes reconciliation the central and compelling category of the history of salvation. Reconciliation is to be (re)discovered as an expression that summarizes all the work of salvation.

The reconciliation-related themes of unity, forgiveness and peace are very present in the New Testament, but the Greek terms that are translated by "to reconcile-reconciliation" only appear fourteen times in the New Testament writings, thirteen of them in the Pauline letters. The twelve main mentions are found in the second letter to the Corinthians (5 times in 2 Cor 5: 18-21), the letter to the Romans (three mentions in Rom 5: 10-11 and one in Rom. 11:15), and those to the Colossians (twice in Col 1: 19-22) and to the Ephesians (Ep 2: 13-17). In the first to Letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 7:11), allusion is made to the reconciliation of a man and his

[10] Bernard Sesboüé, S.J., *Jésus-Christ l'Unique Médiateur. Essai sur la Redemption et le Salut,* tome II: *Les Récits du Salut*, Paris: Desclée, 1991), 278.

wife. The only other use is found in Matthew's invitation to be reconciled with one's brother before presenting the offering to God (Mt 5: 23-24).

The Greek terms are *katallassô* and *katallagè*. In captivity epistles (Philippians, Philemon, Ephesians and Colossians), the prefix *apo* is added, without changing the meaning of the word. According to the *Dictionnaire Encyclopédique de la Bible*[11], the verb *allassein* evokes the idea of exchange and reciprocity. In Latin, it is translated by the term *commercium*, with the double sense of social relation and economic exchange. According to Jacques Dupont, the fundamental meaning is that of "making other", that is, "changing" or "exchanging"[12]. It is interesting to note, however, that the word reconciliation itself comes from the Latin *conciliare* (to assemble, to agree), *reconciliare*, with the repetitive prefix, (to assemble again, to agree again). It conveys the meaning of re-establishing the links. The emphasis seems to be on the materiality of the re-established links while the Greek emphasizes the process of change or of exchange.

The Hebrew word rendered in Greek by *katallagè* is *kapar* or *kaphar* translated as "to cover", "to make atonement", "to accept".[13] It expresses the idea of producing a change in a variant relationship, from enmity to agreement or acceptance. In Gen 32-33, Jacob's project is **to cover Esau's face** before his own face, **to see Esau's face**, so that **Esau can accept his face**. Like in many African languages, the word "face" in Hebrew stands for one's presence, which expresses one's person. Thus, to see God's face is to have access to God's presence or, simply, to meet God. A person who desires to meet God's face is a person who needs God's favor, like in Ps 17 or Ps

[11] "Réconciliation", in *Dictionnaire Encyclopédique de la Bible* (Maredsous: Brépols, 1987), 1096.
[12] Jacques Dupont, O.S.B., *La Réconciliation dans la Théologie de Saint Paul* (Bruges/Paris: Publications Universitaires de Louvain/Desclée de Brouwer, 1953).
[13] David J.A. Clines, ed. *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 4: 455-457.

27. In the story of Jacob and Esau, Jacob prepares a gift with the intention to cover or appease (*kapar*) Esau's face in search of being favored (Gen 32: 20). The Hebrew word rendered by "favored" here is *nasa*, which means also "to forgive" or "to lift up".[14] He is willing to bring about change in their alienated relationship. He wants to be lifted up (back) to the dignity of a brother that he lost. One can deduce from such a nuance that the notion of "reconciliation" as we receive it in English contains a fertile tension between the otherness and the sameness in relationships. This tension must be maintained to keep the richness of the concept.

The use by Paul of "reconciliation" is quantitatively limited as compared to the number of times he uses the words "redemption", "justification" or "sanctification". However, as Dupont argues, it appears as a key word in Paul's essential passages that express the main articulations of his theology concerning the redemption and the role of Christ in the divine action of re-creating.[15] As mentioned above, reconciliation traverses the entire history of salvation, from creation to new creation united in Christ. It is current in theological settings to appropriately speak of reconciliation as a "God given reality", and "to claim that at the end, God will reconcile all things to himself."[16] Such an approach, however, while keeping its distinctiveness, should not be withdrawn from the political arena. This means that the vertical dimension of reconciliation is to be completed by its horizontal dimension, which entails the healing and restoration of relationships[17] between the alienated peoples, groups or nations.

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[14] David J.A. Clines, ed. *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 5: 758-760
[15] Ibid., 5.
[16] John W. De Gruchy, 18.
[17] Thomas Stegman, sj., "What does the New Testament say about Reconciliation?," in *Healing God's People: Theological and Pastoral Approaches*, ed. Thomas A. Kane. csp (New York: Paulist Press, 2013), 37.

Upstream of the reconciliation, there is the Covenant, God's initiative rooted in the divine desire to find in the human being a vis-à-vis and an interlocutor. Downstream, there is the gathering of all humanity and the whole created universe in Christ. Between the two, the long history of salvation is a perpetual reconciliation that we constantly receive and that we are called to construct continuously through the mediation of Christ. It is within this history that our discourse on reconciliation takes place.

The central place of the passion of Christ and, in particular, of his cross as a sacramental place of reconciliation, is affirmed here with force. It is in his passion that Jesus is the sacrament of salvation. It is in his passion, his way of life, that Jesus actually accomplishes our salvation and exercises the causal mediation of reconciliation between God and humanity, which is the object of his mission. It accomplishes what it means. Its causality is effective in so far as it is exemplary. Its causality is exercised according to a relational and interpersonal schema, that of the restoration of the amorous exchange between God and the world, which, at the same time, liberates. The characteristic of such a sacramental causality is to include in its process the moment of free response, stimulated by love.

It is in this sense that Sesboüé presents the cross as the Symbolic place of reconciliation. The cross operates by what it is, what it reveals and what it accomplishes at the same time. The cross converts the one who looks at it with faith. It converts not only the heart, but also the intelligence and the will. Finally, the cross, total communion of Jesus with the life of the humans, gives them to share in the life of God.[18] The emphasis on Jesus' passion and death on the cross

[18] Bernard Sesboüé, S.J., *Jésus-Christ l'Unique Médiateur. Essai sur la Rédemption et le Salut,* tome II: *Les Récits du Salut*, Paris: Desclée, 1991), 326.

should not undermine the reconciling mediation of his life as a whole. His preaching and parables, healings and exorcism, table fellowship and proclamation of the forgiveness of sins, the new family of disciples built upon the Twelve[19], were invitatory symbols of the reconciling Reign of God.

The interest of such a presentation of the mediation of Christ is to go beyond the notion of objective causality, which is a problem for many contemporaries, to enter into a sacramental causality which is in the order of communication. It is a relationship based on the freedom and reciprocity of the subjects. Faced with God who freely communicates with the contagious freedom of Jesus who gives the sign of divine love and human response, each person is placed before a choice: to enter or not into the offered reality, namely, reconciliation with God, the humankind and the world.

If reconciliation offers the possibility of restoring the relationships, it also establishes a new relationship between humans and implies a transformation of social reality. In Christ, we are offered the possibility of escaping from the spiral of violence and sin. Against the seemingly unavoidable sinful human structures of violence, and against the human mechanisms that generate hatred, the text of the letter to the Ephesians reminds that “he has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us” (Eph. 2: 14). Can we choose not to get into the game of hatred and violence? That is what Jesus did to anticipate the God’s Reign. As he faced the structures of hatred and violence, he chose not to enter into their game, so as to break the

[19] Thomas P. Rausch, sj., *Who is Jesus?: An Introduction to Christology* (Collegeville, Minesota: Liturgical Press. 2003), 90.

bonds of enmity between brothers. Jesus' life and death is the place of their first reconciliation. From then on, the circle of violence is broken. The perpetrators of violence do not have to fear vengeance. They are loved, forgiven by the excess of his love.

Such an event has the value of a purpose when it is compared to the history of humanity and the history of every culture. The historical life becomes a continuous endeavor of actualizing Christ's event until we complete His resurrection when we are resurrected with him and in him. Then only all things will be recapitulated in him.

The story of Jacob and Esau in the book of Genesis is one the biblical narratives that describe both historical conflicts and attempts of reconciliation. Fraternal relations are forged between brothers and sisters in the Bible; they are sometimes difficult, but become possible. In several accounts, beginning with Abel by Cain (Genesis 4: 1-16), the narratives relate relationships of love, hatred, rivalry and jealousy, murder and rape between brother and brother, brother and sister or sister and sister.

In these family conflicts, the difficult relations raise the question of the formation of identity where each one builds his own personality. Miroslav Volf synthetically identifies the ethnic and cultural conflicts as part of a larger problem of identity and otherness.[20] Certain tragic accounts, such as that of Abel and Cain, present an ambiguous love. From Jacob's account, one understands that identity is formed through the process of differentiation. Jacob's flight can therefore be interpreted as a critical step through which he "begins his journey totally alone but

[20] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abington Press, 1996), 16.

gradually forms relationships that mitigate his isolation."[21] Reconciliation is to be constructed on a critical understanding of the self as on the will to open to the other. As we will show in the synchronic analysis of Genesis 32-33, one understands that after the re-establishment of their brotherhood and the harmonization of their relations, they remained reconciled, but separated, maybe to avoid new conflicts.

Like Genesis 32-33, many other accounts in the Bible show that fraternity and peace are not given. They have to be built, and put in place by the brothers themselves. This is why reconciliation calls for a process that every member must undertake to restore broken relationships.

I.2. The historical Context: resurgence of conflicts and reconciliation attempts

Our reflection on reconciliation aims at allowing theological interpretation of a determined pastoral action. From this perspective, it is important to situate the context, our "theological milieu", from which our reflection develops. This section tries to offer both the African cultural and the historical context of the Democratic Republic of the Congo as related to the reconciliation.

I.2.1. Reconciliation process in traditional (African) society

Many African societies have records of the essential elements that helped their members to achieve lasting resolutions of conflicts that could occur in families and communities. Ajayi Adeyinka and Buhari Oluwafemi[22] have examined the patterns for conflict resolution in three

[21] Andrew R. Davis, "Wrestling Jacob in the Book of Genesis and August Wilson's Fence," *Literature and Theology*, Vol. 29 No. 1 (March 2015), 50.
[22] Theresa, Ajayi Adeyinka and Lateef, Buhari Oluwafemi, "Methods of Conflict Resolution in African Traditional Society," *African Research Review* Vol.8, Serial No. 33 (April 2014): 138-157.

traditional African societies: Yoruba, Igbo (Nigeria) and Pondo (South Africa). Ntedika Nkonde, on his part, has thoroughly analyzed the rites of reconciliation among the Yombe tribe in the Democratic Republic of Congo[23].These surveys can help identify common features that can be translated into other traditional African societies, and adapted to today's societies.

In the following pages, I describe the steps that were taken to ensure the restoration and harmonization of broken relationships. I focus particularly on the process of reconciliation and the role played by rituals to seal the fulfillment of the agreements reached. Respect for the process and its conclusions through rituals but also social integration contributed to the stability and sustainability of peace between the parties. I also examine the relevance of such practice so as to further justify their incorporation in the Church's pastoral today.

A. The essential elements of the reconciliation process in African Traditions

The existing literature on reconciliation in Africa enables us to identify several social or religious components acquired from the long ancestral tradition. Most of them still exist in everyday life and are used today in the process of reconciliation at a small scale. These elements are presented here vaguely as they will be more elaborated in the third chapter.

a. Mediation

Mediation involves people who play the role of emissary and facilitate the contact of individuals and the exchange of their point of view before and during the process of reconciliation.

[23] Ntedika, Konde, "Rites Yombe de pardon et de reconciliation," Karl Josef RIVINIUS, *Schuld, Sühne und Erlösung in Zentralafrika (Zaïre) und in der christlichen Theologie Europas.* Sankt Augustin, Steyler Verlag, 1983, p. 172- 193.

Mediation is usually initiated by the sages or elders of society, because of their accumulated experiences and wisdom. The mediators find their authority in the Bantu worldview. They are seen as visible ancestors who work on the harmonization of relationships and the growth of life in society. They are accepted as such by all the parties in conflict. Their role includes inviting and compelling, making recommendations, giving assessment, conveying suggestions, emphasizing relevant norms and rules, envisaging the situation if agreement is not reached, or repeating of the agreement already attained.[24]

b. Inclusiveness

Social life is characterized by inclusiveness and participation by all in the activities of the community. All the parties in conflict are integrated into the process of reconciliation, in the presence of their relatives and the social community. Social cohesion is concerned with integrating both victims and offenders into the community life. Family members and some representatives of the social community can speak out during the reconciliation process. The whole community therefore acts as a witness.

This "inclusiveness of the parties" reflects the importance given to resolving the conflict and the hope placed in the expected conclusions. It is based on the respect for everyone: regardless of status, each member is encouraged to participate and contribute to the development of community life. Those who feel excluded from such negotiations often disagree with the achieved conclusions.

[24] Theresa Ajayi Adeyinka and Lateef Buhari Oluwafemi, "Methods of Conflict Resolution in African Traditional Society," *African Research Review* Vol. 8 (2), Serial No. 33 (April, 2014): 150.

c. Identification of the causes of the conflict or the Pursuit of the Truth

The success of the process also depends on the proper identification of the causes of the conflict and the real interlocutors. In the discussion process under the “palaver tree”, the parties are required to speak, become aware of the reasons for the conflict and determine their main causes.

Correct identification of problems is a prerequisite for finding good solutions. When the causes are identified, it is also possible to address the real interlocutors with whom to dialogue. All actors involved in a conflict are known. It is easier to understand their claim and find the solution to their problem. This is necessary to achieve the satisfaction of each party, which is an important factor in the resolution of the conflict and the possibility of implementing the agreements reached.

d. Adjudication and Pursuit of Justice

When the truth is told, offenders are generally willing to acknowledge the wrongs done to others. It is also possible to establish individual or collective responsibilities and, where appropriate, to determine guilt. This awareness of responsibility usually reveals that the protagonists who are right also assume some of the wrongs. It is all about determining responsibilities of the parties.

The verdict is often rendered by mediators whose authority is recognized. Because of their power to represent the community, they are listened to and respected by members of society when they establish responsibilities or guilt.

The parties are led to an acknowledgment of the responsibilities and wrongs committed to others. This attitude leads the offenders to voluntarily confess their evil. This step is important because it demonstrates that the person is open to solutions and ready to collaborate in their implementation. It can also give rise to reparation.

Reparation consists of material or moral compensation for the victims or their relatives. It plays an important psychological role in relieving and alleviating the pain experienced by them. However, it cannot always fully satisfy the victims and fill, for example, the void left by the loss of a loved one.

Reparation is therefore a social duty that has a profound meaning in relation to the offender in whom it reduces the feeling of guilt. It also consoles the victim who feels valued within society. Reparation thus ensures the social reintegration of offenders and victims. However, traditional wisdom has reservations about material compensation because it can lead to an overbidding. It is an act whose value must remain mainly symbolic.

e. Forgiveness

Forgiveness involves a twofold approach that concerns both parties. Following the acceptance of responsibilities, there must be humility in the offender to ask for forgiveness and in the victim the ability to grant it for the purpose of achieving peace. Mutual forgiveness is a sign of respect, recognition and acceptance of the other. The gain of forgiveness lies in the emotional impact on oneself and on others. The request for forgiveness satisfies the victims and its acceptance relieves the offenders and reassures them about their social integration.

f. Agreement and Solemn commitment to respect for agreements

When forgiveness is acquired, the protagonists publicly demonstrate their agreement to the whole community in order to commit themselves solemnly to respect it. In the community, direct dialogue between the parties in conflict is an opportunity to express to the public, from the bottom of the heart, the will to restore relations and prevent new conflicts.

People then express a desire to develop better interpersonal relationships in everyday life and to retain the values of the culture and worldview reaffirmed in this process. This time of personal contact opens at the same time the two parties to one another. It helps rebuild the trust needed to maintain community life.

The solemn commitment is a verbal or tangible sign made in front of the community. It guarantees compliance with the agreements reached. Each person freely acknowledges the conclusions of the process and undertakes in good faith their effective application.

The protagonists feel responsible and promise to contribute to the well-being of the social community. This commitment reinforces social cohesion, increases the satisfaction of the parties and influences their attitude in new relationships.

g. Ritual and community rejoicing

The ritual marks the culmination of a successful process. The sense of reunion requires a festive meal in which the social community participates. In its traditional form, the ritual consists

in sacrificing the life of a domestic animal whose flesh is consumed during a feast to express the joy of the whole community. "Life is in the blood, and blood can save life."[25]

The ritual calms the emotions and feelings of those in conflict and strengthens social cohesion. This step responds to a community duty and restores the harmony of social bonds in the presence of God and the ancestors.

The culmination in the celebration and rituals shows the centrality played by religion in the process of reconciliation. Furthermore, it is about retrieving the wholeness of the community.[26]

B. Can the traditional process of reconciliation be adapted today?

One of the question raised by the application of the traditional processes today is their relevance and actuality. Can they be translated into contemporary language? Have they not become vestiges of the past? And since this traditional processes of reconciliation is founded on the African Traditional Religion, their relevance depends on the relevance or the persistence of the religion that founds them.

The persistence of traditional religion is evident in the behavior of the Africans. It is a shared patrimony and a substratum on which Africans graft other beliefs. As a non-missionary religion, it predisposes the Africans to embrace other religions. It continues to influence and determine the lives of many Africans, including those converted to Christianity or Islam.

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[25] John S. Mbiti, "Never Break the Pot That Keeps You Together: Peace and Reconciliation in African Religion," in "Speeches and Articles," *Universal Peace Federation* (November 2010): accessed March 15, 2017. http://www.upf.org/resources/speeches-and-articles/3226-js-mbiti-peace-and-reconciliation-in-african-religion.

[26] Conflicts break relationships in the community. And the community in African traditions is composed of the living, the dead and yet to be born. Reconciliation retrieves the broken relationships, not only among the living, but also with the dead and the unborn. For a complete understanding of the perception of community, read Bénézet Bujo, *The Ethical Dimension of Community: The African Model and The Dialogue between North and South* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1998).

Several cases are observed in the present society and show a return to or an influence of the traditional religion on the daily practices. One can still wonder whether, after having embraced Christianity, African society can still return to it.

It is true that the African religion is not practiced in a structured way like Christianity or Islam. In any case, it has never been a structured religion like "the religions of the book". Rather it exists in the oral culture of proverbs, ritual formulas, prayers and symbols. And it continues to exert great influence, as Tulu Kia Mpasu Buakasa notes: it is everywhere, in consciences, in spiritual operations, attitudes and gestures, in thoughts, images and symbols, proverbs, legends, myths, etc. Well in the country and in town, in conversations and court proceedings.[27]

Traditional religion is still observed in the behavior of Christians, Muslims and different Africans, who return to consult the diviners and call the ancestors to the rescue. Belonging to another religion does not rule out the imagination of traditional religion. African religion is therefore latent, hidden and pre-scientific. That is why Laurenti Magesa prefers the expression "way of life"[28] to express this reality. And such a way of life cannot be so easily extirpated. It resists and persists. And this persistence of the African Religion, which founds the traditional processes of reconciliation, allows us to justify their relevance today.

However, the dynamic nature of culture and societies requires adaptation and renewal of traditional reconciliation practices. In the renewal process, the symbolic meaning of each of the

[27] Buakasa Tulu Kia Mpasu, "L'impact de la Religion Africaine sur l'Afrique Aujourd'hui," Religions Africaines et Christianisme, *Colloque international de Kinshasa*, *9-14 janvier 1978* (Kinshasa: Faculté de théologie catholique, 1978), 32.
[28] Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997).

main elements is more important than its traditional form. In this adaptation, we will try to reproduce this symbolic meaning by using modern equivalents.

For Christians, it is the Gospel that illuminates their praxis. And it is possible to work out the traditional practices in the light of the Gospel to foster an African Christian model of reconciliation. And the Church, as the bearer of the Gospel message, has the task of bringing people together into the one Family of God. The Christian adaptation of the reconciliation process must be able to account for the fullness of life brought by Christ through the transformation and renewal of relationships between God and humans, and relationships among the humans. It will seek to translate this transformation into a Christian symbolism adapted to contemporary culture.

I.2.2. Conflicts and Attempts of Reconciliation in Democratic Republic of the Congo

The above sections have circumscribed the framework of our reflections in this paper. Through them, we have understood that reconciliation is God's covenantal call to which we have to respond, a task that every society and generation have to carry on. This paper proposes ways to carry on such a task in the particular context of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. But, before proposing our "model", we think it is important to look at what has been done so far and how it was done. More importantly, we look at the historical processes of conflicts' resolution and reconciliation to detect flops and reasons for their failure. By doing so, we will open the space for a new model.

The history of the Democratic Republic of the Congo reveals that this country has been and remains constantly in search of a peaceful living together. There has not been a single

moment in the history of this nation when the people of God living in it have not been troubled by turmoil. Rebellions, ethnic conflicts, and even wars have always tainted the desire and hope of the Congolese to live a reconciled life. At the same time, there have been several opportunities for this country to come together, discuss their conflicts and build new ways to go forward. Historians have reckoned over 22 post-conflict-agreements[29] signed at the national level to ensure peace and reconciliation. But all these agreements have failed as conflicts continue to tint the social and political life of the country. Why are all these agreements failing to reach their goals? We analyze these reasons under four headings in the following pages.

A. Were the Congolese prepared to live together as a nation?

Asking such a question can sound sarcastic. But I think any people living together or projecting to live together need to ask the question of whether they are prepared for such a life. And in the context of a nation, composed of several tribes and traditional kingdoms, this question becomes even more accurate.

The nation known today as the Democratic Republic of the Congo is not a homogenous entity. It is composed of approximately 250 ethnic groups. These ethnic groups did not decide to come together and form a nation. They were forced to as a result of the imperial dream of the Belgian King Leopold II, his quest for access to the rich natural resources of Central Africa, and the imperial rivalries of the European scramble for Africa.[30] Unlike other countries who happened to become free nations through historical turmoil, Congo and the African countries are results of

[29] Isidore Ndaywell è Nziem, *L'Invention du Congo Contemporain: Traditions, Mémoires, Modernités* Tome 1 (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2016).
[30] Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila: A People's History* (New York: Zed Books, 2007), 14.

sudden external decision. They did not prepare themselves to be nations as we know them today. European powers decided, following a conference held in Berlin in from November 15 1884 to February 26 1885, to share among themselves, the continent of Africa.

The Belgian King, who became the owner of Congo after the partition, played a significant role during this Conference. In fact, it was his intent to own and exploit the center of Africa that led to this unintended partition of the whole continent.[31] He was then able to assemble entire or parts of subdued Kingdoms and Empires under the same State called Etat Indépendant du Congo (Congo Free State), which later became the Belgian Congo.

As we can see, today's Democratic Republic of Congo is an assemblage of formerly strong and well organized nations, which did not decide to come together, but were imposed to form one country under the rule of some external authority. One acknowledges that such a cohabitation is fragile, and it could be presaged that it could degenerate soon or later. Living together is a matter of choice and processed decision, not of imposition.

The fragility of such unwanted living together started showing up on the national level shortly before the country gained its independence from Belgium on June 30th 1960. It was in November 1958 that the first democratic elections were organized to choose the leaders of municipalities. Until then, the whole administration was run by Belgian authorities and, and the basic organizations were ethnic. According to the Congolese historian Ndaywel, the municipal elections of 1958 aimed at creating entities administered by the Congolese themselves and

[31] Ibid., 18.

establishing the basic structure for the establishment of democratic local institutions.[32] As there were no political parties yet, the mobilization took place around the tribal federations. This led to a severe deterioration in relations between ethnic communities as the people were not ready to accept a leader coming from a different ethnic group. Consequently, the ethnic groups with no elected representatives denounced injustices and discrimination out of frustration. This resulted in the increase of hostilities and the collapse of the bonds of fraternity among ethnic groups. As Ndaywel observes, these negative consequences could have been anticipated since the tribal identities were so constitutive of the social life at that time.[33] Without judging about the goodness or the badness of such an organization, the question remains: were the people prepared to this new way of governance? Obviously, they were not, and the arising conflicts were unavoidable in such a context.

The proclamation of independence itself came as a surprise for both the Belgians and the Congolese. The former were pushed to grant independence by the uncontrollable independentist movements rising all over the country. In the late 1950s, in spite of the wind of decolonization movements that shook the African colonies, Belgians clung to their Congo. Instead, they drew a plan of independence spread over a period of 30 years. Van Bilsen, a researcher and counsellor of the Belgian government issued a long term plan for the political emancipation of the Belgian Africa. The plan described steps towards a smooth hand over of the political administration from the colonial power to the native authorities. And the latter, demanding immediate independence did not see that running a country required enough qualified personnel that the country did not

[32] Isidore Ndaywel è Nziem, *Nouvelle Histoire du Congo: Des Origines à la République Démocratique du Congo* (Kinshasa: Afrique Editions, 2008), 428.
[33] Ibid., 432.

have at that time. As René Hoffherr observes, the problem of the training of executives had not received the desirable attention as the colonial administration did not see the necessity of preparing the native Congolese officers to serve in the national administration.[34] Besides the lack of competences, the Congolese elites had no common vision of their post-independent country.

By the end of the 1950s, ethnic associations begun to organize themselves into political parties. The Congolese political elites at that time had no time to unify their views on the vision of the post-colonial Congo. Three tendencies[35] can be identified in this regard:

1. The nationalist current, consisting of national, ethnic or regional political parties, advocated the national unity of the country;

2. The conservative current, also called the moderates, with especially small rural and peasant political parties, favored collaboration and union with Belgium, which was rejected by others;

3. The secessionist movement was composed of independent and conservative parties that claimed the independence of their various territorial entities.

It was in these conditions of disparity of views that the parties were born and that the political actors headed to the 1960 "Round Table", with the idea of demanding independence in the immediate or gradual way. In this process, the general elections were organized in May 1960,

[34] René Hoffherr, "L'Avènement du Congo Belge à l'Indépendance", *http://www.persee.fr/doc/polit_0032-342x_1960_num_25_2_6134*, accessed on April 20th 2017.
[35] Georges Nzongola

to choose the Representatives of the first parliament of the future independent Congo. How could one not foresee divisions among the new leaders of the country?

As a result of such unpreparedness and diversity of views, the newly independent found itself weakened as several parts of nation proclaimed their autonomy and secession from the central government. The two main secessions were that of Katanga and Kasai regions. To see how fragile the central government was, the secession of Katanga was proclaimed only ten days, and that of Kasai two months after the declaration of the independence of the country. And six governments claimed legitimacy of power almost simultaneously and in different parts of the same country. Even if, as we will see later, these secessions had external and mainly economical backings, we hold that they are consequences of the fact that different tribal and ethnic groups forming the modern Congo were not prepared to live together in one nation. Therefore, the attempts, and there were many of them, to bring them together after the rise of open conflicts could hardly succeed.

B. Heavy hands of external forces in both the rise and the resolution of conflicts.

We have seen above that the Congo as a nation as we know it today is a result of external imperialism. Congo has always been of particular interest for the European and American powers. As Nzongola puts it, the rivalries among the major powers over Congo led them to cede this rich territory to a king of a weak and little country, Belgium, so as to maximize the chances of having Congo serve as a free-trade zone for the more developed countries.[36] But the Belgian

[36] Georges Nzongola, 18.

king took this advantage as an international triumph and as an occasion to set up his personal rule in the Congo.

This external presence never intended to leave the Congo to the Congolese even after the independence was declared. The words “after independence is like before independence”, from a Belgian military leader, fill the Congolese memories even today. They meant that the Belgians were not ready to leave the army, an important institution of sovereignty, into the Congolese hands. This declaration provoked riots among the Congolese military against their colonial hierarchy. It also served as the avowed reason for Moses Tshombe, the leader of Katanga to proclaim the secession of his region.

The central government could not handle the context of military mutiny and generalized destabilization. It called for external help and the United Nations sent troops to neutralize the angered soldiers, wipe out the secessions of Kasai, and summoned the most resistant secession of Katanga to reunite with the central government.[37] The United Nations intervened militarily to dislodge all the foreign forces, mainly the Belgian, French and even English mercenaries who supported the secession. At a certain moment, it looked like the General Secretary of the United Nations was the one running the Congo as they operated to restore the unity of the country. These operations saw the then Secretary General, Dag Hammarskjold, being assassinated on September 18 1961, during a trip from Leopoldville, the capital city of the Congo to Katanga to meet with the leader Tshombe.

[37] Though unofficially, the secession of Katanga had the support of Belgium, France and Great Britain.

Eventually, the United Nations succeeded to restore law and order, and brought the situation under control. Katanga secession ended, Tshombe returned from exile and became prime minister on July 10 1964. However, accused of fighting for power against Kasavubu, then President, he was dismissed and replaced on October 13 1965 by Evariste Kimba, his former minister in the secession of Katanga. Because of the struggles at the top of the state, Mobutu took advantage of it to make the coup. He suddenly took power by a coup on November 24 1965, dismissing Kasavubu and his Prime Minister Kimba.

Mobutu's regime began as a military dictatorship aiming at silencing the fights among politicians, overcoming rising rebellious movements and restore law and order in the country. It got rapidly transformed into an authoritarian personal rule of a single individual. Mobutu's rise resembled the King Leopold's rule. Like the Belgian King who owned the Congo for more than 20 years after being backed up by the major powerful nations in 1885, Mobutu received the support of the same powerful nations grew to become a dictator we know. He owned his rise and the astonishing longevity of his regime to external sponsorship and backing by the United States and the Western allies.[38] According to Nzongola, "it is this basic character of his regime as an externally backed autocracy that eventually led to state decay and collapse."[39]

Mobutu's distance from the popular aspirations and loyalties led to the resurgence of rebellious movements in the Katanga region at the end of the 1970s. With the help of Morroccan

[38] Georges Nzongla, 141-142.
[39] Nzongola, 142.

soldiers, supported by French, Belgian and American logistics, Mobutu was able to repeal the 2 "Shaba wars"[40] against the rebels who were backed by Angola.

Mobutu's dictatorship enjoyed external Western support on the premise that, in the context of Cold war, the Western interests in Central and Southern Africa needed to be promoted and protected. Hence, a strategically well situated country with such a diversity of ethnic groups, needed a "strongman" to keep it together and prevent it from the chaos, and from potential communist subversion and takeover.[41]

At the end of the Cold War, the international configuration had changed and internal frustrations had increased. After 25 years of dictatorship under a single political party, Mobutu was summoned by his external allies to open up the political space to promote democracy in his country. Following these pressures, the process of democratization began and a Nation Conference was convened put in place a new Constitution and establish the institutions leading to the new democratic era. 2,842 delegates gathered, and adopted a provisional constitution. While the Congolese people saw in such a gathering the hope to begin a reconciled national life, "the international community chose to follow Mobutu in not recognizing these decisions as sovereign and binding on all the parties. It chose to ignore them."[42] The peaceful and non-confrontational transition did not go smoothly as intended.

After the failure of the National Sovereign Conference, "the cycle of the Great Lakes" began. The Rwandan war in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide moved to Congo-Zaire to become

[40] Under Mobutu regime, Congo changed the name to become Zaire, and the Provinces and Regions also received new names. Thus, Katanga became Shaba.
[41] Georges Nzongola, 160-161.
[42] Nzongola, 1.

a liberation war in 1996-1997, bringing Laurent Désiré Kabila to power after chasing Mobutu.[43] Very soon the new leader of the Congo tried to escape the influence of his Rwandan and Ugandan allies and sponsors. The initiative soon led to the rise of the "First African World War", opposing the former sponsors of Kabila on the one hand, and the Zimbabwean, Angolan and Namibian armies on the other. In all, a little more than half a dozen different armies crossed the line in this war. An apparent peace came only after an international intervention through the United Nations.

The consensus decreed from above (under the aegis of the United Nations) through a series agreements of Lusaka, Sun City and Pretoria only exacerbated a war that is in no hurry to fade definitively, all the more so because it maintains an atmosphere so favorable to the deployment of the mafia activities, which have produced a series of rebellions.[44] From 1997 to the present day, scenes of vile violence have continued to accumulate: massacres of civilians, burning of villages, burial of living persons, systematic rape of women, recruitment of children, deportations, torture and mutilation of prisoners. And this instable situation is said to necessitate the permanent presence of the United Nations through different missions since 1999. And the successive accords and agreements to resolve the conflicts, as we will further see, seem to rely

[43] In the aftermath of the genocide in 1994, and after the fall of the regime in Rwanda, numbers of refugees fled to the neighboring Congo in the Kivu regions. Among them were the former Rwandan dignitaries and perpetrators of the genocide, who are accused of planning to relocate their regime on the Congolese soil, so that they could regroup and reconquer Rwanda with the risk of them continuing their genocidal enterprise. The New Tutsi regime in Rwanda decided then to attack and annihilate the threat on the Congolese soil. This is how the "war of liberation" started. For more deatails, read Georges Nzongola, *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila: A People's History*, 219-225.

[44] Isidore Ndaywell è Nziem, *L'Invention du Congo Contemporain: Traditions, Mémoires, Modernités*. Tome I, 159-160.

more on this external presence than on a true encounter between the Congolese people themselves.

The heavy external hands have played an ambiguous role in the "living together" of the Congolese. They have created the conditions of conflicts and, at the same time, have proposed solutions to the crisis. We have seen their support to the secessions. But we have also seen how the colonial rule created ethnic differentiations and exploited them to promote and maintain inter-ethnic conflicts. The most pathetic example of this "divide-and-rule" policy is the differentiation process among the Luba people in the Kasai region. The colonial rulers divided them into two groups (Luba and Lulua), each group being stereotyped. The first (Luba) were stereotyped as "progressive" and "hardworking", in contrast to the Lulua who were said to be "conservative" and "lazy".[45] Hence, they did not receive the same treatment and consideration from the colonizers. And this discriminatory treatment could only create jealousy and hatred resulting in conflicts between the two groups. And in proposing solutions to the existing conflicts, they search to protect their interests rather than promoting proper reconciliation. The example of Mobutu who enjoyed the support of the US, Belgian and France to protect the Western interests regardless of the way he governed is more than eloquent.

C. *The prioritization of the Military and Political approaches to the resolution of conflicts*

We have seen that the unpreparedness of the Congolese to live together as a nation and the heavy external hands in provoking and proposing solution to the conflicts make it difficult for reconciliation to happen. A third characteristic of the conflicts' resolution processes that we

[45] Georges Nzongola, 103.

underline is that these processes have almost exclusively adopted either a military or a political approach.

We have recalled in the previous pages the military role played by the UN forces in neutralizing the secessions and rebellious movements around the independence of the Congo. At the same period, there have been conclaves and conferences that failed one after another. The political approach to resolving conflicts privileges grievances expressed by (ethnic or political) groups who feel marginalized or repressed. In this case, conflict resolution is the resignation of repression or the social integration of marginalized people in the form of the occupation of political posts by the leaders of these groups. This form of reconciliation has shown its limits because conflicts always arise, sometimes with the same demands. However, the grievances, as Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffer[46] suggest, are secondary in the production and maintenance of conflicts. One has to consider primarily the "greed" approach, which considers the economic constraints as the primarily causes of conflicts.

In fact, in the repeated conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo, it was the economic and strategic imperatives that served as the matrix for the multiple cycles of violence identified. This singular situation is beautifully expressed by the Belgian historian David Van Reybroeck[47] when he says that over the past 150 years, whenever the international market has expressed an urgent demand for a certain raw material, the Congo has proven to have gigantic reserves of the coveted raw material: ivory at the time of the queen Victoria, the rubber after the invention of

[46] Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffer, "Greed and Grievance in Civil War", *Working Paper Series* (Oxford: Centre for Studies of African Economies, 2002).
[47] David Van Reybroeck, *Congo: Une Histoire* (Paris: Actes Sud, 2012)

the inflatable tire, copper during the strong industrial and military expansion, uranium during the Cold War, the alternating current during the oil crisis of the 70s, coltan in the era of the Mobile telephony. On a permanent basis, this sad privilege is at the root of unusual violence.

The history of the Congo is akin to a long history of “harvesting” since the 17th century since the Berlin Conference: harvesting ivory, rubber, palm oil, coffee, and cotton; harvesting copper, tin, cobalt, uranium, diamond, up to the recent one of cassiterite, coltan, and gold. From one predation to the next, from the policy of the plantations to that of the mining factories, the constant “useful Congo” only changes its form and its geographical focus.

The useful Congo would not have ceased to change its geographical identity, according to the whims of the international market, featuring sometimes one product, sometimes another. At the end of the 19th century, the west and north of Congo served the interests of the world with the gathering of their agricultural products. The terror set up in the Independent State of the Congo by king Leopold was only a technique of maximizing production. Then for many decades, the useful Congo was relocated to Katanga-Kasai because of cobalt, copper, tin, uranium and diamond. Nowadays, it has spread widely, from North Kivu to the south of Katanga.[48]

In this evolutionary pattern, violence would always have been imposed as the consequence of the need to maximize production, in order to best meet external demand. It is not surprising, therefore, that the regime of terror and violence has experienced a certain form of circulation, and that it has almost always coincided with the succession of "useful Congos",

[48] Isidore Ndaywel è Nziem, *L’Invention du Congo Contemporain: Traditions, Mémoires, Modernités*. Tome I (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2016), 165.

focusing on the space of the coveted product. First, the coast in the 17th and 18th centuries, because of the slaves, the regime of terror was then lodged in the forest area from Kasai to Mongala and from the Upper Congo River to the Lomami because of the Ivory and rubber in the 19th century. Then it was the space of palm oil and cotton such as the Kwilu, the land of the Pende revolt, then the Katanga, a paradise of mining and the Kasai as the granary of Katanga in the 20th century. Finally, nowadays, the Kivu and Ituri, which have made a shocking entry into the news of the tumultuous history of Congo, both as spaces of violence and as a market for natural resources.

It is impossible to make an inventory of the forms of the subsequent violence, which have been produced as a consequence of this economic system. They are more important than at first sight. Only the principle of the harvesting the raw material and mineral resources has introduced inequalities between regions of the country because of the discriminatory establishment of colonial infrastructures. These inequalities have led to inter-communal tensions, which are still perceptible in the Congolese political landscape, including today. The roots of contemporary ethnic violence, thus, lies in the attempts to counteract and correct these inequalities.

That is how far the policy of exporting natural resources has been. Not only has it systematically used the practice of terror; but it has paved the way for intercommunity tensions, nowadays instrumentalized in political practice in the country. Moving out of this permanence of violence presupposes an incontestable effort to take this economic aspect seriously as a starting point for reconciliation efforts.

The first chapter has provided us with the language and the context from which we build our theological discourse. It has circumscribed the meaning of reconciliation, both as covenantal and eschatological reality as well as a historical endeavor. Thus, living in a conflicted world, reconciliation is a task. Reconciliation, we have reminded in the first section, is central in the salvation history. Every people and every generation are called to actualize the covenantal call of reconciliation in their contexts and according to their challenges. And the second section of the chapter has analyzed the conflictual context of the Congo and how the people of God living in that context are trying to actualize God's call for reconciliation. Hopefully, we have isolated the approaches that hinder the success of the processes undertaken by the Congolese to achieve peace and reconciliation for their nation. Having understood the nature of the successive conflicts and the failures in the attempts to achieve peace, the space is open for a new approach. But before discussing the reconciling mission of the Church in the described context, our next step in chapter two consists in exploring the scriptural text that we have chosen as a paradigm for the process of reconciliation.

Chapter Two: Genesis 32-33 as paradigm for reconciliation

The first chapter has provided with the language and the theoretical framework as well as with the context from which we develop our discourse on reconciliation. We have learned that historical reconciliation is initiated by God, effected through human beings, and accomplished through them by God. We have also learned that we are to actualize God's call for reconciliation within our conflicted world. The subsequent question is "how do we respond to such a call in our history"? The next two chapters are a proposal to the way we can actualize God's invitation. In this second chapter, we seek to identify features that can inform the reconciliation processes in the context of the Democratic Republic of Congo in particular, and in Africa in general. We use Genesis 32-33 as an example of how in history, people have tried to overcome their estrangement to retrieve the bonds of fraternity. Thus, what helped them in their recovery can also help our societies today. It can be used as a template or a reference for our own processes of reconciliation. The chapter contains two main sections. The first section discusses why we think that Genesis 32-33 is a paradigm of reconciliation. And in the second section, we identify features that made possible the process of reconciliation between Jacob and Esau, and that can be used in subsequent models.

II.1. Why is Genesis 32-33 a paradigm of reconciliation?

I have chosen Genesis 32-33 as a paradigm of reconciliation with the awareness that some commentators doubt the quality or sincerity of reconciliation as contained in the story.[49] Their argument is that their process of reunion, ending with separation of two brothers at the end of

[49] Sheldon Lewis, *Torah of Reconciliation* (Jerusalem: Gefen Publishing House, 2012), 88.

their encounter (Gn 33, 12-17), indicates a failure of reconciliation, after a simple and superficial fraternization. While others, relying on the progression of the narrative and the details that confirm the ending of hostilities and enmity within the Cycle of Jacob (Gen 25-37), maintain that reconciliation has been a success.

Alfred Agyenta discusses these two approaches and concludes that some narrative details dissipate the doubt expressed by some commentators.[50] Jacob's astute refusal to go with Esau is a sign that reconciliation has not reached its peak. The two brothers harmonized their brotherhood, but because of their separation, they did not succeed in concluding a true reconciliation. To reply to such an argument, one could argue that reconciliation goes beyond the immediacy of a visible relationship. Reconciliation between Jacob and Esau does not necessitate them to have a dwelling in the same area. As we can recall, sharing the same space (in their mother's womb or in the same household) has been an occasion of competition, thus, of conflicts between Jacob and Esau.

Following the struggles linked with the sharing of the same space, we can infer that the choice to live in distinct dwellings could have responded rather to the need to preserve the space and identity of each of the brothers. The example of Abraham and Lot (Gen 13: 5-13), then that of Jacob and Laban (Gen 31: 44-55), show that distinct dwellings preserve and reinforce the relations and prosperity of the affairs of the members of the same family, each with his/her own territory. Thus, rather than denying it, distinction becomes a means to sustain reconciliation.

[50] Alfred Agyenta, "When Reconciliation Means more than the Re-Membering of Former Enemies: The Problem of the Conclusion to the Jacob-Esau Story from a Narrative Perspective (Gen 33, 1-17)," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 83/1 (2007), 123-134.

Moreover, the fear experienced by Jacob led him to offer gifts which helped to calm the anger of Esau. Jacob brings his brother Esau the benefits of the blessing he had gained. In a process of reconciliation, as we will see further, these goods given by Jacob also play the role of a reparation for the harm done to the victim. Jacob also shows deference by identifying himself as a servant of his “lord Esau”. Instead of Esau prostrating, Jacob and all his family did. Following this attitude, Esau sets no conditions for reconciliation. He returned calmly to Seir, hoping that Jacob would join him.

At the end of the dialogue, Esau went to Seir, and Jacob came in peace to Shechem. In his new situation, Jacob bought a land, planted his tent and erected an altar for the worship of his God. Jacob is developing his new community in peace. Esau, who was planning to take revenge on his brother after their father's death, now abandoned his plan. He granted him the favor needed, forgave the frauds, and accepted his thanksgiving. The story also confirms that the two brothers collaborated in the funeral of their father (Gen 35:29). Esau is no longer angered, nor does he announce the evil intentions against Jacob. According to Rebecca's prediction (Gen 27: 44, 45), Esau's anger subsided, especially as a result of various elements of the process of reconciliation.

The reunion of Jacob and Esau, situated within the broader context of the Cycle of Jacob, helps to dissipate the doubt about the genuineness of the process of reconciliation. The openness to dialogue, the willingness to share their wealth, the appeasement of anger, and, above all, the collaboration after the death of their father, signify the willingness of the estranged brothers to overcome their enmity and recover the lost bonds of brotherhood. We hold this position while acknowledging the incompleteness and the imperfection of Jacob-Esau reconciliation. In fact, any

historical response to God's call to reconciliation remains imperfect and partial until the day "when all things will be subdued to him, …, and God will be all in all" (1 Cor 15, 28). We hold that the account of Genesis 32-33 provides us with an example of a process of reconciliation anchored in a spiritual vision, with the participation of God and human beings.

II.2. Reconciling features in Genesis 32-33

This section is central to our work. It identifies the countenances and contents that form the structure of reconciliation between Jacob and his brother Esau. However, before elaborating on these features, it would be useful to affirm that they are structured upon some foundations that I consider as conditions of possibility for the process of reconciliation.

II.2.1. Conditions of possibility for the process of reconciliation

Under the expression "conditions of possibility", we understand the set of factors that constitute the framework or the background necessary for the process of reconciliation to happen. In this section, we identify these necessary and fundamental elements that facilitated the encounter between Jacob and Esau and enabled the reconciliation process to reach its goal. I identify two fundamental features that are necessary matrix for reconciliation. The first one is God's intervention and the second one is human genuine self-awareness.

II.2.1.1. God's intervention in the process of reconciliation

The narrative is marked by God's active presence, which confers the theological character to the narrative and makes it possible for the brothers to reconcile. Throughout the cycle of Jacob, we see God's action expressed through God's intervention in the relations of Jacob and Esau and in the relations He/She keeps with them. God's active intervention in the narrative is

manifested in the promises of God (Gn 28: 13-15; 31: 3), the angelophany (Gn 32: 2-3), the prayer of Jacob (Gn 32: 10-13), the struggle of Jacob against the unknown person (Gen. 32: 25-30).

At Bethel, Jacob experienced the presence of God. He promised to adore God if he allows him to return to his country (Gen. 28:21). God intervened in such a way that the return of Jacob in Canaan, near Esau, begun with the harmonization of the relations with him. At Mahanaim (32, 1-2), God sent messengers to Jacob. At the ford of Jabbok, Jacob's struggle with the unknown man has a spiritual impact on him. Jacob understood that he met God face to face and that his life was preserved (Gen 32:30). He experienced a moral and spiritual transformation before meeting Esau. It is with his new identity of Israel that he was able to meet Esau. For the reader, Jacob's home return is a culmination of the promise announced in Gen 31. 3: "Return to the land of your ancestors and to your kindred, and I will be with you." An analeptic also parallels the promise made to his father Abraham: "I will give this land to your posterity." (Gen 12: 7). This return indicates the presence of God in his steps. Hence, he can now erect an altar and adore his God as Abraham did. The theology of reconciliation drawn from the narrative conceives reconciliation as initiated and animated by God, and can be displayed only within the intersection of the human and the divine.

God's presence plays the role of informing, challenging, transforming and assuring. It functions, same as Jon Sobrino's theologal dimension, as a grounding and energizing principle. It affirms that the reality "is both imbued with God's presence and rooted in God."[51] Such an understanding of reality as imbued with God's presence reminds one of the key features on the

[51] Ernesto O. Valiente, *Liberation through Reconciliation: Jon Sobrino's Christological Spirituality* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 75.

Traditional African Religion: "God is a God who sees all, is present in all, and acts in all circumstances of life."[52] In other words, there is no aspect of life that can be kept outside God's realm. To use Laurenti Magesa's words, there is no way one can separate the sacred and the profane in the traditional African mindset. He argues that, the universe, as a whole, is a "divine milieu."[53] So, even if certain natural elements might enjoy a more concentration of the sacred power, the diffusion of the divine presence throughout existence, in human and natural events, and activities must be acknowledged.

Such an approach of the universe as inhabited by God's presence has been mistakenly categorized as "pantheism" or "animism". But it is clear that it does not confuse God with the creatures, nor does it give a "soul" to every inanimate creature. Rather, it acknowledges every creature as well as the whole reality as capable of revealing God because they are grounded in God. It is against this divine grounding of reality that humans confront their conflictual and sinful reality. Thus, they are challenged and they feel invited to live a "more" harmonious and peaceful life.

In a conflicted nation like the Democratic Republic of Congo the call for a more harmonious society must be made more insistent through the promotion of a culture of reconciliation. By culture, we mean the set of tools, customs, societal structures, ideas about reality, and representations of ideas that nurture, shape one's worldview.[54] A culture of reconciliation requires to nurture and foster openness, dialogue, and a dynamic of understanding

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[52] Agbonkhiameghe E. Orobator, *Theology Brewed in an African Pot* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Book, 2008), 143.
[53] Laurenti Magesa, *What is Not Sacred?: African Spirituality* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Book, 2013), 167.
[54] Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, "Reconciliation: An Intrinsic Element of Justice," in *Explorations in Reconciliation: New Directions in Theology*, eds. David Tombs and Joseph Liechty (Aldershot/Burlington: Ashgate, 2006), 83-84.

differences. It requires to promote a perception of the world based on encounter, rather than exclusion, competition or confrontation. African theologians uses the African expression *Ubuntu* to portray such a worldview. The argument is that life is to be shared, not to be competed upon. One cannot flourish alone.

The *Ubuntu* makes it clear that there is a continuous interactions between the humans, and these interactions makes possible the welfare of individuals as well as the welfare of the community of humans as a whole. Hence, the human persons complement each other and prolong each other to the extent that one cannot exist outside of this connection and this interdependence. The Christian tradition expresses this in terms of communion within the creation. Pope Francis contends that "this is the basis of our conviction that, as part of the universe, called into being by one Father, all of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion which fills us with sacred, affectionate and humble respect."[55]

Denis Edwards speaks of the "community of creation"[56] to express such a reality. At the same time, he notices that human beings are torn between self-interest and the tendency to cooperation. The penchant to self-interest, identified as original sin, considers the others as the outsiders, and is in perpetual conflict with the original grace which leads to cooperation. In this sense, a genuine ethics, receptive to the original grace, has to reach to the outsiders, beyond the insiders. What is at stake here is the common flourishing of the universe: together we flourish,

[55] Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 89.
[56] Denis Edwards, "Humans and Other Creatures: Creation, Original Grace, and Original Sin", in *Just Sustainability: Technology, Ecology, and Resource Extraction,* eds. Christiana Z. Peppard and Andrea Vicini (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Book, 2015), 164.

and together we decline. Promoting such a culture would not only confront the on-going conflicts, mistrusts, enmities and divisions, but also shape people's identities.

II.2.1.2 Identity formation as differentiation

I have just suggested, in the conflicted setting of the Democratic Republic of Congo, to promote the *ubuntu* worldview, which presupposes the existence of a common fabric of which we are made or a "pre-scientific" solidarity among human beings. Such a culture, we have argue, would shape reconciling identities, following the axiom that a reconciling culture would shape reconciling identities. We also acknowledge that forming identities is a complex process. Following Miroslav Wolf, we argue in this section that Identity is formed through the process of differentiation. Exclusion is the distortion of this process. Reconciliation is to be constructed on a critical understanding of the self as on the will to open to the other.

Volf's argument is that the way one thinks of his/her identity determines the quality of his/her relationship with the others. Thus, the question: how should situated selves understand their identity so as to relate harmoniously to those who are different? Volf finds in the creation account in Genesis the model for constructing our identities. He uses the term "differentiation" to exemplify that the formation of identity is not only a process of "taking in and taking out", but also it implies "separating-and-binding". Hence, he suggests that identity is not self-enclosed, isolated. Rather, it entails difference, connectedness, and heterogeneity. In other words, identities are not static and monolithic. They are dynamically constructed, interconnected and interdependent. Identity is a result of the distinction from the other and the internalization of the relationship to the other (66). In the account of Jacob and Esau, it is interesting to note that the call to go back (Gen 31: 3) and his willingness to appease Esau emerged after they were

separated for fear of murder (Gen 27: 43-45). Thus, the same process of "separating-and-binding" that Volf identifies in the account of creation can also be applied here. Conflictual before being separated (in their mother's womb and in the same household), the two estranged brothers remembered that they belong together after they had lived distinctly from one another.

While living undifferentiated, they saw themselves as competitors. A closer look at some of the narrative elements help identify the causes of the conflict. Following Isaac's many prayers, Rebecca, the barren woman, conceived. The oracle confirms the presence of two children and announces the relationships between the two: "the elder will serve the younger" or "the elder the younger will serve[57]" (Gen 25: 23). At this twin birth, the narrator adds the surprise of an unusual birth: Jacob is born holding the heel of Esau, as if to supplant[58] his brother (Gn 25: 24-26). The rivalries between the two brothers revolve around the birthright and the stealing of the paternal blessing. Jacob, the second born, does not have a right to the paternal blessing, reserved for the elder. The sale of the birthright of Esau against a dish of stew becomes the trigger of the conflict. Further, Jacob astutely obtains the paternal blessing with the complicity of his mother. The stealing of the father's blessing provoked the rivalry between Jacob and Esau.

Esau is the most wounded principal figure. His efforts resulted in a kind of counter-blessing (Gen 27:39, 40). In the narrative, the lightness with which he sold his birthright is emphasized by the narrator (Gn 25:34). The tension, begun in the womb of their mother,

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[57] Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "The Emergence of Jewish Biblical Theologies," in *Jews, Christians, and the Theology of Hebrew Scriptures*, eds. Alice Ogden Bellis and Joel S. Kaminsky (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 115.
[58] In Hebrew, *Yaaqob* is a close to the word *aqeb*, "heel". The verb *aqab*, "grasping the heel" also means, figuratively, "to supplant or "to usurp". Jacob holds the heel of his brother Esau at birth. He is the supplanter, as Esau says: Is it because he calls himself Jacob, that twice he has supplanted me? (Gen 27:36). See *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 2007), 784.

increases. As a result of threats and fear of his brother's vengeance (Gn 27:41), Jacob enjoys the help of his parents to flee to his uncle Laban where he will remain for twenty years (Gen. 31:38, 41). Jacob married Leah and Rachel, the eldest and younger of his uncle (Gen 29: 15-30). He has a descent and acquires a considerable fortune at (Gen 30: 43). Then, at the command of God, Jacob must return to his own country (Gen 31: 3).

We can assert that this separation participated in the process of identity formation through differentiation, and the two estranged brothers became aware of their “porous” boundaries as necessary for further living together. Before their differentiation, Jacob and Esau conceived life as a competition, each trying to overtake the other. Identities become or can become murderous when they are conceived in a tribal way, opposing “us” to “them”, favoring a partial and intolerant, exclusive and excluding.

As we shall see later in Gen 33, 9-11, the blessing they were fighting for in an exclusive way over birthright (Gen 25: 24-34), God makes it is inclusive. When God blesses Jacob, he also does it with Esau: therefore the God of Jacob is also the God of Esau. Both brothers are blessed socially and materially by increasing their descent and wealth, and spiritually through the transformation of their lives and attitudes. And God’s blessing is regardless of human principles, and goes beyond moral merit.

In such a process of differentiation, exclusion appears as deviation, which contradicts the “separating-and-binding” fundamentals. It does not take into account the interconnectedness of the self and the other, as it consecrates the separation, the cutting off the connecting bonds. The practice of exclusion is the distortion of the differentiation, a search for “purity”, a will to push

others “out of our world” through assimilation, domination, ejection, indifference or abandonment.

In a world where exclusion is the most prominent expression of identities, Volf’s approach offers the insight that reconciliation is founded on a critical appropriation of identities. Distance, departure, de-centering are the categories he uses to show how critical perception of one’s cultural identity would not only lead to relativize and desacralize the culture, but also create a space to receive the other. Reconciliation, then, presupposes the refusal to exclude and the willingness to embrace everybody. In such a framework, even the enemy and the wrongdoer are not excluded.

We have seen how conflicts and divisions are designed around ethnicity, a concept used by Western anthropologists and colonial administration to categorize groups and enforce divisions among them. The “Tutsi-Hutu” conflicts, for example, which ended in the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, are in large part the result of this colonial specifications. They were told they came from different ancestors, and belonged to two different groups of peoples: the Tutsis were Nilotic and the Hutus were Bantous. And with these differences, came the typology of economic and political activities. The Hutus were to occupy the intermediate positions on the social pyramid as agriculturists and clients, while the Tutsis, described as pastoralist and nomad, were considered chiefs and nobles.[59] The Hutu, larger in number, could not accept to be governed by the Tutsis, while the noble Tutsis would despise Hutu’s leadership.

[59] Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, 217.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo the most famous example comes from the "Baluba-Lulua" conflict. Up to 1870, there was only one tribe called "Luba", made of several groupings and chiefdoms. The colonial administration came to identify a portion (groupings who lived in the valley of River Lulua) as Lulua through the process of land and labor policies.[60] In this "differentiation" process, the Luba were categorized as "progressive" and "hardworking" while the Lulua were stereotyped as "conservative" and "lazy". It goes without saying that the first enjoyed political and economic privileges while the others felt despised by the Colonial administration. Such a situation could only nurture the conflicts between the two tribes, providing direction for the cleansing of the Luba in 1959-1960 by the Lulua.[61]

These examples serve to show how the deviated identity constructions can become murderous. And in the case of many African countries, these constructions have been imposed by external causes. A proper identity formation needs to be fostered as a condition of possibility for the process of reconciliation.

II.2.2. Main Reconciling Features in the process of reconciliation between Jacob and Esau

The previous section has provided us with the conditions *sine qua non* of our processes of reconciliation. They represent the fertile terrain from which we can expect to grow our processes of reconciliation. In this section, we reflect on the ingredients that are necessary for a promising process of reconciliation.

II.2.2.1. Willingness and openness to dialogue

[60] Ibidem, 103.
[61] Ibidem, 104.

Through God's invitation and after a time of separation from his brother, the desire for reconciliation is evident in Jacob and Esau, as well as in certain third persons who are concerned with restoring family relationships. At different levels, both the protagonists and the third personages express their desire to seek the solution to the conflict that threatens the cohesion of the family and jeopardizes the fulfillment of God's promise.

Jacob's willingness and openness to dialogue can be identified through the sending of messengers to Esau (Gen 32: 4-6). By sending his messengers to his brother and giving them a reassuring message, Jacob seems to manifest to his brother a desire for rapprochement in their relations. This initiative begins a process of reconciliation, because Esau can see in this approach a sign of openness on the part of Jacob and a willingness to resume contact and dialogue. The fact that Jacob speaks to him as "my lord" and that he designates himself as "your servant" or "slave" is probably more than a form of politeness: this suggests a kind of submission of Jacob to his elder brother or Jacob's deference for appeasement.[62] This element could contribute to the appeasement of Esau's anger and his desire for vengeance, since it seems to indicate the recovery by Esau of his lost (stolen) precedence over Jacob. Esau, the victim, is offered the possibility to play the central role in the announced process of reconciliation. Jacob thus seems to solicit the favor of his brother to make a peaceful return to the land of Canaan. As an elder and a lord, Esau can effectively facilitate the return of his brother.

By placing Jacob's message of "finding favor" in the eyes of his brother and restoring peaceful relations with him, the narrator suggests that the real issue of the narrative is the

[62] Robert Ignatius Letellier, *Creation, Sin and Reconciliation: Reading Primordial and Patriarchal Narrative in the Book of Genesis* (Cambridge: Scholars Publishing, 2015), 183.

restoration of brotherhood between Jacob and Esau. According to Jacob thus solicits the "favor" or "grace" of Esau as it would be obtained from God. Such an attitude "reinforces Jacob's deep but fearful hope for reconciliation."[63] It prepares the peaceful encounter of the estranged brothers. And the steps that Jacob subsequently undertakes bear witness to his desire to seek a return and appease his wronged brother. Similarly for Esau, when he learns that Jacob is on his way home, he sets out to meet him (Gen. 32: 7). Even if the reason for his coming is not clearly announced, he is also preparing to meet Jacob.

The willingness to reconcile is a fundamental element in this process where Jacob, who returns to Canaan, can live near his brother Esau. With such a will, several paths are possible to resolve the conflict and restore broken relationships. After all, reconciliation can be pursued only if alienated parties accept to meet, facing each other, talking to each other, listening to each other. This is the hard task that Jacob is trying to pursue: to create the space for encounter. Opening such a space of confrontation and conversation "makes it possible for us to see ourselves and to see the other [], to explore the possibilities of overcoming and transforming the past."[64]

The approaches of Jacob and Esau constitute a model of will that challenges the estranged groups, as well as the political leaders in the Democratic Republic of Congo, who often, do not show their willingness to end conflicts. Peace negotiations and approaches to reconciliation fail because of the lack of such a proper disposition. Several agreements signed to restore peace are subsequently violated before their implementation, leading to more violent and murderous

[63] Ibidem.
[64] John W. de Gruchy, *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 149.

conflicts in proportions. Some leaders sometimes take advantage of conflicts. When the situation of peace degenerates because of hostilities, the protagonists benefit from certain advantages of war: politically, they reach power and economically, they enrich themselves to the detriment of the population whose interests they claim to defend.[65]

Without the space for dialogue, it becomes impossible to initiate the process of reconciliation. As John De Gruchy states, "opening up the space in between, drawing us into the confrontation and conversation, is the art of reconciliation at work, the taking of the first step."[66] Sometimes the dialogue clarifies the differences, presuppositions or visions of the world. The willingness and openness of all the parties to meet and discuss has an impact on the application of the results of a reconciliation and makes possible the implementation of the conclusions of the resolution of rivalries. It is precisely through dialogue that Jacob and Esau were able to clarify their intentions, and to re-orient them in order to achieve reconciliation.

It is worth noticing how in the meeting process between Jacob and Esau, there is no mention of their parents. One recalls that the conflict of the two brothers was instilled by their parents' preferences: Rebecca preferred Jacob while Isaac loved Esau (Gen 25: 28). These dividing preferences resonate with the tribal and ethnic divisions created by the colonial administration in the African countries. We have mentioned above some of these divisions in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In such a context, the paths to reconciliation are linked to the ability of the estranged groups to create meeting spaces far from the influence of external forces.

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[65] Patricia Daley, "Challenge to Peace: Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region of Africa," *Third World Quaterly* 27, no. 2 (2006), 303-319.
[66] John De Gruchy, 149.

II.2.2.2. Forgiveness

In this narrative, forgiveness can be situated in the interplay of the favor searched for by Jacob and granted by Esau. In soliciting Esau's favor, Jacob at the same time thinks of the possibility of obtaining forgiveness for the wrongs he has done to him.[67] Forgiveness is in itself a process. It is undertaken by Jacob and will be granted by Esau. It is Jacob the offender who makes the request for forgiveness and reconciliation. This demand also implies the willingness of Esau, the victim, to renounce vengeance and respond positively to the offender's initiative. It is in this interplay that reconciliation is taking place. The central role played by the victim is here underlined. In fact, reconciliation depends on the appeasement of Esau, the victim and on the favor he is willing to grant to his offender.

Jacob's request for forgiveness is implicitly expressed in the corporal gestures and present deeds to Esau. The favor and forgiveness of the latter are depicted in his renunciation of vengeance and a warm welcome to his brother. The narrative lacks an explicit reference in which Jacob confesses and makes a formal request for forgiveness. But the symbolic gesture sometimes replaces speech: Jacob's gestures are as eloquent as words.

The narrator highlights the prostration of Jacob seven times on earth (Gen 33: 3), as a significant gesture in a process of reconciliation. In this case, Jacob's way of confessing and asking for forgiveness, and even Esau's reply, is not formal, as it is encountered in certain other processes of reconciliation where they are clearly expressed. However, the request is accepted: Esaü's pardon is granted and enmity is overcome. The process arrived at the same result of

[67] Claus Westerman, *Genesis 16-50*, 525.

reconciliation without requiring an excessive trial to Jacob. The narrator here shows the ability of Esau to forgive the grudges and the wrongs done to him gratuitously.

In Gen 33: 9-11, Jacob compares the face of God and the face of Esau. This comparison has given rise to a variety of interpretations and commentaries. In line with Jacob's history of ruse, some have seen in such a speech a simple flattery (Gunkel) or a speech meant to persuade Esau (Petersen). Others interpret the meeting with Esau the continuation of Jacob's encounter with God (Fokkelman).[68] For us, the transformation Jacob has gone through after his encounter in Jabbok and the fact that Esau has "enough" (Gen 33: 9) put in balance the flattery thesis in favor of an expression of thanksgiving for the mercy he has enjoyed from God and from Esau.

Jacob saw God face to face, he survived by an exceptional favor. He was also able to see his brother face to face and survive thanks to the welcome of Esau and his forgiveness which testify to a gratuity similar to that of God. It is in recognition of this that he asks that Esau accept the present, which will confirm his favorable reception and his forgiveness of the wrongs caused. In speaking of Esau, who welcomed him, Jacob uses a verb also used for a pleasing or appeasing sacrifice: this term describes God who receives favorably the sacrifice from the hands of humans (Lv 1: 4, 7. 18, 19. 7).[69] Esau cannot really deny such a gesture of thanksgiving. Theologically, one might admit that if the sacrifice played the role of appeasing an angered king, it becomes an expression of gratitude, a thanksgiving for the favor received from the graceful God. Jacob's perception of his relationship with Esau (and with God) seems to evolve. His gift changes the

[68] Bradford A. Anderson, "The Intersection of the Human and the Divine in Genesis 32-33," *ZAW 2016*, 128 (1), 39.
[69] Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50* (Dallas: Word Book, 1992), 299.

significance: from the role of an expiation to that of thanksgiving because of the gratuitousness received.

The evolution in the meaning the Jacob’s gift expresses the idea that the grace of God, as well as that granted by Esau, is always gratuitous. Jacob's presents might have been a way to buy forgiveness. But Esau's answer suggests that his willingness to embrace his brother is beyond commerce. Consequently, the presents are reinterpreted as a gesture of sharing and an act of recognition. Even if the narrator does not specify in detail how Esau responds to Jacob's explanation of the present, we see the reversal of the situation: Jacob, the offender who supplanted his brother by cunning, places himself at the mercy of the one who was his victim. It now belongs to Esau to accept or refuse apologies, to forgive or not to forgive, and to seal the welcome he has given to his brother by now receiving the present offered to him, thus, participating voluntarily and actively in the reconciliation process. For Jacob, this gesture is necessary to confirm the change of attitude of Esau.

As for the oblivion of the past offense, the narrator leaves us in ambiguity. He does not say explicitly that Esau has remembered past hostilities. Jacob himself has not forgotten the events. He is still afraid of what he had done to his father and brother. But he did not mention it directly when he met Esau. The story tells us that it is not always necessary to revive the past in all its details in order to achieve reconciliation. The essential thing is to plan a restoration of the relations, which allows to reconstruct the elements of life that have been destroyed by rivalries, to renew them by a spirit of mutual respect and the will to live with the other.

Discussions are often raised about whether one can forgive and forget, or whether it is possible to forgive while keeping the memory of past events. Obviously, one cannot ignore or forget the facts before forgiving them. In Genesis 32-33, it is not explicitly stated whether Esau recalled past hostilities. But it seems that neither Jacob nor Esau have forgotten the events that occurred twenty years earlier. In several places, the text speaks of Jacob's fear of a probable vengeance on his brother Esau. Jacob therefore assumes that Esau still remembers the wrongs he suffered.

The two brothers could remember the rivalries without reviving the past in all its details. They seem to have learned to remember differently. They are no longer victims of their painful memories. For them, the essential thing is to restore relations allowing the renewal and reconstruction of social life, with a view to guaranteeing the reconciliation achieved.

I do not intend to undermine the importance of memory in the process of reconciliation. Rather, I acknowledge that remembering serves to keep us vigilant against ignorance, denial or indifference. To prevent from reproducing the evil, one cannot forget or behave as if nothing had happened and no harm had been caused. But if we need to remember, such a remembering should open to hope, the hope for a lasting peaceful living together. Such a “constructive memory” is opposed to a smoldering anger that cannot be quenched.[70] As Robert Schreiter beautifully expresses it, “we do not forget; we remember in a different way.”[71] Such a hopeful memory opens up for renewed ways of living together. It may be that Jacob and Esau had this

[70] Robert J. Schreiter, cpps, *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality and Strategies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Book, 1998), 67
[71] Ibidem.

memory, and that is why, when their reconciliation was achieved, the two brothers decided to live separately in peace at Seir and Shechem.

II.2.2.3. Justice and Reparation

In a process of reconciliation, reparation restores justice to the victims. Those who have suffered the effects of rivalry need a gesture that rehabilitates their dignity. The victims always feel humiliated for a long period. Jacob was aware of the anger his brother could still be bearing. It is that anger that he wants to appease. Therefore, one would rightly interpret Jacob's gift offering as well as the humble attitude he adopted as a way to repair the wrongs he caused to his brother. That reparation would then bring about the appeasement needed.

As we can see, reparation offered by Jacob is both material and moral, and it is expressed through gestures and words. Jacob offers an enormous present to Esau with symbolically beasts of every animal species of his flocks (Gen 32: 13-15). Prostration, as we have seen above, is also a sort of moral gesture supposed to repair the wrongs done to Esau. But Esau refuses the material gift brought by Jacob. Some comments interpret this refusal as a sign of avoiding recalling past rivalries. They especially think that Esau cannot sell his goodwill against an enormous supply of animals[72] as it happened at the episode of the sale of his birthright against a dish of lentils (Gen 27: 29-34). Others assume that the present of Jacob enters into the logic of reparation when it comes to ending the conflict. They add that "Esau's refusal is consistent with their culture that the gift is accepted after a donor's insistence.[73]

[72] Alfred Agyenta, "Reconciliation from a Biblical Perspective", 42.
[73] Ibid., 44.

It is important that the gift brought by Jacob in Gen 33:11 is referred to as a "*berakah*", which is the Hebrew word for "blessing". The same word is used for what Jacob stole from Esau in Gen 27: 36: "he took away my '*berakah*'", Esau said. Now Jacob is bringing (back) the blessing he took away as to indicate the desire for reparation.

The narrative does not explicitly mention reparation. But in general, it contributes to the success of the process and the sustainability of the solutions acquired. It is not imposed. It may be refused or accepted. It does not compensate for loss and often plays a symbolic role in relieving the victims. When Jacob makes this symbolic gesture, it is up to Esau, the victim, to accept it as a thanksgiving. This type of adaptation is also encountered on several occasions of reparation within the African traditional processes of reconciliation. The idea is, as for Jacob in the account of Genesis 32-33, that the offender become aware of his past frauds and seeks to compensate the wrongs done to the victim. The reparation, thus, testifies to the awareness of the offenders who acknowledges their guilt and confess their responsibility in the hostilities. The ultimate objective of these approaches is to promote rapprochement and the way to do justice on the faults between offenders and offended.

We have seen resurgences of violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo due to the absence of justice, or kind of reparation of the offenses caused. Different processes of reconciliation, different agreements reached have privileged the dynamics of power at the expense of justice and reparation. People who have killed entire villages have found themselves occupying positions in the government while the wounds they caused are still alive. The famous "Accords de Sun City", signed in 2003 as an act to a peaceful political run, saw the leaders of armed groups being privileged to join the government and run the country for almost three years.

These armed groups had previously caused terror and trauma among the peoples. How would one accept to be governed by an impenitent offender? Immediately, other armed groups were created, seeking revenge, to fight the former offenders. Hence, a vicious cycle of violence is created as no justice was required in the process of reconciliation.

In the majority of cases, the manner of making the reparation is not imposed. Jacob's gesture comes from his inner conviction, demonstrating a will that contributes to a promising process and ensures the durability and application of the conclusions reached. In the African traditional processes, this reparation is rather symbolic. The offender generally does not pay a remedy of considerable value. Just as Esau hesitates to take the gift, reparation is sometimes accepted or rejected in certain cultures. Jacob's offer is an enormous gift, but Esau accepts it only because it is redefined as an act of grace.

The South African model of reparation proceeds in a special way. From the way Desmond Tutu implemented it, this model only requires that each offender acknowledge his past actions by sincerely telling the whole truth. In doing so, it is considered that the offender has already ensured the reparation of the harm done to the victim. Thus, he obtains forgiveness without having paid a material compensation, even symbolic. Some political pessimists accuse Desmond Tutu of having Christianized the meaning and the steps of the reparation. But it corresponds rather to the traditional form of reconciliation made in the spirit of *Ubuntu*, that is, with the intent of sustaining the life of the whole community. The fact that reparation takes place without any material compensation highlights the spiritual dimension of reconciliation. Still, opinions on the form of reparation are variously shared. Some victims demand punitive justice rather than encourage restorative justice, which they accuse of impunity because individuals remain

irresponsible for the acts committed. One may wonder whether punishment is effective in the education and integration of the offenders. Criminal justice is often used as a solution to offenders. However, as Cheikh Faye notes, punishment does not produce peace.[74] Hence, it becomes explicit that the exit from the crisis can take paths other than that of penal sanctions. Analysts also show that restorative justice restores victims to their rights and ensures the social integration of both the offenders and offended.[75] It is in this way that it favors the restoration of peace and the peaceful achievement of reconciliation between the enemies.

Justice as reparation for the victims, particularly the impoverished population, remain relevant and needs to be applied in Congolese communities if we want to have a chance to achieve a promising process of reconciliation. We hold that an effective process of reconciliation in the Democratic Republic of Congo should work on the up-lifting of the social and economic situations of the impoverished people. After all, these massive impoverishments are a result of wars and violence that last since the aftermath of the independence.

II.2.2.4. Social integration and the Sharing of wealth

In my view, one of the most important features in the process of reconciliation is the social integration, which can be defined as the capacity for the individual to relate and live with one other. Sociologically, this capacity is fostered through certain conditions like wealth repartition as we shall further note.

[74] Cheikh Faye, "Justice Réparatrice et Théorie de la Responsabilité" (Mémoire de Maîtrise en Philosophie, Université de Montréal, 2011), ii, accessed May 20, 2017, http://hdl.handle.net/1866/8338.
[75] Ibid., 3.

Following the rivalry with his brother Esau, Jacob left the family and took refuge with his uncle Laban. His absence presupposes a sort of estrangement from family life. He starts a different life, apart from family members. By his return and reconciliation with Esau, Jacob seems to be reintegrated into the family. Andrew Davis rightly argues that the deception that brought Jacob to flee to his uncle Laban came from self-interested actions. Consistently, Jacob's self-centeredness isolated him from his brother and produced a cycle of estrangement.[76] Self-centeredness and isolations prevented Jacob to relate properly to Esau (and later to Laban). However, Jacob would progressively grow from isolation to create relationships that will "mitigate his isolation."[77]

For Jacob, social integration has been a process that eventually put him in a social community with the others, taking into account their differences. As for Jacob and Esau, they are the two leaders of clans with different characteristics at birth (Gen 25: 24-27). Esau is naturally described as red. He is a skillful hunter, a man of the fields. Jacob remains in the tent, supposedly serving his mother Rebecca in domestic activities. Interpretation of these differences gives parents the preference for one or the other son. The text states that Isaac has a preference for Esau because of the game and Rebecca prefers Jacob who stays with her in the tents. The preference of the parents is also the cause of the exclusion of the one and the other as well as of the rivalries in different places of the Genesis. It generates the conflict between Jacob and Esau; Jacob's preference for Rachel is also a source of rivalry between Leah and Rachel, two sisters

[76] Andrew R. Davis, "Wrestling Jacob in the Book of Genesis and August Wilson's Fences," *Theology and Literature* 29 no. 1 (March 2015), 54.
[77] Ibid., 50.

married to one man; Finally, Jacob's preference for his son Joseph would cause aversion form his brothers in Gen 37.

Reconciliation opens the door to the integration of Jacob and Esau without violence despite their differences. Now the two brothers seem to accept each other and respect each other. Even separated after their reunion (Gen 33: 18-20), everyone can ensure the prosperity of his family and his business. The issue of differences, and stereotypes is at the root of conflicts in African families, communities or ethnic groups. Generally influenced by their worldview, group members support each other because they share the same social and ethnic characteristics. We have previously observed that power is also often retained with the help of members of one's social group, with reference to the tradition of family inheritance. Since the first conflicts of 1958, before independence, the exclusion of some from the management of the common goods has been the cause of the conflicts. The integration model of Jacob and Esau is a paradigm for social cohesion, a tool for bringing populations together in diversity at different levels, local, regional and national. Integration will succeed when each individual or group will be able to accept and respect others, given the difference that characterizes them.

This social integration has a lot to do with the access to resources. Thus, the sharing of wealth is an element that reduces the distance between individuals and leads to the rapprochement of the parties with a view to restoring relations. Numerous descent and wealth are the basis of the blessing Jacob seeks. The enumeration he brought from Laban shows the importance he attaches to children and riches (Gen. 32: 6). The present that he is offering testifies that he can share his possessions with his brother Esau and assure him the reproducibility of the herds by males and females.

By these expressions, Jacob recognizes his wealth: “God has dealt graciously with me, I have everything I want.” (Gn 33:11). Esau, on the other hand, confirms that he is also in abundance: “I have enough, my brother.” (Gn 33: 9). The use of the same expression indicates the degree of their enrichment and shows that Esau and Jacob have “a lot” and “everything”, and that they are probably willing to share their property. No one can be envious of the wealth of the other. They are all blessed by God. The blessing they were competing for is shown to be more inclusive. So, it can also be assumed that the material abundance enjoyed by the two brothers is a socio-economic factor contributing to their stability after reconciliation. The animals that Jacob shared will ensure Esau a more or less sustainable economic situation. Like Esau, Jacob continues to live in an acceptable material and economic prosperity. In general, the poverty of some may become a source of community rivalry in different environments and a minimum of balance in access to resources and distribution of assets is necessary to ensure lasting reconciliation.

Esau receives the present and invites Jacob to go with him (Gen 33:12). The invitation of Esau may be interpreted as a willingness to share his possessions with Jacob. Contrary to the illicit enrichment observed in different social environments, we may advance that the sharing of the resources is a social element that translates the willingness to live as a community. It puts an end to the search for selfish interest and marks the change of attitude, facilitating the meeting and reconciliation of the protagonists.

After the acceptance of the present, Jacob and Esau were able to share their properties. They have separated and, henceforth, each has a territory proper to him with, the possibility to become a chief of clan in Seir or Shechem. This attitude reflects the acceptance of the other and respect for the difference and status of each other. The blessing that is the basis of rivalry

presupposes that everyone accumulates material wealth and retains power over the other children of Abraham's genealogy. The sharing of wealth and power reduces tension, brings Jacob and Esau closer together and restores their relationships.

The analysis of the causes of repetitive conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo in the first chapter has identified “greed” as the most important factor that nurtures wars and violence in that country. We have seen how the international mining companies are using their Congolese proxies to create and sustain destabilizing armed groups in order to exploit at low costs the natural resources. At the same time, peoples are being impoverished economically and socially. In such an environment where the wealth of the country is concentrated in the hand of a few, social tensions and civil wars are always predictable. Hence, appeasing the tension and processing reconciliation would require an effort to alleviate people’s poverty and lift up the socio-economic situation on a larger national scale.

In a context of imbalance in resources sharing, where the larger number live in extreme poverty while a few enjoy ostentatiously the riches of the country, reconciliation would demand to implement the “economics of eating together”. We borrow this expression from Laurenti Magesa to emphasize mutual dependence and cooperative success above competition and individual accomplishment.[78] The enhancement of common life becomes an important feature to foster reconciliation. The promotion of such an economy joins the Ubuntu worldview where no reason can justify a situation where the majority of people are dying of hunger while a minority is rolling in luxury.[79] It requires to pass form an individualistic to a more solidary

[78] Laurenti Magesa, *What is not sacred?*, 150.
[79] Ibid., 155.

economy. It is obvious that such a passage demands a deeper transformation of people's mindset.

II.2.2.5. Christian Reconciliation ought to be more spiritual than strategic

Without excluding the strategic from the spiritual, we hold that genuine reconciliation has a spiritual basis that informs the strategies. The spiritual character of the reconciliation of Jacob and Esau is in the transforming power of God that changed their attitude. This transformation can be better seen through Jacob's change of name and identity after the encounter and the wrestling with an unknown man (Gen 32: 25-33). After the crossing of Jabbok, Jacob finds himself alone in the night, for an unknown reason. He is surprised by a strange man who attacks him and fights against him until morning (vv. 24-25). Without defeating him, the man hits Jacob at the hip and makes him lame. A dialogue then ensues between them (vv. 26-30). The man wants to go, but Jacob first requires of him a blessing. The man changes Jacob's name to Israel before blessing him, but he refuses to reveal his own name. Jacob interprets what has just happened to him (v. 30): he understands that he saw God "face to face" and that his life was saved. He calls the place Peniel. The drama thus unfolds in three stages. First Jacob resists during the fight, but he is struck. Then a dialogue engages with the man. Finally, Jacob makes his interpretation of this encounter. The narrator concludes by describing a Jacob diminished by his infirmity as he passes Peniel at dawn to walk to meet his brother (v.32).

The identity of the one who struggles with Jacob is not revealed, nor the motive of this struggle. The narrator simply presents Jacob's opponent as "a man", who later, "tells Jacob that

he has striven with beings 'humans and divine' (v. 29)."[80] According to Andrew Davis, Jacob's opponent is "an unusual versatile figure, one who is able to embody at once several elements from Jacob's past."[81] Is this wrestling a surrogate for the (foreseen) confrontation with Esau? Is it an echo of Jacob's past quarrels with Laban? In any case, Jacob's wrestling with the mysterious personage "seems to epitomize the swarm of conflicts from his past."[82] And this wrestling with the past portrays the difficult process of transforming Jacob into a new person. The verb "to wrestle", Robert Ignatius Letellier reminds, has the root 'bq (to destroy, or annihilate or to empty or transform), which is also found in Jacob (*ya'aqob*), Jabbok (*yabboq*) or *ye'abeq* (heel). This interplay of names, action and sound underlines the central theme of the story: in striving (with God) at the Jabbok, Jacob is transformed.[83] Something in him needed to be destroyed or transformed before his meeting with Esau. And that transformation was made effective by Jacob's encounter with the divine being.

The battle takes place during the night, until daybreak. According to the biblical symbolism, night and darkness constitute a danger, while the light of dawn brings salvation and deliverance. The transition from one to the other is often marked by a transformation. It was also at night that Jacob was in contact with God for the first time in Bethel (Gen. 28: 10-15). As the rest of the text shows, this narrator's precision also means that the wrestling lasted a long time without any of the opponents really succeeding in imposing themselves. In fact, Jacob shows great tenacity and no winner emerges. At dawn, the assailant sees that he cannot defeat him, he

[80] Andrew R. Davis, 55.
[81] Ibidem.
[82] Ibid., 56.
[83] Robert Ignatius Letellier, 185. See also Andrew R. Davis, 55.

hits Jacob at the hip and inflicts him an infirmity, without however obtaining a clear victory. When struck, Jacob undergoes a great physical transformation. He limps and is diminished in his body strength to confront Esau, for a lame man is no longer fit for battle. If he were to fight against Esau, Jacob would have to rely on God's intervention rather than on his own strength.

The dialogue also makes us witness another transformation of Jacob. He first shows his tenacity by refusing to let go of his assailant without having obtained a blessing from him. He will finally get it, as he receives a new name imposed by his interlocutor. With this change of name, Jacob becomes “Israel” (v. 28). The change of name means the change of identity. The name of Jacob, “the supplanter” (Gen 25: 26a), evokes his spirit of competition and his ruses to achieve his ends. In the macro-narrative, Jacob manifests this character from birth, but also when he usurps the right of his elder and appropriates the blessing, with Laban and in the strategies he has just deployed to ensure his return to Canaan and prepare the meeting with his brother. His new name, “Israel” (He who strives with God or God strives)[84] is interpreted by the interlocutor from the struggle that has just occurred. It suggests that Jacob’s new blessings are the result of his perseverance and insistent struggle, unlike the previous ones which were a resultant of deception and ruses.

The request for blessing (same root as *berakah*) also manifests a change of attitude. Rather than trying to defeat his assailant, Jacob wants to make him an ally who is benevolent towards him. One wonders what kind of blessing Jacob wants, after having obtained that of his father by pretending to be his brother Esau. Maybe he wants the mysterious character to convey

[84] Ibidem

some of his strength to him? Does he expect a kind of reparation for the injury he has just suffered, or any guarantee for his future threatened by the imminent encounter with Esau? Or is he dreaming of a new promise like the one God gave him at Bethel: to give him a land, a great offspring, and to protect him (Gen. 28: 13-15, see 32: 10-13)? The narrator does not provide an answer to this questions, but confines himself to confirming that Jacob received the blessing requested, legitimately this time, and not by fraud. A certain order of things seems to have been restored.

He directed their steps towards the ending and resolution of rivalries. The promises made by God, the presence of his angels and the change of attitude of Jacob are all elements that have had an impact on the spiritual life of Jacob. Then the change of Jacob influences the behavior of Esau: then Jacob "looks at him as we look at God." Esau's act suggests that he is also inspired by God to become generous to Jacob and to act as God does in his way of grace and forgiveness. True peace and reconciliation require the inner transformation and change of attitude of the protagonists.

Prior to this encounter, Jacob prayed (Gen 32: 9-12). Jacob then adopts a strategy that goes beyond human efforts by resorting to prayer. He solicits divine help and manifests his humility before God. Faced with the danger of death, Jacob relies on the promises and graces of God.

Jacob's prayer begins with an invocation to the God of his fathers, Abraham and Isaac, this God who commanded him “to return to your country and to your kindred, and I will do you good” (v. 9). Jacob declares himself unworthy before God's generosity to his “servant” (v. 10). He

also describes the content of all the graces and all the faithfulness of God toward him: when he passed the Jordan leaving the land of Canaan, he possessed only his staff. Now, he returns with a family and herds sufficiently numerous to form two companies (v. 10). Jacob then makes his request that God deliver him from the hand of his own brother, of whom he is afraid lest he come to strike without sparing neither the mother nor the children (v.11). This would annihilate any hope of seeing innumerable offspring like the sand of the sea that God promised him (v. 12).

This prayer is constructed with the aid of several parts of the story, which contribute to give it its strength. In speaking to the God of his fathers, Jacob evokes the dream he had at Bethel, where the Lord presented to him as "the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac." (Gen 28:13). It was also at Bethel that God promised him a numerous offspring as "the dust of the earth" (Gen. 28:14), thus reiterating the promise made to Abraham (a descent like "the stars of heaven") and to his father Isaac (a descent "like the stars of heaven and like the sand that is on the seashore," 22:17). This analeptic shows that Jacob is part of a chain through which these blessings pass to future generations. But this chain could break if Esau decimated the family of Jacob.

The recall of the order to return to the land (v. 10) constitutes another piece of the effect of prayer: Jacob does not act on his own initiative. Rather, he is obeying an instruction that God gave him at Laban while assuring him His/Her help: I will be with you (Gen 31: 3). God then repeated a promise already made to Bethel: "Know that I am with you, and I will keep you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." (Gen. 28:15). This promise, more precise than that concerning the descent, specifically concerns the return to Canaan. Jacob rephrases in general terms "I will do

you good.” (v. 10), reprinted in insistent form at the end of prayer (v. 12). He relies on it to ask God to help him in the face of the menace of his brother's coming with his four hundred men.

In presenting himself as small before God, Jacob admits that he owes his prosperity to God, of whom he is a “servant”. By sending his messengers to Esau, Jacob also used the term “servant” to qualify before his “lord”. He shows an attitude of humility similar to God. But here the motive is different. If he fears, Jacob is on the contrary grateful for the help he has received from a God whom he first feared at Bethel (Gn 28:17), but who was full of “grace” and “fidelity” to him (v. 10).The contrast between the only staff that Jacob possessed while passing the Jordan in his flight (a detail that does not appear previously) and the “two companies” that he became on his return (v. 10) recalls both the (Mahanaim, v. 3), and the preventive measure which Jacob has just taken by separating his people and his beasts into two parts (vv. 8-9). But here the expression wants to evoke the expansion taken by his family and herds (implicitly too numerous to hold in one camp). Before God, Jacob does not present his gesture as a strategy of defense, but as a proof of the generosity of God, whom he wants to convince to help him.

As for the request itself, “deliver me from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid of him” (v. 11), it echoes the fear provoked by the announcement of the coming of Esau, that complicates the story (v. 6), and to the preventive measure of Jacob (vs. 7-8a). This is the first time Jacob uses the expression “my brother” to refer to Esau (see v. 4 and v. 7). Despite the threat he feels, Jacob still considers Esau as a brother, rather than a foreign enemy. Jacob, whom God has promised to protect, fears not only for himself but also for mothers and children, the descent God has given him. Would God be indifferent to this argument? Here again, Jacob finds the right

words to plead his cause and ask for his “deliverance”. It should be noted, however, that the form which this deliverance might take is not specified.

Jacob expresses his dependence on God and his weakness in defending his family and property before his brother Esau and his accompanying company. However, this prayer adds a spiritual dimension to the intrigue and its resolution. Jacob places the drama in a wider context, which of God's promises to his ancestors and to himself. If the encounter with Esau does not lead to a satisfactory reconciliation, all that will be compromised. Jacob's prayer suggests that God’s intervention makes reconciliation possible, and that, at the end, reconciliation goes beyond the two protagonists. It is about restoring good relations within the community, composed not only of the present living members, but also of the dead and those yet to be born.

This chapter aimed at identifying reconciling features that can inform the Church’s ministry of reconciliation among the estranged individuals and groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo. To achieve this goal, we chose to recall a known (biblical) story through which the rival brothers have been able to overcome their enmities and recover the bonds of fraternity. Our assumption is that what helped them to achieve such a recovery can be used to today to foster reconciliation among our peoples. The story of Jacob and Esau (Gen 32-33) has been insightful to our endeavor as it portrays the whole scope of human relations, from rivalries to cooperation.

The story of Jacob and Esau suggests to the reader a cause of rivalry between people and within society: the centeredness of the self and the exclusionary understanding of the blessings. The narrator reveals the frequent maneuvers and tricks of Jacob who seeks to secure his interests

by competing against his brother Esau. In the other hand, Esau seeks revenge for the stolen blessing. Therefore, God's blessings become object of competition and rivalry. The pursuing of the story shows that, selfishness and rivalry are not inevitable for humans. Like Jacob and Esau, humans can move from exclusion to embrace through God's action and their own willingness.

The narrative also provides us with the example of the necessity of taking into account both the social and the theological dimensions of human life. Beyond their social reconciliation, Jacob and Esau also restore good relationships with God. The divine intervention in the life of the protagonists also contributes in an important way to the renewal of the broken relationships.

Reconciliation is based on a change in the attitude of humans toward one another and toward God. Jacob returns to Canaan to obey an order of God and to fulfill his promise. His encounter with God upsets him. His deference to Esau shows a change of attitude that produces a reciprocal effect on his brother. By sharing his wealth, Jacob recognizes the goodness of God who has filled him, accompanied him on his return and touched Esau to welcome him. Esau, also beneficiary of God's generosity, knows how to forget the past and to show himself in favor of his brother. The forgiveness granted and received constitutes a central piece where each protagonist feels lifted up: Jacob recovers his status of a brother (no longer a target to be destroyed), and Esau's face reminds the loving face of God. Their reconciliation is more spiritual than strategic.[85] The account of Genesis 32-33 thus provides us with the (historical) example of a process of reconciliation anchored in a spiritual vision, with the participation of God and human beings. These features of Jacob-Esau process of reconciliation can be built upon to foster reconciliation

[85] Robert J. Schreiter, *Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality and Strategies* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1998).

among the estranged individuals and groups in the Congolese and African context. The next chapter will try to look at how the Church can use these features for her reconciling ministry in that context.

Chapter Three: The Reconciling Ministry of the Church

Our journey so far has brought us to understand reconciliation as both an eschatological and historical promise. Grounded in God, reconciliation will reach its fullness and absoluteness as the communion of human beings with God and among themselves at the end of times. But it is also an intrahistorical reality as it orients and transforms history to its fulfilment.[86] Full eschatological reconciliation gives its authentic meaning to historical reconciliation. In theological terms, we would say that, as a divine promise, reconciliation is already but not yet. In order words, it is not yet completely, but it is already fulfilled in historical events. The reconciled future we hope for is not yet here, but is emerging and arising.[87] And the story of Jacob and Esau is a spark of such fulfillment of God's promises.

For Christians, Jesus Christ is the only mediator of reconciliation. The Church, like Christ, is at the crossroads between God's path to humanity and that of humanity to God. But, it must be clearly put, the ecclesial mediation is of a different nature than that of Christ. Christ mediates primarily as a "reconciler", while the Church exercises it primarily in so far as it is "reconciled". Christ embodies the divine initiative and communicates reconciliation. The Church, on the other

[86] Gustavo Gutiérez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, trans. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 85.
[87] John K. Downey, ed., *Love's Strategy: The Political Theology of Johann Baptist Metz* (Harrisburg, Pensylvania: 1999), 22.

hand, receives it at first as a gratuitous gift that transforms her, and then, as a mission. In other words, the ecclesial community becomes reconciliatory, insofar as it allows itself to be converted by the grace received. The sacraments by which it transmits the divine life are the same ones that constitute it as a saved people.

It is the Second Vatican Council that has applied the term “sacrament” to the Church, but in an analogical way: “The Church being in Christ, in a way, the sacrament, that is, the sign and means of the intimate union with God and the unity of the whole human race "(LG, 1). The Church therefore has not her end in herself. She is turned to her Lord and to the gathering of all in God. Its *raison d'être* is not her own growth. She is at the service of the communication of the gift of God and the advent of the Kingdom in this world. She fulfills her mission by living her own conversion, by provoking others through testimony and preaching, and by placing the sacraments at the disposal of all, insofar as they adhere to the self-communication of God in Jesus Christ. It is her essential mission, even though she has often forgotten that she is only “sign and instrument”, and thus a servant of God's universal plan of reconciliation.

The Church is at the service of the mediation of Christ through the preaching of the "Word of reconciliation", which is the account of salvation always updated in time and in cultures. The Church is thus an “ambassador”: God accredits her to announce the good news of reconciliation. If the whole ecclesial ministry focuses on reconciliation, it is that this is the salvific work in all its extension. The ministry in question is therefore not limited to the sacrament, which today is called the “sacrament of reconciliation”. It concerns the whole of sacramental and pastoral activity. It expresses the action of salvation in its entirety. Furthermore, this ministry of reconciliation is not only for Christians. It aims at the reconciliation of all. It cannot, therefore, be

confined to preaching and sacramental activity properly so called. It covers other pastoral activities which have as their goal the “unity of the whole human race” and the growth of the Kingdom of justice and peace. Moreover, all Christians are indeed invited to be ambassadors of Christ who entrusts the ministry of reconciliation to the whole ecclesial community. The reconciling mission of the Church is entrusted to all members of the Church, lay and religious, priests, bishops and deacons who, in the diversity of their charisms and ministries, implement the ministry of reconciliation, of which the Church as a whole is the sacrament. Reconciliation becomes, in this perspective, the primary mission of the Church.

If reconciliation is the essential mission of the Church, then, one cannot be a Christian if he/she is not permanently moved by the concern for reconciliation. However, it is not sufficient to assert theologically that the Church is “the sacrament of the unity of the human race.” It would even be pretentious to state such a universality in the eyes of those who do not belong and do not want to belong to the Church. In a pluralistic world, asserting the Church as “the sacrament of unity of human race” would mean for Christian men and women the call to serve the gift of life and communion among all, without seeking privilege or domination. In such a perspective that is not more that of conquest, but of fraternal quest and openness, dialogue is possible with other paths of faith and searches for meaning. To develop a fundamentally "hospitable" ecclesial attitude would be a valuable contribution to the reconciliation of the human community. Diverse and mysterious are the forms of adherence to the universal design of happiness and salvation, even if for us Christians Christ occupies the crucial place and the Church is a privileged instrument and sign.

The sign must be legible, and the instrument, effective. It is therefore essential to seek how pastoral practice can be “the sign and instrument” of reconciliation at the heart of social realities. Such sacramentality, to be effective, must know how to speak to the conscience and to the heart of today's men and women. God's gift, absolute reconciliation is an eschatological reality. But this gift is already in germ, as an energy and a force. This germ must be allowed to act immediately in our lives. I propose in the following pages some “criteria of sacramentality” or conditions likely to make credible the communication of salvation recapitulated in the reconciliation by the Church.

III.1. Making Reconciliation visible

This first criterion of sacramentality affirms that the Church does not overstep her boundaries when she speaks out and takes action in favor of historical reconciliation. In other words, the eschatological hope of reconciliation calls for a visible and explicit engagement towards the promotion of reconciliation among the peoples. This call is expressed by Johann Baptist Metz as an invitation to “a creative and militant eschatology.”[88] If the Church’s strivings have the Kingdom of God as the goal, and not herself, then, she carries the responsibility of making this Kingdom visible to the world. She has to permanently reduce the gap between the eschatological reconciliation and the conflicted reality.

In the context of the Democratic Republic of Congo, the hiatus between those who consider themselves followers of Christ and the dismantlement of the social cohesion is more than intriguing. The churches are filled on Sundays (and weekdays for some) while violence,

[88] *Love’s Strategy*, 22.

conflicts, poverty and other social illnesses are increasing. There seem to be a split between the content of the Christian faith and liturgical celebrations and their social and political engagement. The Church seems to have withdrawn from the political arena.

As De Gruchy reminds, "the gap between the eschatological reconciliation and the realities of social and political life cannot be bridged by words alone, but only by words that take on flesh and concreteness."[89] And this concreteness has to go beyond the walls of chapels and parishes to become public. It is only in this way that the Church will (continue to) take up her role of social criticism and bring about transformation in the Congolese society.

Many Christians, individual Priests, individual Bishops, sometimes in associations, make such commitments. Bishop Christophe Munzihirwa, the late Archbishop of Bukavu (1994 – 1996) in the troubled Eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo, can be presented as one of those committed Christians. When, in April 1994, thousands of people flew from the neighboring Rwanda during the genocide, Archbishop Munzihirwa committed himself to helping the refugees while denouncing the atrocities going on against them. He became an embarrassment for the forces engaged in the atrocities to the extent to be killed in April 1996. Father Vincent Machozi, a Priest belonging to the Order of the Augustinians of Assumption, followed the same path as Munzihirwa. At the heart of a war presented as an ethnic conflict, he committed himself to finding the truth about the real causes of the ongoing massive killings in the region of Beni-Butembo in the North-East of the Congo. He denounced the current government as being

[89] John W. De Gruchy, *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 75.

responsible of the conflicts and the military as the authors of the killings.[90] He was assassinated in March 2016.

However, these individual commitments have hardly found support from the institutional church. When they are not simply silenced by the hierarchy, they are considered as individual charisms that disappear when the charismatic figure vanishes. Priests are summoned by their hierarchy not to "get involved into politics" when they try to bring awareness to the faithful. At the same time, the institutional church keeps herself from the confrontation that goes with such a prophetic commitment. This prophetic commitment is not to be limited to delivering pastoral letters or homilies against situations of injustices and violence. Punctual homilies and Pastoral letters are not sufficient. They have to be part of a broader project of evangelization that considers reconciliation as an intrinsic mission of the prophetic role of the Church. Such a project will then inform and generate programs and works to foster a culture of reconciliation.

I do not intend to undermine the church's implication as an institution in facilitating important forums of "reconciliation" as she did during the CNS or recently when the Episcopal Conference of the Democratic Republic of Congo brought the politicians together in an attempt to solve the electoral crisis in 2016 in their country. Those are concrete moments when the Church intervenes to address and resolve particular crisis. I advance that making reconciliation visible consists, for the Church in the Democratic Republic of Congo, in embodying and identifying her mission as a mission of reconciliation. It is not to be limited to offering services of mediation to the politicians in specific situations. Rather, those instant interventions should be inscribed

[90] https://www.bu.edu/bostonia/fall16/vincent-machozi-congo-machozis-calling/. Accessed on June 14, 2017.

within a pastoral of reconciliation chosen as a long term program for the Congolese Church. This means that the church is called to live, worship, socialize and evangelize in ways that promote constructive relationships, individually and collectively.[91]

The following questions can be helpful for the Church in imagining and designing her pastoral as a project of reconciliation: by what evangelical projects of society can Christians manifest their concrete will to work for reconciliation in the places of distress? Do Christians suffer that the human family is divided so as to constantly update the good news of reconciliation? This leads to a constant discernment for the church: what negative or positive participation has the ecclesial community taken in such concrete situations of violence and death? What is the meaning of the divisions in the history of salvation and in relation to the Paschal event? It also requires commitment so that this situation, whether it is the rise of racism or ethnicism, genocide, the economic crisis or the influx of refugees, for example, can become an event of reconciliation offered by Jesus Christ and a sign that God is a stakeholder and agent in social transformation. Such a Church is at the heart of the conflict, and does not flee from confronting it.

III.2. Confronting the reality of conflicts: Bishop Munzihirwa and the option for the victims

The second criterion of sacramentality of the Church advances that, against the widespread belief that those seeking reconciliation flee from conflict or deny it, it can be argued that the search for a reconciled society does not protect against conflicts. On the contrary, the solidarity with the excluded, which puts them at the center of the Church and of society, often

[91] Cecelia Clegg, "Between Embrace and Exclusion," in *Explorations in Reconciliation: New Directions in Theology*, eds. David Tombs and Joseph Liechty (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006), 132

involves questions, wrongs to be acknowledged, solidarities to be broken, or a social order to be transformed. Acting against the current can never be done without conflicts, and this at different levels.

The indissoluble articulation between the Gospel and the prophetic mission finds a privileged place of concretization in the preferential option for the poor. The expression born in the Latin American context, taken up by John Paul II (*Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 1987, n. 42, *Tertio millenio adveniente*, 1994, n.51), and then integrated into the official discourse of the social teaching of the Catholic Church (see the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, Chapter IV) brings a real novelty in the context of conflicts today. It becomes a "preferential option for victims".

Of course, the priority choice in favor of the poor has always existed throughout the history of the Church, with known works of charity. But for the Church of the Congo, the option for victims must become more explicitly an integral part of what defines her, a true theological place according to the various fields of relevance (cultural, social, economic and political) and a proposal explicitly made to all the baptized.

It is necessary to take an interest in the lives of those who are usually excluded from social discourse, either by collecting their narratives of life or by valuing the testimony of the most affected in order to verify the relevance of the organization of a society, or by providing the victims with teaching levers to express their point of view. The authentic encounter of the victims is also a true theological source of the elaboration of the discourse on God and man.

Finally, Christian faith is to be conceived less as adherence to a body of doctrines than as the reception and encounter of Christ in each concrete human situation. The Good News offers itself through words and gestures, which give places of confrontation with great distress a particular importance: as a sign of God's covenant for the world, the Church is therefore especially expected on the field of solidarity and in her way of being close to the victims.

The first axis of the pastoral action of Bishop Munzihirwa concerns his involvement in the drama of the Rwandan refugees present in the Congolese territory following the genocide of 1994. He understood not only the distress of the refugees, but also the destabilization of the Kivu by the presence of the hundreds of thousands of Rwandan refugees, with the prospect of the extension of the conflicts to the whole region of the Great Lakes.[92]

Mgr Munzihirwa, aware of their conditions of misery and their fate, was not content to face the immediate problem of finding food for the various camps where the refugees were piled up. He also devoted himself to finding a lasting solution for them through numerous appeals to all national and international bodies. "They live in increasingly distressing conditions: food distributions are becoming more scarce, kitchen wood is more and more difficult to find," he said and “several organizations are withdrawing, but continue to work in Rwanda.[93]

Motivated by the overwhelming desire of the vast majority of refugees to return to their country, Bishop Munzihirwa has always advocated a negotiated solution in Rwanda to allow for this return. He believed that “there is no other peaceful solution to the conflict than a meeting

[92] Bruno Chenu, “Editorial”, *La Croix*, November 2, 1996.
[93] Christophe Munzihirwa, *Lettre au Cardinal G. Danneels et à Mgr J. Delaporte* ,Bukavu, Janvier 1995. The translation is mine.

of all Rwandans with a view to a negotiated and balanced political solution. Allowing two million Rwandans to die in Zaire is a crime against humanity."[94] By the return of the refugees, Bishop Munzihirwa intended a return to "dignity and security". Among the proposed solutions, he suggested "working for peace in the Great Lakes region' by opening an international investigation into the massacre, revising US financial and military aid conditional on respect for The right to life for all, the recognition by UNHCR and WFP of the living conditions of refugees and their anxiety about forced return; The opening of political negotiations between the Kigali government and representatives of refugees who want reconciliation, the organization of an indispensable round table, the arms embargo, etc.[95]

Bishop Munzihirwa responded to the call that the bishops must propose the Christian doctrine in a way adapted to the needs of the moment, that is to say, by responding to the difficulties and questions that most agonize men and women (*Christus Dominus*, 13). His commitment relayed this text of Vatican II, which reminds the pastors how to speak to the faithful. Indeed, beyond his interventions in the higher spheres of the politics of his time, he did not fail in his duty to refugees who, by the force of events, became members of the herd that God entrusted to him. His pastoral work, and this is a peculiarity of his episcopate, has spread to all refugee camps.

In addition to his many visits to these brothers in distress, he created a new type of spiritual guidance in the parish structures of the diocese. Among the Rwandan refugee priests living in parishes with those of his diocese, he appointed chaplains for the camps. Thus, while the

[94] Ibid.
[95] Christophe Munzihirwa, *Lettre au Président Carter*, Bukavu, 30 Janvier 1996.

diocesan priests of Bukavu took care of the faithful of their parishes, at the same time the Rwandan priests performed the same services in the various camps. To the humanitarian work has been added a large-scale pastoral framework where all, indigenous and refugees, were under the leadership of the same pastor. Here is a new form of the testimony of the unique communion of the faithful but also and above all of the co-responsibility of churches in the care of Christians. In his pastoral letter to the refugees of his jurisdiction, Bishop Munzihirwa proposed a pastoral accompaniment that prepared them to confront the problems related to their condition by force of the gospel. In the preparation for the season of Advent 1995, he told them the following:

> It is in anguish that we begin this period of Advent. Time of conversion to the one who comes and of torment for what blocks us. Since we have welcomed you, your fate has become, in a sense, our own. It is the same Christ who suffers in all of us. So we cannot agree with the measures that violate human rights and especially the refugee's rights. People cannot be repatriated against their will, especially when they know that an almost certain death awaits them in their homeland. (...) We pray that these measures that threaten you may be changed into a more humane and Christian way ... By entering the dynamic of Christ, we will be able to wish us a merry Christmas, the joy of the Son of God born little by little in the tear of human history, and who knows that he will die on the Cross to save this world. It is this profound joy of true hope - the one that hopes against hope - that I wish you already and that, in solidarity, we will build together while waiting for the day of your return to your homeland.[96]

Bishop Munzihirwa embarked on a new evangelization which, starting from the nightmare of his people, oriented him towards the future to rebuild, a future of which this people remained the unavoidable protagonist. In this sense, Bishop Munzihirwa wanted to bring his people to go beyond a superficial Christianity. Thus, he introduced his Christians to the living Christianity. In this new way, he trained his Christians in a new impetus for initiative, creativity and innovation, to think and build their living together, to animate and energize the energies for

[96] Christophe Munzihirwa, *Lettre à mes Frères Réfugés, Lettre de l'Avent*, Bukavu, 18 Novembre 1995.

a renewed understanding of what the Christian faith has as a project for them in their context. His aim in this process of reconstruction was to restore the entire human edifice because in fact any structure in the service of the people would have a certain fragility if it did not take as its foundation the central character of the person.[97]

His devotion to the refugee problem did not, however, distract Munzihirwa in taking into account the overall situation created by the dictatorial regime of Mobutu. He launched another front against the abuses of the Zairian army unpaid for years and those of a society bearing the defects of those who have directed it for three decades. This society also reveals a pathological ecclesial universe that has not escaped contamination. A snapshot of this disastrous situation can be found in his letter to the United States Ambassador about the national armed forces, which were supposed to secure the population, were actually involved in plundering them and confiscating their goods.[98]

Through this reading, Bishop Munzihirwa practically warned of the danger of a tribal division within the organizations and the population, that is, the danger of ethnic conflicts and a desperate chaos and politically motivated.[99]

As one can see, Munzihirwa is an example of what the church as a whole should be in the context of oppression and conflicts. She is called to side with the oppressed and the victim. And, siding with the oppressed inevitably places the Church "in conflict with idols of death, their

[97] Congrégation pour la Doctrine de la Foi, "Questions sur l'Engagement et le Comportement des Catholiques dans la vie Politique," *Documentation Catholique* 2255 (100, 2003), 130-136.
[98] Christophe Munzihirwa, *Lettre à Monsieur l'Ambassadeur des Etats-Unis d'Amérique à Kinshasa*, Bukavu, le 18 avril 1996. The translation is mine
[99] Christophe Munzihirwa, *Lettre à Monsieur l'Ambassadeur des Etats-Unis d'Amérique à Kinshasa*, Bukavu, le 3 juin 1996. The translation is mine.

mediations, and their mediators (the oppressors)."[100] Munzihirwa's pastoral orientation provides us with a concrete example of the Church's mission of reconciliation in a context of war and extreme violence. He focused on the issue of the refugees. Other issues also can and should become apostolic priorities of the Church in the context of Congo today with regard to the many consequences of wars and on-going violence.

III.3. Promoting a memory of guilt

The third criterion of sacramentality of the Church states that the role of the Church is to discern the collective sin in which Christians participate and to denounce situations that spurn the dignity of the person and the unity of the human family. Such an attitude would not stand as a judgement against individuals, groups or nations involved in the conflict. Rather, it would express solidarity in sin and acknowledge the Church's own guilt in the violence happening in the society. The Christian universal solidarity extends to those who have been overcome and left behind in the history of progress. It is not a solidarity of the victors, but a solidarity with the vanquished and the oppressed. Such a solidarity, which is gratuitous, and might even mean losing something, is qualitatively higher than that of two equal partners forming alliance of interests.

Dangerous memories reveal that human history is not only a history of success, but also a history of suffering. Thus, the history of the Church is not made only of spreading the good news. It is not only a history of victories and successful evangelization, but also a history of failures that the Church has to account for. Thus, the Church cannot sidestep the question of her own guilt.

[100] Valiente, 188.

Historians think that one of the flaws of the *Conférence Nationale Souveraine* lied in the lack explicit expression of guilt. The political actors did not confess their past wrongs and did not ask forgiveness of one another as well as of the people, as the custom would have required. Bishop Mosengwo declared at the end of the CNS that the rite of reconciliation envisaged on the occasion of the closure cannot take place without this repentance and this request for forgiveness.[101] Such a statement is appropriate and becomes the foundation of justice. Looking at the story of Jacob and Esau, one can rightly advance that Jacob acknowledged his responsibility in the on-going estrangement before making a move toward Esau. Without such an acknowledgement, it would be difficult to think of any reunion between the brothers.

The history of suffering and history of guilt cannot be separated because someone or some people have to take responsibility. For the Church, it is about acknowledging her responsibility in the failure of building a reconciling Christian culture, as we witness the existence of violence and shattered lives even among Christians. And if solidarity is about all persons becoming subjects before God, then its praxis ought to be preferentially oriented towards those whose lives as subjects have been and are being shattered.

Christian solidarity invites human persons to face up the reality of guilt. Only by taking such a responsibility, will they be open to making possible the enduring struggle for universal reconciliation. In other words, the responsibility for universal freedom and solidarity entails the responsibility for guilt since human history has shown failures on the path to emancipation due to human sinfulness and finitude. Refusing to accept guilt, sinfulness and finitude does not

[101] Nzongola, 201.

promote concrete and universal solidarity and reconciliation. Rather, it can degenerate new histories of violence and oppression, new histories of suffering.

Many contemporaries appreciate that ecclesial authorities recognize their faults or omissions in historical situations such as slavery, the Shoah or more recent genocides. John Paul II prophetically traces the way. These gestures are "received" by the human conscience as Good News. Similarly, commitments embodying the defense of human rights and the rights of peoples are recognized as living the Gospel message. The leaders of the Church in Rwanda have followed the path traced by John Paul II as they acknowledged the Church's responsibility in and asked for forgiveness for the genocide. In the same trend, the churches in South Africa have acknowledged the role they played in the apartheid. They have expressed their repentance for the past failures as well as their determination to work for national reconciliation and justice in the future of South Africa. Even if there is no guarantee that such a confession of guilt will alter the course of history or restrain the forces of evil, and that those confessing will follow with repentant actions, at least, we can assert that without the memory of guilt, the possibility of breaking the rule of violence and hatred caused by oppression and war becomes impossible.[102]

III.4. Announcing the historic strength of forgiveness

The fourth criterion of sacramentality of the Church in her mission of reconciliation is to announce that forgiveness is victorious and powerful. Valiente uses the expression "God's victorious forgiveness"[103] to express that it is through forgiveness that the reconciling Reign of God breaks through and interrupts the hatred-filled world of conflicts and violence. And Jesus

[102] De Gruchy, 111.
[103] Valiente, 187.

exemplifies such an interruption. His unconditional promise of forgiveness has changed the course of history. The proclamation of forgiveness therefore constitutes, in view of our theology of reconciliation, the fundamental vocation of the mission of the Church. If the gift of reconciliation founds her and the promise of reconciliation in Christ attracts her history and constitutes her future and the future of the world, the Church is endowed with a specific and indispensable responsibility at the heart of the secular society. She is called to recall the principle of forgiveness in public space against the winds and tides that no human law can impose, although it is the cornerstone of life in society. Alongside the hatreds she has occasionally fueled, the Church has also been, in some contexts, a historic force of forgiveness. More than ever, circumstances have prompted her to put this mission at the center of her preaching and action. Not to forget that, composed of men and women, it fully shares the ambiguities of the human condition and is often found on both sides, when there are political, economic or cultural divisions.

Today more than ever, in Congo and beyond, we recognize that the need for reconciliation and forgiveness is at the heart of contemporary aspirations, both in terms of individual relationships and social relations. Hence, the mission of the Church is not only to repeat in words and deeds the ethical demand for forgiveness. It is also to rediscover the way to communicate the sacramental force of reconciliation in a society that does not know how to express the absolute necessity of liberating forgiveness. Jesus Christ is the model of forgiveness par excellence for Christians.

However, most of the times, we have to acknowledge, this model is too far to reach. And forgiveness can be manipulated and easily recommended but tough to live. That is why, it is

important to situate forgiveness, as Valiente[104] and De Gruchy[105] do, within God's covenantal plan, to understand it in the light of God's judgement of sin and oppression. Hence, forgiveness does not exclude justice but inscribes justice in the perception of restoration. Following the story of Jacob and Esau, the forgiveness we try to suggest here lines with the "uplifting the face of the other" in order to restore the whole community. Moreover, I would suggest the Church to announce the power of forgiveness not theoretically or speculatively or argumentatively. Rather, she needs to tell stories of forgiveness. Such story-telling approach seems more effective as it presents the narratives of wounded living people who were able to forgive their oppressors and found the way to heal themselves and the whole society. And those narratives exist. There is need to search, find and present them to the many wounded persons who still find it difficult, and sometimes impossible, to offer forgiveness.

III.5. Promoting an inclusive pastoral care

The fifth criterion of sacramentality in the Church's mission of reconciliation consists in an inclusive pastoral care. It is an urgent way to announce the Good News of reconciliation, and to do so by acts that speak effectively of a more fraternal, friendly and hospitable human community. It is essential that the whole pastoral sector have this aim of inclusion in order to fight all the mechanisms of exclusion that divide the society and hinder the unity of humanity. Guy Bajoit invites a "relational sociology"[106], based on the dialectic of the other and the same. Can we not encourage a "relational pastoral" or even a "relational theology"? This relational

[104] Valiente, 188.
[105] De Gruchy, 172.
[106] Guy Bajoit, *Pour Une Sociologie Relationnelle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1992).

theology is founded on the praxis of Jesus and the people confronted with social challenges as he goes beyond the “center-periphery” scheme.

Liberation theologies and pastoral practices that encounter injustice tend to analyze situations in terms of domination / oppression and to propose salvation in terms of liberation. In addition to this simple scheme, the authors propose that of marginalization / reintegration, which makes it possible to analyze more complex and diversified realities, with relationships that are not all in the same direction. Marginalization, that is, rejection at the periphery by the group occupying the center's position, makes it possible to account for multiple economic and political phenomena, but also cultural, religious, sexist or racist. Any individual or category of persons can be placed on the periphery of a social system for a specific reason: a young immigrant, a fundamentalist, a woman, a divorcee, a region, a religious minority, a raped woman, a child soldier, etc. And the inclusive pastoral approach I advocate for goes beyond the categorizations and provides pastoral care to both the hurt and the harming, the victim and the oppressor, the horrible and the heroic. It goes against a selective and exclusive remembrance that tends to be forgetful.

Underlining the need to remember both the hurt and the harming on all sides, David Tombs, an Afrikaners of South Africa, recalls that he grew up with the perception of belonging to a minority group victimized by the British imperialism. Thus, he was only reminded of the horror

done to his people and it became difficult for him to see the man horrors done by his people during the apartheid years.[107]

One of the difficulties in reconstructing a reconciled post-genocide Rwanda is the lack of inclusive remembrance, that is, the remembrance of the hurt and the harming of all sides, but also the horrible and the heroic of all sides. The people of this country try not to refer to themselves as Tutsis and Hutus, but as simply Rwandans because the ethnic memories are horrifying. At the same time, a visit to the genocide memorials and public places reveals the emphasis on the "genocide of the Tutsis by the Hutus". Such an emphasis points exclusively to the Hutus as authors and sole responsible for the genocide and undermines the suffering of Hutus. As James Carney points out, while the genocide's systematic elimination of Tutsi should never be forgotten, there are also dangers to exclusively "ethnicizing" the social memory of genocide.[108]

While remembering the horrible events and their perpetrators and victims, the inclusive pastoral care I advance here should also not forget the humanity of those responsible of the horrible acts. In doing so, one moves away from the diabolization of the oppressor so as to consider the social context and appreciate "the power of various binding and blinding forces that enables an ordinary person to kill or torture another human being."[109] But the horrible events are not the only ones to be remembered and their perpetrators and victims to be ministered to.

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[107] David Tombs, "Towards Inclusive Remembrance after the 'Troubles': A Philosophical Perspective from within the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission," in *Explorations in Reconciliation: New Directions in Theology*, eds. David Tombs and Joseph Liechty (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006), 107.
[108] James J. Carney, "A Generation after Genocide: A Catholic Reconciliation in Rwanda," *Theological Studies* 76(4), 2015: 808.
[109] David Tombs, 114.

The inclusive pastoral care should not forget to remember the inspiring human potential for goodness. In the context of violence, be it genocide or racism, there are usually heroes that history tends to forget. In the context of Rwanda, for example, it is necessary to unearth the names of Hutus who risked their lives to protect and save some Tutsis from the hands of the *génocidaires*. It is the same in the ethnic conflicts in the Katanga Province in the Democratic Republic of Congo where some heroic Katangese helped in protecting the Baluba from Kasai.

The inclusive pastoral care would also try to look at the reality of a nation holistically; it does not reduce history to a single event that happened during a period of history. More clearly, we consider that while certain events (genocide, ethnic cleansing, apartheid, wars) are critical in understanding the past and the present of and determining people's future, the history should not be reduced to those particular happenings. Humanity is more than its failures. That is why the whole community should be part of the reconciliation process. And community as we use it here refers to a shared life beyond the living humans. It includes as Bénézet Bujo theorizes it, the living, the living dead, and those to be born.[110]

It is not fortuitous that Jacob brought all his blessings (people and goods) to meet and re-unite with Esau (Gen 33). The author could have wanted the readers to understand the community and inclusive dimension of reconciliation. While recalling the promises made to Abraham (living dead), the peaceful re-union of Esau and Jacob involves future generations. Such an understanding of community and reconciliation as prolonging life from the past towards the

[110] Bénézet Bujo, *The Ethical Dimension of Community: The African Model and the Dialogue between North and South* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1998).

future should be more explored so as to foster the inclusive pastoral care that the Church needs to develop in Africa and beyond.

III.6. An Inculturated Pastoral

The sixth criterion of sacramentality of the Church in her mission of reconciliation consists in the dialogue with the cultures. What is true of the relationship between people or between social groups is also true of the relationship between cultures. It is undoubtedly a decisive act of the Second Vatican Council that the necessity of the inculturation of the Gospel has been established. The inculturation of the Gospel and of the liberating action of salvation cannot take place outside of time and space. It requires taking into account a culture with its own identity, constituted by an original way of thinking, acting, organizing economic and political life. Gospel and culture enter into a dialectic of alterity and similarity in a process of mutual transformation. The theological view allows us to see the revelation of the Incarnation of Christ extending into human and ecclesial mediations. It is now the unavoidable foundation of all pastoral action and all theological interpretation.

The theology of reconciliation proposed here invites the Church to make use of the available resources in the African cultures to build up creatively her pastoral of reconciliation. One the distinctive features that the Church shares with the African worldview is the importance of the rituals. Therefore, an inculturated pastoral of reconciliation in Africa should revive the rituals and replace them at the heart of the life of the community. An experience of the

inculturation of the process of reconciliation was tried in Rwanda with some success. It is known as the "*Gacaca Nkirisitu*" to be translated as the Christian *Gacaca*.[111]

In the late 1990s, the Church leaders in Rwanda conceptualized and developed the *Gacaca Nkirisitu* as a combination of the Rwanda's traditional *Gacaca* process with the ancient Christian Church's penitential process. It is reported that the process would start with the perpetrators of the genocide being asked to abstain from the sacrament for six months. During this period, they would participate in a weekly catechesis on Saturday mornings. These sessions would examine the connections between human rights, sacramental practice and the work of the Holy Spirit. Over the course of this program, perpetrators are encouraged to share the full truth about their actions during the genocide, to seek forgiveness from their victims and to overcome their shame. Retreats are organized to facilitate this process, focusing successively on the group of perpetrators, the group of victims and the encounter of the two groups.

At the end of the six months period, the victim survivors are given the opportunity to offer forgiveness to the perpetrators. They would, then, be invited to join the perpetrators in the private sacrament of reconciliation. At the subsequent Sunday Mass, each perpetrator would kneel in front of the representative of the victim's family, who would place a hand on the perpetrator's shoulder, signifying prayer and blessing over the perpetrator. Thus, the perpetrator feels lifted up again as he enjoys the blessing from the victim. Then the priest or the bishop would perform the ritual rite of reincorporation including the sprinkling of baptismal water. After mass, the entire community would share a celebratory party with the perpetrator, the victim and their

[111] The description I give here is completely drawn from the thoroughly searched article by James J. Carney, "A Generation After: Catholic Reconciliation in Rwanda," *Theological Studies* 76 (4), 2015: 785-812.

families, symbolizing that the community is restored from brokenness and is ready to live together again in peace and harmony. A path for a renewed living together is opened as individual perpetrators and victims are invited to participate in the same workers' cooperatives and community associations. This ending conveys that lasting reconciliation could grow only through sharing life together daily.

The *Gacaca Nkirisitu*, while echoing ancient Church's penitential tradition, makes good use of the existing processes of reconciliation as found in traditional African societies. Therefore, it constitutes a model of inculturation that can be spread and adapted to other specific African societies. Such attempts of inculturation would consecrate the fact that the African have taken up the initiative to understand and present with their symbols their path toward salvation. We all recall Paul VI's invitation to the Africans to such initiatives during his visit in Kampala: "You can, you must have an African Christianity"; and the Congolese Cardinal Joseph Malula to add: "Yesterday the foreign missionaries Christianized Africa; today, the Negro Africans will Africanize Christianity."[112] African initiative by Africans and with African symbols would suggest that foreign hands are no longer determinant in the management of the common life among Africans, which we have identified as one of the causes of the conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in Africa in general.

Looked in this perspective, inculturation can serve not only to heal the wounds as in the case of the *Gacaca Nkirisitu*, but also to educate, orient and straighten the social bonds. Thus, it is not only curative, and also preventive of the social estrangement. It is thus that various

[112] "L'Eglise à l'Heure de l'Africanité," in *Oeuvres Complètes du Cardinal Malula: Textes Concernant l'Inculturation et les Abbés*, ed. Léon de Saint Moulin (Kinshasa: Facultés Catholiques de Kinshasa: 1997). The translation is mine.

inculturated rites follow the step of an education of the leaders. Others are oriented toward the defense and protection for the vulnerable of the community, like widows and children. Thanks to inculturation, we better realize that Christianity is not a simple dish that we simply want to bring to others! Either it germinates in a soil, from a seed brought from elsewhere or from a message coming from somewhere, or it is grafted on existing roots. And in both cases, Christianity feeds on the sap, and on the humus of the environment in which it grows. This is how Africans have brought and should continue to bring their symbols, their arts to feed the message of the Gospel. Thus, they contribute to enrich the Christian mysteries. They even need to go further by inventing other rituals, drawn from their ritual memory, to interpret salvation in Christ. In this renewal of the initiative, the composition of new liturgical songs, for example, can full of titles given by Africans to Christ, enriches the history of salvation with new registers that resonate with Africa.

III.7. Living a permanent conversion

The seventh and last criterion of sacramentality I propose is that of a permanent conversion of the Church. The Church can only be communicative of salvation through reconciliation if she recognizes her poverty and shows signs of an unceasing conversion, not only at the level of persons, but also at the level of structures. As John Paul II invites, in the apostolic exhortation on the sacrament of reconciliation:

> Insofar as the Church is able to bring about active concord - unity in diversity - within her own bosom, and to offer oneself as a witness and humble agent of reconciliation with other churches and ecclesial communities and other religions, she becomes, according to the express definition of St. Augustine, a ‘reconciled

> world' (*Sermo* 96, 7). Then she can be a sign of reconciliation in the world and for the world.[113]

If reconciliation is at the heart of the work of salvation, how can the Church be its instrument and sign without fighting within herself the divisions, the rivalries and hatred? How can we maintain our credibility without accepting to change the structures that do not take into account the legitimate democratic aspirations, the place of women, the diversity of cultures and theological interpretations? In the context of the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Church elites are challenged in their acquaintances with the milieu of economic and political powers. Such acquaintances prevent them to side with the victims, and so to be signs of reconciliation as we have developed previously.

The entire ecclesial community is called to the work of reconciliation in the search for communion through the richness of differences and respect for justice, not by the pure and simple affirmation of a timeless truth. With Teresa Okure, we can identify three areas where the Church in Africa needs urgent conversion to become effective and credible witness of God's reconciliation. The first area of urgent conversion refers to the "Laity-Clergy" split. There is need, according to Teresa Okure, to reject the actions that tend to socialize some Christians into believing that as laity they are "nobodies", or that they are merely helpers in their church.[114]

Observing such a "schism" between on the one hand the clerics and on the other hand the laity in the church of Kinshasa, the Congolese Cardinal Joseph Malula, then Archbishop, wished to

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[113] JEAN-PAUL II, *Réconciliation et pénitence dans la mission de l'Église aujourd'hui*, exhortation apostolique post-synodale *Reconciliatio et paenitentia*, 2 déc. 1984, (Paris: Centurion, 1984), n° 25. The translation is mine.
[114] Teresa Okure, "Church-Family of God: The Place of God's Reconciliation, Justice and Peace," in *Reconciliation, Justice, and Peace: The Second African Synod*, ed. Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 20.

present the Church above all as a body of the disciples of Christ and a community of witnesses whose mission is to announce the Gospel in co-responsibility, to gather the people of God by this announcement, to pursue God's plan to humanize and reconcile the world.

The mission of the Church, Malula said, "is not the task of the priest alone or of group of lay people around the priest, more or less under his dependence or even some charismatic individuals."[115] The responsibility for the mission rests with the entire people of God. It is in this perspective that he created in the 1970s the ministry of the Bakambi or lay parish leaders. Certainly the most innovative creation, the existence of the Bakambi, reduced the differences then observed between the priests and the laity in the taking of responsibilities within the Church. This intuition of Cardinal Malula already put an end to clericalism. Unfortunately very few bishops followed. And even in Kinshasa where it was invented, this ministry is in the process of disappearing.

The second area of conversion for the Church for Okure concerns the split between the inclusive nature of the Church and the exclusion of women from Church's responsibilities. Their exclusion on the basis of gender contradicts the reconciling call of the Church. The issue of women in the Church, Okure says, is a justice issue.[116] It is about justice to God, who re-creates and offers the gift of reconciliation to all without any personal merit or consideration based on gender. It is also about justice to women who, like men, are baptized in Christ and thereby entitled to full and inalienable membership in Jesus Christ. Failure to work on such an inclusivity

[115] Quoted by Rodhain Kasuba Malu, *Joseph Cardinal Malula: Liberté et Indocilité d'un Cardinal Africain* (Paris: Kathala, 2014), 165.
[116] Teresa Okure"Church-Family of God: The Place of God's Reconciliation, Justice and Peace," in *Reconciliation, Justice, and Peace: The Second African Synod*, ed. Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 21.

means obstructing the gift of reconciliation given freely by God to all men and women. In Christ all become new creation, male or female (2 Cor 5: 17). A Church that discriminates from within cannot claim to be a reconciling instrument for the world.

The third area of urgent conversion is a concern with the ranking in the Church. As a Church, there is need to liberate ourselves from the preoccupation with ranks. The early Church emphasized the gifts of the Holy Spirit that made some apostles, others prophets, evangelists, pastors. These gifts, given freely and not based on gender or race or clan, were not used for personal aggrandizement but for building up the body of Christ, so that the whole Church would obtain fullness of Christ's own maturity (Eph 4: 4-3, 16).[117] So, where does the current emphasis of the ranks come from? The church needs to recover the difference in ministries based of the difference of gifts that people have received, not on the ranks that one occupies. Are we not all called to be full sharers of Christ's mission through the daily breaking of our lives so that others may eat and have life in fullness? As Timothy Radclife observes, the "stiff clericalism and authoritarianism do not help the Church now to thrive and be a sign of God's friendship for humanity." With him, w hold that "we need a new culture of authority from the Vatican to the parish council, which lifts people up into the mystery of loving equality."[118]

There are certainly other areas where there is need for conversion. But the three that are mentioned appear as urgent to our eyes. Addressing them, now, would make the Church in Africa correspond to what she claims to be, that is, the Church-family of God, which effectively and

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[117] Teresa Okure, "Church-Family of God: The Place of God's Reconciliation, Justice and Peace," in *Reconciliation, Justice, and Peace: The Second African Synod*, ed. Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 21.
[118] Timothy Radclife, "Towards a Humble Church," *The Tablet* (January 2, 2010), 4.

legibly is at the service of reconciliation within herself and then respond to her "ambassadorial appeal to a world in dire need of God's reconciliation."[119]

[119] Teresa Okure, "Church-Family of God: The Place of God's Reconciliation, Justice and Peace," in *Reconciliation, Justice, and Peace: The Second African Synod*, ed. Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 22.

CONCLUSION

Faced with the situations of disintegration and the surge of violence currently experienced, we can think that the Church must today favor the announcement of reconciliation. Presence with the excluded and immersion in a pluralistic world have increased the awareness that true reconciliation based on mutual and integral enhancement, which combines the evangelical demands of justice and forgiveness, is an emergency. Beyond its relevance in the particular context of the Democratic Republic of Congo, I am convinced that, in the cultural, economic and social context that is ours today, reconciliation cannot fail to take more and more prominence. Revisited theologically from categories of exclusion-inclusion, power dynamic and plurality, it can give the announcement of salvation an updated human and theological language. Reconciliation would be a way to think and live not only conflicts, but also differences.

At the end of this theological reflection, reconciliation appears as a sort of circle of life. It is the horizon towards which we tend and from which we constantly go. It is graciously proposed by God as the gift par excellence that founds communion with Him and between humans. It is entrusted to us as an imprescriptible responsibility that engages in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, the only mediator of universal reconciliation. For us Christians, reconciliation is “already there” since the loving sacrifice of Christ has destroyed hatred, once and for all. It is “not yet” because the birth of the reconciled universe will come to an end only when Christ will gather everything in him, in the Holy Spirit, to the glory of the Father.

In time, the Church is “in labor” of reconciliation. In her being of grace, she is inhabited by the transforming energy of the divine life. In her sinful reality, she struggles against the forces

of evil and pursues her own conversion. By mission, it is called to fight against hatred and violence and to become a sacrament of reconciliation for all, regardless of people or cultures. Reconciliation becomes the very name of salvation and, therefore, the foundation of Christian existence and the regulative principle of personal and social ethics.

By receiving the gift of reconciliation, the ecclesial community is entrusted with a mission of mediation to live simply in the middle of the human family, so that human beings "have life in abundance" (Jn 10, 10).

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