

27 July 2016



## **Conference report**

**Reconciliation from a Christian Perspective  
Bogota, Colombia**



**VU University, Amsterdam | Faculty of Theology**

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Religion**

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## Introduction

As a delegation from the VU Amsterdam we traveled together to Bogota, Colombia to participate in a five-day conference on `Reconciliation from a Christian Perspective`. We left Amsterdam the 5<sup>th</sup> of March 2016 with a group of ten people;

- Dico Baars, MA Peace, Trauma and Religion
- Thomas de Boer, MA Peace, Trauma and Religion
- Carla Borgers, Premaster Theologie
- Fernando Enns, professor Peace Theology and Ethics
- Fulco van Hulst, research associate, Peace Theology and Ethics
- Saapke van der Meer, MA Predikantenopleiding
- Marie-José van Os, MA Peace, Trauma and Religion
- Daan Savert, MA Peace, Trauma and Religion
- Jan Willem Stenvers, future MA student Peace, Trauma and Religion.
- Britt Bakker, MA Peace, Trauma and Religion

This report describes the program of the conference. Each morning different speakers presented different perspectives to the topic of reconciliation, faith, forgiveness and justice. During the midday programs we met in a smaller group with representatives of community and government organizations. Central to the conference was the topic of reconciliation, Christian faith and the situation in Colombia. But as you will see, we encountered many different perspectives to these topics and discussed interdisciplinary approaches, as well as different international perspectives. Next to church representatives, NGO associates and community members, people from El Garzal, a small community in the Northern jungle of Colombia participated. The people from El Garzal are under constant violent threat from paramilitary groups surrounding them. However, due to their strong faith and positive community peacebuilding process, they find the strength to resist giving up the land and continue their struggle for justice. In addition, during the conference, thoughts, different feelings and dialogue have been present during and around the entire program. I have written this report from my own perspective, and at different points have tried to be as objective as possible in my depiction of different dynamics during the conference. However, I cannot speak for or about the experiences lived through by others during the conference, if I have presented this wrongfully, *lo siento*.

## **Preface by Jenny Piedad Neme Neiva**

*“Justapaz and the Mennonite community work together in this course on reconciliation. It is not only a time to learn, but also to encounter and to meet each other. We seek to what is exactly going on in our country. Second, not all of us are part of the Mennonite community. We are all faith people. We think it is import to reflect on the theological and theoretical aspects of our work in the field of justice and peace, and also to deal with practical issues. Therefore there are here people from all over the country of Colombia. We welcome the international delegation, which enriches our discussion with different perspectives.”*

## **7<sup>th</sup> March**

### **An introduction to Colombia**

**By Jenny Piedad Neme Neiva**

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of March we were introduced to Colombia by Jenny Piedad Neme Neiva, one of the organizers of the conference, president of the Mennonite Peace organization “Justapaz”. Jenny explained to us that Colombia has been exposed to violence and armed conflict for over 60 years. However, according to others the conflict started over a 100 years ago. This difference of around about 40 years immediately tells us that Colombian history cannot be told by only one story. Colombia has 48 million inhabitants, which perhaps all have their own interpretation of Colombian history. For instance, 13 million of these 48 million people live in poverty. Unlike the prosperous lives lived in the bigger cities, these people’s lives are often directly exposed to the armed conflict and are the ones to bear the greatest burden of the consequences of the violence. You can imagine that the shape of storytelling about Colombian history, the armed conflict and responsibility, varies amongst societal positions. Next to the poverty, land ownership and unequal land divisions are one of the greatest problems in Colombia. But also the international context, like the influence of Cuba and the US had influences on the Colombian context. However, the main problem perhaps is the armed conflict itself. What started in 1964 with the rise of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), sided by state army violence, continued into the formation of the E.L.N and paramilitary groups. Kidnappings, forced disappearances, killings, drug related violence and fear spreading have generated 8 million victims, 6 million internally displaced people and over 11.000 recruited children since 1985. Colombians are tired of the violence. They organized themselves into different non-violent protest groups, which along with the current peace talks between the government and the FARC give rise to hope. On 23th of March 2016 the peace agreement will hopefully be signed between the Colombian government and the FARC (which do not included is ELN so far). However, as Jenny continues to explain, we should not expect too much from the official peace talks. Poverty and paramilitary violence continue and can even spur up after a peace agreement is signed. Furthermore, it is likely that the government will not be able to live up to the deal. Therefore, to speak of real peace is ill advised.

## People of Colombia

By Maria, Samuel, Alma and Felice

During the second morning session, we were introduced to different people from nearby and far away communities. They expressed their immediate thoughts when thinking about reconciliation.

*"We need space for dialogue to see, are we even on the same page? Maria from Trujillo*

*"Reconciliation is healing, arriving to agreements. For 40 years we wanted to keep this land. Armed people tried to take it from us and the government is not helping. We aren't even reconciled amongst ourselves so how can we speak of the bigger picture of reconciliation?" Samuel from El Garzal*

*"I only speak of reconciliation with small children. They are uncontaminated, as we should be in order to reconcile. And how can we speak of peace when we have hunger for justice and education?" Maria from Trujillo*

*"We need to restore the trust that is lost when we talk about forgiveness. From my faith, I find the power and the strength to forgive. However, I have no idea what is going on in the minds of the enemy, or what he wants! I don't know whether they want to forgive and reconcile. I don't know how this person views his faith, and how much he values forgiveness. To trust our faith, makes us able to forgive, but it has to come from both ways." Alma from El Garzal*

*"We receive many people who have been involved in gangs and drugs due do displacement, and I see we need four things to make reconciliation happen.*

- *We need to express our different ideas about reconciliation and agree on a form,*
- *the community itself needs to be involved,*
- *we need to define our spirituality towards peace,*
- *and finally, we should not continue listening to the people that constantly speak, we should hear from the community and the people themselves." Felice from St. Nicolas (neighborhood in Bogota)*

## 7<sup>th</sup> March

### Midday program Meeting three organizations

During the midday session we met with representatives of three different human rights organizations in Colombia; Mencoldes, Justapas and Dipaz.

- **Mencoldes**

During the afternoon we met with the Colombian Mennonite Relief Foundation (*Mencoldes*). Mencoldes is an initiative of the Mennonite Church of Colombia. They promote integral development in communities in vulnerable situations. Mencoldes is mainly involved in 5 different areas, namely: 1) micro crediting, 2) women in violent situations, 3) entrepreneurship, 4) poverty and displacement and finally 5) they are involved in juridical issues. It is the work of Mencoldes to analyze society and report on that what happens along the line of societal issues regarding the above mentioned topics. Next to analyzing, their work is practical, as they are directly involved in society, working with families who find themselves in desperate situations. The ideology within

Mencoldes is that people should not only focus on the individual when trying to make a change in society, they should focus on a whole family. Family is central in Colombian culture and society and within that structure change can occur. Thus, Mencoldes focusses on relations and love for others in order to resolve what the conflict, poverty and inequality have caused.<sup>1</sup>

- **Justapaz**

Founded in 1991, the Christian Centre for Justice, Peace and Nonviolent Action (Justapaz) seeks to embody and serve non-violence through programs that focus on working towards transforming Colombia into a peaceful society. The center was founded from within the Mennonite Church in Colombia, which is focused on justice and peace. At this moment, Justapaz is involved in programs concerning non-violence, conscientious objectors to military service, memory, and political lobby.

The conscientious objector

In Colombia, when a boy turns 18 years of age, he will have to serve in the army. Military service is therefore mandatory. In addition, having served in the military is a precondition for anyone who wants enroll in university. However, there is one 'loophole' in order not to serve: being a conscientious objector. A legally recognized conscientious objector is a person who is opposed to serving in the army and bearing arms on the grounds of moral or religious principles. Justapaz especially accompanies young people who decide not to go to the army and to be conscientious objectors. Justapaz spreads the word about the option for youngsters to choose this option, because many of them don't even know that this option exists. This is how they helped one young boy who was picked up from the street and was taken to one of the training camps in order to join the military. Justapaz went into the legal process with this person in order to make sure that he will not have to serve in the army against his will. Eventually, they succeeded! This victory is emblematic, because the jurisprudence from this court case will serve as a legal source in favor of future conscious objectors.<sup>2</sup>

- **Dipaz**

The Interchurch Dialogue for Peace in Colombia (DiPaz), is an organization that is initiated by representatives of churches and faith-based organizations that have been involved during the recent years in social processes of peace and accompanying communities on building peace and justice from nonviolent action.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mencoldes (2016, May 31) Mencoldes, Fundacion Menonita Colombiana para el Desarrollo. Retrieved from <http://www.fundacionmencoldes.org/>

<sup>2</sup> Justapaz (2016, May 31) Insight on Conflict. Retrieved from <http://www.insightonconflict.org/conflicts/colombia/peacebuilding-organisations/justapaz/>

<sup>3</sup> Dipaz (2016, May 31) Dipaz Colombia. Retrieved from <https://dipazcolombia.wordpress.com/>

**8<sup>th</sup> March**

**Reconciliation through European eyes**

**By Prof. Dr. Fernando Enns**

When Fernando visited Jerusalem a few weeks ago (on behalf of the World Council of Churches), he noticed that this was a city built up out of rocks and stones, which have left little room for nature. The people there now say, because of the ongoing conflict we have become like these rocks: rough and tough. There are soldiers everywhere, tension and violence. The enormous separation wall between Palestinian occupied territory and Israel is a daily reminder of this conflict. But another wall in Jerusalem stands for faith and hope: the Western Wall. It's where the Jewish people stick little papers with prayers written on them between the cracks of the stones. The Israel-Palestine conflict is a situation of hope and desperation. Still, reconciliation is hardly spoken of. If you ask them what to do next, they are silent.

In the Colombian context, there is also a need to break down 'walls' which are our obstacles for reconciliation. Fernando asked the audience: Which are the walls that need to be overcome? The audience reacted:

*"The attachment to the current status quo needs to be overcome. People have gotten used to the current situation, made their life out of it and don't understand what change might bring about. This fear for change is a fear of the unknown, leaves us paralyzed. People now just live on the waves of the conflict."*  
Jorge, audience

As Fernando said, reconciliation is something we participate in, not something we produce, and it's something we receive as a gift. Reconciliation is an attitude, not only possessed by Christians. We will get further if we also as Christians, go into dialogue with other religions. Until this day we suffer from the separation between different denominations, historical boundaries still inflict us through stereotyping, and this affects our identity. Reconciliation can help us to get out of our stereotypical, historical labels, f. ex. of our 'Mennonite group', while we can still honor the past. In order to further reconciliation we have to admit to and work with three things:

1. We need to face our suffering, the past needs to be addressed;
2. Then, we need to find a unity. What is it that connects us all?
3. We need to create a shared narrative of the history and start with an honest self-assessment in the presence of the other. This last part is particularly difficult.

And finally, you need repentance. But not in the way we all think. Because repentance is a dangerous key aspect of the practice of reconciliation and forgiving. Often people believe that without the perpetrator repenting, there will never be space to forgive. This however leaves the perpetrator in power, because without his or her repentance, you as a victim will never even be given the option to forgive or not. And you will never be able to fully let go, and get past your grievances.<sup>4</sup> In that regard, we should view reconciliation not only as an interpersonal action but also as an intrapersonal practice; something that happens within us. So making peace, without depending on the repentance of the perpetrator to act.

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<sup>4</sup> Van de Loo, S. (2009). *Versöhnungsarbeit: Kriterien, theologischer Rahmen, Praxisperspektiven* (Vol. 38). W. Kohlhammer Verlag.

## The non-violent cross

By Fulco van Hulst

Fulco van Hulst works as a research associate for Mennonite Peace Theology and Ethics at the Mennonite Seminary and the VU University in Amsterdam. Fulco gave a presentation on the topic: “violence needs atonement, but atonement does not need violence: A peace Church perspective on the Cross.”

### Reconciling with God

The death of Jesus at the cross is often interpreted as something that God wanted to happen and God himself initiated. Through this perspective, this violent act was necessary to restore the order between humans and God, and to reconcile between these two parties. However, this would suggest that God initiated the violence done to Jesus, and that God in that sense legitimizes the act of violence. Especially within the Mennonite church this raises some serious issues. God creating peace through violent means seems to be a paradox in this non-violent peace church. The main question that is asked here is: If God legitimizes violence, how should we as humans then approach violence? Can violence then be legitimized for ‘a greater good’ or a higher purpose? First, Fulco delineates that there are different interpretations of the cross. Such as the *Christus Victor* perspective, the subjective atonement perspective and the satisfaction motif. The latter is the most wide spread and will be discussed in further detail.

### The satisfaction perspective.

This perspective was created by Anselm of Canterbury and his model atonement through satisfaction. This perspective goes as follows: Adam sinned against God by eating the apple in paradise. However, there is a cosmic structure which demands that humans and God are reconciled with each other. The problem here is that the whole humanity was created by God, therefore we owe him everything, but we as humans therefore don’t have the means to satisfy God again, after Adam sinned. (We could all die forever, but that would go against the divine plan of God, so this was no option). This is the point where Jesus saves us. The most important thing to remember here is that Jesus – the “Son of God” – was born without any sin, unlike the rest of humanity, who are all born with sin. Now Jesus was the one person on the earth that did not owe God anything. However, he was willing to sacrifice his life. This sacrifice gesture was the one thing that could satisfy God again. This perspective leaves the role of humanity out of the question. The reconciliation was something that needed to be done and was initiated by God to reconcile through himself (Jesus as God). This perspective is what we would describe as a retributive perspective, where God demanded a form of sacrifice and punishment in order to restore what was done to him.

### The non-violent atonement

Then Fulco proposed an alternative perspective, which is inspired by the teachings of the theologian J. Denny Weaver. Weaver’s approach to interpreting the violence of the cross helps us to understand this event not as a retributive act from God, but shows that the death of Jesus was a pure advocacy for non-violence. Fulco discusses three points which shed light on the non-violent aspects of the story of the cross.

1. There are different paradigms of justice, you can view justice in the form of retribution, but also in the form of restoration, which does not require violence.



2. Who was actually responsible for the violence? God or humans?

Weaver tells us that it was not God who wanted Jesus to die at the cross. The responsibility of the death of Jesus lies with evil powers and humans, who in a way are enslaved by these evil powers.

*“By virtue of what society is and of human participation in society, we are all guilty of the killing of Jesus”<sup>5</sup>*

When we involve the holy trinity into the story, we won't be able to state that it was God who was responsible for the violence. If God, the son and the Holy Spirit are 1, we have to admit that when Jesus is non-violent, God cannot be violent, because they are one and the same.

3. When the Christian religion became the official religion of the Roman Empire, the Church started to change its position on nonviolence – as the interests of the Church now started to coincide with the interests of the Empire. This has changed people's ideas about the non-violent core of Jesus' death, and the event was used by the Roman Empire for their own benefit. It opened the way towards a perspective in which God Himself used violence to bring peace.<sup>67</sup>

With these three reasonings, Weaver explains to us that interpreting the violence at the cross as a divine action undertaken by God is a misinterpretation. We should view the death of Jesus as an act of reconciliation, where the violence was initiated by humans and which has been used by different powers in the world in order to sustain a violent interpretation of the cross, leaving a wrongful interpretation to become the dominant understanding in society. What we can learn from Weaver is that we can still see the death of Jesus as an act of penance, also without holding God responsible. We should emphasize on the human responsibility of this violence and see God not as a strict judge who wants to punish sinful people, but rather as a loving and forgiving God.

### **Midday program**

#### **High Commission for Peace**

#### **By Juan Perez, representative of the government**

During the afternoon we met Juan Perez, who works in the High Commission for Peace. The Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos initiated a specific commission for peace, which is dealing with the current peace talks and organizes the peace negotiations between the government and the FARC. Juan explains to us that it is important to understand the gist of this agreement, in order to understand the reaction of the society and mostly, the victims. Some of these victims were also around the table with us. Some from the Community of El Garzal, and other from nearby communities.

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<sup>5</sup> J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, Grand Rapids (MI): Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001

<sup>6</sup> Weaver, J. D. (2011). *The nonviolent atonement*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing.

<sup>7</sup> Van Hulst, F. (2016). Violence needs atonement, but atonement does not need violence: A Peace Church perspective on the Cross of Christ.

Juan explains the demands from the government and the FARC and shows what has been agreed upon until now. In short the agreements come down to this: the FARC will not tolerate retribution for their wrongdoings. In other words, the FARC will only sign a peace agreement, as long as their members will not be prosecuted by the state and are granted complete amnesty.

The government on the other hand, is not willing to grant complete amnesty to the FARC members. They propose the following; everyone who has committed rape, torture, kidnapping, execution, child recruitment, forced displacement or any international crime (genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes) will not be granted amnesty. He or she will be prosecuted. If a perpetrator has been found guilty for one of the above mentioned crimes, and is being prosecuted, three things can happen. First, if a perpetrator will fully cooperate with the government in the process of truth finding, he or she will not have to go to jail, but their rights will be restricted for 5 to 8 years. (It is not specified which rights will be restricted). Second, if a perpetrator purposefully does not further the process of truth finding, he or she will be sentenced to jail for 5 to 8 years. Third, if a perpetrator does not acknowledge the crimes committed and does not express any form of remorse, he or she will be sentenced to jail for 15 to 20 years. Any perpetrator who has been found guilty (only) to the act of (armed) rebellion, can be granted amnesty. The peace process and proposed peace agreement heightens the political and public debate. Disagreement, anger and feelings of injustice gather in societal debate, but also around our discussion table. During discussing the content of this peace agreement Maria speaks up:

*"I always have the feeling that the FARC is getting the best deal out of this agreement. We as victims have to fight for our rights and have to make huge efforts in order to get any form of restoration. After this peace agreement will be signed, the FARC members will live a happy ever after life. They do not only not have to pay for their crimes, but also can make claims to education and support from the government in order to pick up their lives again. While I as a victim have been trying to go to university for years, these perpetrators will be supported and granted this without any effort. The FARC members pose as the victims of the conflict, while we have done nothing wrong, but suffered all the consequences, and are the real victims. This is so unfair" Maria from Trujillo*

Juan responds explaining:

*"Reconciliation is a process as well as a result. It depends on participation of all the civilians. There is no recipe for dealing with this violent situation. Our main goal is to stop the violence from happening in the first place, as soon as possible. Maybe years from now, people will be ready for real reconciliation." Juan.*

*Maria continues:*

*"I feel frustrated, because from where I come from, we are looking for justice and truth. There might be some jail sentence for the perpetrators, but what we really want is to know where our family members whom we lost or who are disappeared are now. There should have been victims around the table when this peace agreement was build up. First the government should have been talking to us, and then they should have involved the FARC, not the other way around!" Maria*

This discussion illustrates only the tip of the iceberg in the disagreement between the government and the unsatisfied victims.

**9<sup>th</sup> March**

**Models of reconciliation**

**By Prof. dr. Fernando Enns**

‘The pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.’ This is the title of the World Council of Churches’ newest project. This project is meant to unite churches and Christians all over the world, to work together on healing harm, injustice and pain done by conflict around the world. It is wonderful to see that at our last assembly in 2013 in Korea, all churches were able to agree on the fact that this is for now, the most pressing concern, which churches have to deal with.<sup>8</sup>This project adds a new dimension into the search for justice, namely, the spiritual one. Cause without religion, it seems something is lacking in reconciliation. Now, the churches unite to create economic justice, ecological justice and peace building.<sup>9</sup><sup>10</sup>What is important to understand, is that this is not a pilgrimage towards peace, it’s a pilgrimage of peace. It’s a journey, not a destination. And every step in this path should be inspired by justice and peace.<sup>11</sup>Transformative spiritualities: spirituality is not just something to please yourself, it’s a social and relational process, not disconnected from the political realm. Dorothee Solle explains what this spirituality is:

- 1) *Viapositiva*: We should celebrate the blessings of creation. We always lived in the narrative of ‘the original sin’, but it would be much more positive to live in the narrative of the ‘original blessing’.
- 2) *Via negativa*: This is the road of looking up and acknowledging the wound which were inflicted. God reveals himself in the middle of suffering, exclusion and discrimination.
- 3) *Via transformative*: This road is all about resistance. Often we are not capable of letting go of ‘the evil’ inside us, because we carry around too much weight. This process is all about getting closer to ourselves, in order to transform injustices within ourselves, and trough that transform ourselves completely.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> WCC. (2016, May 31) Message of the WCC 10th Assembly. Retrieved from <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2013-busan/adopted-documents-statements/message-of-the-wcc-10th-assembly>

<sup>9</sup> An Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace adopted by the WCC Central Committee. (2016, April 9). Retrieved from <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/geneva-2014/an-invitation-to-the-pilgrimage-of-justice-and-peace>

<sup>10</sup> Infographic on the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace (pdf) to guide individuals and groups in their reflections. (2016, April 9). Retrieved from [http://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/files/Pilgrimage\\_JusticePeace\\_web.pdf](http://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/files/Pilgrimage_JusticePeace_web.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Fernando Enns, BEHOEDZAAM DE WEG GAAN MET JE GOD. De oecumenische pelgrimage van gerech1gheid en vrede als herorientatie voor de oecumenische beweging; in: [hvp://www.raadvankerken.nl/pagina/3273/god\\_behoedzaam\\_volgen](http://www.raadvankerken.nl/pagina/3273/god_behoedzaam_volgen)

<sup>12</sup> Soelle, D. (2001). *The silent cry: Mysticism and resistance*. Fortress Press.

Models of reconciliation within political processes.

The first model I want to discuss is the one from Germany after World War II. 20 million people died. The question after the war was: What do we do with the ones responsible? In 1945/1946 the Nuremberg trials were held. Here only the leaders were tried, and the winners, the allied forces, were the ones that initiated the court cases. This raises the question: can the winner of a war, provide a just judicial system for the ones that lost the war? The second model was that of Germany in the time that the Berlin Wall fell. West and East Germany were reunited, but not without serious consequences, especially for the Germans living on the East side of the former wall. In order open up to the public about what really happened during these separated times, the government implemented an enquiry-committee to investigate former state violence and injustice performed by the socialist regime to the public. However, these files are so inaccessible to the public due to the legal jargon, that this action had absolutely no effect on society at large. A third model was introduced: the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa after the end of the Apartheid-Regime. This 'tool' was installed in order to create truth finding, but also to let the public know what has happened in this area. Every meeting this commission had started with a prayer. This would not have been possible in Europe. However, this is one way of bringing the spiritual dimension into the reconciliation process next to the political dimension. Sadly, the commission has not lead to complete reconciliation, especially not among the black population in South Africa. After looking into these three models, we can only ask ourselves one question: *Colombia, quo vadis?*<sup>13</sup>

### **Retributive Justice versus Restorative Justice**

**By Britt Bakker**

After Fernando`s great introduction on models of reconciliation, I myself gave a short presentation introducing the concepts of retributive justice and restorative justice. The presentation went deeper into what both forms of justice imply, and what their advantages and disadvantages are. The main question during this presentation was: What is justice after an atrocity?

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<sup>13</sup> Latin: Where are you going?

After an atrocity has taken place, the search for justice is great. Different experiences of victims and perpetrators make it difficult to grasp what exactly would imply justice. If we follow the retributive system, punishment of the perpetrator would imply justice to both the victim and the perpetrator. In the restorative system, providing amnesty or setting up a truth and reconciliation commission would imply justice. However, both systems share their pro's and con's as listed in the figure below.

ADVANTAGES OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE SYSTEM	CHALLENGES IN A RESTORATIVE JUSTICE SYSTEM	ADVANTAGES OF A RETRIBUTIVE SYSTEM	CHALLENGES IN A RETRIBUTIVE SYSTEM
Local context insensitivity, More capacity, Cooperation of local actors, More change at finding the truth, Greater speed in launching investigations, Greater ability to compensate victims.	Cooperation of local actors and multiple parties, Unfulfilled expectations for victims, Deterrence?	Focus on retributive justice and punishment, Exposure of perpetrators – Individualization of guilt, Potential of deterrence, Clearly structured procedure, High evidentiary rules, Fair trials, Authoritative historical record, Universal norms generation.	Backward looking, Neglect of collective character of international crimes, Neglect of victims, Very selective enforcement, Time consuming, Higher up the chain of command, more difficult to prove guilt, Rules protect suspect rather than victims, Formalism, Very limited truth finding, Victor's justice? Expensive.

Table 1. Advantages and challenges of both the retributive and restorative justice systems

After exploring the different justice systems, we went on and applied these abstract concepts to the story of Rwanda and their search for justice after their genocide.

The story of Rwanda

Rwanda, 1994. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of April a genocidal mass slaughter caused the death of approximately half to a million Tutsis and moderate Hutus by the hands of extremist Hutus, the Rwandan army and national police. This all happened over the course of 3 months. This meant that over 70% of the Tutsi community died, erasing 20% of the entire population of Rwanda. A now divided society was looking for revenge and justice. The search or justice was impeccably complex. The government tried to handle the situation with different means. Namely: using conventional courts, installing Gacaca's and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda was implemented.

Conventional courts:

The first thing the government tried in their search for justice was to try the perpetrators in conventional courts. This soon showed to be impossible. Even though the national courts upheld the standards of the legal justice system, providing mostly fair trails, this approach had by no means the capacity to try all the perpetrators of the genocide. Next to the limited capacity in the court system, prisons were overflowing, killing hundreds of prisoners due to over crowdedness. As you can imagine, there was no talk of rehabilitation in these prisons, so when the convicts were set free, they sometimes were mentally worse of then before their prison experience.

The Gacaca`s:

It was clear that the national courts were not up to the task of providing justice after the atrocity. As an alternative to the national courts, the government started working with a new concept in 2001, the Gacaca courts. Loosely translated this means: "Justice among the Grass". The Gacaca courts are a method of transitional justice and are designed to promote communal healing and rebuilding in the wake of the Rwandan Genocide. The proceedings went as follows. Different communities were allowed to elect one judge from their own community. This person was now an official judge. Indicted perpetrators had to show up before this person and tell their story. This approach to create justice led to a huge amount of truth telling, involved the community in the healing process and had way more capacity than the national courts. However, corruption soon took over the judges, which made sure that fair trials were scarce. Furthermore, the Gacacas had no policies on victim/witness protection, which led to several cases in which victims or witnesses who provided evidence were retaliated against.

The ICTR:

The International Criminal Tribunal of Rwanda was established right after the genocide due to a resolution from the United Nations Security Council. This tribunal was set up to prosecute some of the higher leaders in the genocide. In 2005 this tribunal had dealt with 50 cases, and convicted 29 people. This international tribunal has a very high procedural standard, which led to many fair trials as far as possible and a highly reliable outcome to the cases. Furthermore, the tribunal reached international awareness which the Gacacas and national courts could not reach. However, the capacity was extremely small and cases were very time consuming and expensive. Furthermore, the ICTR was placed in Tanzania, which made local or even national involvement very limited.<sup>1415</sup>

### **Midday program**

**By Father Xavier and Magda**

Father Xavier:

It's important for everyone to talk about reconciliation. In our faith, reconciliation is mentioned too, like how the Apostle Paul speaks about it. In Colombia we need the spiritual aspect to make reconciliation work. Which is currently lacking in the entire peace proposal. Spirituality is something else than religion.

We should be able to speak about all aspects of peace, because peace is all about human relations. And human relations cannot be diminished to one trait. There are three steps involved in the peace process.

- **Recognition - We need to see that everyone is human, and not anything else**
- **Acceptance of the other – We need to accept a higher level of love in order to feel universal compassion.**

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<sup>14</sup> Smeulers, A., & Grünfeld, F. (Eds.). (2011). International crimes and other gross human rights violations: A multi-and interdisciplinary textbook (Vol. 32). Martinus Nijhoff Publishers

<sup>15</sup> Van Der Merwe H. et al. (Eds)(2009). Assessing the Impact of Transitional Justice: Challenges for Empirical Research. United States Institute for Peace Press. USA.

- **Respect and love – Having enough trust to trust and rely on the other.**

Human relations are an emotional issue. I had to suffer through so many preaching's that I know that human relations are about other things than mere faith, it's about emotions. In the scholarly world we separate thinking from feeling. We try to be as objective as possible. This is complete nonsense. Reconciliation needs emotions. We always move from love to hate and that's completely human. Love is what unites, and hate is what separates. Hate is not a bad thing. It enables us as humans to separate us from things that are not good for us. But if you turn your hate towards a human, you misuse your ability to hate. The book that I'm currently reading is that from Karen Armstrong: Compassion life. Her key point is: compassion is needed for peace. And I completely agree with this."

Magda:

After the Father's words, some short reflections. I'm very happy to see that we are not the only ones interested in reconciliation. It's a great thing that you are all here.

My question is: How can we pave the path for a perpetrator to come back into society? I tried to answer this question by visiting different communities and I found a few conclusions that I want to share with you. First, reconciliation is spontaneous and partial, and it happens over the course of time.

*Spontaneous:* Reconciliation is a thing that needs to be allowed to happen, never forced. Forgiving is something owned by the victim, and the government can never force this to happen or to occur. Forgiving needs to happen, spontaneously from the victims to the perpetrators.

*Partial:* Reconciliation is never complete; it will always be partial. Some perpetrators might come back into a community where they have reconciled with some people, but not with everyone. And that needs to be accepted. Reconciling is an individual internal process, which takes time for every individual to take place.

*Over the course of time:* Reconciliation is something that happens over time, it is not an instant choice. Social actors in a community will need to facilitate and support this long term process. Cause institutions, organizations or community places can do so much to further reconciliation. They can put `separate` people together, they can strengthen collective restitution and lobby for reconciliation. Furthermore, reconciliation needs a receptive community. They need to allow it, and can also stop the entire process from working. The community needs therefore to be involved from the beginning and involve everyone in the community, not only the victims.

**March 10<sup>th</sup>**

**The concept of forgiveness from different perspectives**

**By Andrés Pacheco**

Andrés Pacheco, psychologist and PhD-student of theology and one of the organizers of the conference, invited us to better understand the concept of forgiveness from different perspectives; namely, from a psychological, theological and political perspective. But first, Andres started his presentation with a letter.

*"On Friday night you stole the life of an exceptional being, the love of my life, the mother of my son, but you won't have my hatred. I don't know who you are and I don't want to know - you are dead souls. If this God for which you kill indiscriminately made us in his own image, every bullet in the body of my wife will*

*have been a wound in his heart. So no, I don't give you the gift of hating you. You are asking for it but responding to hatred with anger would be giving in to the same ignorance that made you what you are. You want me to be afraid, to view my fellow countrymen with mistrust, to sacrifice my freedom for security. You have lost. I saw her this morning. Finally, after many nights and days of waiting. She was just as beautiful as when she left on Friday night, just as beautiful as when I fell hopelessly in love over 12 years ago. Of course I'm devastated with grief, I admit this small victory, but it will be short-lived. I know she will accompany us every day and that we will find ourselves in this paradise of free souls to which you'll never have access. We are two, my son and I, but we are stronger than all the armies of the world. I don't have any more time to devote to you, I have to join Melvil who is waking up from his nap. He is barely 17-months-old. He will eat his meals as usual, and then we are going to play as usual, and for his whole life this little boy will threaten you by being happy and free. Because no, you will not have his hatred either."*

This letter was written by Antoine Leiris, a French journalist, who wrote this letter after the terrorist attacks in Paris in November 2015, where his wife died due to the attack. Andrés continues: This person frees himself from hatred, and that is why this letter could easily be a part of the Bible (either a Lament or a Psalm). It describes a struggle between reality and God. Although this letter was written by a victim with the intention not to spread hatred and forgive, the French government responded in the opposite way. Paris militarized. The government was not the direct victim, but they were the ones who allowed themselves to give a response. This letter brings us to the task of looking at and trying to understand forgiveness, which is critical in the path of reconciliation. In order to make justice to the complexity of the process of forgiveness, different dimensions should be explored. Andrés proposed to explore forgiveness from psychological, theological and political points of view.

Robert Enright<sup>16</sup> – psychological perspective

Robert Enright is a psychologist and professor of Educational Psychology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He is the founder of the International Forgiveness Institute in Madison.

Enright explains that when we speak about forgiveness, we automatically have to acknowledge that there has been some form of injustice acted out. Cause without injustice, there does not have to be forgiveness. Rage, anger and hurt are not bad things. They're human experiences which are part of life. This cannot be denied and should never be avoided. For people of the church, Andrés says, this is a bitter pill to swallow, because the Bible promotes forgiveness, it is hard to allow yourself to be in rage, while you feel forgiveness is expected from you. However, forgiveness is the tool that allows us to let go of these feelings of rage, anger and hurt. One cannot exist without the other. We need to be hurt and in anger, in order to feel the need or be able to understand true forgiveness. But not only people of the church find it difficult to practice forgiveness. Where some people of the church feel that they have the divine duty to forgive, others feel they can never forgive because of the strong sense that it is not deserved by the perpetrator to be forgiven.

However, as Robert Enright explains, forgiveness is never something that is deserved by the perpetrator. Forgiveness is always something owned by the victim, and it's theirs to share it in the form of a gift with

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<sup>16</sup> Enright, R. D. (2001). *Forgiveness is a choice: A step-by-step process for resolving anger and restoring hope*. American Psychological Association.



the perpetrator, or choose not to do so. Robert continues by explaining that there are 4 stages present in the process of forgiving.

#### 1 Recognize that there is rage.

We often try to hide emotions of rage and anger, but we never should. As we feel that anger and rage are not allowed to be felt. However, forgiving is expressing the rage in itself, it's acknowledging that something was truly wrong. So only by the mere gesture of forgiveness, we can simultaneously show and express that we felt wronged, and through that make known our anger.

#### 2. Understanding that forgiveness is not a decision, it's a commitment.

We have to understand and accept that rage and anger will not immediately be gone, once we forgive. It's never about forgetting the past and you don't have to let go the emotions you have felt. The thing that is however needed, is to shift the focus of your energy to the future, instead of the past. Then, you can decide to commit yourself to the practice of forgiving. It is a path rather than an isolated event or decision.

#### 3. Symbolize the act.

Besides committing yourself to the practice of forgiveness, you need to actually practice the forgiveness. This is where the other person, or the perpetrator, is needed –or at least when creating space for the other is important. Because forgiveness is not only an internal process, it is something that needs to be expressed. This could be as simple as walking up to someone and say "I forgive you", but this can also be the hard part, if that someone is not available. However, a form of action is always needed. One could also choose to forgive their perpetrator in a symbolic act which does not require him or her to be present.

#### 4. Get out of your own prison.

The final step in the process of forgiving is to discover the freedom you have granted yourself. You have to get out of your own emotional prison, and this is not easy. Even though people are in their fullest right to experience anger and rage, we are also obliged to deal with these feelings, for the sake of others, but mainly for our own sake. Emotions can be our shield, but can also turn into a sword, which we use against others and ourselves. Furthermore, it's not enough to only leave our own emotional prisons, we need to redefine what our life is going to be about from now on. The void needs to be filled with new focus and new enthusiasm, in order for us to get out of our own way.

### Miraslov Volf<sup>17</sup> – Theological perspective

Miraslow Volf is a Croatian Protestant theologian. He researches forgives from a theological perspective and claims that forgiveness is the act of neutralizing the damage that has been done.

According to Volf: *"...forgiveness is a special kind of gift... We can forgive when others have wronged us. And we release them from the burden of their wrongdoing"* (Volf, 2005. P. 130)

What is interesting here is that unlike in the psychological perspective, the theological perspective recognizes the perpetrator and their emotional burden in the process of forgiving. Here, the act of

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<sup>17</sup> Volf, M. (2009). *Free of charge: Giving and forgiving in a culture stripped of grace*. Zondervan.

forgiveness is not acted out for the sake of the individual who feels wronged, but mainly to lift the burden of guilt from the shoulders of the perpetrator. Furthermore, this perspective explains that forgiving is an active act, in the sense that the victim and perpetrator have to come to a certain understanding of what happened. The victim has to clearly explain and name the things that he or she felt they were wronged in. So does the perpetrator. Else you can forgive someone as a victim, but the perpetrator might not even have realized he/she did something wrong. This situation would not constitute true forgiveness.

David Bloomfield<sup>18</sup> – Political perspective

David Bloomfield researches political science and peace building. As he explains, forgiveness is often seen as a spiritual and individual thing. While according to him, forgiveness is a social and relational practice. David explains that there are essentially 2 aspects of forgiveness, which we need to take into account from the perspective of political science:

1. Forgiveness is about power relations.

We must recognize that during the practice of forgiveness, the victim holds power over the perpetrator. The victim can choose to give or hold back their forgiveness. Reconciliation between belligerent parties is allowed through the process of forgiveness, but will never occur once the forgiveness is forced. We cannot interfere in these power relations. This is where it gets difficult for churches, because in a sense, they love and live to forgive. But they also need to understand that forgiveness belongs to the victim, and that power should not be taken from them or forced in order to further reconciliation.

2. Forgiveness is the last step.

Many approach reconciliation with the thought “first I need to forgive, and then we can reconcile”. This is the wrong sequence according to Bloomfield. Forgiveness should always be one of the last steps in the whole process of reconciliation. It can only happen when co-existence is already becoming a bit more comfortable.<sup>19</sup>

Summing up

What we have learned from these 3 approaches is that in many aspects they overlap. All three approaches stress the importance of expressing the hurt that was done. However, there are also some differences. Psychology tells us that forgiveness is an internal and individual process. While theology and political sciences stress the group dynamics and the importance of relations, especially when forgiveness is part of reconciliation.

In the end Andrés poses the question: What comes first, repentance or forgiveness? The audience replies that repentance should take place first, but as long as you expect repentance to come your way from the

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<sup>18</sup> Bloomfield, David (2015). *Clarificando términos: ¿Qué podemos entender por reconciliación?* en “Reconciliación: Perspectivas y Aportes Conceptuales para su Comprensión”. P. 11-34. Bogotá: Impresol, ediciones.

<sup>19</sup> The question of “when” to forgive: “*Moreover, forgiveness should be a component of the last stages of process of reconciliation, which can take place only when the victims define it and when coexistence is becoming something a bit more positive*”

El “cuándo” del perdón: “*Más aún, el perdón debe ser un componente de las últimas etapas de la reconciliación, la cual puede darse en el momento que lo definan las víctimas y cuando la coexistencia se esté convirtiendo en algo más positivo*”

perpetrator, he or she will always be in power. When you expect repentance, you as a victim are dependent on the perpetrator, and this power dynamic makes it even more difficult for the victim to feel in control, or eventually feel free enough to forgive someone.

Andrés explains that practically, both ways can work. Either you repent first and later forgive, or the other way around, both can lead to reconciliation. It is the point where the roads cross, there is the place for reconciliation.

## **Contextual Bible reading**

**By Inge Landman**

During the midday program we gathered in small groups and started the practical exercise of contextual Bible reading. We read together with around 8 people the text of 'handelingen' 9:1 1-19 (NBV).

The goal of contextual Bible reading is never to convince others of ones right or wrong interpretation. Neither is this a place to advocate for conversion. It is meant as a method, which can allow people from different faiths and traditions to better understand each other. Through the discussion of different interpretations of sacred texts and worldviews, every party or rather to say; person, that is practicing contextual Bible reading can share their convictions in a safe and respectful environment, without being judged or in any way looked down upon for your personal convictions. The dialogue which occurs during this practice allows critical debates to take place, and new insights to be born, but also allows every person to uphold their personal religious convictions with distinction and dignity. The outcome of these dialogues are valuable for a number of reasons. In our diverse society, our daily lives are often intertwined with people who uphold different worldviews. Contextual Bible reading can allow people to understand and live together in peace with people of different convictions and worldviews and learn from each other in order to overcome personal problems.

- During this practice we were given 5 questions to answer about this text.
- What do we know about Saulus and Annanias after reading this story?
- With which person do you identify?
- Which conflicts do you identify from this text?
- Do we see transformation happening in this text? Where?
- Think about the Colombian context, is it possible from victims and perpetrators to reconcile?
- Does the story call for action?

This exercise showed how people can differently interpret a text. In the end all groups were asked to gather their final thoughts onto one paper and present them to the whole audience.

## **Midday program**

### **GemPaz Women Peace Makers**

Reconciliation is key to the network of the women peace makers of GemPaz. Catholic, evangelical or Mennonite, all are welcome. Our main mission is: how can we work for peace?

In this country, religion is fractured. The Catholic Church is dominant in society. Next to the violent conflict we are dealing with, this is a structure, which also causes many issues, which should not be forgotten. This

all poses the challenges: how do we gather everyone, heal ourselves and reconcile. Well, this has not been easy. In 2008 we first made some basic agreements. First, all we do is in an ecumenical sphere. And secondly, we do not go into dogmatic thinking. We work in what unites us, not what separates us. We are all women of faith, from Colombia and we have witnessed the violent conflict. Others may divide us, but our focus lies with Colombia and Peace, those are our basics. Currently we work in 5 different areas all over Colombia. We call these 5 different areas: Ecumenical circles. We visit these places regularly to see and check up with what is going on in society. We also gather with victims, indigenous people women and vulnerable women. We also visit the different areas together, so that we can really learn from each other.

Next to this, we are also involved in political advocacy and the recognition of female leaders in the communities.

Why focus on women?

- Women are often victims instead of perpetrators, so women are left to deal with the consequences of the conflict.
- Women have the power to reconcile.
- We are creators, we generate
- Women have often been discriminated in our society
- Women are natural justice fighters
- 70% of the church attendees are women
- Women are often initiators within the church.
- There are very few women in leading positions in the church
- We live in a male dominant society.

Overcoming trauma is difficult, but with the help of psychological, social and spiritual insights we are making it happen. The more tools we have, the better. We focus on the body and on emotions to deal with trauma. We joined Andrés and Inge on the pilgrimage of peace. That has been great for us because they visit many of the communities and also carry out contextual Bible reading practices in these communities. They are very beneficial practices for our goals with the women. To sum up:

*“We are women of faith, we reinterpret the reality through the eyes of a women and as religious women. We don’t look at God as a male being”*

**March 11<sup>th</sup>**

**Church in Conflict**

**By Saapke van der Meer**

This presentation is based on the book *Reconcile* by Jhon Paul Lederach. Because I have experience with conflict within the church, I decided to share with you what Lederach explains to us about conflict in church. When we are dealing with a conflict in a church, we are automatically dealing with unspoken assumptions. The first assumption is that conflict within a church is often considered to be a sin. In his book, Lederach tries to show that conflict is a part of our life, and of church life. In addition, Lederach explains that there are many `commandments` within church to which people find the need to obey.

1. Thou shall be nice

2. Thou shall not confront each other in public
3. If there is a confrontation, don't listen to thy enemy. Prepare your defense
4. Don't speak with contentious folks who disagree with you
5. Remember the art of a noble character: don't show emotions in public
6. Men, we rational, do not show emotions
7. Women, you shall not whine nor prepare defense.
8. If you do not like the way things go in the church, thou shall blame the pastor.
9. If you have to go into confrontation, save your frustration for the annual meetings.
10. In a nutshell: you shall not have conflict in church.<sup>20</sup>

Naturally, these commandments are meant ironically, but for many people in church these are recognizable.

During a conflict, certain processes take place according to Lederach. For instance:

1. Conflict can be good. "A gem cannot be polished without friction, nor a man perfected without trials"
2. Issues will continue to multiply
3. Language is changing, not in a nice way
4. Talk with likeminded people will increase, and separate groups will start to develop.
5. The focus will shift from the original issue to most recent action.
6. The `middle` group will disappear, the Church will be divided.

What would Jesus do in this case? In the bible in Mattheüs 22: 36, the questions is asked: What is the biggest commandment you have for us? And Jesus answers:

"Love your God with all your heart, soul and mind. Love your neighbours as you love yourself."<sup>21</sup>

What can we learn from Jesus?

- He noticed people in a different way
- He didn't see a person's status or condition
- He saw common humanity.<sup>22</sup>

### **A Final End Note, reconciliation as a gift and a vocation**

**By Prof. dr. Fernando Enns**

Samuel from El Garzal reminded me that this is a clear message in the Bible (2 Cor. 5: 14-21.)

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<sup>20</sup> John Paul Lederach, *Reconcile. Conflict transformation for ordinary Christians*, Harrisonburg, Virginia/Kitchener, Ontario: Herald Press, 2014, p.144-146.

<sup>21</sup> The Bible, 2 Mattheüs 22: 37-38. (2016, April 9). Retrieved from <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2%20Corinthians%205:14-21>

<sup>22</sup> Lederach, J. P. (1999). *The journey toward reconciliation*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press.

<sup>14</sup>For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. <sup>15</sup>And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

<sup>16</sup>So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. <sup>17</sup>Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! <sup>18</sup>All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: <sup>19</sup>that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup>We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup>God made him who had no sin to be sin<sup>16</sup> for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.<sup>23</sup>

From this passage I read that reconciliation is not something we produce. It's a gift and a vocation.<sup>24</sup> It's a space we enter in which we allow ourselves to participate in the practice of reconciliation. I do not know whether the FARC, president Santos or all the victims believe in this. And maybe that's not even necessary. But the role of the church can be actually that, it is the most humble role. Because we know what reconciliation is, and we can participate in it. If the church misses that point, then it is not the church of the New Testament.

#### The gift

We, as Christians see ourselves as the gifted ones. Even though we have not done anything for it. We are justified without condition. We received something from God that we did not deserve. Salvation. We did not deserve this, but we needed it.

This shows me, that reconciliation is not about what we deserve, but about what we need. Think about it; from a Christian perspective, what do I actually need? What does the FARC need? What does the government need? What do the victims need? As long as we pose the question: What do I deserve? Creating a peaceful society will not happen. During this conference I have heard so many perspectives: that of the government, victims etc. And I am worried. I wonder: do we all mean the same thing when we talk about peace? And when we talk about "restorative justice"? God reconciled the world. Not only Christians, everyone. It was a gift to all of us. God has already reconciled himself with the FARC, with the poor, the victims, children and nature. This is hard to believe, but it is what this text tells us. Everyone is reconciled. Even I find that hard to believe. But it's true.

#### The vocation

A gift now lies in our hands. Our personal reconciliation with God. A true gift. You can do with it as you like. You can keep it to yourself. However, the text tells us that this gift is so great and so powerful, that you can share it with others.

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<sup>23</sup> The Bible, 2 Corinthians 5:14-21. (2016, April 9). Retrieved from <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2%20Corinthians%205:14-21>

<sup>24</sup> Randazzo, D. (2014). Just Peace: Ecumenical, Intercultural, and Interdisciplinary Perspective. *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 49(4), 674.

This is where the focus of the church should lie: sharing again this gift of reconciliation. Even though we do not know how to solve this conflict. We know that we can share this gift of reconciliation, in a humble way. Bearing in mind that we also received it as a gift, without conditions.

God separates between your deeds and you as a person. And that is what we need to do to. Judge the deeds, not the person. Because the person is already judged by God, and he is reconciled, always. Denying that even to your worst perpetrator, basically goes against the gospel of reconciliation.

This is not a Sunday morning message, it`s a message which should be acted out from Monday to Saturday, and should be celebrated on Sunday.

**To all the organizers of the conference, muchas gracias**