
RECONCILIATION AND HEALING FROM NEW TESTAMENT PERSPECTIVE: TOWARDS A PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL APPLICATION TO CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

In Nigerian society today, many relationships face a myriad of complex problems that call for reconciliation and trauma healing due to various historical, social, economic, and political factors. Some of the current challenges that affect various spares of living are caused by religious extremism and radicalization in some communities, which bread into misunderstandings, stereotyping, and prejudices. The challenges further fuels mistrust and conflict with political and social factors that motivate tensions between the populations and impact of global events and media narratives on perceptions and attitudes of individual towards each other. From practical theological methodology, the paper explored the New Testament perspective of reconciliation that addresses healing. The research examines the concept of reconciliation in the New Testament, exploring its biblical and theological foundations to understand its implications for healing within contemporary contexts. The study investigates various dimensions of reconciliation presented in the New Testament, including reconciliation with God, within the Christian community, and with self and others. The research revealed the New Testament rich and integrative understanding of healing and reconciliation that emphasizes holistic restoration, encompassing physical, spiritual, and relational dimensions. On the other hand reconciliation stressed on the mending of humanity's relationship with God and the fostering of harmonious relationships among people. The pragmatic contributions involve integrating the theological principles into daily practices and community initiatives by recommending engagement in personal spiritual practices, developing community-based programs, advocating for social justice, offering education and training, incorporating cultural sensitivity, and leveraging technology.

Keywords: Reconciliation, Practical Theology, New Testament, Trauma, Healing

Introduction

The major problems of the world are relationally related. Such were the same problems that were encountered at the very beginning of humanity. This type of relational

problems initiate and result to conflict which in turn end up in separation, break-ups or tension that breeds suspicious living among humanity. In most of our societies today, many relationships face a myriad of complex problems that call for reconciliation and trauma healing due to various historical, social, economic, and political factors. Some of the current challenges that affect various spaces of living is caused by religious extremism and radicalization in both Christian and Muslim communities, misunderstandings, stereotyping, and prejudices fueling mistrust and conflict, political and social factors contributing to tensions between the populations, and impact of global events and media narratives on perceptions and attitudes of individuals towards each other. These experiences are breeding an increasing awareness that many people live in what is being described as a "Disjointed Society". Today, territorial spaces are said to be an illusion, with countries no longer able to shut themselves off from the rest of the world. And as observed by Etukumana: "A conflict society, however, does not imbibe a communal ethos. Rather, such a society relies on warfare and similar principles, such as strife, that demean the dignity of humanity" (68). Conflict, rather than blending, seems to be the norm of the day. At the same time as we become aware of our global interdependence, we also experience the erection of new barriers between peoples.

The New Testament part of the scripture is a record of God's reconciling work with Man whom before then have a broken relationship. That is to say, emphatically, the New Testament, as a central text in Christian theology, is fundamentally a book of reconciliation. As a key term in Christian Doctrine, "The doctrine of reconciliation is deeply embedded in Christian theology" (Sauter 504) and it portrays the restoration of the relationship between God and humanity, fractured by sin. This theme of reconciliation is woven throughout its various books, letters, and teachings, revealing a multifaceted approach to mending the broken bond. The New Testament's narrative emphasizes the reconciling work of Jesus Christ, the role of the Holy Spirit, and the call for human beings to participate in this divine reconciliation both with God and with each other as presented in the Acts of the Apostles. Armed with the understanding of the theological relevance the New Testament, this Paper presents a New Testament perspective of Reconciliation that produces a lasting healing. Though from a Biblical Theological point of emphasis, the paper addresses the issue using a Practical Theology hermeneutical method, because, "As a matter of fact, human acts are manifestations of thoughts, perceptions, interpretations, values, and assessments that lie 'behind' the acts, and religion has to do with these background data, which empirical research is not able to reveal" (Dingemans 88-89), hence, the choice of Practical Theological Hermeneutical Methodology. The Paper begins by unearthing the meaning of Conflict as that element which necessitates the action of Reconciliation that would ultimately lead to Healing. It also presents the Biblical and theological meaning of Reconciliation as it comes from the New Testament canon. This brings a conclusive stand that Healing is possible. This is having in mind that "As theological concepts and functions of pastoral care, healing and reconciliation refers to the restoration of relationship. Healing and reconciliation are

two different concepts that need to be understood together in achieving their meanings. The former means a lot to the latter, as there cannot be true reconciliation without healing" (Tuduks 18).

Conflict: The Trigger of Contemporary Crisis and Trauma

Conflict is an inherent aspect of human interaction and organizational dynamics. It arises from differences in values, motivations, perceptions, ideas, or desires. It ranges from personal to community issues and affects all aspects of human endeavors. It is therefore true that "humanity was not always isolated from conflict" (Etukumana 34). By definition, Conflict is "the pursuit of incompatible and particular interests and groups by different groups.... It is the denial which causes re-solvable differences to degenerate into armed violence or armed conflict" (Best 20). When conflict is Interpersonal, it occurs between two or more individuals. This type of conflict often stems from differences in opinions, personalities, values, or competition for resources. It can manifest in various settings, including the workplace, family, friendships, and other social contexts. Its triggers are first of all, divergent personality traits and temperaments which can lead to misunderstandings and clashes. For instance, an extrovert might find an introvert's behavior aloof, while the introvert might perceive the extrovert as overbearing (Lang, 296). Secondly, miscommunication or lack of communication often leads to misunderstandings. At this stage, communication is undermined. When this stage is not really controlled, it degenerates to the second stage (Chukwuedo 23). Tone, context, and non-verbal cues play significant roles in how messages are perceived. Thirdly, Conflicts often arise from fundamental differences in values, beliefs, and cultural backgrounds. These differences can influence how individuals interpret situations and respond to them. And finally, it can come as a result of competition for limited resources, such as time, money, or recognition, can cause friction and conflict. Ultimately, interpersonal conflict can lead to stress, reduced productivity, and strained relationships (Chukwuedo 24).

Conflict can also be seen as Intrapersonal. This intrapersonal conflict arises within an individual. This type of conflict involves internal struggles and is often related to one's thoughts, emotions, values, or desires. It affects areas such as one's roles, value and psychological judgments. When an individual faces conflicting expectations or demands from different roles they occupy (e.g., being a parent and a professional), it can lead to significant internal stress. When personal values are in opposition to actions or decisions one feels compelled to take, it creates internal turmoil. And, psychological conflict arises when a person holds two contradictory beliefs or values simultaneously, leading to discomfort and a drive to reduce the dissonance. This Intrapersonal conflict can lead to anxiety, indecision, and stress. However, it can also prompt self-reflection, leading to greater self-awareness and personal growth when resolved constructively (Best 25).

On a cooperate level, conflict can either be Organizational or International. Organizational conflict occurs within or between organizations. It involves disputes over

policies, procedures, or work-related issues among employees, teams, or departments. When it is Structural Conflict, it is defined by differences in hierarchy, roles, and responsibilities which can lead to power struggles and competition for resources or recognition. Chukwuedo sheds more light with an example that:

Today in many parts of the world people are divided from one another on the basis of nationalist, ethnic and/or religious rivalries. These rivalries are frequently passed from generation to generation as seen in the examples of Nigerian civil war (between the Biafrans and Nigerian Government), Rwanda and BosniaHerzegovina etc. We are divided today on the basis of ethnic, cultural, religious and political differences. The outbreak of the pandemic and its resultant effects of social distances and massive deaths have further created a gap in the world system. Man has tried in diverse ways to procure a solution but there cannot be a lasting solution outside the atoning death and love of Jesus (Chukwuedo 24).

On the other hand, though cooperatively, conflict can be international. International conflict occurs between nations or groups of nations. This type of conflict often involves political, economic, or military disputes and can have far-reaching consequences. Its causes and characteristics include:

Territorial Disputes: Conflicts over land and boundaries are a common source of international strife.

Resource Scarcity: Competition for natural resources, such as oil, water, or minerals, can lead to international conflicts.

Ideological Differences: Conflicting political ideologies or religious beliefs can lead to international tensions and confrontations.

Economic Competition: Trade imbalances, competition for markets, and economic sanctions can cause international disputes.

By implication, International Conflicts can lead to wars, economic sanctions, and significant loss of life and resources.

Understandably, the New Testament made it clear that conflict can either be Spiritual conflict, often referred to as spiritual warfare which is a prominent theme in the New Testament. This type of conflict involves the struggle between the forces of good, represented by God and His angels, and the forces of evil, led by Satan and his demons. In this type of theological understanding of Conflict, Apostle Peter in 1 Peter 5:8-9 warns believers to be sober and vigilant because their adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour (Wesley, 424). Conflict can also be Interpersonal, involving disputes between individuals. In Ephesians 4:31-32, the Apostle Paul encourages believers to put away bitterness, wrath, anger, and malice, which “refers to a settled hostility that poisons the whole inner man. Somebody does something we do not like, so we harbor ill will against him” (Wiersbe 611), and to be kind, tenderhearted,

and forgiving to one another, as God in Christ forgave them. Which suggests that without such virtues, Interpersonal Conflict will certainly sets in.

Biblically there is also an Internal Conflict, or Intrapersonal Conflict, involving the struggle within an individual between the desires of the flesh and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul in Romans 7:14-25 vividly describes his internal struggle with sin, expressing the tension between his desire to do good and the reality of his sinful nature. The Apostle James likewise explains in 1:14-15 how internal desires can lead to temptation and sin, which ultimately results in death. "Disobedience gives birth to death, not life. It may take years for the sin to mature, but when it does, the result will be death (Wiersbe 855). Since Christianity is a communal relationship, the possibility of Conflict is high. This type of theological-related conflict is Communal Conflict. Communal conflict involves disputes within the Christian community, including doctrinal disagreements, leadership issues, and relational strife. The Jerusalem Council in Acts 15:1-21 provides a model for resolving doctrinal disputes through discussion, prayer, and seeking guidance from the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul addresses divisions in the Corinthian Church, urging unity and reminding believers that they are all part of one body in Christ (1 Cor 1:10-13). He also pleads with Euodia and Syntyche to agree in the Lord, and asks the church to help these women reconcile (Phil 4:2-3).

Contemporary society faces a myriad of crises and traumas that highlight the urgent need for healing through reconciliation. Some of these include:

Social Injustice and Systemic Oppression: Many communities around the world continue to grapple with systemic injustice, including racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of discrimination. These injustices create deep wounds within societies, perpetuating cycles of trauma and division. (Bush & Folger 38).

Interpersonal Conflict and Violence: Conflict and violence at the interpersonal level, whether within families, communities, or nations, leave lasting scars on individuals and relationships. (Bush & Folger 37).

Political Polarization and Division: In many parts of the world, political polarization and ideological extremism have led to deep-seated divisions within societies. These divisions not only hinder constructive dialogue and cooperation but also fuel animosity and hostility between opposing groups. (Long & Brecke 7).

Environmental Degradation and Climate Crisis: The environmental crisis, including climate change, deforestation, and pollution, poses a significant threat to human well-being and ecological balance. This crisis exacerbates existing social inequalities and vulnerabilities, leading to displacement, resource conflicts, and humanitarian emergencies. (Long & Brecke 71).

Historical Trauma and Intergenerational Wounds: Many communities carry the intergenerational scars of historical trauma, including colonization, genocide, displacement, and cultural erasure. These unresolved wounds continue to impact present-day relationships and identities, perpetuating cycles of pain and mistrust. "It runs the risk of creating greater resentment among participants to civil conflict and of

opening old wounds and inflicting new ones on an already fragmented society” (Long & Brecke 68).

The Necessity of Healing and Reconciliation

Healing and reconciliation are not merely optional or desirable; they are fundamentally necessary for the well-being of individuals, communities, and societies as a whole. Firstly, healing and reconciliation are necessary for the restoration of individual well-being. When a person experiences trauma, whether physical, emotional, or psychological, it leaves deep wounds that can impact every aspect of their life. Without proper healing, these wounds can fester, leading to long-term consequences such as chronic mental health issues, substance abuse, and relationship difficulties. Healing provides individuals with the tools and support they need to process their experiences, rebuild their sense of self, and move forward with resilience and strength (Tuduks 84). Furthermore, healing and reconciliation are essential for the restoration of relationships. Conflict, betrayal, and harm can fracture relationships at various levels - between family members, friends, colleagues, and even entire communities. Without reconciliation, these rifts can persist, breeding resentment, mistrust, and ongoing conflict. Reconciliation involves acknowledging harm, seeking forgiveness, and rebuilding trust and connection. It paves the way for meaningful dialogue, understanding, and cooperation, fostering healthier and more harmonious relationships (Tuduks 119).

At a societal level, healing and reconciliation are crucial for building peace and promoting social cohesion. History is replete with examples of societies torn apart by division, violence, and oppression. Without efforts to heal past wounds and reconcile conflicting groups, the cycle of violence and animosity can perpetuate across generations. Healing and reconciliation initiatives, such as truth and reconciliation commissions, restorative justice practices, and intergroup dialogue, provide avenues for addressing historical injustices, promoting empathy and understanding, and building a shared vision for a peaceful and inclusive society that “caregivers whose goal is to provide the dying one with the resources needed to insure peace and dignity” (Bulkley 76) would be available. Ethically, healing and reconciliation are necessary to uphold principles of justice, dignity, and human rights. Every individual deserves to live free from the lingering effects of trauma and injustice. Healing acknowledges the inherent worth and dignity of each person, offering compassion, support, and resources to facilitate their recovery and well-being. Reconciliation, on the other hand, confronts systemic injustices, addresses power imbalances, and works towards restoring equity and fairness in society, “to provide trauma counseling to help people deal with their traumatized experience” (Shore 63). Moreover, healing and reconciliation are essential for collective healing from societal traumas such as war, genocide, and oppression. These traumas leave deep scars on the collective psyche, shaping narratives, identities, and intergroup dynamics. Without processes of healing and reconciliation, the wounds of the past continue to haunt the present, perpetuating cycles of intergenerational trauma and

conflict. Healing collective traumas requires acknowledging historical injustices, honoring victims' experiences, and working towards a shared narrative of healing and resilience "as a possible mechanism for resolving intergroup conflicts and for maintaining social order" (Long & Brecke 29).

New Testament Concept of Healing and Reconciliation

Reconciliation, both as a concept and a practice, holds a central place in the New Testament, forming the bedrock of Christian theology and ethics. Rooted in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, the New Testament offers profound insights into the nature of reconciliation and provides a framework for understanding and pursuing healing in interpersonal relationships, communities, and societies. In the New Testament, the call to healing and reconciliation is not just a moral imperative but a theological necessity deeply rooted in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. From the Gospels to the Epistles, the message of healing and reconciliation permeates the teachings and actions of Jesus and the early Christian community, offering profound insights into the nature of human brokenness, the power of forgiveness, and the transformative potential of reconciliation.

At the heart of the New Testament's theological perspective on healing and reconciliation is the concept of sin and its consequences. Theologically, sin ruptures the harmonious relationship between humanity and God, as well as among individuals and communities, leading to alienation, suffering, and division. The New Testament portrays Jesus as the ultimate healer and reconciler, whose life, death, and resurrection offer hope and redemption to a broken world (Bloesch, 313). One of the central themes of Jesus's ministry is the restoration of wholeness and reconciliation. Through his teachings and miracles, Jesus demonstrates compassion and empathy towards the marginalized, the sick, and the oppressed, inviting them into a relationship of healing and reconciliation with God and one another. Whether he is healing the sick, forgiving sins, or reconciling sinners, Jesus embodies the transformative power of God's love and grace in restoring broken lives and relationships (Bloesch, 313). Furthermore, the New Testament emphasizes the centrality of forgiveness in the process of healing and reconciliation. Jesus's teachings on forgiveness, exemplified in the Lord's Prayer and his parables, underscore the importance of extending forgiveness to others as a precondition for experiencing God's forgiveness (Matt 6:14-15). Forgiveness is not only a moral virtue but a theological imperative, reflecting the reconciling work of Christ and the transformative power of grace in overcoming sin and division (Keener 233). Moreover, the New Testament presents reconciliation as a communal endeavor. In his letters to the early Christian communities, the Apostle Paul frequently emphasizes the importance of reconciliation in the body of Christ, urging believers to be agents of reconciliation and peace (2 Cor 5:18-20). Reconciliation involves not only the restoration of individual relationships but the healing of communal divisions and the promotion of justice and equity within society (Keener 508).

From a New Testament theological perspective, healing and reconciliation are inseparable from the mission of the Church. The Church, as the body of Christ, is called to embody the reconciling love of God in the world, proclaiming the good news of salvation and working towards the restoration of all things in Christ (Col 1:19-20). This entails not only addressing the spiritual needs of individuals but also confronting systemic injustice, advocating for the marginalized and fostering reconciliation and peace in all aspects of human life (Keener 572). In light of the New Testament's teachings on reconciliation, a feasible approach to healing can be articulated based on several key principles. First and foremost, reconciliation requires a commitment to truth-telling and acknowledgment of wrongdoing (Tuduks 220). This entails a willingness to confront past injustices and address systemic issues that perpetuate division and harm within communities. Secondly, reconciliation necessitates humility and vulnerability, as individuals and communities must be willing to acknowledge their own complicity in perpetuating conflict and seek forgiveness from those they have wronged. Thirdly, reconciliation involves a process of restoration and restitution, where efforts are made to repair the damage caused by past injustices and rebuild trust and mutual respect among conflicting parties (Tuduks 181).

Fourthly, reconciliation requires ongoing dialogue and engagement, as healing is not a one-time event but a continuous journey towards understanding, empathy, and reconciliation. Emphasizing the theme of Healing and Reconciliation as understood in the context of 2 Chronicles 7:14, Tuduks stated that, "to engage in dialogue is not to undertake arguments against one's opponents in the framework of conflict, but rather it is to be approached in a spirit of love, sincerity, and honesty. In this respect ... dialogue implies equality that speaks humility. Therefore, with equality and humility dialogue becomes a simple way of life among religious groups that dispels hostility and arrogance" (Tuduks 21). Finally, reconciliation is ultimately grounded in love, as demonstrated in the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ. Love compels us to seek the well-being of others, to prioritize relationships over grievances, and to extend grace and compassion even in the face of hostility and resistance (Taylor 148). Furthermore, the New Testament presents a profound and multifaceted understanding of healing and reconciliation, both deeply interwoven with the ministry and message of Jesus Christ. Healing, in the New Testament context, extends beyond mere physical restoration to encompass spiritual, emotional, and relational dimensions. Reconciliation, likewise, is portrayed not just as the mending of broken relationships between individuals, but as the restoration of humanity's relationship with God. Together, these concepts form a cornerstone of New Testament theology, reflecting the transformative power of Christ's work.

Healing in the New Testament is frequently demonstrated through the miracles of Jesus. These acts of healing are signs of the in-breaking Kingdom of God, illustrating Jesus' authority over sickness and his compassion for human suffering. The Gospels recount numerous instances where Jesus heals the blind, the lame, the lepers, and even raises the

dead. These miracles serve multiple purposes: they authenticate Jesus' divine identity, manifest God's compassion, and prefigure the ultimate healing found in salvation. For example, in Mark 2:1-12, the healing of the paralytic not only restores physical agility but also signifies the forgiveness of sins. Jesus' statement, "Son, your sins are forgiven" (Mark 2:5), underscores the holistic nature of healing—addressing both physical ailment and spiritual estrangement from God. This dual aspect is further seen in the healing of the woman with the issue of blood (Mark 5:25-34), where Jesus commends her faith and grants her peace, indicating a restoration that transcends physical health (Keener 133). The New Testament also extends the concept of healing to the apostles and early Christians. In Acts, the apostles perform miraculous healings in Jesus' name, demonstrating the continued presence and power of Christ in the Church. Peter and John heal a lame man at the temple gate (Acts 3:1-10), and Paul's ministry includes numerous healings and even resurrections (Acts 20:9-12). These acts affirm the early Church's role in continuing Jesus' healing mission, emphasizing the enduring nature of divine compassion and power (Keener 326).

Reconciliation is another central theme in the New Testament, primarily articulated through the Apostle Paul's writings. Reconciliation refers to the restoration of a right relationship between humanity and God, made possible through Jesus Christ's sacrificial death and resurrection (Tuduks 153). This concept is vividly presented in passages such as 2 Corinthians 5:18-19: "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation."

Paul's letters emphasize that reconciliation with God also entails a new way of relating to others. In Ephesians 2:14-16, Paul explains that Christ has broken down the "dividing wall of hostility" between Jews and Gentiles, creating one new humanity. This passage highlights the social and communal implications of reconciliation – Christ's work not only restores individual relationships with God but also fosters unity and peace among diverse peoples (Vorster 5). The New Testament also links reconciliation with forgiveness and love. Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount advocate for reconciliation among individuals, encouraging believers to seek peace and settle disputes (Matthew 5:23-24). The parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) poignantly illustrates God's reconciling love, depicting a father who welcomes back his repentant son with open arms. This parable emphasizes the unconditional nature of God's forgiveness and the joy of restored relationships (Keener 221).

The Intersection of Healing and Reconciliation

The intersection of healing and reconciliation is most profoundly demonstrated in the person and work of Jesus Christ. His ministry exemplifies how healing leads to reconciliation, both vertically (between humanity and God) and horizontally (among individuals).

Vertical Reconciliation: Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross is the ultimate act of reconciliation, bridging the chasm between a holy God and sinful humanity. This is not merely a legal transaction but a transformative healing of the relationship. In 1 Peter 2:24, it is stated, "By his wounds, you have been healed." This healing refers to the spiritual restoration that comes through reconciliation with God. "The reconciliation with God, which is initiated by God himself, must be grasped by faith of the merits of Christ. Reconciliation becomes a gift of grace to 'only those who are engrafted into Him and receive all His benefits, by a true faith' (Vorster 3).

Horizontal Reconciliation: Jesus' healing miracles often restored individuals to their communities, addressing both physical ailments and social ostracism. For example, in the healing of the woman with the issue of blood (Mark 5:25-34), Jesus not only heals her physically but also publicly acknowledges her, restoring her dignity and social standing. This act of healing facilitates reconciliation with the community that had marginalized her. "To 'be made whole' meant much more than receiving mere physical healing. Jesus had given her spiritual healing as well" (Wiersbe 104)!

The Ministry of the Church: The early church continued this dual mission of healing and reconciliation. In Acts, the apostles perform miracles of healing, which often lead to opportunities for preaching the message of reconciliation. The church is called to embody this intersection, as seen in James 5:14-16, where prayer for the sick is linked with confession and forgiveness, intertwining physical healing with spiritual reconciliation.

Understanding the intersection of healing and reconciliation has profound implications for contemporary Christian practice. It calls believers to engage in holistic ministry that addresses both physical and spiritual needs. Churches are encouraged to be places of healing—offering support for physical ailments through healthcare ministries and addressing emotional and relational brokenness through counseling and community support. Moreover, this perspective challenges Christians to be agents of reconciliation in a fractured world. This involves advocating for justice, promoting forgiveness, and working towards the restoration of broken relationships within families, communities, and society at large.

Theological Concept of Healing and Reconciliation: A Historical Overview

The concepts of healing and reconciliation hold significant places in Christian theology, discussed extensively by theologians throughout history. These discussions explore how these concepts are understood biblically, their implications for Christian life and practice, and their relevance to contemporary issues. This section presents an overview of how some key theologians and theological traditions have approached these vital themes.

Early Church Fathers

The early Church Fathers, such as Augustine and Athanasius, laid foundational perspectives on healing and reconciliation. Augustine's *Confessions* reflects a deep

understanding of spiritual healing and the journey toward reconciliation with God. Augustine saw sin as a profound sickness of the soul that could only be healed through God's grace, emphasizing the necessity of inner transformation for true reconciliation (Werbick 725). Athanasius, in his work *On the Incarnation*, emphasized the cosmic scope of reconciliation. He argued that Christ's incarnation and atoning death were necessary to restore the corrupted human nature, thus reconciling humanity with God. This theological perspective set the stage for viewing salvation as a comprehensive healing of the entire human condition (Tanner 711). Augustine also speaks of the connection between justice and peace. "When it is said that mountains yield peace and hills justice (Enarrat. Ps. 71/72:3), it means that the mountains proclaim the message of reconciliation through Christ. Sometimes Augustine speaks of reconciliation in the context of penitence (e.g. City of God 20.9.73 and 21.25.86)" (Tanner 723).

Medieval Theologians

Medieval theologians such as Thomas Aquinas further developed the concepts of healing and reconciliation. In his *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas explored the nature of sin and grace, articulating how grace heals the soul by restoring its relationship with God. He emphasized that the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist and Confession, are means of grace that facilitate both personal healing and communal reconciliation (Aquinas 58). Thomas Aquinas teaches that the passion of Christ is the cause of our reconciliation with God in two senses. First, it removes sin and thus enmity with God. Secondly, Christ's sacrifice is pleasing to God, removing humankind's offence against God. Reconciliation thus appeases God's wrath. While sinful humans caused Christ's passion, offending God also in this act, the death of Christ expresses such divine love that brings about reconciliation (Aquinas 49). Aquinas also integrated Aristotelian philosophy with Christian doctrine, understanding healing as the restoration of natural order disrupted by sin. His sacramental theology highlighted how God's grace operates through tangible means, offering both spiritual and sometimes physical healing (Etukumana 240).

Reformation and Post-Reformation Theologians

The Protestant Reformation brought new emphases in the theology of healing and reconciliation. Martin Luther and John Calvin focused on the doctrine of justification by faith, seeing reconciliation with God as fundamentally a legal declaration of righteousness through faith in Christ. However, they also acknowledged the transformative aspect of salvation, where believers are progressively sanctified and healed from the effects of sin (Geréby 352).

Luther's theology of the cross emphasized God's presence in suffering and the paradox of finding life through death, suggesting a nuanced understanding of healing that includes enduring suffering in faith. Calvin's emphasis on the sovereignty of God and the work of the Holy Spirit provided a framework for understanding healing as part of God's redemptive plan for individuals and creation (Geréby 354).

Modern Theologians

In the modern era, theologians like Karl Barth, Jürgen Moltmann, and Gustavo Gutiérrez have offered fresh insights into healing and reconciliation. Barth's theology of reconciliation, particularly in his *Church Dogmatics*, centers on the person and work of Jesus Christ as the definitive act of God's reconciling love. Barth emphasized that reconciliation is an accomplished fact in Christ, and believers are called to live out this reality. The massive volume IV of this work, consisting of several large parts or sub volumes, is entirely devoted to the doctrine of reconciliation (*Versöhnung*). The volume discusses Jesus Christ as the servant of God, the Lord of humanity and the true witness of God. Central soteriological themes, such as mediation, justification and sanctification are treated in this context. The fourth volume also includes discussions concerning vocation, the sending of Christian community, and the Christian life. This wealth of themes means that 'reconciliation' becomes an architectonic umbrella concept that covers both salvation and Christian ethics (Barth, 718–719)

Jürgen Moltmann, in works like *Theology of Hope* and *The Crucified God*, integrates themes of eschatological hope and the suffering of God with the concept of reconciliation. He argues that true healing and reconciliation involve participation in the suffering and resurrection of Christ, pointing to a future where all creation will be healed and reconciled (Porter 131).

Gustavo Gutiérrez, a key figure in Liberation Theology, views healing and reconciliation through the lens of social justice. He argues that the Gospel calls for the healing of societal structures that perpetuate injustice and alienation. For Gutiérrez, reconciliation involves both personal conversion and structural transformation, advocating for a preferential option for the poor and marginalized (Webster 635).

Contemporary Discussions

Contemporary theologians continue to explore these themes, addressing modern challenges such as trauma, mental health, and global conflicts. The integration of psychological insights with theological perspectives has enriched the understanding of healing, particularly in pastoral care and counseling. Theologians like Henri Nouwen and Richard Rohr have emphasized the importance of vulnerability, community, and contemplative practices in the process of healing and reconciliation.

Nouwen, in his concept of the "The Wounded Healer," suggests that those who have experienced pain and healing themselves are uniquely equipped to facilitate healing in others. He says: "Those who have spent many hours trying to understand, feel, and clarify the alienation and confusion of one of their fellow human beings might very well be the best equipped to speak to the needs of the many, because all of us are one at the wellspring of pain and joy" (Nouwen 79). Rohr's work on contemplative spirituality highlights the transformative power of encountering God's love, leading to inner healing and outward reconciliation (Rohr 194).

Ecumenical and Interfaith Perspectives

Ecumenical movements have also contributed to discussions on healing and reconciliation, emphasizing unity among Christians as a witness to the reconciling work of Christ. While the report admits that 'it is not always easy to reconcile our confessional and ecumenical loyalties', the final purpose of God is nevertheless 'to reconcile all men to Himself and to one another in Jesus Christ' (Vischer 79–82). The ecumenical movement is defined as "a reconciling and renewing movement" (Werbick 725).

Regarding interfaith dialogues that explore how different religious traditions understand and practice healing and reconciliation, fostering mutual respect and collaboration in addressing global issues, it was employed as a part of ecumenical movement. Reporting such an effort, Tuduks writes:

The Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama is one of the popular bridge builders in the north-central region. As a founder and leader of 'Jos Interfaith Centre', an Inter-religious Centre created for training and dialogue among Christians and Muslims. He has engaged in inter-religious discussion that aims at fostering the peaceful coexistence among Christians and Muslims especially in Jos, Plateau state. The Archbishop is committed in organizing training and interreligious discussions towards creating an inclusive functional coexistence. The Archbishop has made several efforts in visiting the Muslims in their mosques as another strategy of building trust. The visitation is crucial as it prepares the journey of healing the broken relationship between the religious groups where inter-religious crises have leaved the survivors in a state of residential divide that has become challenging for a member of one group to live in another (Tuduks 80).

Christian theologians' discussions on healing and reconciliation reveal a rich tapestry of thought that spans historical, doctrinal, and practical dimensions. These discussions underscore the centrality of these concepts to the Christian faith, highlighting their relevance to personal spirituality, communal life, and societal transformation.

Reconciliation and Healing: A Proposed Feasible Approach

The New Testament offers a comprehensive framework for healing and reconciliation, emphasizing both the spiritual and practical dimensions of this transformative process.

Steps to Reconciliation and Healing

Here are the steps derived from the New Testament concept of healing and reconciliation:

Recognition of Brokenness: The first step in the New Testament concept of healing and reconciliation is the recognition of brokenness, both in individuals and communities.

This involves acknowledging the reality of sin, injustice, and suffering, and the need for restoration and renewal (Tillard 244–247).

Repentance and Confession: Repentance and confession are essential components of the healing and reconciliation process (Schreiter 24). Individuals and communities are called to acknowledge their own complicity in perpetuating division and harm and to seek forgiveness from God and those they have wronged (1 John 1:9).

Forgiveness: Central to the New Testament concept of reconciliation is the practice of forgiveness. Jesus teaches that forgiveness is essential for experiencing God's forgiveness and for healing relationships (Matthew 6:14-15). This involves letting go of resentment and bitterness towards those who have wronged us, and extending grace and mercy to them (Tuduks 93).

Restitution and Restoration: Healing and reconciliation often require practical actions to address the consequences of wrongdoing and restore what has been lost or damaged. This may involve making amends, seeking restitution, and working towards restoring trust and reconciliation in relationships and communities (Luke 19:8-9). "The reconciliation process as follows: the first step is that offender needs to realize that an offence has been committed, second step is that there must be a remorseful confession of the offender to the victim, thirdly, there must be willingness for reparation, restoration and restitution by the offender" (Tuduks 68).

Reconciliation with God: The ultimate goal of healing and reconciliation in the New Testament is reconciliation with God. Through faith in Jesus Christ, individuals are reconciled to God and experience spiritual healing and restoration (2 Corinthians 5:18-19). This vertical reconciliation with God forms the foundation for horizontal reconciliation with others.

Reconciliation with Others: Healing and reconciliation extend beyond individual relationships to encompass communal reconciliation. Believers are called to be agents of reconciliation, promoting peace and justice within their communities and working towards the restoration of broken relationships and divisions (2 Corinthians 5:20).

Transformation and Renewal: Healing and reconciliation in the New Testament are not merely about returning to a previous state but about experiencing transformation and renewal. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, individuals and communities are empowered to live lives characterized by love, grace, and reconciliation, reflecting the reconciling work of Christ (Romans 12:2).

Continual Practice: Healing and reconciliation are ongoing processes that require continual practice and engagement. Believers are called to cultivate attitudes of humility, empathy, and grace, and to continually seek reconciliation in their relationships and communities (Ephesians 4:32).

Pragmatic Contribution

The concepts of healing and reconciliation call for practical applications that bring theological principles into daily life and community practice (Schreiter 34). Pragmatic contributions that can help Christians embody these concepts in tangible ways include:

Personal Spiritual Practices

Prayer and Meditation: Engaging in regular prayer and meditation can facilitate personal healing and reconciliation with God. Practices such as contemplative prayer, where individuals spend time in silent communion with God, can help in processing personal pain and seeking divine guidance for reconciliation in broken relationships (Tuduks 21).
Scripture Study: Immersing oneself in the stories of Jesus' healings and teachings on reconciliation found in the Gospels can inspire and guide personal efforts toward these goals. Reflective reading and study groups can help believers understand and apply these narratives to their lives (Schreiter 113).

Community and Congregational Initiatives

Healing Services and Sacraments: Churches can hold special services dedicated to healing and reconciliation. This can include the laying on of hands, anointing with oil, and communal prayers for those seeking physical, emotional, or spiritual healing. Celebrating the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, can be an act of communal reconciliation, reminding the congregation of their unity in Christ (Schreiter 129).

Support Groups: Establishing support groups within the church for those dealing with specific issues like grief, addiction, or trauma can provide a safe space for sharing, support, and healing. Trained facilitators can help guide these groups in a way that integrates faith with therapeutic practices (Tuduks 22).

Conflict Resolution Programs: Developing programs within the church to address and resolve conflicts can foster a culture of reconciliation. Training members in conflict resolution skills and establishing mediation teams can help prevent and heal divisions within the community (Taylor 51).

Outreach and Social Justice Efforts

Community Health Initiatives: Churches can partner with healthcare providers to offer health clinics, mental health counseling, and wellness programs to the community. These initiatives can address both physical and mental health needs, embodying Christ's healing ministry (Taylor 28).

Restorative Justice Programs: Involvement in restorative justice initiatives can extend the church's mission of reconciliation into the broader community. These programs focus on repairing the harm caused by criminal behavior through inclusive processes that engage victims, offenders, and the community in dialogue and healing (Taylor 10).

Advocacy for Social Change: Christians can advocate for systemic changes that promote justice and reconciliation in society. This can include working on issues such as racial reconciliation, economic justice, and environmental stewardship, aligning social action with the biblical call to love one's neighbor (Tuduks 88).

Education and Training

Workshops and Seminars: Offering educational programs on topics related to healing and reconciliation can equip church members with the knowledge and skills needed to

address these issues in their personal lives and the wider community. Topics might include trauma-informed care, forgiveness, and conflict mediation (Tuduks 80).

Counseling and Pastoral Care Training: Training pastors and lay leaders in pastoral care and counseling techniques can enhance the church's ability to provide effective support to those in need of healing. This training should include understanding mental health issues, grief counseling, and the dynamics of reconciliation (Tuduks 138-139).

Integration of Cultural Practices

Cultural Sensitivity in Healing: Recognizing and integrating cultural practices related to healing can make the church's ministry more inclusive and effective. This might involve incorporating traditional healing practices within a Christian framework, especially in multicultural congregations (Tuduks 209).

Interfaith Collaboration: Partnering with other faith communities on initiatives related to healing and reconciliation can build bridges and foster mutual understanding. Joint efforts in community service projects, peace-building activities, and dialogue events can enhance collective impact (Tuduks 81).

Technology and Digital Outreach

Online Support and Counseling: Utilizing technology to offer online counseling services and virtual support groups can expand the church's reach, particularly to those who may be unable to attend in person. Digital platforms can also provide resources such as webinars, podcasts, and blogs focused on healing and reconciliation (Tuduks 175).

Social Media Campaigns: Creating social media campaigns that promote messages of healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation can engage a wider audience and spread positive, faith-based perspectives on these critical issues (Taylor 2).

Conclusion

In summary, the New Testament presents a rich and integrative understanding of healing and reconciliation. Healing is seen as a holistic restoration, encompassing physical, spiritual, and relational dimensions, while reconciliation focuses on the mending of humanity's relationship with God and the fostering of harmonious relationships among people. Together, these themes encapsulate the essence of the Gospel—the transformative power of Jesus Christ to heal and reconcile all creation (Rom 8:19-23). The arguments of New Testament and practical theology scholars on healing and reconciliation converge to present a robust understanding of these concepts as central to the Christian faith. They highlight the transformative power of God's love in healing brokenness and restoring relationships, calling Christians to embody these principles in their lives and communities.

Practical contributions to the concepts of healing and reconciliation for Christians involve integrating these theological principles into daily practices and community initiatives. By engaging in personal spiritual practices, developing community-based

programs, advocating for social justice, offering education and training, incorporating cultural sensitivity, and leveraging technology, Christians can embody the healing and reconciling love of Christ in tangible and transformative ways. These efforts can help foster holistic well-being and unity within the church and the broader community, reflecting the Kingdom of God on earth. In today's society, the reality of crisis and trauma induced by conflicts is an ever-pressing issue that profoundly impacts individuals and communities worldwide. Conflicts, whether stemming from geopolitical strife, social injustice, economic disparities, or cultural clashes, leave lasting scars on the fabric of society. These crises manifest in myriad forms, including psychological trauma, displacement, and a breakdown of social cohesion. The pervasive nature of these issues calls for a multifaceted approach to healing and rebuilding, emphasizing the need for comprehensive mental health support, robust conflict resolution mechanisms, and policies promoting social equity and inclusion. In addressing these contemporary crises and traumas, reconciliation offers a path towards healing and renewal. By fostering empathy, promoting dialogue, and seeking justice and restoration, individuals and communities can work towards healing the wounds of the past and building a more equitable and compassionate future.

As we navigate these turbulent times, it is imperative to foster resilience and solidarity, recognizing that addressing the roots of conflict and trauma is crucial for building a more just and peaceful world. The path to recovery is arduous, but with collective effort and compassionate leadership, it is possible to transform the cycle of crisis into one of reconciliation, healing and growth. The steps to the New Testament concept of healing and reconciliation involve recognition of brokenness, repentance and confession, forgiveness, restitution and restoration, reconciliation with God and others, transformation and renewal, and continual practice. By following these steps, individuals and communities can experience the transformative power of God's reconciling love and work towards healing and renewal in their lives and relationships.

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