

An Unlikely Conversation Partner

Gustaf Aulén's Connection with Reconciliation in South Africa

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Introduction

It is an unlikely connection. To say it is far-fetched would not be an overstatement. This is precisely what *Christus Victor* (1930) invokes when connected to the discourse on reconciliation in South Africa. Gustaf Aulén (1879–1977), a leader of Lundensian scholarship, certainly did not have South Africa in mind when he penned this theological classic. Nevertheless, for reasons as I will explain, *Christus Victor* gained traction particularly at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) in Cape Town. It was here where the Swedish theologian, Hans S.A. Engdahl first introduced Aulén to his students. I was one of them. One should note Engdahl's long history with South Africa. A Lutheran priest with a deep appreciation for South Africa and its people. He later took the position of extraordinary professor at the UWC. Throughout his career, Engdahl built close relationships particularly with the people of the Cape Flats, an area in Cape Town designated as “non-white” by the apartheid government. They, in turn, adopted him and his family as their own. In his lectures, one quickly became aware of how he was dealing with the sensitivities of race and identity in the country. For example, the literature he prescribed always reflected a preference for ideas from the developing world. Black consciousness, black theology, and liberation theologies were central themes of many of our class discussions.

To say Engdahl had an aversion to Western thought would be incorrect, but one certainly had a good sense of where his loyalties lied. It is for this reason that I was somewhat perplexed when in a post-graduate course on the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), Engdahl introduced *Christus Victor* as one of our prescribed texts. At this stage, to me at least, he was an unknown theologian. Just another white man, whose work I had to study to get through a course – as if I was not colonized thoroughly enough. This was my thought at that moment. Besides, what could Aulén possibly say that would help me better understand the reconciliation process in South Africa? To say my expectations were low would be an understatement. Nevertheless, what I did not realize, was that the introduction of *Christus Victor* inadvertently opened the door to something that eventually became the theoretical basis of my doctoral dissertation. A few years later, in conjunction with my doctoral supervisors, Ernst M. Conradie and Eddy Van der Borght, I returned to this typology to map the theological discourse on reconciliation in South Africa. The purpose of this paper thus is to explain exactly how this is conceptualized.

Setting the Scene

Violent forms of conflict have continued to erupt in different locations all over the world since the end of the Second World War. Such conflict may be addressed at various levels, including the need to come to terms with the personal trauma associated with such conflict. Politically, the gross violations of human rights are typically addressed in terms of criminal law and international law. The (in)famous Nuremberg trials may serve as a good example. More recently, various forms of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission have been introduced to facilitate the transition from such social conflict to a new dispensation.¹ The introduction and subsequent proceedings of the TRC in South Africa is widely regarded as an outstanding example of such an approach. Frequently held up as the focal point of reconciliation, the TRC has enjoyed premier status in accounts of South Africa's democratic transition.

While the proceedings of the TRC have elicited much interest outside South Africa, it led to much controversy inside the country. Indeed, the need for and the very symbol of national reconciliation was highly contested. This controversy has to be understood in terms of the years of struggle against apartheid. In the mid-1980s the question was whether

1. Priscilla Hayner, "Same Species, Different Animal: How South Africa Compares to Truth Commissions Worldwide", in Charles Villa-Vicencio & Wilhelm Verwoerd (eds.), *Looking Back, Reaching Forward: Reflections on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa*, London 2000, 32–41.

political liberation for the poor and oppressed black majority or reconciliation between blacks and whites should have precedence. In the famous *Kairos Document* (1985), the emphasis on reconciliation was severely criticized as a form of “church theology”. During the transition to democracy (1990–1994), the need for a negotiated settlement became widely accepted. As part of such a settlement, the need to come to terms with the history and legacy of apartheid became evident. Both the experiences of the victims of apartheid and the gross violations of human rights by the perpetrators simply had to be addressed. The decision to establish the TRC followed upon these developments in 1994. This was soon supported by calls for “national reconciliation”, “nation building”, the “healing of memories”, the rediscovery of humanity (*Ubuntu*), and a celebration of the so-called “rainbow people of God” as popularized by Desmond Tutu.² Nevertheless, as the proceedings of the TRC unfolded, many criticisms were raised regarding such an emphasis on reconciliation.³ These criticisms related to various aspects of the process: the very possibility of amnesty, the need for criminal justice, the objectivity of the commission, the understanding of “truth”, the emphasis on reconciliation, the leadership role of Archbishop Tutu, the associations with Christian symbolism, and the need for compensation for the victims, were some of the concerns raised.⁴

The proceedings of the TRC were concluded in 1998, followed by a set of extensive reports. The legal aspects of the proceedings about amnesty and reparation need not be addressed here. Reflection on the legacy and significance of the TRC has continued unabated since 1998. In this sense, the TRC cannot be reduced to a set of legal proceedings. It provided an opportunity for ordinary South Africans (who were neither perpetrators nor victims of gross violations of human rights) to reflect on their past and future through the publicity around the TRC. Its significance, therefore, has to be understood in terms of calls for national reconciliation and the implications of that in various spheres of society. More than twenty years after the conclusion of the TRC’s work, it is all too obvious that reconciliation between individuals and groups in South Africa remains a high priority. The South African Reconciliation Barometer of the Institute for Justice and

2. Desmond M. Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, London 1999.

3. See for instance Mahmood Mamdani, “A Diminished Truth”, in Wilmot James & Linda van de Vijver (eds.), *After the TRC: Reflections on Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa*, Cape Town 2000, 60; Mahmood Mamdani, “Reconciliation Without Justice”, *Southern African Review of Books* 46 (1996), 22–25; Wole Soyinka, *The Burden of Memory, the Muse of Forgiveness*, New York 1999; Anthea Jeffery, *The Truth about the Truth Commission*, Johannesburg 1999, 157.

4. For a detailed account on the role of religion (and Christianity in particular) in the TRC, see Megan Shore, *Religion and Conflict Resolution: Christianity and South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, Farnham 2009.

Reconciliation gives clear indications how South African citizens remain deeply divided in terms of the categories of race, class, ethnicity, and culture.⁵

Such South African discourse over the symbol of national reconciliation cannot be separated from the influence of Christianity in South Africa. This has to be understood in terms of the allegiance to Christianity in South Africa, the use of the term “reconciliation” in Christian soteriology, and the significance of what is aptly described as the “church struggle” against apartheid. The influence of Christianity is also evident with respect to the TRC. The pivotal role played by Archbishop Tutu, the charismatic chairperson of the TRC, needs no elaboration here. One may also mention the leadership roles of several other church leaders (such as Alex Borrairie [1931–2018], the deputy chairperson) and theologians (including Charles Villavicencio and Piet Meiring).

Reconciliation as a Controversial Symbol

The term “reconciliation” was indeed at the heart of the church struggle against apartheid.⁶ This has been evident at least since the publication of the famous *Message to the People of South Africa* (1968). In the 1980s, the term was further used in conflicting ways in the *Belhar Confession* (1982/1986), the *Kairos Document*, and the *National Initiative for Reconciliation* (launched in 1985). The term elicited much controversy, especially in the *Kairos Document*.⁷ In the context of local congregations, the theme of reconciliation prompted many further debates, including the criteria for church membership, ordinations, expressions of and structures for church unity, and the need for a ministry of reconciliation across the divides of culture, race, and class.⁸

It is therefore not surprising that the term reconciliation came under close scrutiny in Christian theological reflection in South Africa at least since 1968. One may suggest that such theological controversies had to do with the search for appropriate theological models and root metaphors. The symbol of “reconciliation” offered one such concept, but “ecclesial unity”,

5. Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, *Confronting Exclusion: Time for Radical Reconciliation*, Cape Town 2013.

6. For a detailed account on how the term was used in the South African context in the twentieth century, see John W. de Gruchy, *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice*, London 2002, 33–38.

7. Ernst M. Conradie, “Reconciliation as One Guiding Vision for South Africa? Conceptual Analysis and Theological Reflection”, in Ernst M. Conradie (ed.), *Reconciliation: A Guiding Vision for South Africa?*, Stellenbosch 2013, 13.

8. Of course, one needs to be aware of the contested nature of some of these categories. The contested nature of the race category is most notable.

“liberation”, “justice”, “nation-building”, “human dignity” (*Ubuntu*), “reconstruction”, and “development” offered alternatives. At the very least, the question had to be addressed how these concepts are related to each other. How, for example, is reconciliation related to liberation theologically and methodologically? Should justice and liberation follow upon reconciliation or vice versa? How is reconciliation between different social groups related to the reconciliation in Jesus Christ? In other words, what connotations are attached to the symbol of “reconciliation”? While there may well be a general understanding in theological publications on the question what “reconciliation” entails, the controversies over the symbol of reconciliation suggest diverging interpretations of its significance for theological reflection in South Africa.⁹ In other words, reconciliation appears to lack a fixed or singular meaning, lending credence to the idea that it is best conceived as an essentially contested concept.¹⁰ On this basis, the problem addressed in this contribution may be formulated as follows: How has the symbol of reconciliation been understood in Christian theological literature emanating from the South African context between 1968 and 2010? This calls for further clarification of a number of issues.

Among other, the problem underlying conceptual clarification is that the term “reconciliation” is used in quite different ways. Conradie’s reference to “reconciliation as one guiding vision for South Africa” on the various uses of the term is quite useful here.¹¹ In his view, the term “reconciliation” may refer to personal relationships that may have become distorted in marriage, personal life, between neighbours or colleagues, and so on. Here reconciliation is required to avoid unwanted animosity and to allow the relationship to flourish again. In the social and political context, the term may be used to describe perceptions, attitudes, and behaviour of individuals and groups towards other social groups. These groups are typically defined through markers such as race, class, culture, and sexual orientation, among others. The term “reconciliation” is thus used as a barometer for social cohesion, as a means to establish how members of the different social groups respect, cooperate with, and tolerate each other in order to avoid open conflict.

In addition to this, the Christian discourse on reconciliation presents at least three additional layers of meaning: (1) Reconciliation with God

9. Gruchy suggests the difficulties are heightened as reconciliation come loaded with the weight of Christianity and the problem of how to differentiate between a transformative form of love that may well have useful lessons for secular life and a piety that presupposes the facticity of a divine gift. Gruchy, *Reconciliation*, 25–26.

10. Erik Doxtader, *With Faith in the Works of Words: The Beginnings of Reconciliation in South Africa, 1985–1995*, Cape Town 2009, 12.

11. Conradie, “Reconciliation”, 17–21.

following alienation as a result of sin; this is understood in the light of a broken relationship with God; (2) Reconciliation through being one with Christ in the Body of Christ (the church); and (3) The ministry of reconciliation through the Holy Spirit in church and society.

These additional layers raise questions on how the use of the term “reconciliation” inside the church is related to the use outside of the Christian context. Furthermore, one may also reflect on how the relatedness of these theological, ecclesial, and social layers of meaning are understood. Given the history of division in South Africa, one may well ask what the relationship is between the politics of national reconciliation and the Christian doctrine of reconciliation? For obvious reasons, the compartmentalization of the three layers would be problematic. However, it would be equally problematic to fuse them together and thus confuse the genres.¹² The issue is the subject of much debate because it raises classic theological questions on the relationship between God and the world, text and context, church and society, and also faith and science. Moreover, these three layers of meaning bring into play all three articles of the Christian confession in relation to each other.

Conradie suggests that some employ a “deductive” logic, moving from reconciliation with God to the ministry of reconciliation in society. According to this logic, the fruits of reconciliation are dependent upon reconciliation with God. This approach assumes that no lasting solution to social conflict can be found without addressing the deep roots of such social conflict. In this case, social conflict is linked directly to our alienation from God. However, this can be overcome through God’s gracious forgiveness of sins. From a classic Reformed perspective, such forgiveness is appropriated through justification, sanctification, and the vocation of believers. Furthermore, such reconciliation in Christ enables and requires reconciliation with one’s brothers and sisters in Christ regardless of the social markers that may separate them (“We are all one in Christ”). In this way, the church constitutes what David Bosch (1929–1992) describes as an “alternative community.”¹³ The social significance of such ecclesial forms of reconciliation is most evident in the *Belhar Confession*.

According to this “deductive” logic, the ministry of reconciliation in church and society is only possible on the basis of reconciliation in Christ. In this sense, the ministry goes beyond the requirements for social cohesion and its primary focus remains firmly rooted in reconciliation with God. It is only through reconciliation in Christ that social conflict can be addressed adequately. Without this, reconciliation remains superficial, if not

12. This is the point raised by Gruchy as quoted in Conradie, “Reconciliation”, 18.

13. David J. Bosch, “The Church as an Alternative Community”, *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 13 (1975), 3–11.

misplaced, thus opening itself to renewed conflict. In other words, reconciliation in society springs from the celebration of the Holy Communion. God's reconciliation in Jesus Christ thus becomes the basis for Christians to reject any social system that assumes the fundamental irreconcilability of people.

In contrast, there are those who employ what may be described as an "inductive" logic. According to this approach, the "deductive" logic does not account for the process behind the conclusion that was reached, namely that the deepest root of social conflict is rooted in human alienation from God. This conclusion can only be reached through contextual and pastoral reflection on such conflict. It is the result of prior analysis, namely recognizing that sin constitutes the deepest roots of the human predicament. In this context, theological perspectives may help in deepening the common understanding of what may be at stake. These views aid reflection by situating personal and social relationships within a wider, cosmic frame of reference. However, it may be limited in the sense that it would not necessarily apply to those outside of the Christian faith.

According to this "inductive" logic, the need for a wider frame of reference follows the argument that any breach in a relationship has broader implications than only for the two parties concerned. If such a breach has almost cosmic ramifications, the final resolution of such conflict has to take into account the widest possible scope of the problem. In this context, reconciliation between two individuals is only possible if the whole of that society is reconciled with itself. Ultimately, reconciliation between two people is possible only through reconciliation with God. In turn, this invites reflection on the cosmic scope of God's work of reconciliation. This would include not only human beings and human societies but the whole created order. In other words, everything is included in God's work of reconciliation in Christ. Reconciliation should, therefore, be understood in the context of both God's work of creation and salvation. What is at stake is the tension between the Creator and the creature that has emerged because of captivity to the principalities and powers of this world (Colossians 2:15). "God's cosmic reconciling activity precedes and provides the framework within which God's reconciliation of humanity occurs."¹⁴ This "inductive" logic is most evident in the approach of the *Kairos Document*. Embedded in the "deductive" approach is the danger of using abstract theological language. Here, more focus is placed on the church than on societal needs. In other words, theological legitimacy is considered more important than social relevance. The "inductive" approach, on the other hand, is confronted with

14. Gruchy, *Reconciliation*, 53.

the danger of self-secularization, of reducing the Christian confession to nothing more than an example of religious affiliation that may be tolerated as long as its particular claims are not foregrounded. The obvious danger is one of being socially relevant without having anything distinct to offer in response to a challenge.

Aulén's Three Main "Types" of Christ's Work (Atonement)

The symbol of reconciliation (or atonement) is a central tenet of the Christian faith. Essentially, the Christian Gospel is about overcoming alienation and estrangement between God and humanity. In light of this observation, the Christian tradition portrays Jesus Christ as the mediator of the broken covenant between God and humanity. Christian reflection on the work of Christ is traditionally discussed with reference to a theology of reconciliation. However, unlike the “person of Christ”, to which the ecumenical councils formally stated their position, the question regarding Christ’s work on reconciliation does not have a central ecumenical reference point. This makes it difficult to single out any one view as the traditional (Nicene) Orthodox position.¹⁵ In this light, Christ’s work on reconciliation has been understood in very different ways throughout the history of Christianity. Essentially, *Christus Victor* is an effort to consolidate this history – an attempt to provide a history of the interpretation of “reconciliation” up to 1930, when the book was first published. In *Christus Victor*, Aulén postulates what can simply be described as the three main “types” of Christ’s work on reconciliation (or atonement).¹⁶ In Christologies developed during the twentieth century, Aulén’s analysis has become highly influential, although the details of his argument have often been criticized. For the sake of brevity, the detail of the typology need not be exhausted here; a brief summary will suffice.¹⁷

15. See for instance John N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, London 1968, 163–164, 375; Otto Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics*, vol. 2, Grand Rapids, MI 1983, 177–191.

16. The original Swedish title, *Den kristna försoningstanken* (The Christian Idea of the Atonement) was published in 1930 in the wake of his series of lectures that were delivered at Uppsala University that same year. The English translation appeared in 1931. See Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement*, London 1931.

17. The names of the three models of atonement identified by Aulén are used in the following manner. The terms are used interchangeably; this, only as it relates to a specific model: First, referring to the “Ransom theory”, Aulén also uses notions such as *Christus Victor*, “dramatic”, or “classic” approach to describe the model inspired by Irenaeus. Second, referring to the “Satisfaction theory”, he also uses notions such as the “Latin” or “objective” view to describe the model inspired by Anselm of Canterbury (c. 1033–1109). Third, when referring to “Subjective theory”, he also uses notions such as “moral influence” (or exemplary) to describe the model inspired by Peter Abelard (1079–1142).

First, Aulén highlights the classic type (drawing especially on Irenaeus of Lyon [c. 130–202]), in which Christ’s victory over the powers of evil is emphasized. He contends that the classic view portrays atonement as a movement of God towards humankind. God is intimately and personally engaged in the work of humanity’s deliverance:

The classic type shows a continuity of Divine operation, and a discontinuity in the order of merit and of justice, while the Latin type is opposite in both respects. In the classic type the work of Atonement is accomplished by God himself in Christ, yet at the same time the passive form also is used: God is reconciled with the world. The alternation is not accidental: He is reconciled only because He Himself reconciles the world with Himself and Himself with the world. The safeguard of the continuity of God’s operation is the dualistic outlook, the Divine warfare against the evil that holds mankind in bondage, and the triumph of Christ. But this necessitates a discontinuity of the legal order: there is no satisfaction of God’s justice, for the relation of man to God is viewed in the light, not of merit and justice, but of grace.¹⁸

Secondly, in the Latin or Anselmian type, Christ’s satisfaction for guilt incurred by humanity is the focal point. With the Latin view, God seems to be more distant. Here, the satisfaction is paid by a human being, in the person of Christ, to God:

In the Latin type the legal order is unbroken. Images and analogies are taken continually from the law-courts in the manner dear to the Latin mind. Such analogies can also be used by the classic type; but in the Latin type they dominate the whole conception, and any violation of justice becomes unthinkable. It is at this point, in the payment of the required satisfaction, that the continuity of Divine operation is lost; for the satisfaction is offered by Christ as man, as the sinless Man on behalf of the sinners. At the same time the Atonement is still in some sense the work of God, since he is regarded as planning the Atonement; therefore, also, the doctrine does not require that there is any change in God’s attitude to men, even though this may often be taught.¹⁹

Thirdly, the “subjective” type draws on Abelard’s subjective appropriation of Christ’s atonement. In the moral influence theory, God acts even more

18. Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 145–146.

19. Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 146.

distantly. Here, no atonement is needed, and all the emphasis is on human movement to God, and this is accomplished in the human world:

In the third type, the Atonement is no longer regarded as in any true sense carried out by God. Rather, the Reconciliation is the result of some process that takes place in man, such as conversion and amendment. If mention of Christ be made in this connection, His work is no longer thought of as the work of God for man's salvation: He is rather the perfect Example, the Ideal Man, the Head of the race. In so far as Christ's work can affect the relation between God and men, it is chiefly that God now sees mankind in a new light. Therefore in this case, also, it is a matter of an approach of man to God, from below upwards, and not of an approach of God to man.²⁰

Thus, for Aulén, the essential Christian idea of God reaching out to humans, which dominates the classic type, is weakened in the Latin type, and lost in the subjective type of atonement.

Aulén's Typology and the Reconciliation in South Africa

Against this background, I want to advance that “reconciliation” during the church struggle against apartheid is understood in at least three distinct ways. This, as per the available theological literature, at least since the period commonly referred to as the church struggle against apartheid (1960–1994). First, there is an approach, I propose as “Justice through reconciliation in Jesus Christ” (drawing especially on the Latin or Anselmian type), where penal substitution is crucial. In this approach it is assumed that the reconciliation of humanity with God in Jesus Christ implies a ministry of reconciliation in a country divided by race, class, and culture, thus necessitating a concern for social justice. This particular approach employs what I referred to as a “deductive logic”, moving from reconciliation with God to the church's ministry of reconciliation in society. Here, the fruits of reconciliation in South Africa are contingent upon reconciliation with God – it is assumed that the message of reconciliation has been entrusted to the church as the Body of Christ. In this respect, the *Belhar Confession* suggests that the church is to embody reconciliation among its members. It further asserts that reconciliation must be understood as a gracious gift from God through the blood of Christ. Also, it calls the church into understanding its own reconciliation and its place in God through the Body of Christ. It further asserts that the church is called to take up the ministry of

20. Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 146–147.

reconciliation to the point where it is believed to be the responsibility of the church. Thus, the church needs to act as a reconciled community reflecting love and peace among people and establishing visible signs of God's kingdom within the context of the divisions in society. However, the focus on the ministry of reconciliation in the church transcends the noble idea of merely helping people to "get along". Here, the assumption is that no lasting solution to social conflict can be found without addressing the deep roots of such conflict. This social conflict is traced directly to humanity's alienation from God and can only be overcome through God's gracious forgiveness of sins through Christ. In other words, the focus of the church must remain on reconciliation with God. Otherwise, too much emphasis on reconciliation in society without reconciliation with God will continue to be inauthentic, shallow, and misplaced, allowing the space for renewed conflict. In this sense, this approach goes beyond the requirements for social cohesion and remains firmly rooted in reconciliation with God through God. In other words, God's reconciliation in Jesus Christ becomes the basis for Christians to reject any social system that assumes the fundamental irreconcilability of people. However, through using this "deductive logic", one runs the risk of using abstract theological language that only focusses on the church more than societal needs. This approach is evident especially in the *Message to the People of South Africa*, the *Belhar Confession*, the *National Initiative for Reconciliation*, and the current discourse on the legacy of the *Belhar Confession*. Rhetorically, this approach was aimed at apartheid theology and its assumptions about the fundamental irreconcilability of people.

Secondly, there is an approach I describe as "Justice and reconciliation after liberation" (drawing especially on the classic or *Christus Victor* theory). Here, reconciliation is explored in the context of liberation theology, especially in the *Kairos Document* and black theology more broadly. This approach is associated with churches or theologians who see the need to address situations of conflict in society. Here, the need for political, economic, and cultural liberation was emphasized. Those involved assumed that social justice can only follow upon the liberation from apartheid and that reconciliation is only possible on the basis of (following) justice. They employ what I referred to as an "inductive logic", where the situations of conflict are rooted in human alienation from God and where social conflict forms the starting point for the ministry of reconciliation. This view suggests that reconciliation has to be understood in the context of both God's work of creation and salvation, given that what is at stake is the tension between Creator and creature, which has emerged because of captivity to the principalities and powers of this world. The "inductive logic" further

suggests that not only human beings or human society, but the whole of creation is included in God's work of reconciliation in Christ – the need for a wider frame of reference follows the argument that any breach in a relationship has wider implications than only the two parties concerned. If such a breach has almost cosmic ramifications, the final resolution of such conflict has to take into account the widest possible scope of the problem. In this context, reconciliation between two individuals is only possible if the whole of that society is reconciled with itself. In other words, everything is included in God's work of reconciliation in Christ. God's cosmic reconciling activity precedes and provides the framework within which God's reconciliation of humanity occurs. This approach is significant because through it the Christian message of reconciliation in Christ is rediscovered through engaging with social problems such as social and economic inequality and the need for restitution, especially in the context where there is a history of social injustices. However, I want to argue that those using the "inductive logic" as an approach to the discourse on reconciliation are confronted with the danger of self-secularization, of reducing the Christian confession to nothing more than an example of religious affiliation that may be tolerated as long as its particular claims are not foregrounded. The obvious danger, as may be the case with the *Kairos Document*, is one of being socially relevant without having anything distinct to offer.

And thirdly, I identify an approach where it is maintained that "Reconstruction requires national reconciliation" (drawing especially on Abelard's moral influence theory). This approach only became evident after the negotiated settlement reached during the period from 1990 to 1994 in South Africa. Here, I describe the steady movement of reconciliation as a theological concept used by Christian churches and theologians, into a key notion in the political discourse in the transition towards a democratic state structure. In other words, the movement of reconciliation as theological to a multi-disciplinary symbol became a central feature. This prompted the recognition of the need for the reconstruction of society and social development. However, this required coming to terms with the apartheid past (including amnesty), for national reconciliation and nation-building. This was expressed (and legitimized) theologically in diverse ways, including the emergence of a theology of reconstruction, but especially through engagements with the proceedings of the TRC of South Africa. Rhetorically, this approach is aimed at calling for moral responsibility and against the privatization of religion after the advent of democracy. However, in this approach, the biblical message of reconciliation is taken out of context and reduced

to matters directly related to the social transformation and the moral regeneration of South Africa.

Towards an Intergration of the Three Approaches to Reconciliation

These approaches have particular strengths and weaknesses, thus, highlighting the need for a more integrated approach. Generally, the range of soteriological concepts present in the discourse on reconciliation allows people to use whatever concepts they deem appropriate to address particular concerns. Just to highlight once again: First, in the *Belhar Confession* (drawing especially on the Anselmian or penal substitutionary theory), the focus is on addressing the root cause of social conflict. Here, social conflict is traced back directly to our alienation from God. This, in turn, can only be overcome through God's gracious forgiveness of sins through Christ. Reconciliation in society without reconciliation with God is deemed inauthentic, shallow, and misplaced, allowing the space for renewed conflict. God's reconciliation in Jesus Christ becomes the basis for Christians rejecting any social system that seeks to divide people. However, here one runs the risk of using abstract theological language that focusses on the church more than societal needs. Secondly, in the *Kairos Document* (drawing especially on the *Christus Victor* theory), the need for political, economic, and cultural liberation is emphasized. Social conflict forms the starting point for the ministry of reconciliation. Reconciliation is understood in the context of both God's work of creation and salvation, given what is at stake is the tension between Creator and creature, which has emerged because of captivity to the principalities and powers of this world. God's cosmic reconciling activity precedes and provides the framework within which God's reconciliation of humanity occurs. In other words, the Christian message of reconciliation in Christ is rediscovered through engaging with social problems such as social and economic inequality and the need for restitution, especially in the context where there is a history of social injustice. However, here also one runs the risk of self-secularization, of reducing the Christian confession to nothing more than an example of religious affiliation that may be tolerated as long as its particular claims are not foregrounded. Thirdly, during the transitional period (drawing especially on Abelard's moral influence theory), the need for the reconstruction of society and social development was emphasized. This included coming to terms with the apartheid past, including working towards the realization of national reconciliation and nation-building. Rhetorically, this approach is aimed at calling for social responsibility and against the privatization of religion. My main concern with this approach is that the biblical message of reconciliation is taken out of context and

reduced to matters directly related to issues of social transformation and moral regeneration.

Following Aulén's analysis, I posit that the three approaches address the evil consequences of human sin (God's victory over evil, based on the message of resurrection), the roots of such evil in human sin (sinners are forgiven by God through grace, manifested in the cross of Jesus Christ), and a way of life for the present in order to map a better future (following Christ's moral example, redemption is depicted as an achievement that human beings can reach themselves). Here, one would have to consider whether the integration of these soteriological concepts would be appropriate, also for the discourse on reconciliation? After all, the history of the Christian tradition indicates that the symbols of the life, cross, and resurrection of Jesus Christ were integrated with one another in order to present a narrative whole.²¹ In this sense, it would be problematic to emphasize a single approach at the expense of other existing approaches. Also, no one-size-fits-all approach can ever capture the theological breadth of Christ's atoning work. Respectively, we have used soteriological concepts such as forgiveness, justice, liberation, reconstruction, and reconciliation among others, to better recognize and appreciate the message of salvation. However, in emphasizing Aulén's analysis and applying these models to the South African context, one would need to come to terms with the fact that a focus on the forgiveness of sins in Christ (Anselmian or penal substitutionary theory) has not yet brought an end to injustice. In the same way, liberation (drawing especially on the *Christus Victor* theory) from social oppression also does not necessarily translate into the end of injustice. Those proposing theologies which are more liberal in their orientation (drawing especially on Abelard's moral influence theory) also need to be reminded that knowledge and moral appeals alone are not sufficient in addressing the deep-rootedness of suffering. In this sense, the social roots of evil must be recognized. The realization of the good relies on more than just a mere focus on the ideal moral example. In this context, it is clear that in order to make progress on the challenge of reconciliation in South Africa, one would have to go beyond the neat compartmentalization of the various approaches. In other words, one would need an integration of the three approaches to reconciliation. This may very well lead to the distorting of soteriological metaphors and their implied *Sitz im Leben*. At the same time, it may also broaden what may otherwise be considered contrasting soteriological positions. This is often the case in South Africa, where, for example, reconciliation and justice

21. Ernst M. Conradie, "The Salvation of the Earth from Anthropogenic Destruction", *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology* 14 (2010), 133.

are often used as oppositional terms.²² The same could be said about liberation and reconstruction.²³ Instead, what I am proposing here is a broadening of our local understanding of these soteriological metaphors, thereby highlighting their theological relatedness beyond the false dichotomies that are often emphasized. However, here one would need to be cautious not to blur the distinct character of the three approaches.

In conclusion, inadvertently Aulén's *Christus Victor* provides something that has become one of the defining features of the theological school at the UWC. A legacy, I suspect, that would make this bishop of Strängnäs proud. By no stretch of the imagination is *Christus Victor* a perfect text. It has many shortcomings, and there is no shortage of literature in this regard. Even with this in mind, there is no denying the importance of this theological contribution, especially as far as the symbol of reconciliation (or atonement) is concerned. It truly is a theological classic. With *Christus Victor*, Aulén has found a way to transcend time and space, speaking to his native Sweden as much as he does to South Africa (or anywhere else for that matter). Maybe Aulén is not an unlikely conversation partner. Maybe it is just me, a black South African, who needed to be reminded of the fundamental asymmetry between divine and human action, an unbridgeable gulf between the work of Christ through which God reconciled the world to Godself (2 Corinthians 5:19) and the Spirit's ministry of reconciliation through us regardless of race or geography. ▲

SUMMARY

This contribution provides a conceptual analysis of "reconciliation" as one of the guiding concepts in Christian discourse in South Africa. It is abundantly clear from available literature that reconciliation is understood in very different ways. This is observed from publications as early as the 1960s, a period generally referred to as the "church struggle" against apartheid. Since that time, it is often used to offer theological reflection on social conflict in the country. In this paper, I propose a framework in which one can identify, describe, and assess at least three distinct ways in which the reconciliation concept is understood in theological literature emanating from the South African context. I categorize them as: (1) Justice through reconciliation in Jesus Christ; (2) Justice and reconciliation after liberation; and (3) Reconstruction requires national reconciliation. The famous *Christus Victor* typology of the three main "types" of

22. Miroslav Volf, "Forgiveness, Reconciliation and Justice: A Theological Contribution to a More Peaceful Social Environment", *Journal of International Studies* 29 (2000), 869–872.

23. See Tinyiko S. Maluleke, "The Proposal for a Theology of Reconstruction: A Critical Appraisal", *Missionalia* 22 (1994), 252–256.

atonement developed by Gustaf Aulén is used as a background to these approaches. The purpose of this contribution is to aid continued theological reflection on the basis of a conceptual analysis of creative ways in which the reconciliation concept is used in a Christian context.