

TOWARDS RECONCILIATION AS A RESPONSE TO RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL CONFLICTS IN AN INDONESIAN CONTEXT

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Abstract

Religious and social conflict is a problem that often occurs in the world. This problem has caused many victims, both the dead and those who were traumatized. Indonesia is a country that experiences inter-religious and social conflicts as well. A number of bloody events have occurred in several places. The focus of this paper is responding to these events especially in a Christian context. This is a concern because a number of conflicts and victims also involve Christians. In the midst of Christian life with other religions and social diversity, efforts to build reconciliation and peace are the main targets to be discussed in this paper. The author uses the literature method in this article. Through various literature, the author explores the idea of reconciliation and offers several solutions, especially those that can be realized in the Indonesian context. This study invites anyone, especially members of the Church, to be involved in reconciliation in order to build peace in living together.

Keywords: Conflict; Forgiveness; Peace; Reconciliation

I. PRELIMINARY

The theme of reconciliation becomes relevant throughout the world especially for all who still seek harmony and peace in conflict areas. In Indonesia, the social conflicts often relate to the situation of religious and sectarian tensions. In fact, Indonesia has experienced serious religious and sectarian conflicts. For example, in 1996, religious conflicts emerged in Situbondo, one of cities in Eastern Java, in which churches were burned, and some victims died. The biggest conflicts happened in the period between 1997 and 2001. According to Michel, it was called Indonesia's "sad years." In the Mollucas (Maluku), eastern Indonesia, the bloodiest conflict caused the death of perhaps six thousand persons and destruction of hundreds of buildings such as schools, churches, mosques, and so on. At the same time, the religious and ethnic violence also emerged in some places, such as in Jakarta, Solo, Surabaya, and other cities, and the slaughter of Madurese in the west Kalimantan (Schreiter et al, 2010: 246-250). The tragedy

has left trauma and suffering for many people, especially Christians as a minority status. For the victims, the experiences make them difficult to build relationships better with others. While the relationship with other religious groups does take place, interreligious conflicts still occur in some places although the tension between groups has decreased. Among the common reasons causing these conflicts are difficulties in acquiring permission to build worship houses and fears of Christianization.

Catholic Church realizes that the Jesus' call of reconciliation and forgiveness (Mt 18:21-22) is an invitation for the sake of peace especially in the Indonesian context. According to Padmoharsono, one of the ways to reenact the importance of reconciliation for mission comes from the Indonesian Bishops' Conference that establishes a Crisis Center to help the victims of conflicts. On other occasions, the Indonesian Bishops issues the pastoral letter on the importance of reconciliation as a way to engage all Christians in the ministry of forgiveness and peace (KWI, 2002:131). The focus of this research paper is to explore and to reenact the value and importance of reconciliation that will support the emergence of reconciliation and develop responsibility both corporate and individual to embody harmony and peace in every dimension of human life.

II. RECONCILIATION

2.1. Reconciliation in the Christian Tradition

The idea of reconciliation in the Bible appears in both the Old and New Testament such as in the passages of Isaac and Esau (Genesis 33), Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 45), the prodigal son (Luke 14), the moment of the Atonement of Christ, and Paul's letters (Muller, et al, 2014: 379). From a biblical perspective, Christian theology recognizes vertical and horizontal reconciliation. According to Schreiter, "Vertical reconciliation is the reconciliation God works so as to restore humankind to communion with God. Horizontal reconciliation draws upon vertical reconciliation in order to bring about healing in human relations, either between individuals or between groups of human being" (2014:1).

The concept of reconciliation in human societies and the Christian tradition shows many distinct understandings. Some cultures possess various ideas of reconciliation represented in different ways such as ritual apology and punishment. In the Christian tradition, Protestants and Catholics have different perspectives in understanding reconciliation as well. The protestant theology uses Romans 5:6-11, and tends to view reconciliation as the result of the Redemption of Christ and the justification by faith, while the Catholic theology takes 2 Corinthians 5:17-20, and emphasizes that the love of God poured out upon us as a result of God who initiates reconciliation through Christ (Schreiter, 1998: 13-14). In terms of reconciliation as Paul said, God reconciling the world to himself in

Christ constitutes a conviction that represents the heart of the Christian tradition (Gruchy, 2002: 17).

In the Catholic Church, reconciliation is also viewed as a sacrament; an instrument of God's grace to us. The Second Vatican Council pays attention to grow reconciliation among the members of the Church on behalf of restoring relationships with God and social reality as appeared in *Lumen Gentium* 11; "Those who approach the sacrament of penance obtain pardon through God's mercy for the offense committed against him, and are, at the same time, reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by their sins and which by charity, by example and by prayer labors for their conversion." Federation of Asian Bishops Conference (FABC) confirms that nowadays, Asia faces challenges pertaining to issues of human rights, justice, and peace that affect all in society especially the poor and the downtrodden. It requires solidarity and reconciliation, and the Church must overcome the problems by building collaboration at the level of local, regional, and international level (Rosales and Arevalo, eds., 1992:180-181). In Indonesian context, Indonesian Bishops' Conference (KWI) views that reconciliation among others after conflicts is a vehicle to embody peace in family and society. In this situation, the Church encourages all Christians to help victims and to heal their wounds. The sacrament of reconciliation for Christians will bring them back to God and all people (KWI, 2002:131).

2.2. Reconciliation as Spirituality

In the ministry of reconciliation, Schreiter sets out that "reconciliation is more a spirituality than a strategy." An awareness of reconciliation as God's work and Christians as "ambassadors for Christ" shows that reconciliation tends to spirituality. Here, God works through people in reconciliation, and we need to build an intimate relationship with God. As spirituality, reconciliation constitutes a way of living and necessitates a spiritual orientation, especially when Christians work together with others for reaching a goal in the ministry of reconciliation. If reconciliation is merely seen as strategy, it refers to a kind of technique. Consequently, reconciliation can fail because people feel arrogant with many resources to do just for the sake of their own selves. Nevertheless, strategy cannot be ignored. In doing the ministry of reconciliation, we must recognize spirituality and strategy for overcoming issues (1998: vi, 16,17).

There are three characteristics of the spirituality of reconciliation. First, reconciliation requires spirituality of listening and waiting. This spirituality constitutes an undertaking to create the atmosphere of truth-telling in which victims must be enabled to avoid the narrative of lie and their burden by telling repeatedly their story including the experiences of suffering and violence. The

best listeners have an important role in the ministry of listening. The dimension of listening also includes learning to wait by being calm and comfortable in the process of reconciliation such as learning to wait God's will and stories of painful memories. For missionaries who live a spirituality of reconciliation as mission, contemplative prayer is an important practice to build contact with God and to realize themselves as agents or ambassadors of God, and the need of great patience in the reconciliation process. Contemplation will develop the ability of missionaries to imagine peace as "new creation" (Mellor and Yates, eds., 2004: 37). The second characteristic is attention and compassion. In reconciliation, learning to wait will develop attention as the basis of compassion. As spirituality, both attention to God and the healing of bad memories constitute the significant elements in the ministry of reconciliation. Attention builds a situation of trust and safety, while compassion enables us to accompany a victim with hospitality. The third characteristic is "its post-exilic stance." Charles Villa-Vicencio, a South African theologian uses the terminology by comparing the post-apartheid condition with Israel after the Exile in Babylon. The spirituality views that reconciliation is a calling through conversion and service to move forward in a new place where all people will live together (Schreiter, 1992: 70-73).

2.3. Reconciliation Processes

2.3.1. Considering definition of Reconciliation based on the Context

Various historical contexts greatly influence how reconciliation is constructed. It means in doing reconciliation, we must recognize a social history, particular circumstance, and context of every place (Gruchy, 2002: 30-31). There are three questions for defining reconciliation to help us in the reconciliation process based on the context: "What and who need reconciliation? What will be the efficacious means for bringing that about? What the final state of reconciliation will look like?" The first question can obtain different responses from victims and wrongdoers. For example, while victims desire to do reconciliation, wrongdoers can refuse and think that it is unnecessary. The first question really requires a consensus from the parties involved in the reconciliation process including to think about what will happen if there is failure in this reconciliation. The second question refers to usage of appropriate means of doing reconciliation such as considering cultural issues. Although the final state in the third question constitutes an ongoing discussion, reconciliation always offers a new place for both victims and wrongdoers. For the sake of better goal, the reconciliation process encourages the parties to seek together the reconciled state (Schreiter, 1998: 106-108).

2.3.2. Actors of Reconciliation

According to Mark Hay, there are actors who should be considered engaging in the reconciliation process. The victims and the survivors are the first actors as well as the primary attention in reconciliation. In conflict, both of them can undergo an individual and communal trauma, and need the recovery process of healing and reconstructing one's human dignity. The second actors are the perpetrators who commit criminal acts and motivate the narrative of lie. They are actually subjects that need repentance. In the reconciliation process, they can undermine and resist the development of the reconciliation to save themselves from the punishment. Occasionally, some of them engage in the process of reconciliation just for the sake of their amnesty. The third actors in reconciliation are bystanders. In Hay's opinion, "the challenge to bystanders is that they deal with their own silence or tacit complicity. Bystanders, too, can indirectly victimize the victims themselves." In the process of reconciliation, bystanders can play a role in offering hope of both the victims and the perpetrators. The fourth actors refer to a number of people who are both victims and evildoers. They are people who at the beginning become the victims of the conflicts, but latter on they commit human rights abuses in their struggle. The further actors are the dead. In the reconciliation process, living people cannot forgive the perpetrators on behalf of the dead. In other words, the dead victims are the only subjects who have the right to forgive the wrongdoers. For this reason, honoring the dead through a ritual moment is an important agenda in social reconciliation. The sixth actors are the future generations. Although the subjects do not know the conflicts, they will take part in the reconciliation process. Our neighbors are the seventh actors. They are neighboring countries and international communities that participate in solving problems in social reconciliation. The final actor is God. For Christians, all the reconciliation process must be seen in the Christian perspective because God is the primary reference or agent of reconciliation (Hay, 1998: 122-126).

2.3.3. Truth in the Reconciliation Process

Establishing the truth or truth-telling is important in the reconciliation process because it will break culture of lies and silence. In the situation of conflict, perpetrators usually create lies about what happen in society to legitimate their violence (Schreiter, 1998: 118-119). Oppressive regimes also involve cruel treatment to prevent their victims speaking out the truth, and to cover the brutality and the wrongdoing. Consequently, revealing the truth will lead to reconciliation especially in rebuilding justice and forgiveness (Daly and Sarkin, 2007: 141). In terms of reconciliation, Schreiter identifies three different types of truth. First type is factual or forensic truth. This understanding refers to what actually happens in the reality or the event. People can state that what they said is truth if it corresponds to the facts. The second type is dialogical or personal truth. This truth

is a result of investigation to discover what really happened. In this way, because the truth relates to personal relations, motivation of the perpetrators to do the crime is often asked by survivors as well. The third type of truth is existential truth. This kind of truth may take longer time and process than the first and second type. The truth needs a deepening understanding of events because “such truth resonates with what we know about ourselves and our community and helps us rebuild our relations with ourselves, the community, the larger world, and with God” (Schreiter, 2006: 53-54).

In the reconciliation process, establishing truth-telling will promote the emergence of a new society. Daly and Sarkin confirm that there are three primary ways to disseminate the truth: through files or documents, a commission report, and a trial. First, publishing official documents constitutes a vehicle to spread the truth and data on how oppressive regimes commit violence. The publication can be written word for word or summarized in newspaper. In this action, we must consider some things such as the timing and the amount of the publications including falsification of public document. In some cases, the dissemination cannot be carried out because the regimes try to prevent the publication, and to change the report for the sake of their own selves. Second, to disseminate the truth and bring justice, a government should establish a truth and reconciliation commission. The commission will be very beneficial in reconciliation because it has more legal access to find truthful information and focuses on revealing the truth. Third, in the reconciliation process, trials will support the establishment of the truth and justice. Trials have relationship with the truth commission because both of them promote the national narrative and reconciliation. Consequently, trials contribute to makes clear the truth and evidence (2007: 148-150).

2.3. Forgiveness

In the Christian tradition, the stories of forgiveness often appear in the scripture, especially when God forgives the people of Israel. Jesus in His ministry calls His disciples to forgive and to love their enemies (Mat. 5:39, 18:22; Luk. 6:35). Jesus teaches an unconditional forgiveness as the heart of the Christian lives (Gruchy, 170). Forgiveness plays an important role in leading reconciliation for the sake of restoring relationships. According to Stephen Pope, “forgiveness is often described in terms of acts and processes that move victims from negative to positive attitudes toward their perpetrators” (Llewellyn and Philpott, eds., 2014: 175). In reality, forgiveness cannot be manifested instantly and completely. It takes times, especially for those who experience traumatic events and require the healing process. Forgiveness is also not pretending, but requires a serious concern for reconciliation. Tutu claims as follows:

Forgiving and being reconciled are not about pretending that things are other than they are. It is not patting one another on the back and turning a blind eye to the wrong. True reconciliation exposes the awfulness, the abuse, the pain, the degradation, the truth. It is a risky undertaking but in the end it is worthwhile, because in the end dealing with the real situation helps to bring real healing. Spurious reconciliation can bring only spurious healing (2000: 270-271).

“Forgive and forgot” is an expression that we may have heard in society. Schreiter claims that the expression is a misconception because “in forgiving, we do not forget; we remember in a different way.” It means our memories cannot be erased because they become part of our identity. Now, we remember in God’s perspective by building a new relationship with the past and realizing the evildoers as human beings who have weakness and need guidance. Other reasons to remember are not to repeat the violence in the future, and not to forget the deaths, but to honor them (1998: 58,66-67).

2.4. Practical Implication

Considering the important values of reconciliation and the characteristics of the Indonesian Catholic Church, the role of the Church or Christians can be embodied as follows:

2.4.1. Living Reconciliation as Spirituality

The Church must realize that “reconciliation is more a spirituality than a strategy” as discussed at the beginning of this paper. Living reconciliation as spirituality will increase significant points in the ministry of reconciliation such as listening truth-telling, building trust, human hospitality, and forgiveness. A spirituality of reconciliation is an important source to nurture peace and relationships with others as well. In spiritual practices, Eucharist, contemplative prayer, recollection, and stories of Christ’s wounds are valuable ways to increase the spirituality, find God’s will, and grow awareness of Christians as “Christ’s ambassadors” in the ministry of reconciliation (Schreiter et al, 2010: 237-23).

2.4.2. Creating Communities of Reconciliation

Communities of reconciliation are valuable to embody reconciliation in the concrete situation. The communities will provide safe environment and accompany victims with hospitality, empathy, and patience both physically and socially. Consequently, the Church must prepare people who are able to serve in this reconciliation process through pastoral training and leadership. The communities will play an important role in encouraging the larger society to participate in the ministry of reconciliation such as the establishment of a truth and reconciliation commission. In a broader context, as an international organization the church can collaborate with other international organizations or

international religious orders. For this reason, reconciliation will represent the mission of the Church in the world (Schreiter, 1998: 129-130).

2.4.3. Peacebuilding as a Ministry

Reconciliation in Indonesia after religious conflicts requires approaches to interreligious Peacebuilding. According to Lederach, a vision of relationship is needed in peacebuilding. It is a capacity to imagine a mutual relationship: “the space of recognition that ultimately the quality of our life is dependent on the quality of life of others” (2005: 35). Michel recommends nine significant elements for peacebuilding that can be learned from “Sad Years” in Indonesia. *First*, it is important for religious leaders to prepare the models of leadership in peacebuilding. This accommodates the role of the religious leaders who can unite many kinds of people such as ministers, officers, workers and so on. *Second*, interreligious dialogue will be more effective if religious leaders personally recognize one another. In this way, the process to solve the problems of conflict will be faster. *Third*, ideology plays an important role to bring together all groups. In this case, Pancasila as Indonesian Ideology is a medium for peacebuilding. *Fourth*, in peacebuilding, the commitment for truth telling helps to provide accurate information needed to solve communal conflicts and promote reconciliation. *Fifth*, in Indonesian context, religion also expresses the identity that shows someone’s life, work, dialect, different region and so on. Mostly, the problem of identity becomes a factor that supports the conflicts such as competition, envy, emotion, and so on. *Sixth*, people will understand the values of religion and morality if religious leaders provide education for peace such as respect for each other. *Seventh*, in Asia, training for peacebuilding agents is important to support transformative practices. The agents need specific skills such as analysis or techniques to respond problems of interreligious conflict. *Eight*, preventing conflicts from occurring is more effective for peacebuilding than working after they erupt. *Finally*, in realizing peacebuilding, forgiveness is a fundamental factor to embody relationship to one another (Schreiter et al, 2010: 255-259).

III. CONCLUSION

Jesus’s call to reconciliation is always an actual call in the Church’s ministry. This call is an invitation for all Christians to embody reconciliation, forgiveness, and peace. Today, as Jesus’ disciples, we are called to embrace humanity and all creation through reconciliation. As a native Indonesian, I feel that reconciliation is very relevant in locations where Christians are becoming a minority and face social conflicts. I hope the endeavors to revive the importance of reconciliation will generate worthy benefits for all. I also expect that all

Christian members both corporate and individual, despite their minority status, will not be afraid to engage in the ministry of reconciliation.

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