

Plenary Session

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Reconciliation in Judaism and Christianity

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The theology of reconciliation from a Liberal Protestant point of view

He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy. Proverbs 28:13

For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; 1 Timothy 2:5

Introduction

I come from partly Catholic and partly Protestant family background. My family on both sides is rooted in Transylvania (now Romania). Being a liberal Protestant (Unitarian) minister and theologian I studied at the Budapest Lutheran University, and also at Harris-Manchester College Oxford. I did some research at Meadville/Lombard Theological School Chicago, USA.

The Unitarian religion is a Hungarian curiosity, was founded during the 16th century Hungarian Protestant Reformation, now celebrating its 450th anniversary. It spread from Transylvania to Europe, later to the United States and then to many places in the world. The Unitarian religion belongs to liberal Christianity with regard to its theology. Referring to Jesus of Nazareth, the church respects the ONE God. Its formation coincides with the first significant edict of tolerance, religious freedom decree. As a result of its openness, first Unitarians contacted the Christian communities and then from the middle of the 20th century encouraged cooperation with the more open branches of other world religions.

There was a special trend, called Sabbatarians, who celebrated their worship service on Saturdays instead of Sundays. The Magyar Sabbatarians arose among Transylvanian Unitarians, led by the Matthias Vehe's followers Simon Péchi who founded the Sabbatarians in 1588, after Ferenc Dávid died in prison and the Unitarian church formalised on a non-Sabbatarian line. Initially they believed Jesus to be the messiah, but a human rather than divine messiah. Gradually they passed to read only the Old Testament and to celebrate Torah's feasts, follow dietary laws, and a strict observance of seventh-day Sabbath, but not circumcision.

In my presentation I try to give a general Protestant image of the culture of reconciliation.

Reconciliation has become a fashion in social sciences, politics, theology, and religion. The importance of reconciliation is indisputable at all levels of society and community life. At the same time, several interpretations attach to the concept, so it is important to clarify them.

Reconciliation between Christian churches is one of the key words of ecumenical theology. The "reconciled difference" is also used for that purpose.

Biblical bases

Old Testament

Among the Old Testament stories I mention some paradigms that exemplify what constitutes reconciliation between each other. How can forgiveness overcome revenge?

In the Bible, the issue of reconciliation with neighbour is a pattern that can be understood in all other dimensions.

The story of the first brothers is the story of people alienated from God. Hatred ends up with homicide. This narrative (Genesis 4:1-16) sets up rivals of brothers, among whom hatred is formed, one is a farmer, the other is a shepherd. Rejection of the expected reconciliation leads to murder.

The other story is the story of Joseph and his older brothers. (Genesis 37-50) Joseph is the favourite son of Jacob (from his favourite wife, Rachel) while his brothers are children of Lea. Jealousy and envy motivate the deceptive actions of the brothers. At the end of the story, Joseph is already ready to forgive, but his brothers must first kill their own hate. Here, the condition for forgiveness is to create a perception change in the offender. In my view repentance precedes forgiveness and reconciliation.

New Testament

In the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) the two boys, the two brothers, have different lifestyles. The basic problem, like in some Old Testament stories, lies in the difference between the brothers. Reconciliation is for the father's love for the children. In Karl Barth's theology of reconciliation, he emphasizes the fact that in this parable the prodigal son and his return, humiliation and ascension are parallel to the path of Jesus.

"Reconciliation requires the conversion of man, and this can be achieved through reflection of things, insight into sin and repentance ... The father runs to his son before he knows that he really came to atone. Thus, reconciliation always starts with the stronger one, the one with the truth, " – writes Christoph Klein, a Saxon Lutheran bishop of Transylvania.

The biblical aspects of reconciliation

Legal aspect

In the Old Testament, there is the concept of material reparation between people. Repentance instead of atonement, which is covered by the word kofer.

Cultural aspect

Reconciliation in the cult is devoted to the relationship between God and man. In this conflict, God is the injured party, he who is avenged, or demands compensation. In Israel, God can not be bribed, but God accepts offerings in order to reconcile with him. The reconciliatory effect of the victim is according to God's will. This reparation is called an atonement.

Christian dogmatic

Karl Barth's Christology has been formed as theology of reconciliation: reconciliation with Christ simultaneously commends reconciliation with God, reconciliation between men and reconciliation with our own personality.

Vertical dimension is reconciliation with God

Canterbury Anselmus, in his 1099 release, set up the deputy suffrage batch. He was the first who used the term of reconciliation. Gustaf Aulen, a Swedish Lutheran theologian in his work published in 1930, describes reconciliation as a victorious battle of Christ when God reconciles the world.

Horizontal dimension: reconciliation with our fellow human beings

Love is a double command. It is a matter of reconciliation with God and the fellow human being. Reconciliation with the neighbour is not a result of diplomatic wisdom, not a compromise, not an undesirable peace or a compromise. Reconciliation is a gift that starts from God reconciling with us. There can be reconciliation within a given community, in society, in the world, and which is very important to ourselves.

Reconciliation with ourselves

Reconciliation with God and your neighbour reaches your goal if you have reconciled with yourself. The man who is hostile to God has been reduced to himself. Loss of spiritual balance, disillusionment means alienation from God.

In order to reconcile with God and our fellowmen, we need unity with ourselves. In this case reconciliation and finding identity are interconnected.

Reconciliation can be described as a process. It is not a static but a dynamic matter. Reconciliation is not a single process. In this process, the guilty and the victim are heading for a new common direction.

Serving Reconciliation in the Church

Church ministry has to begin serving the church, and the church should play a leading role in the process of reconciliation and peace making. Churches can only be effective if they work in an authentic way, not only in words but also in action.

Paul Tillich's interpretation of sin is alienation from God. According to Tillich, reconciliation is the opposite. Tillich also divides alienation into three parts in his systematic theological work: God, the other man, and our own self.

How does reconciliation look in a pluralistic world, in brotherhood in church?

There has always been pluralism within Christianity, which is reflected in the New Testament documents. The Church exists in the diversity of the world. Confessing our faith occurs both before God and the world. This diversity, however, is a challenge. Allows the learning process for Christians. The followers of Jesus are open and willing to learn.

The problem of diversity in the Church began when the Synods began to form dogmas. At the time of the Creation of Creeds, diversity had to bend in front of the council's decision.

Reconciliation between churches

The Pentecostal energy of the churches determines the church-based debate culture, the church's reconciliation culture.

In the 1970s, the notion of "reconciled difference" became known to the public. Many churches are organized within Christianity. At the same time, Christianity as a whole faces a secular society and a religiously diverse world.

Repentance

We see in the Old Testament, then in the New Testament and in the first Christian communities, the attitude to the sinner. With the conversion of the guilty and repentance, reconciliation is achieved. From the 3rd century we are talking about canonical repentance. The reality of sin and the need for forgiveness soon grew up in the early church and practiced forgiveness.

The reformers also knew repentance as a medieval private embrace and sought to retain it.

In the Assumption of Confessio Augustana we read in the article of repentance: "Penance is being taught that those who fall after the baptism may at any time benefit from forgiveness if they repent." Martin Luther on the Freedom of the Christian Man writes that Christian life is based on faith, which prevails through Christ's reconciliation in love.

Personal Theology

Reconciliation is one of the key concepts in Christian faith and theology.

Reconciliation is only honest and lasting if it is preceded by a self-examination, if it is needed, repentance and then forgiveness (if there is something to forgive and reconcile). The point is that if reconciliation based on the surface and not on the analyses of the deep layers of the relationship can easily be a false gesture, a political symbolic act which, however, has nothing to do with real reconciliation. Reconciliation is a prerequisite if both communities self-criticize themselves, their past, what has led to conflicts, where they have mistaken (not the other, but ourselves), and only if the sincere intention of repentance or penance is felt seriously the reconciliation process may begin. This work can not be saved, missed, because then there will be no real reconciliation either.

Ecumenical and interfaith relations

The real problem today is not hostility between churches, this is no longer typical in Hungary.

Although on the official level the main stream Christian Churches give gestures and are friendly towards Jews, we cannot notice any kind of anti-Semitism in official declarations, but underneath you can hear voices, you can find hatred against our Jewish sisters and brothers. Modern anti-Semitism in Hungary is also social and cultural, which some irresponsible politicians strengthen and build their vote-making strategy.

Fundamentalists in Europe

In Europe, the strengthening of anti-Semitism in Muslim-based communities is intensifying and steadily strengthened by the fundamentalist Muslim imams and politicians (there is also a social background to anti-Semitism: frustrated, suburban underclass rebellion). In Europe one cannot notice a high percentage growth of religious fundamentalist, rather we see an increase of political populism.

The need for interfaith dialogue

Today there is a great need for reconciliation between the Scriptura-based, Abrahamic monotheistic churches, because not only the Muslim-Jewish, but at least the Muslim-Christian relationship have become more prominent and have taken on the role of Christian-Jewish hatred of centuries-old traditions. This is now a much more urgent issue in the social, security policy sense than the Jewish-Christian conflicts, which have lost much of their earlier hostility.

Europe is based on Jewish-Christian religious traditions. I am a dedicated devotee of interfaith dialogue. The connotation of multicultural societies is that the world religions are also looking for coexistence and co-operation peacefully.

Today, the role of inter-religious dialogue has been revalued - it could be said it came to be fashionable. In the present time, based on the Western Christian documents examined, we can assure you that it is not the question of whether there is any meaning to dialogue but rather how to fill it with the deeper content.

There is no doubt that positions can not be approached at the theological level, because it would be equivalent to giving away one's own creed, but there is also the possibility to find mutual understanding and acceptance. The common roots of the Abrahamic religions are the foundation, not to be missed that at the same time there are significant differences in the beliefs of monotheistic world religions both faithfully and culturally. Dialogue is not a means to cover, deny, but articulate and promote cooperation. The future can only be based on the elimination of mistrust.