

THE  
CHURCH  
IN  
AFRICA

WITNESS TO JUSTICE, PEACE AND  
RECONCILIATION A POST-SYNODAL  
REFLECTION AND RECEPTION

*Edited by*

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### About the Book

**T**his book comes out at an auspicious moment, as the universal Church rejoices at the election of Pope Francis. The book contains the theological responses of the members of the Catholic Theological Association of Nigeria (CATHAN) to the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Africae Munus*, of Pope Benedict XVI, promulgated on 19 November 2011. The document, with the subtitle "In Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace," challenges the Church in Africa to make reconciliation the centre of its mission. The book takes up this challenge as it reflects on the African situation from diverse perspectives.

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## The Pedagogy of Reconciliation in 2 Cor 5:14-21

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### 1. Introduction

The idea of reconciliation is as old as God's relationship with human beings. It is found in the story lines of the entire Bible, where it is developed in different ways and with different terminologies. In the New Testament, Paul is an author who speaks of it in very explicit terms. The term, reconciliation (*kātāllāgē*), is one of the diverse terms, which Paul used to describe the beginning and process of salvation.<sup>1</sup> As an essential concept in the theology of Paul, the theme of reconciliation is descriptive of the saving mission of Jesus Christ, and it underlies the arguments of almost all the letters of Paul. The scholar who first questioned the role of reconciliation in Paul was E. Käsemann.<sup>2</sup> Although much has been written on this theme since the provoking question of Käsemann, the aim of this essay is to discuss the meaning and character of

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<sup>1</sup> Other terms are: justification, atonement, expiation, redemption, liberation and freedom. Cf. James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998, pp328-329.

<sup>2</sup> See his "Some Thoughts on the Theme 'The Doctrine of Reconciliation in the New Testament'", in J.M. Robinson (ed.), *The Future of our Religious Past: Essays in Honor of Rudolf Bultmann*, New York: Harper & Row, 1971, pp49-64.



reconciliation in 2 Cor 5:14-21 and to argue that it is a tutorial to the Corinthian Christians on how to contribute, as those inserted in the life of Christ, to the restoration of sanity in their conflict-ridden community.

The paper develops in five parts. After the present introductory part, the second part is a delimitation of 2 Cor 5:14-21 and a study of the language of reconciliation in the text. The result of this study is applied to an explanation of the Ministry of Reconciliation in Part Three. In Part Four, the central place of 2 Cor 5 in the Letters to the Corinthians is underscored by its message of the good news and ministry of reconciliation. Having written to resolve many and varied problems that threaten growth to maturity in Christ, Paul educates the Corinthians on how to live out in practical life the new reality of salvation in Christ. In 2 Cor 5:14-21, therefore, the language of reconciliation serves to describe salvation in its cosmic and personal aspects. Part Five concludes with a brief comment on the relevance of the text to the African situation.

## 2. Exegetical Study of 2 Cor 5:14-21

### 2.1 Delimitation of the Text

Paul's second letter to the Corinthians is largely divided into two parts in which he addresses (a) the doctrine of Reconciliation: 1:1-9:15 and (b) his defence of his ministry: 10:1-13:13. This division is based especially on the evidence of Paul's tone and language, which changes radically as the reader encounters him in 2 Cor 10:1. Even his relationship with the Corinthians is seen to change from this point onward.<sup>3</sup> These two large sections harbour other smaller units, whose study cannot receive due attention in the

<sup>3</sup> On the evidence of this change in Paul's tone, language and attitude, some scholars regard this second part of the letter. 2 Cor 10-13, as a separate letter written in response to bitter oppositions against him.

present essay. Our text, 2 Cor 5:14-21 falls within the first part of the letter. After its introductory section in 1:1-7, the author presents his first self-defence against the accusation of insincerity and duplicity (1:8-2:13). This is followed by a second section, 2:14-7:16 where he develops a doctrine of ministry, both in relation to the Christ event and as a response to rival missionaries to Corinth who have challenged his competence. The last section of the first part of the letter, 8:1-9:15, is an appeal to the Corinthians to complete the collection of money for the needy Jerusalem church.

Our text, 2 Cor 5:11-21, is the centre of the argument of the larger section in 2:14-7:16. Paul begins by presenting in 2:14-3:18 the new operations of the Spirit of God which has unveiled the meaning of the Christ event, showing also how it surpasses the old dispensation through Moses. The direct implication of this is renewal of human life thanks to the power of God's grace (4:1-5:10). On these grounds, therefore, Paul exposes the doctrine of Reconciliation (5:11-7:4), which is the salvific implication of his law-free gospel. Within the context of 5:11-7:4, our text 5:14-21 is Paul's explanation of the central motive and power of Christian life and ministry and how this ministry is motivated by Christ's love.<sup>4</sup>

A study of the major terminology of 2 Cor 5:14-21, the verb 'to reconcile' - *kātāllāssō* - found in vv18, 19 and 20, is necessary here, since it is the key to interpreting the ministry of reconciliation in the following section.

<sup>4</sup> The following section, 6:1-7:4 contain smaller units of exhortation to the community to respond to the appeal for reconciliation. He also exposes the credentials of God's ministers and the hardships associated with ministry. Cf. T.D. Stegman, *Second Corinthians*, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2009, pp147-175; George V. Shillington, *2 Corinthians*, Believers Church Bible Commentary, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1998, pp117-122.



## 2.2 Meaning of the *kātāllāssein* – *kātāllāgē* Word Group in 2 Cor 5:14-21

In conventional use, reconciliation is a nomenclature that forms part and parcel of human relationships. It is what happens when two or more opposing or contrasting parties come together and resolve their differences. Sometimes, the two parties in conflict need the effort of a mediator, who persuades the offender to restore a deprived right or undertake an action towards peace. It is believed that justice and peace are reinstated with the restoration of deprived rights. This term is used in the Bible to describe the restoration of the strayed relationship between God and sinful human beings. This study of the lexical meaning of the term is undertaken to show how Paul applied the term to the God - human relationship in 2 Cor 5:14-21.

The Greek term for reconciliation is *kātāllāgē*. Philologically, the *kātāllāssein* - *kātāllāgē* word group is a compound form of *āllāssein*, which is derived from a root meaning 'other' (*āllos*), 'to make otherwise' or 'to change the status of X'.<sup>5</sup> The Greek verb *kātāllāssō* is a transitive verb that properly means 'to reconcile' or more specifically 'to change' from enmity to friendship. The noun *kātāllāgē*, meaning 'reconciliation', denotes a change on the part of one party, induced by an action on the part of another.<sup>6</sup> The word is found in classical Greek where it describes the decisive act that sets aside hostility or estrangement and restores friendship. Still in classical Greek, it is used always in the passive voice, rarely in religious contexts but its use is primarily restricted to

sociological and political spheres of life. The change that it effects is not basically psychological or emotional but a change in the relationship or situation vis-à-vis another.<sup>7</sup>

In the entire Bible, the verb appears five times and the noun four times in Rom 5:8-11 (2x) and in 2 Cor 5:14-21 (4x), but also in Col 1:21-22 (1x); and Eph 2:16 (1x). It is also found in its subordinate sense as reconciliation between human beings in 1 Cor 7:11; Rom 11:15 and in Matt 5:24 (*diāllāssein*). In all these contexts in which the word is found the term is very closely linked, as will be shown below, to the death of Jesus Christ. It becomes clear from this evidence that in the entire Bible; in fact, of all the New Testament writers, Paul alone employs the *kātāllāssein* - *kātāllāgē* word group to describe the significance of the action of God in Jesus Christ.<sup>8</sup>

Before Paul adopted the term, the word 'reconciliation' is found only in the secular sphere of classical Greek literature. It neither derived from any word in the Old Testament nor in Hellenistic religious language.<sup>9</sup> It is an example of Paul's employment of a secular concept to describe a reality of a religious nature. This notwithstanding, Paul used the vocabulary in an exceptionally different way. In classical Greek, the word is used in four different ways:<sup>10</sup> It may describe the work of a mediator to bring two warring parties back to friendship (active form), or a person's effort to persuade another to give up his anger (passive deponent form). It may also be used of an offended person who is persuaded

<sup>5</sup> Cf. W.H. Gloer, *An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul's Understanding of New Creation and Reconciliation in 2 Cor 5:14-21*, New York: Mellen Biblical Press, 1996, p91; J. Fitzmyer, "Reconciliation in Pauline Theology" in J. Flanagan – A. Robinson, *No Famine in the Land: Studies in Honor of John L. McKenzie*, Claremont: Scholars Press, 1975, p157.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. W.E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, pp932-934.

<sup>7</sup> Gloer, *Paul's Understanding*, p90; Fitzmyer, "Reconciliation", p157; F. Büchsel, "āllāssō" in G. Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964, pp251-259.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Gloer, *Paul's Understanding*, p89.

<sup>9</sup> J. Reumann, "Reconciliation" in K. Crim et al. (eds.), *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976, p728; Fitzmyer, "Reconciliation", p157.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Gloer, *Paul's Understanding*, pp93-94.



to give up his anger, therefore, it describes the willingness to forgive (passive deponent form). Finally, the term could be used with a direct object to describe offenses concerning which reconciliation needs to be made (passive deponent form).

Paul's use of the verb fits none of the above categories. Rather, in all its occurrences, God is the subject of the verb *kātāllāssō*, used in the active sense.<sup>11</sup> This use differs fundamentally from its passive use in classical Greek. In the interpretation of the text below, this Pauline use of the term will become more meaningful when it will be shown that God, the offended party, is the subject of reconciliation. This implies that God has freely initiated an action which changed the status of the offending partner. A study of this term in the context of 2 Cor 5:14-21 will unfold more of its meaning as an aspect of the effects of the death of Jesus on mankind.

### 3. The Ministry of Reconciliation

2 Cor 5:14-21 is clearly divided into two parts, each comprising a thesis and an explanation: (a) vv14-17: First Thesis [vv14-15] and Explanation [vv16-17] (b) vv18-21: Second Thesis [v18] and Further Explanation [vv19-21].

#### 3.1 The Death of Christ and New Creation (vv14-17)

Paul begins by stating the meaning and effect of Christ's death on 'us'. These first four verses are divided into two parts, the second part, vv16-17 being an explanation of the first, vv14-15.

<sup>11</sup> The verb is also used in its active voice and it retains the same subject in Rom 5:10-11; 1 Cor 7:11; Col 1:20; and Eph 2:16. This use is unattested prior to Paul. Cf. Dunn, *Theology*, p228.

Vv14-15: First Thesis: For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.

Here, Paul states a truth of fundamental importance about the power behind his Christian mission: "the love of Christ urges us on". This love of Christ is expressed concretely in Christ's death for us. Paul explains the reason and purpose of Christ's death, and that is, 'Christ died so that we might stop living for ourselves but for him who died and rose for us.' In other words, the death of Jesus engages us to a selfless life for others.

Different interpretations have been given as to how one should understand the death of Jesus for all (*huper pāntōn āpethānen*).<sup>12</sup> Depending on how the preposition *huper* is translated, scholars have interpreted Jesus' death either as substitution or representation.<sup>13</sup> A consideration of 2 Cor 5:14-21, alongside other Pauline texts, like Rom 5:12-21 and 1 Cor 15:20-23, 45-49, favours the representative function of Jesus and shows that 2 Cor 5:14-15 is "one of the most explicit expressions of Paul's

<sup>12</sup> Jesus died for all could mean that (a) all are juridically regarded by God as having died; (b) all are potentially dead because Christ's death has made it possible for them to die to themselves; (c) individuals die with Christ in the context of baptism; (d) individuals either identify with Christ and die his death or fail to identify with him and die their own death. Each of these different interpretations fails to represent fully the force of Paul's idea, and each diminishes one aspect of what Paul said or the other. Cf. Gloer, *Paul's Understanding*, pp33-34.

<sup>13</sup> Linguistically, the preposition allows for both representative (on behalf of, for) and substitution (in place of, instead of) interpretations. Cf. W. Bauer, *A Greek - English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Chicago: University Press, 1979, pp838-839.



understanding of Jesus' significance as representative man".<sup>14</sup> The actions of the first and last Adam have universal significance. However, on the basis of the phrase "since we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died" (vv14), we may affirm with some other scholars that Paul moved beyond the idea of representation to that of participation.<sup>15</sup> In the event of his death, therefore, Jesus did not act as substitute for others; his death did not merely produce certain benefits for others; it is rather an event in which the believer participates because he or she is incorporated into Christ.

In his other letters, Paul describes the death of the believer with Christ as a death to the flesh and to the power of sin (Cf. Rom 6:3-11; 7:4; Gal 2:19-20; 5:24; 6:14; Phil 3:10-11). Since Christian life is a sharing in the life of God, Paul says, therefore, the love of Christ urges us on. In other words, the same love, which God concretely expressed for us in the death of his Son, is the love by which the believer lives and acts. In the next two verses, Paul uses a new term to explain the meaning of this event.

vv16-17: Explanation: From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

<sup>14</sup> James D.G. Dunn, "Paul's Understanding of the Death of Jesus" in R. Banks (ed.), *Reconciliation and Hope*, Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1974, p130; Gloer, *Paul's Understanding*, pp33-34.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 1, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951, pp297-298; W.D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, London: SPCK, 1948, p242; D.E.H. Whiteley, *The Theology of Paul*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964, pp130-131; E. Käsemann, "The Saving Significance of the Death of Jesus in Paul" in *Perspectives on Paul*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969, p41.

Here, the thesis of vv14-15 is explained with a new phrase: 'new creation'. What God has done for us through the death of Christ has completely and fundamentally changed the situation of human beings. It has also changed our old ways of knowing Christ. "From now on...", anyone who is in Christ is a new creation or new creature – *kāinē ktisis* (v17) and inserted into a new realm of existence (*en Christō*). Anyone who is in Christ has entered the sphere of the divine, since the person now shares in the life of Christ. The human being is no longer an outsider in God's affairs (estranged). This way of presenting the new creation as life in Christ explains what we may also call incorporative elements, incorporation into the household of God (Eph 2:16-21). This new state signals the end of hostility that alienated humans from God, as Paul says: "the old has passed away, behold the new has come" (v17).

### 3.2 The Ministry of Reconciliation (vv18-21)

What Paul says here is not unrelated to the first. By using the phrase *tā de pāntā*,<sup>16</sup> Paul recalls all he had said in vv14-17, which describes what God has done to bring us to the grace in which we now stand. God's action in Christ rules out completely mere human achievements. In these verses, Paul uses the terminology of reconciliation to describe the effect of Christ's death and how it serves God's greater plan for the entire creation.

v18: Second Thesis: All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.

<sup>16</sup> The particle 'de' is not intended to denote contrast; rather, it acts as a transitional term as Paul proceeds to explain that the Christ-event and its benefits for mankind has its origin in God.



The new term, *kātāllāssein*, is employed here to say how the Christ-event has its origin from God and is the objective act of God for the world.<sup>17</sup> God's gracious initiative to change the human condition and to make human beings capable of a relationship of communion and friendship is what Paul designates with the *kātāllāssein* – *kātāllāgē* word group. This language of reconciliation describes the effect of that death for the human situation. God reconciled us to himself through Christ. This idea is clearly supposed in vv14-15 (cf. Rom 5:10). God's response to human hostile actions towards him is self-immolation: the sacrifice of his only Son through death on the cross.

A follow-up to or response to what God has done is described here as *diākoniā*. This implies that what God has done for us in reconciling us to himself is an act of grace which calls us to service (*diākoniā*). The two verses (18 and 19) have two adjectival participles of which God is the subject, and with them Paul draws attention to two important ongoing divine activities: the ministry of reconciliation (v18) and the word of reconciliation (v19). This idea of mission is also underscored in the following verses: "...entrusting to us the message of reconciliation (v19); "...so we are ambassadors (v20); "...so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (v21). The gift or grace of reconciliation with God automatically makes us ministers of reconciliation. These words and sentences speak of what we should do by reason of the reconciliation already obtained.

Vv19-21 Explanation: That is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he

made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

This section develops more fully an idea that had been presupposed by the text from v14 onward, made more evident by the phrase "...not counting their trespass against them.". This phrase underscores the gracious character of God's action. Another related text, Rom 5:8-11, provides a full description of the God-human relationship before and after the death of Christ.

But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation (Rom 5:8-11).

In 2 Cor 5:14-21, as in Rom 5:8-11, reconciliation is the subject of the estranged relationship between God and human beings, where God is its subject. The cause of the estrangement is human trespasses (2 Cor 5:19), which is the outcome of a life for self and not for God (2 Cor 5:15). Therefore, the offended party is God and the offender is humankind. Within this sphere of estranged relationship, Rom 5:8-11 describes the human being as hostile (*echthros*), impious (*āsebēs*), weak (*āsthenēs*), and sinner (*hāmartōlos*), terms which describe the human being without God. The theological implication of this Pauline use is thereby highlighted. God, the offended party, is the one who takes the initiative at reconciliation.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Gloer, *Paul's Understanding*, pp84-86.



The direct object of God's reconciling activity is rendered as 'us' (*hēmās* – v18) and 'the world' (*kosmon* – v19), showing that it has both anthropological and cosmological dimensions. The phrasing of 2 Cor 5:18-19 provides the orientation for understanding how one of these dimensions is at the service of the other. In the first place, the direct result of the death of Christ is the radical change that has occurred in humankind. However, this was in view of God's ultimate and greater plan for the entire creation – the reconciliation of the entire universe to himself. Another text, Col 1:20, describes the word *kosmos* (the world) in v19 as the universe of creation.<sup>18</sup>

...and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross (Col 1:20).

In Col 1:20 as in 2 Cor 5:19, the object of God's reconciling activity is the created universe, all things in heaven and on earth. Consequently, we should understand 2 Cor 5:18-19 as saying that the new humanity born through the death of Christ is at the service of the reconciliation of the entire cosmos to God. This is similar to what Paul says in Rom 8:19-23, that creation now shares in the hope that is born in the Christ-event, as it yearns eagerly "for the revealing of the children of God" (Rom 8:19). We could therefore say that in both 2 Cor 5:18-19 and Rom 8:19-23 Paul views the anthropological dimension of reconciliation to be at the service of the cosmological dimension. He says how God intends to realize this ultimate purpose by addressing the agents of the ministry.

The sentences in vv18 and 19 identify the agent(s) through whom God intends to bring about his ultimate purpose for creation: *hēmās* (v18) and *hēmin* (vv18 and 19). The question to be answered here is whether the 'us' in v18b refers to the same subject

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Fitzmyer, "Reconciliation", p161.

in v19b. For some scholars, *hēmās* is not parallel to *hēmin*. While *hēmās* refers to all humanity, *hēmin*, on the other hand, refers to believers who have actually died with Christ and who live the newness of life in the Spirit.<sup>19</sup> This would seem to be a justifiable conclusion, but the case could be decided from a consideration of the tenses of the verbal sentences. In the first place, the 'us' (*hēmās* and *hēmin*) in v18 refer to all humanity who is the beneficiary of God's reconciling activity (...*God, who reconciling us to himself ...gave us [hēmin] the ministry of reconciliation*). The ones whom God has reconciled in Christ are the ones who receive the ministry of reconciliation. This is also parallel to the direct object of *themenos* in v19. They are the 'us' (*hēmin*) who also receive the message of reconciliation. A description of God's action in vv18 and 19 with verbs in the aorist participle defines it as action completed in Christ of which we are the beneficiary. The same referent cannot be attributed to *kosmos* in v19, which is governed by a verb in the present participle, showing that it is still an ongoing activity (...*that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself*). Through the death of Christ, God has entrusted this ministry of reconciliation to us which is for the benefit of the entire creation (cf. Rom 11:13-15).

The ministry of reconciliation entails both the "word of reconciliation" (...*ton logon tēs kātāllāgēs*) and the "ministry of reconciliation" (*tēn diākoniān tēs kātāllāgēs*). It is both word and event. As word, it needs to be proclaimed, and as event, it needs to be lived out in concrete daily life. As the word of reconciliation, it is the heart of the gospel message. It has been entrusted to 'us', who have been called to proclaim it. As Paul says in 1 Thess 2:1-12 this message should be preached: even in the face of opposition, not out of deceit or from impure motives; not to please mortals but as God has revealed and entrusted it to us; not with words of

<sup>19</sup> Cf. for instance G.R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973, pp137-138.



flattery or with a pretext for greed, and without becoming a burden to the congregation; accompanied with a pure, blameless and upright conduct; in gentleness and care, encouraging God's children to live lives worthy of God, and sharing with them not only the word but the life.

Finally, in v21, Paul qualifies the new life in Christ as justification: "...so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (v21; cf. Rom 5:9).<sup>20</sup> Righteousness is a prerogative of God,<sup>21</sup> but God entrusts it to those who are called in Christ and who thereby become agents of salvation. Paul confirms this when he says in Rom 8:30 "...those whom he called he also justified".

#### 4. The Pedagogy of Reconciliation

What is described in 2 Cor 5:14-21 is a 'pedagogy' of reconciliation. It is an education on how to undertake the ministry of reconciliation which is given to us as sharers in the life of Christ. A greater relevance is given to a teaching on the process of reconciliation if it is properly explained within the context that required the teaching. The Corinthian community was one torn apart by different kinds of conflicts and disagreements. The language of conflict was already suggested at 1 Cor 1:10 with

<sup>20</sup> Reconciliation is not synonymous with justification but there is a sense in which their meanings harmonize. The Christ event is the point of departure for both metaphors, that is, the death of Jesus through which the individual is incorporated into Christ. Justification explains this incorporation as the restoration of the individual into the covenant relationship, with Christ's death explained as the sacrifice of expiation (Rom 3:21-26). Reconciliation, on the other hand, explains the incorporation into Christ as the restoration of the Creator-creature relationship, with Christ's death explained as a dying to self in order to live for God. We could say that reconciliation provides the basic explanation for arguing for the justification of all, Jew and Gentile alike. Because of the fundamental change in human nature, all could have access to the covenant blessings without having to keep the Law.

<sup>21</sup> In Paul, God is always the subject of the noun *dikaiosunē*.

Paul's appeal that there be no divisions among them. Paul's letter is an exhortation over such matters as possession of wisdom and spiritual gifts, exclusive attachment to leaders, sexual immorality and lack of self-control, legal suits against fellow Christians, and even over matters concerning belief in idols. The community was further divided between those who appreciated Paul and those who regarded him as a fake apostle. An evaluation of 2 Cor 5:14-21 within the context of both letters shows that it is the heart and doctrinal centre of the letter. The presence of factions and immorality in the community was evidence that the people did not understand the meaning of their new status as sharers in the life of Christ. This text is Paul's theological teaching to the community on how to understand what God has done for 'us' through the death of Christ and the mission that goes with that salvific event.

In order further to explain the pedagogical character of reconciliation, as defined in 2 Cor 5:14-21, we must first redefine its orientation. Reconciliation initiates a movement that begins with God and ends with God, an action of God whose goal is God: "God reconciles ... to himself". God alone is the orientation and goal of any activity in view of reconciliation. Secondly, reconciliation is the positive, gracious action of the offended party, undertaken on behalf of and not minding hurts suffered from the offending party. This orientation defines the course of action for the ministry of reconciliation.

In 2 Cor 5:14-21, reconciliation is presented as both a gift and a commission. As a commission, Paul insists that it extends to all efforts against conflicts and all forms of alienation in the Christian community and in the world. Through Christ, God has shown that the right attitude towards peaceful resolution of conflicts is self-immolation. Paul's teaching to the Corinthians is valid for today's world and the conflicts that beset relationships at different levels. 2 Cor 5 teaches us that reconciliation is not achieved through



restitution of what one is owed; it is not achieved by softening down one's excesses in order to make compromises. Experience teaches us that an approach to resolution of conflict, which begins with insistence on restoring deprived rights does not yield the desired peace and justice. Reconciliation is the positive attitude of the offended party, which aims at changing the offender from inside out and which makes him or her capable of friendly, non-oppressive, and peaceful relationship.

The terminology of reconciliation speaks of change, that is, change in the attitudes of those who benefit from the love of God, which has been made manifest in the event of Christ. It is a change from living for self to living for Christ. As 2 Cor 5:14-15 shows, God's reconciling activity in Christ launches us into a new way of life that befits the new creation. The ministry requires that we truly identify ourselves with Christ's death and thereby reject attitudes that lead to self-glorification, selfishness and gratification of the body. This change of attitude, as exemplified in God's action through Christ, heals the conflicts that characterize human communities. Ministers of reconciliation should preach the word and be living examples of the attitude that makes reconciliation a reality.

### 5. Conclusion: Relevance for the future of Africa

The Synod of bishops for the African Church, held in 2009 on the theme of reconciliation, was a grace-filled invitation to Africans to reflect on their situations in order to discover the path towards peace and well-being. The Letter to the Corinthians speaks to the African reality which is also a faction-ridden continent. It speaks to Africa at two levels. It calls us out of our selfish ways for a special relationship with God, as it is defined in the manner of Jesus' death. Secondly, it calls us to ministry in our different contexts of disunity and divisions, with the injunction that death leads to new

life. Paul's teaching about reconciliation obviously calls for a change of attitude with which we hope could provide the remedy to the alienation that plagues our society and institutions.

In the face of the conflicts and disorders that characterize Africa today, many Africans believe that their situations would change if their leaders and governments become more responsible, altruistic and patriotic. Nevertheless we should feel ourselves addressed by 2 Cor 5:14-15, which calls us to take seriously our new life in Christ, as Paul says, "we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:20). The call is individual and communitarian. Therefore, we should consider that the Church is calling us to a new beginning, a new hope for Africa, whose realization is possible only if Africans return to God in total submission. Let us beg God to send us his Spirit so that he would remove our gaze from ourselves and direct it to God. It is a change from worship of self to the worship and praise of God. "... the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law... and those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom 8:7-8).

For this reason, Paul describes reconciliation as a ministry, as a call to participation in the reconciliatory work of God, as it is revealed in Jesus Christ. It educates on how finally communities can emulate God's action in bringing about renewal. Finally, this text highlights the task of the Church as an agent and sacrament of reconciliation.

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