

The Mission of the Church in a World of War

BY JOHANNES REIMER

1. The Mission is Back—We Will Not Die

It's February 2018, and a small group of peace builders from the Peace and Reconciliation Network of the Worldwide Evangelical Alliance is visiting the war zone in Eastern Ukraine. After months of negotiations, we are finally here to run our first Christian reconciliation conference in the Druzhkivka, Donetsk, region. Both sides of the conflict—Ukrainian- and Russian-speaking—are invited to spend quality time discussing their situation and to work for practical solutions.

Skeptics in politics and church had discouraged us from going. “The church can do nothing in such zones,” they had argued. “You are only endangering your own lives and are creating a greater misery for those living in the zone. Stay out of this. It is not your business.” We went anyway.

Prior to the conference in the city of Druzhkivka, our team visited the frontlines near Donetsk. A local mission team that frequently visits the villages and towns along the frontlines had agreed to bring us there. So, we loaded up our vehicle with food supplies and off we went. Would the soldiers let us enter the neutral zone between the two armies? Would they perhaps arrest us Westerners for going where no one is allowed to go? Many questions stirred in my mind as we approached the frontline. At the first checkpoint, soldiers stopped our car. “The mission has come!” one of them shouted. “There is fresh bread again. Thank you, brothers!” His eyes were shining. This guy was obviously not enjoying the job assigned to him. And he welcomed our mission bringing bread.

We passed all checkpoints successfully. Now, we were in the gray zone. Daily shooting made this place dangerous. Our driver obviously knew his way, though. Soon, we entered the first village. Within seconds of our arrival, our car was surrounded, mostly by older people.

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“The mission is back!” they shouted. “Our brothers have brought bread. Thank God!” Faces marked by suffering and hardship now showed signs of joy and thankfulness.

One of our guides explained, “Only a few of these people are Evangelical Christians. Most of them were atheists before the war started. This war has robbed them of everything they believed in. For them, our visit is the only glimpse of hope they receive. It is much more than bread; it is a sign of life beyond war.”

We visited a number of villages that day. People started telling us their stories. Some of them cried tears. Others seemed to have dried out of tears long ago. We distributed bread and some winter clothes, sang a number of songs with the people, prayed a prayer, and journeyed on to the next village. The villagers, however, remained standing on the street as we drove away, as if they wished to freeze in place the little moment of comfort they had just experienced.

“The villagers call us brothers. We did not introduce ourselves like this. They decided to name us members of their families themselves. Most of them have lost family in this war. Now, we missionaries are their family,” the brother tells us.

We entered the city of Avdievka, a famous industrial suburb of Donetsk. Wherever one looked, there were marks of war. Just months before, this had been a battlefield. When we arrived at the Baptist church, we were told, “Every building here was hit by a missile, except this Baptist chapel. The neighbors come here for peace and rest because this is a God-protected place, they say.”

The pastor was inside the building, expecting us. The sanctuary seemed like it had been turned into a thrift store; used clothes, household utilities, and many other useful things filled the room. One corner had been cleared, so we placed the bread there.

Explaining the scene before us, the pastor said, “Neighbors have lost everything in the bombing. We try to provide them with what we find here and there. And our brothers help us. No one knows how long this war may continue. We just know what our Christian duty is—to be a helping hand to those in need.”

We asked the pastor how many church members had remained in the city. “Most of the former members left us,” he replied. “But our church has even grown in membership. We do not evangelize aggressively as we did before the war. Loving and caring for people is evangelization enough in our situation. People come to us because they find comfort here. No one else seems to care. We do, because God does. And seeing us, they discover God.”

What a testimony! I left the place deeply touched by his words. And more testimonies like his—many more—would follow during our conference in Druzhkivka. No, the churches have not lost their hope in the midst of war and

conflict. They have discovered that such a missionary life is worth living even in the face of the danger of losing one's own life.

2. The Church in a World of War

The opening story of this article encourages us to think creatively about mission in zones of conflict. What are the main parameters of such a mission? What might the most crucial missionary task of the church in such zones be?

2.1 *The Mission of the Church is Reconciliatory by Nature*

Nowhere does it become more evident than in zones of conflict that the church's mission is principally a mission of reconciliation. The church follows the mission of Jesus. He himself commissioned his disciples, saying: "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21 NIV). The church has no other mission than to do what Jesus did! And Jesus was sent to reconcile the world with God (2 Cor 5:18) and to bring peace on earth (Luke 2:14)—a state of shalom in which conflicts are solved, hope is generated, and convicence becomes a reality.

The church is Christ's ambassador of reconciliation (1 Cor 5:19–20). The heart of Christian mission is to reconcile those in conflict with God and one another. Craig Ott consequently defines mission as "the sending activity of God with the purpose of reconciling to himself and bringing into his kingdom fallen men and women from every people and nation to his glory."¹ Together with other authors, he grounds his conviction in Pauline theology.²

It is the current condition of the world in relationship to God that brings reconciliation to the table.³ The world has become godless by having forsaken and forgotten what God's plan for the world originally was. Dishonoring God, humans have fallen into a self-destructive mode of life. We live in a conflict-laden zone! Where is this more visibly obvious than in situations like the one described in our opening story?

2.2 *Reconciliation: God's Way toward Peace in the Community*

The loving heart of God seeks renewal and restoration. God does not want sinners to perish (Ez 33:11) and, therefore, sent his only begotten Son to save and reconcile the world with himself (2 Cor. 5:18). To reconcile means to bring

1 Craig Ott, *Encountering Theology of Mission: Biblical Foundations, Historical Developments, and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Backer, 2010), 155.

2 See in this regard Cilliers Breytenbach, *Versöhnung: Eine Studie zur paulinischen Soteriologie Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament* 60 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1989).

3 Reimund Bieringer, "2 Kor 5:19a und die Versöhnung der Welt," *EthL* 63 (1987): 295–326.

God's plan of life back to the table, ignite the original vision, and determine a way toward a life in peace. This is the message of God's revelation in Scripture. "From Genesis to Revelation, Scripture witnesses to God's total mission 'to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven' (Col. 1:15–20). The fullness of reconciliation is friendship with God in Jesus Christ."⁴ And with this friendship, peace enters the conflict zones of the world. God desires peace with his creation, and, therefore, peace is at the heart of his mission.⁵ Pope Benedict XVI writes:

Reconciliation, then, is not limited to God's plan to draw estranged and sinful humanity to himself in Christ through the forgiveness of sins and out of love. It is also the restoration of relationships between people through the settlement of differences and the removal of obstacles to their relationships in their experience of God's love.⁶

And Robert Schreiter summarizes properly:

What we see in these Pauline passages is how reconciliation is a central way of explaining God's work in the world. Through the Son and the Spirit, God is making peace—between God and the world, and thus also within all of creation itself. When this insight is brought together with the concept of the *missio Dei* developed a few decades earlier in missiology, we see the biblical foundations for reconciliation as a paradigm of mission, a paradigm that began taking on a particular poignancy and urgency in the last decade of the twentieth century.⁷

God's people are invited and sent to participate in his mission. The church is "a people in God's reign," says the German theologian Leonard Goppelt.⁸ Does this mean that all missionary activity of God's people must intentionally follow a spirit of peace and reconciliation? Yes, says the apostle Paul to the Christians in Corinth. In 2 Corinthians 5:18–19 we read:

⁴ Chris Rice, *Reconciliation as the Mission of God: Christian Witness in the World of Destructive Conflicts* (Durham, NC: Duke Divinity School, 2005), 11.

⁵ Johannes Reimer, *Missio Politica: The Mission of the Church and Politics* (Carlisle, England: Langham, 2017), 69.

⁶ Pope Benedict, "Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus*," http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20111119_africae-munus.html (1.12.2), 8.

⁷ Robert Schreiter and Knud Jørgensen, eds., *Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation*, Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series, Volume 16 (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2013), 14.

⁸ Leonard Goppelt, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), 254.

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

God's people have been given a mission of reconciliation and peace. They are sent as their Lord was sent. With the same intention. Theologically speaking, all Christian mission must be transcended by a spirit of peace and reconciliation. Christian mission can never intentionally promote conflicts and war. Instead, it will move into zones of conflict, introducing peace and reconciliation. As Christians, we are invited to go to those troubled by conflict and offer them God's hand to reconcile with those they fight against. At the conference in Druzhkivka, this very truth opened hearts and minds of people on both sides of the conflict. God offers help—divine help—to assist a process of ending conflict. The way toward peace is reconciliation!

2.3 Recovering the Missionary Task of Reconciliation

In our opening story, few Evangelical Christians understood the reconciliatory role of the church in a community in conflict. The “world of war,” as John Howard Yoder once called it,⁹ appeared to them to be a place they would rather leave behind. Inward and outward emigration instead of active participation ruled their agendas. What do Christians contribute to a more peaceful living in communities around the world? Do they see peacebuilding as their mission? In Ukraine, the majority did not. And the Ukrainian Evangelicals are in no way an exemption.

A quick overview of positions shared among Christians of different denominations reveals a deep divide between Ecumenical and Evangelical Christians. While the first clearly identify peacebuilding as a vital part of the mission given to the church,¹⁰ most Evangelicals distinguish between evangelism and social responsibility and include peacebuilding in the latter. Christians are called to both, they argue, but social responsibility—and, with it, peacebuilding—is not part of the core mission of the church. This approach is evident, for example,

⁹ John Howard Yoder, *He Came Preaching Peace* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1998), 17.

¹⁰ See, for instance, Evangelisches Missionswerk in Deutschland, Eds. *Frieden und Mission: Eine Arbeitshilfe für Gemeinden* Materialheft 6 (Hamburg: EMW, 2011); Das Position Papier der Assemblies of God aus dem Jahr 2015: Church Mission and Peacemaking, <https://ag.org/Beliefs/Position-Papers/Church-Mission-and-Peacemaking>, accessed January 9, 2016; David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 411; and Johannes Reimer, *Die Welt umarmen: Theologie des gesellschaftsrelevanten Gemeindebaus*, Transformationsstudien Bd. 1 (Marburg: Francke Verlag, 2009), 147ff.

in the Lausanne Covenant.¹¹ In missionary praxis, as Rick Love, a missionary to Muslims, rightly observes, “Peacemakers don’t do evangelism and evangelists aren’t known for being peacemakers. Peacemakers focus on social issues, while evangelists save souls. Peacemakers fear that evangelism among Muslims increases conflict, while evangelists believe that peacemakers compromise the gospel.”¹² Consequently, peacebuilding and reconciliation are not subjects in most evangelical works on mission. Love even speaks of a *missing peace* in evangelical missiology.¹³

Anabaptists, of course, differ in this regard. Since the publication of Guy F. Hershberger’s book on the Mennonite theology of peace, in which he clearly states the responsibility of Christians for peace in the world,¹⁴ the issue has been intensely discussed among Mennonites.¹⁵ Of great importance in this regard are the works of Mennonite theologians John Howard Yoder¹⁶ and John A. Lapp.¹⁷ In all their publications, there is a distinct confession of peacebuilding as an integral part of the missionary calling of the church. However, the mission of reconciliation and peacebuilding is, as a rule, separated from evangelism. Alan and Eleanor Kreider’s book *A Culture of Peace* puts all of the life of the church under peace witness. This includes evangelism as attraction. Evangelism as proclamation, on the other hand, is not even mentioned.¹⁸ Gary B. Miller gets to the heart of the struggle of North American Anabaptists, stating:

11 *Lausanner Verpflichtung*, 5th ed. (Stuttgart: Lausanner Bewegung Deutschland, 2000), 4.

12 Rick Love, *The Missing Peace of Evangelical Missiology: Peacemaking and Respectful Witness* (Baltimore, MD: Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology, 2008), 2.

13 Love, 2.

14 Guy F. Hershberger, *War, Peace, and Nonresistance* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1944).

15 See, for instance, the list of Mennonite publications on the subject of peace in Willard Swartley and Cornelius J. Dyck, eds., *An Annotated Bibliography of Mennonite Writings on War and Peace, 1930–1980* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1987).

16 John Howard Yoder, *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace and Revolution* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Cooperative Bookstore, 1983); *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972); *The Original Revolution* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1972); *Nevertheless: The Varieties of Christian Pacifism* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1971); and others.

17 John A. Lapp: “The Peace Mission of the Mennonite Central Committee,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 44 (1970): 281–97; John A. Lapp, ed., *Peacemakers in a Broken World* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1969).

18 Alan Kreider, Eleanor Kreider, und Paulus Widjaja, *Eine Kultur des Friedens: Gottes Vision für Gemeinde und Welt* (Schwarzenfeld: Neufeld Verlag), 165–83.

One of the biggest struggles on this journey is our “peace position.” I’m not trying to walk away from it; that’s far from the truth. But in our society and even in our congregations, this is a loaded conversation. We have dichotomized Jesus’ call to be people of peace and to share the Good News as though either or both of them are optional.¹⁹

Somewhat different is the position of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America. Since 1975, the church has expressed an integral view of the relationship between evangelism and peacebuilding.²⁰ This does not mean that local churches automatically subscribe to such a view, however. One has the impression that church leaders feel they are forced to decide between the two—for engagement in evangelism or peacebuilding, as Hans Kasdorf rightly observes.²¹ Douglas Heidebrecht laments a principal disability of the majority of church leaders among the Mennonite Brethren to correlate evangelism and peacebuilding.²²

The situation in other countries and churches in the world is not much different. The separation between mission as evangelism and peacemaking as mission is a universal problem.²³ Is this why conservative Christians tend to leave the conflict zones rather than stay and introduce peace to society? I suggest that yes, it is. In Eastern Ukraine, the vast majority of Christians left the conflict zone. The absence of a proper integral theology of evangelical peacebuilding leads to withdrawal from the conflict zones of the world.

In contrast, a missional church will find herself in the midst of the world of war, in all those conflict zones, offering peace to those in trouble. It is fascinating to see that the issue of reconciliation has become one of the central themes in mission circles since the beginning of the 1990s²⁴ and has developed rapidly to a vividly discussed model of mission.²⁵ Some authors even postulate that

19 Gary B. Miller, “Can We Embrace Both Peace and Evangelism?” Accessed August 28, 2016, *The Mennonite* (April 15, 2008), <https://themennonite.org/feature/can-embrace-peace-evangelism>.

20 See, for instance, Ray Harms-Wiebe, “Mennonite Brethren Mission: A Brief Assessment of Its Mission Theology and Praxis,” *Mission Focus* 20 (2012): 44–46.

21 Hans Kasdorf, “Centrality Instead of Priority: An Emerging Philosophy of Mennonite Brethren Mission,” *Direction* 16 (1987): 32.

22 Douglas Heidebrecht, “Mennonite Brethren and the Gospel: A Theology of Mission on the Way,” *Direction* 42, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 217.

23 Johannes Reimer, “Evangelisation und Frieden,” in Lukas Amstutz and Hanspeter Jecker, eds., *Fit für die Welt: Beiträge zu einer friedenskirchlichen Theologie und Gemeindepraxis*. Edition Bienenberg Bd. 6 (Schwarzenfeld: Neufeld Verlag, 2017), 133.

24 Schreiter and Jørgensen, *Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation*, 13.

25 See, for instance, an overview of the debate in Jacques Matthey, “Versöhnung im ökumenischen missionstheologischen Dialog,” *ZfM* 3 (2005): 174–91.

solving the disturbing factors and eliminating sources of conflict in society—aiming for a meaningful convivence—will determine the future of Christian mission.²⁶ Robert Schreiter, then, speaks of reconciliation as the paradigm of mission.²⁷ The Lausanne Movement²⁸ and the mainline churches,²⁹ the Ecumenical Movement³⁰ and the Roman Catholic Church (RCC)³¹ all reclaim mission as reconciliation for their future operations.

The church moving into the conflict zones of the world with a message of reconciliation and peace will make a difference. How does this happen practically? What is a genuine contribution of the church to peace and conflict resolution?

3. The Church: God's Agent in Conflict Zones

The church is called to step into the mission of Christ. She has no other call, no other vision, no other methodology. The church is invited to join the people, incarnate into a given culture, serve and converse with the people, confront them with their sin, lead them to divine healing and reconciliation, and invite them to join God's mission in the world. What does a mission of reconciliation include? Following the example of Jesus, it will include five basic dimensions:

1. Witness: living a reconciled life
2. Diaconia: serving troubled people
3. Dialog: engaging in conversation for peace
4. Prophecy: naming the hard issues
5. Evangelism: healing the wounded

26 Theo Sundermeier, "Konvivenz als Grundstruktur ökumenischer Existenz heute," *Ökumenische Existenz Heute* 1 (1986): 86–90; Johannes Reimer, "Der Dienst der Versöhnung—bei der Kernkompetenz ansetzen: Zur Korrelation von Gemeinwesen-mediation und multikulturellem Gemeindebau," *Theologisches Gespräch* Heft 1 (2011): 19–35.

27 Robert Schreiter, "Reconciliation and Healing as a Paradigm for Mission," *International Review of Mission* 94, no. 372 (Jan. 2005): 74–83.

28 LOP 51, in <https://www.lausanne.org/content/lop/lop-51-reconciliation-as-the-mission-of-god>, accessed January 13, 2018.

29 Chris Rice, *Reconciliation as the Mission of God*, 18–19.

30 World Council of Churches, "Participating in God's Mission of Reconciliation: A Resource for Churches in Situations of Conflict," Faith and Order document 201 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2005), accessed January 12, 2017, https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/faith-and-order/vi-church-and-world/Faith-and-Order-201?set_language=en.

31 Pope Benedict XVI, "Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus*," http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20111119_africae-munus.html.

3.1. Witness: Living a Culture of Peace in the Midst of conflict

A mission of reconciliation begins where the church joins the people in a zone of conflict. Living among those who suffer in conflicts—as salt of the earth and light of the world (Mt 5:13–15), as God’s people, his divine family, “a sign, instrument, and foretaste of the reign of God,”³² a kingdom of peace, and, therefore, a sign, instrument, and foretaste of peace—marks the entry point into a mission of reconciliation.

Kingdoms are recognized by culture, their “way of life,”³³ “the design for living”³⁴ in the kingdom. Cultural anthropology speaks of a four-story house describing culture: (a) the material, (b) the social, (c) the cognitive, and (d) the religious levels of life.³⁵ The material includes everything people have, the social involves all they do, the cognitive includes the way they think, and the religious encompasses all they believe. In a culture of peace, all levels will be shaped by peace and justice. In fact, peace transcends all life, becoming the way to be.

- (a) *Materially*, the church—where peace reigns—will never take advantage of conflicts, never engage in producing poverty among her neighbors. Instead, it will be involved in caring and serving those who lost all their possessions through the conflict around them. Poverty is consciously reduced among those who share with one another. Bringing bread and clothes (etc.) to the needy, as described in our opening story, is an important step toward reconciliation and conflict resolution.
- (b) *Socially*, the church of peace is shaped by love. Christian neighbors love each other as they love God and themselves. Love never harms the other. In fact, in the kingdom of God, anger cannot hold longer than sunset (Eph 4:26). Community is here defined as reciprocal fellowship in which everybody has something to give as well as to take from the community. In the New Testament, such fellowship is called *koinonia*. It is somatic community, a body in which every part plays its crucial role. The church, the body of Christ, demonstrates to the community in conflict her *koinonitic* nature, inviting everyone to participate in sharing and giving.

32 Lesslie Newbigin, “*The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 110.

33 Wendy Griswold, *Cultures and Societies in a Changing World* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge, 2012), 8.

34 Luis J. Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989), 59–60.

35 Gary Ferraro and Susan Andreatta, *Cultural Anthropology: An Applied Perspective* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2009), 18.

- (c) *Cognitively*, the church of peace is a royal priesthood (1 Pet 2:9–10). Societal life in such a context is shaped by a mind of service. Meekness is the ideology of a thriving, peace-centered society. The well-being of all is its agenda. As a true priest, the church brings the world in conflict, in which she lives, to the throne of God in her daily prayer. And as a true king, the church will engage in meaningful action toward transformation of conflict and rebuilding of community.
- (d) And, finally, *on the religious level*, in a church of peace, God rules. All religion is God-centered. God rules through his Spirit, granting to the church spiritual gifts such as a word of revelation, of knowledge, of wisdom, and of prophecy that enable her to listen to his voice. Members of the church receive gifts of discerning the spirits, new tongues, and interpretation of tongues. They are gifted for strategic leadership and teaching, helping and serving. No institution on earth has ever been as qualified to live in prosperity, justice, and peace as the church of Jesus Christ. And by this richness of her gifts and competences, by her life under the direct leadership of God's Spirit, she will do works by which the people around her will recognize her father in heaven, the God of peace (Mt 5:16).

Jesus referred to the Jubilee Year—the fiftieth year in the lifecycle of God's people in the Old Testament—when he displayed the kingdom to his disciples (Luke 4:18). “The good year of the Lord is literally shaped by peace: the captives are set free, the poor are given a new material and social beginning, the nature is left to rest, and even the natural and unequal enemies, lamb and wolf, find peace with one another (Is 65).

The mission of peacebuilding of the church of Christ is first and foremost a lifestyle, a culture she promotes—a just, loving, and serving culture. In order to be such, the church must incarnate into the given local community and consciously become one of the society's social agents. Only where she incarnates into the local culture, where she becomes a Jew to the Jew and a Greek to the Greek, might she save some for God's kingdom (1 Cor 9:22). This includes all local communities—and conflict contexts are no exemption but rather a priority.

3.2. *Diakonia: Serving the Troubled*

Living amid a culture offers millions of chances to act justly, lovingly, and peacefully. The kingdom is displayed in a community by a missional church, who accepts her priestly role to serve the world around her. Doing works of compassion, she introduces hope to a troubled world. Diakonia becomes a crucial instrument of peacemaking in the world.

It is diaconal service that removes the roots of conflict and trouble. The Jubilee Year, for instance, required Israel to return all land to the original own-

ers. People might have lost their property due to bad management and for fifty years others participated in their source of income, but now, at Jubilee, things were supposed to change. The return of property was to give everybody a new start. The dangerous divide between those who have and those who have not—which is responsible for much economic and political unrest in the world—was never to develop. Shared economy was to be celebrated as justice, good neighborhood, and national pride. In other instances, people ended up in slavery, selling their strengths to the rich and well-off. In the Jubilee paradigm, serving these people in slavery meant setting them free from their owners. Peace, to them, was marked by freedom and independence. For the sick, caught in their pain and disability to care for themselves, it meant treatment and health, assistance and help. For the demoniacs, it meant freedom from the spirits occupying them. This is how we see Jesus introduce peace to people. He came to serve those in need.

The church is called to serve those in need, free those in bondage, heal the sick, and set the captives free. Her service displays the glory of God in society, brings light to the dark places of the world, and shares minerals for the fruitless soil of culture. Wherever she serves, reconciliation and peace with the world, society, the neighborhood, and oneself may come with justice and restoration.

The mission of peacemaking has a diaconal dimension that is crucial to peacebuilding. In a conflict zone, this might mean active engagement in naming the sources of conflict and opposing angry politics and social injustice.

3.3. *Koinonia: Engaging in Dialog*

The culture of God's kingdom is a culture of welcome that promotes *koinonia*—a spirit of participation and reciprocal assistance in daily life. Promoting the kingdom requires working with, instead of just for, the people.³⁶

The mission of God is inclusive, as is peacemaking. Peace is not simply offered by the church to the people; it is a joint communal experience of those who come and offer and those who accept and share peace, as Jesus seems to suggest in his commissioning words to his disciples in Matthew 10:11–13.

The grand story of God with the world reveals to us many examples of this principle. God has his people for peace in places we might not expect them to be. There is Melchizedek, for instance—the just, royal priest of the High God in Salem/Jerusalem (Gen 14:18–20), who blesses Abram and becomes a prototype of a godsend priest forever (Ps 110:4). The city he rules will turn into the capital city of God's chosen nation, Israel, and become the city of peace (Is 26:1–3).

³⁶ See the discussion on inclusive mission in Johannes Reimer, "Inklusive Mission—Widerspruch oder Notwendigkeit," *Theologisches Gespräch*, Heft 3 (2016): 111–25.

Another outstanding person is Cyrus the Great, who becomes king of Persia in 559 BC—a Gentile king who allows the temple in Jerusalem to be rebuilt and orders the Jews to return to their land. The prophet Isaiah praises Cyrus as God’s anointed servant saying:

This is what the Lord says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armor, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut: I will go before you and will level the mountains; I will break down gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron. I will give you hidden treasures, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the Lord, the God of Israel, who summons you by name. For the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen, I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honor, though you do not acknowledge me. I am the Lord, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God. I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me, so that from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting people may know there is none besides me. I am the Lord, and there is no other. I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things. (Is 45:1–7 NIV)

A Gentile king, who does not know God yet, is chosen to bring peace to Israel?! Or a city-known prostitute in Jericho, Rahab—who saved the Israeli spies from being captured and opened a way for Israel to enter the promised land (Jo 2:4)—is praised for being a hero of faith (Heb 11:31) and named among the forefathers and mothers of Jesus (Mt 1:5)? Other examples could be mentioned. Working for God’s kingdom together with those who do not know God yet but are willing to do His will is in no way a problem. Rather, it is a rule. To find a person of peace and stay in his/her house opens opportunities to bring peace to the whole community.

3.4. Prophecy: Speaking God’s Truth

Peacemaking presupposes truth-telling. It is impossible to reconcile conflicting parties without revealing the source of their rivalry. The church has a prophetic voice in the world to name the issues of conflict, strife, and war. The church can never stay quiet about injustice in the world. She must, and she will, speak out for and side with the oppressed and the poor, the victims and weak. She will expose the oppressor and the oppression, knowing where God wants her to be.

This is what the prophets of the Old Testament did. They exposed those who trampled the heads of the weak into the dust of the earth (Am 2:7). They raised their voices against the unjust and oppressive rulers of the day (Am 3:9–10), blaming the ruling elite of their time for their evil practices (Jer 6:7–10; 8:8–13; Is 58:5–7). And the church of Christ “stands on the shoul-

ders of the prophets.”³⁷ She is God’s prophetic voice in the world.³⁸ And the prophetic task of the church prohibits her from conspiring with the powerful and mighty. She will never become a political party but, rather, will be a critical companion of rulers and governments.

The different prophetic gifts of the Spirit allow the church to see the truth. In conflicts, this is an outstanding asset. Reading cultures, contexts, and situations in their entanglement with conflict and oppression is a necessary presupposition to any meaningful conflict resolution. A prophetically gifted church is enabled to analyze the context properly and then name the issues creating unrest. Peacemaking presupposes prophetic insight—a gift to discern the spirits involved.

3.5. *Evangelism: Healing the Wounded*

Peacemaking leads to reconciliation of those in conflict. The reconciled will experience the newly granted peace as GOOD News, as *evangel*. Reconciliation is, therefore, an active part of what is traditionally called evangelism. Evangelism derives its meaning from the Greek *euangelion*, which stands for good news. Representatives of different theological traditions have defined the term differently,³⁹ but in this they all find a common ground: evangelism brings the evangel to the people. The way you define the gospel will, therefore, basically determine your definition of evangelism. Jesus proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom of God that brings peace to humans. And his proclamation included life, deeds, and words, as we have seen above. He modeled good life, offered good life, and spoke about good life. And people accepting his offer were healed from sickness, demonic possession, and loneliness. When the disciples of John came to ask Jesus whether he was the promised Messiah, Jesus replied:

The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.
(Mt 11:5–6 NIV)

Evangelism in the words and praxis of Jesus was truly integral. In fact, the entire New Testament teaches nothing else. Martin Werth reflects this in his definition of the gospel as “message of salvation about the death and resurrection of Jesus to our risqué and restored fellowship among each other and

³⁷ Paolo Suess, “Zur Prophetie im Horizont der Menschenwürde,” in *Mission und Prophetie in Zeiten der Interkulturalität*, eds. Mariano Delgado and Michael Sievernich (St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 2011), 46.

³⁸ See more in Reimer, *Missio Politica*, 57–59.

³⁹ See the discussion in Johannes Reimer, *Leben-Rufen-Verändern: Chancen und Herausforderungen gesellschaftstransformierender Evangelisation heute*, Transformationsstudien Bd. 5 (Marburg: Francke Verlag, 2013), 27–29.

with God.⁴⁰ This message proclaims God's kingdom as a renewed existence, renewed practice and inviting words, and establishes the reign of God in the lives of individuals and in community.⁴¹

David W. Shenk reflects on the experience of the church healing the wounds of ethnic conflict after the genocide in Rwanda, stating that it was exactly the peaceful lifestyle and the fullhearted engagement of Christians for both the victims and the perpetrators in the darkest hour of the Rwandan tribes that brought hope and healing to the whole nation.⁴²

Back to Ukraine

Churches in Eastern Ukraine are troubled by war. Many of their members have left the conflict zone. Others are staying. More and more of them are discovering their missionary task of peacebuilding and reconciliation. The situation might not allow them to do more, but what they do brings to the neighbors food and clothing, glimpses of hope, and trust and forgiveness. Because of this, the church grows naturally. "We have united to rebuild our village differently, when all of this here is over," one of the villagers we spoke to stated. "We will stop dividing among ourselves, forgive those who harm us, and reconcile with one another. And in our new village there will be a church, such as yours." I was moved by such words in the midst of misery and war. The villager was no Christian yet, but you could feel a growing hope for the future—a future in a reconciled community.

The conference in Druzhkivka united many Christians around this new mission. Months later, a center for counseling and trauma therapy was started, a community rebuilding office came into being, and many other initiatives toward a reconciling practice are on the way. Mission of the local church has gained new momentum by accepting a new paradigm—the paradigm of mission as reconciliation.

40 Martin Werth, *Theologie der Evangelisation* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2010), 8.

41 Reimer, *Leben*, 30ff; Werth, *Theologie*, 7.

42 David W. Shenk, *Justice, Reconciliation and Peace in Africa* (Nairobi: Uzima, 1997), 134–36.