



From Wrongdoer to New Creation: Reconciliation in 2 Corinthians

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Abstract

Read through the lens of modern reconciliatory theory, 2 Cor 2:14–7:4 demonstrates that Paul portrays himself as the recipient of God’s gratuitous forgiveness and reconciliation. Against the polemical charge that his past as a persecutor precluded his being an authentic apostle, Paul engages the multivalent metaphors of triumph/procession and reconciliation/friendship. His own participation in the process of reconciliation and his new vocation as ambassador show that it is not simply Paul’s writings but his own personal experience that forms the foundation on which modern Christian reconciliation may continue to build.

Keywords

New Creation; Partition Theory; Reconciliation; Righteousness; Victim

Introduction

No Punishment, No Peace!

For fifty-two years, the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) have been at war. The longest running civil conflict in South America has resulted in the loss of 200,000 lives, innumerable kidnappings and bombings, and the displacement of six million people. On September 24, 2016, Colombian president Juan Manuel Santos and FARC leader Rodrigo Londoño (known as Timochenko) signed an agreement to end the hostilities. The agreement awaited a public vote to become a reality. Despite the travesties, Sigifredo López, a FARC hostage for nearly seven years, was hopeful that voting for this agreement would initiate a legacy of peace for his children. “In 20 years people won’t remember that Sigifredo López was kidnapped, that his fellow deputies were murdered; they won’t remember the massacre at Bojayá or El Nogal. But they will be grateful that they live in a country that is no longer at war.”¹

When the agreement went to the people, the referendum lost by a slim margin. Four years of negotiations ended without a treaty. Those opposed to the proposal were concerned that the perpetrators would see no jail time as part of the negotiated settlement. Another former kidnapping victim, Nohora Tovar, a senator with Uribe’s Centro Democrático, added, “The day they are behind bars I will go and give them my hand and forgive them.”²

1 “Yes or no? After 52-year war, Colombia’s peace with the Farc faces public vote,” <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/sep/29/colombia-farc-peace-deal-vote>.

2 “Colombia referendum: voters reject peace deal with Farc guerrillas,” <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/02/colombia-referendum-rejects-peace-deal-with-farc>.

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Modern Theories and Biblical Roots

The thread of violence woven throughout our international, national, and personal lives binds us, threatening our sense of wholeness and health, and seems an inescapable reality of our modern world. Since the late twentieth century, theories and practices of peacemaking and reconciliation have offered hopeful strategies to cut the stranglehold that violence and war have had on the global society. Christian reconciliation roots itself in the saving act of God who reconciles humanity through the blood of the cross, but “the concept of reconciliation has assumed a far more central place in Christian theology than might have been expected from its limited use in the New Testament.”³ Citing Rom 5:6–11 and 2 Cor 5:18–21, many will credit the apostle Paul with presenting a unique use of the term *katallassō* (often translated “reconcile”) in order to understand God’s redemptive actions. Paul’s own experience of becoming reconciled with God may have led to his creative application of a political term to serve as a theological metaphor.

Another avenue that may provide a fuller interpretation of Paul’s concept of reconciliation is to look beyond the vocabulary of reconciliation and to focus on the larger rhetorical strategy of 2 Cor 2:14–7:4. Attending to the occasion of the letter, we take note of Paul’s own participation in the process of reconciliation and his new vocation as ambassador. It is not simply his writings but Paul’s own personal experience that forms the foundation on which modern Christian reconciliation might continue to build. This essay begins by exploring some aspects of Christian reconciliation that will serve as a hermeneutical lens through which to read the Pauline texts.

Victim, Wrongdoer, and the Possibility of a New Creation

Paul describes reconciliation through the lens of those redeemed. “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold the new has come” (2 Cor 5:17). But modern reconciliatory practices begin with the victim and the situation of violence and suffering that has victimized him or her. Robert Schreiter states that suffering is neither noble nor redeeming, but is an erosion of one’s humanity and of one’s sense of safety and selfhood.⁴ Within this tapestry of pain and suffering, the effects remain even when the violence has abated. Many of those who had suffered through the Colombian civil war continue to feel the effects of trauma, and are still unable to restore a sense of safety. While a ready fix would doubtlessly be desired by the victims, true reconciliation is neither quick nor painless, particularly in areas of protracted and deep conflict.⁵ Thus a prerequisite to any reconciliation is liberation from violence and suffering. To that end, “conflict is not peripheral to the reconciliation process but is met at its very heart. If the sources of conflict are not named, examined, and taken away, reconciliation will not come about. What we will have is a truce, not a peace.”⁶ As Schreiter puts it, true Christian reconciliation is not something to be

3 I. Howard Marshall, “The Meaning of Reconciliation,” in *Unity and Diversity in New Testament Theology: Essays in Honor of George E. Ladd*, ed. Robert A. Guelich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 117–32 (130). According to Fitzgerald, the Greek word translated “to reconcile,” *katallassō*, is found six times in Paul (Rom 5:10 x2; 1 Cor 7:11; 2 Cor 5:18, 19, 20). The noun *katallagē* (reconciliation) appears four times (Rom 5:11; 11:15; 2 Cor 5:18, 19). The related verb *apokatallassō* is used in the Deutero-Pauline letters (Eph 2:16; Col 1:20, 22). The Gospel of Matthew uses *diallassō* (Matt 5:24), and *synallassō* is found in Acts 7:26. See John T. Fitzgerald, “Paul and Paradigm Shifts: Reconciliation and Its Linkage Group,” in *Paul Beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide*, ed. Troels Engberg-Pedersen (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 241–61 (241–42).

4 Robert Schreiter, *Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992).

5 *Ibid.*, 20.

6 *Ibid.*, 23.

achieved or mastered; instead, it is “something discovered—the power of God’s grace welling up in one’s life.”⁷

Reconciliation is not a hasty process. It is not simply liberation, or even well-intended mediation. Reconciliation in a Christian context is rooted in our very faith. It is a response to our having been reconciled to God.

Thus the question is not How can I bring myself, as victim, to forgive those who have violated me and my society? It is, rather, How can I discover the mercy of God welling up in my own life, and where does that lead me? Reconciliation, then, is not a process that we initiate or achieve. We discover it already active in God through Christ.⁸

Victims initiate the process of reconciliation because through grace they have come to know that God is on the side of the lowly, the broken, and the abused. Backed by this assurance, the victims gain the strength to initiate reconciliation with their oppressors. This process was most notably engaged by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that emerged after the dissolution of apartheid in South Africa. After meeting with his torturer and offering his forgiveness, Joe Seramane, former director of the Justice and Reconciliation Department of the South Africa Council of Churches, observed that “it is through reconciliation that we regain our humanity. To work for reconciliation is to live to show others what their humanity is.”⁹ The restoration of humanity—victim and wrongdoer alike—is the center of the reconciliation process.

When the victim initiates the process of reconciliation and is able to forgive the wrongdoer, the possibility of repentance on the part of the oppressor emerges. As political theorist Hannah Arendt wrote, forgiving “is the only reaction which does not merely react but acts anew and unexpectedly, unconditioned by the act which provoked it and therefore freeing from its consequences both the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven.”¹⁰ Only in the process of reconciliation can a victim come to forgive and the oppressor be moved to repent, making both a new creation. Reconciliation “points to the alienation to be overcome that has been created by violence. It involves lament for what has been lost and calls forth a healing of memory. It has a cosmic dimension that we only dimly understand.”¹¹ Those who facilitate Christian reconciliation have developed myriad strategies and processes to effect healing and re-establish peace. But reconciliation is more than a method: “Reconciliation becomes a vocation, a way of life, and not just a set of discrete tasks to be performed and completed. Reconciled communities and individuals do not return to a pre-conflictual state; they live in a new kind of way.”¹²

The first part of a process of reconciliation requires overcoming the suffering caused by the narrative of the oppressor, which has demeaned and replaced the victim’s personal narrative. That requires embracing a new narrative, a redeeming narrative. Only when one’s sense of safety and security is restored can one begin to move towards forgiveness and reconciliation. As Schreiter writes, “To be delivered from our sufferings we need something strong, something complex, something able to hold the contradictions of the situation together.”¹³ The story that overcomes the experience of conflict and violence is the story of the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus. “Body, blood and cross are the symbols that recur over and over in that story, symbols that can bear the paradox of the transformation of suffering and death into a new story of deliverance and

7 Ibid., 26.

8 Ibid., 43.

9 Cited in Robert Schreiter, “Reconciliation as a Missionary Task,” *Missiology* 20 (1992): 3–10 (9).

10 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 241.

11 Schreiter, “Reconciliation as a Missionary Task,” 8.

12 Ibid.

13 Schreiter, *Reconciliation*, 48.

life.”¹⁴ It is this narrative that Paul proclaims as the message of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:19), to which we now turn. How might the concepts of victim, wrongdoer, and new creation provide a hermeneutical lens to read and interpret 2 Cor 2:14–7:4 anew?

Reconciliation in 2 Corinthians

Second Corinthians as an Epistolary Archive

Second Corinthians appears to lack the same cohesive rhetoric found in First Corinthians. Scholars have suggested a variety of explanations for the differences in topic, tone, and rhetorical strategy. The traditional view explained that major disruptions in the thought and argument resulted from Paul’s having had a “sleepless night,” or having been interrupted in mid-sentence. In this line of thought, 2 Corinthians is a whole composition written after Titus returned from Corinth, and contains no earlier fragments.

However, others, including C. K. Barrett and Victor Paul Furnish, partition 2 Corinthians into two letters, the first found in chapters 1–9 and the second in 10:1–13:10.¹⁵ Günther Bornkamm and Hans Dieter Betz propose a five-letter hypothesis.¹⁶ According to this theory, 2 Cor 2:14–7:4 (minus 6:14–7:1)¹⁷ was written after canonical 1 Corinthians. Likely the so-called Letter of Tears (2 Cor 2:4), the letter found in 2 Cor 10:1–13:10, resulted from a subsequent disastrous visit Paul made to Corinth. Fragments of a letter of reconciliation are found in 2 Cor 1:1–2:3; 7:5–16; and 13:11–13. Chapters 8 and 9 are two separate fund-raising letters. Mitchell proposes a slightly different variation of the five-letter theory, placing 2 Cor 8 immediately after canonical 1 Corinthians. The second fund appeal found in 2 Cor 9 would be the final letter.¹⁸ According to this theory, a later redactor gathered the various fragments, and compiled what would become 2 Corinthians.

The date and occasion for 2 Corinthians depend on the theory to which one subscribes. But Furnish comments, “In 2 Corinthians (whether read as a single letter or as a combination of two or more) the main issue is the legitimacy and nature of Paul’s apostleship, which his detractors were calling into question.”¹⁹ This essay proposes to read 2 Cor 2:14–7:4 as part of a five-letter collection that became canonical 2 Corinthians.

Defending God’s Generosity: The Letter Fragment of 2 Cor 2:14–7:4 (minus 6:14–7:1)

Though lacking some of the strident rhetoric of 2 Cor 10:1–13:10, 2:14–7:4 nonetheless contains apologetic elements. The frequent references to recommendations and commendations (3:1; 4:2; 6:4) suggest that Paul’s character is under scrutiny. Paul names his opponents as “peddlers of God’s

14 Schreiter, “Reconciliation as a Missionary Task,” 8.

15 C. K. Barrett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Black, 1973), 21; Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians*, AB 32A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 35–48.

16 Günther Bornkamm, “The History of the Origin of the So-Called Second Letter to the Corinthians,” *NTS* 8 (1962): 258–63; and Hans Dieter Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9: A Commentary on Two Administrative Letters of the Apostle Paul*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 3–36.

17 The admonition of 6:14–7:1 is likely an interpolation of non-Pauline or anti-Pauline origin or another fragment of a different Pauline letter (Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 368).

18 Margaret M. Mitchell, “Paul’s Letters to Corinth: The Interpretive Intertwining of Literary and Historical Reconstruction,” in *Urban Religion in Roman Corinth: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Daniel N. Schowalter and Steven J. Friesen (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 307–38.

19 Victor Paul Furnish, “Paul and the Corinthians: The Letters, the Challenges of Ministry, the Gospel,” *Int* 52 (1998): 229–45 (236).

word,” but he speaks with sincerity (2:17). Paul appears to answer his own rhetorical question, “Who is sufficient [*hikanos*] for these things?” (2:16) when he announces that he himself is *hikanos*, possessing a sufficiency and competence that comes from God (3:5–6). Likely in response to criticisms, Paul argues that he has placed no obstacle in anyone’s way (6:3), has wronged no one, has corrupted no one, and has taken advantage of no one (7:2). The sufferings, hardships, and afflictions he has endured (4:8–11; 6:4b–10; 7:4) serve as his commendations. Paul assures the Corinthians, “There is no restriction in our affections, but only in yours” (6:12). As part of his rhetorical strategy of defending his character, Paul engages the metaphor of reconciliation (5:18–21). Not only has God reconciled Paul; God has set Paul as the very ambassador of God’s reconciliation. If there is a flaw in Paul’s character, God has transformed it: “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” (5:17).

Much of 2:14–7:4 is about this transformation. The temporal is transformed to the eternal (4:18). The earthly tent will become a heavenly abode (5:1). The account of trespasses (*logizomenos . . . ta paraptōmata*) is transformed by the word of reconciliation (*ton logon tēs katallagēs*; 5:19). Within this narration of transformation we see reflections of the three elements of Christian reconciliatory theory: victim, wrongdoer, and new creation.

God as Victim?

As noted above, foundational to practices of reconciliation in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has been the primary assertion that reconciliation as a process must be initiated by the victim. Clearly, Paul’s statement that “God . . . has reconciled us to himself through Christ” (2 Cor 5:18) places the initiative with God.²⁰ Some practitioners of restorative justice argue that God has, indeed, been victimized. “The cross represents a fundamentally restorative initiative by the divine victim toward the human offender. . . . In the narrower sense, God is one with Jesus-the-victim of imperial crucifixion; but in the most cosmic sense, God is victimized by every expression of human injustice and violence.”²¹ But God does not properly “suffer” as humans do. As Ryan describes, “It is not a suffering that God necessarily endures, which is forced on God from outside or is due to some intrinsic deficiency in divine being.” Citing the arguments of Elizabeth Johnson, Ryan explains: “Whatever God’s suffering entails, we must uphold the infinite, qualitative difference between God’s suffering and the suffering of creatures.”²²

Paul understands that God’s reconciling action is, indeed, initiated by a human victim. “And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised” (2 Cor 5:15). The actual death of the human Jesus clearly establishes Jesus as the victim of wrongdoing and suffering. The very basis of Paul’s concept of reconciliation is the

20 Since the passive form of the verb *katallassō* is not used with God as the subject, and the active form does not occur with God as the object, Marshall concludes: “This in itself strongly suggests that it is God who takes the initiative in the action of reconciliation. Further, it is generally accepted that God’s act of reconciliation takes place prior to, and independently of, any human action: it was while we were still sinners that we were reconciled to God. Paul speaks of ‘the reconciliation’ as something that we have received. All this suggests that the act of reconciliation is primarily something done by God” (Marshall, “The Meaning of Reconciliation,” 122).

21 Ched Myers and Elaine Enns, *Ambassadors of Reconciliation*, vol. 1: *New Testament Reflections on Restorative Justice and Peacemaking* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2009), 11.

22 Robin Ryan, *God and the Mystery of Human Suffering: A Theological Conversation Across the Ages* (New York: Paulist Press, 2011), 289. See Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God In Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 266.

atonement death of Christ.²³ God may be the one reconciling, but that process is initiated by the death of Jesus.

In several instances throughout 2:14–7:4, Paul explicitly states the relationship between God and Jesus Christ. In 4:4, the god of “this world” prevents the unbelievers from seeing “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God.” In 4:6, it is God “who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” The repeated mention of the death of Jesus in 4:10–11 may derive from Paul’s identification of his own sufferings with those of Jesus.²⁴ Paul may not be presenting Christ in hypostatic union with God, but he does recognize the connection between Christ, who is the image and likeness of God, and the God “who sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law” (Gal 4:4–5). Paul clearly understands that the foundation of the act of reconciliation was the death of Jesus, victimized on the cross (1 Cor 1:23).

The Wrongdoer Saul and the Apostle Paul: Becoming a New Creation

That all was not well between Paul and the Corinthian community is evident in the sheer volume of the exchange between the two, but also in the tenor of the letters. The rhetoric of 2 Cor 10:1–13:10 demonstrates that Paul needed to defend himself against the “super apostles” (11:5; 12:11) and “pseudo-apostles” (11:13), who challenged Paul’s stature as a speaker (10:10). At issue in 2:14–7:4 appears to be not Paul’s physical nature nor his lack of rhetorical skills, but his past actions. Scholars have argued that the root of contention between the Corinthians and Paul is his seeming reversal concerning who would be responsible for the collection (1 Cor 16:1–4; 2 Cor 8:22). But several verses in 2 Cor 2:14–7:4 could be read as relating to Paul’s past as a persecutor.²⁵ Chapter 4 opens with Paul’s acknowledgment that he has his ministry by the mercy of God (4:1). He has renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways (v. 2), which may allude to his past actions against the church.²⁶ Having been “mercied” by God, Paul experiences the glory of Christ (v. 4) and “the glory of God in the face of Christ” (v. 6), perhaps referencing his revelatory encounter with Jesus Christ (Gal 1:16; Acts 9:3–5).²⁷ In 2 Cor 5:16, Kim reads the phrase “from now on” (*apo tou nyn*) as signaling a turning-point in Paul’s own understanding of Christ’s death and resurrection: the apostle is “speaking of his Damascus experience of abandoning his prior ‘fleshy’ estimation of Christ in the face of divine revelation of Christ as the one who had died for humankind and been raised from the dead.”²⁸

One wonders if, like those Colombians who voted against the peace initiative, the Corinthians questioned the sincerity of Paul’s apostleship because his persecution of the church had seemingly gone unpunished. In fact, as Paul explains, while he was still in sin God made of him a new creation (5:17). Paul uses two metaphors to explain this event of grace: a multivalent metaphor of being led in triumph (2:14) and an inverted metaphor of reconciliation (5:18–21).

Second Corinthians 2:14–7:4 opens with a thanksgiving section, in which Paul uses the metaphor of an imperial triumph (*thriambeuein*) to describe the paradox of Christ: “But thanks be to

23 Cilliers Breytenbach, *Versöhnung: Eine Studie zur Paulinischen Soteriologie*, WMANT 60 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1989), 221.

24 Frank J. Matera, *II Corinthians*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 111.

25 Rhetoricians advised against citing one’s prior bad actions (e.g., Theon, 112), so we should not be surprised that any direct references to Paul’s past as a persecutor are missing. However, Paul does describe his zealous actions against the church in other letters (1 Cor 15:9; Gal 1:13; Phil 3:6).

26 Margaret Thrall, *II Corinthians 1–7*, vol. 1, ICC, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004), 300.

27 Matera, *II Corinthians*, 103.

28 Seyoon Kim, “2 Cor. 5:11–21 and the Origin of Paul’s Concept of Reconciliation,” *NovT* 39 (1997): 360–84 (369).



Paul's use of the term "triumph" recalls the triumphal celebrations of Roman emperors that included parades of soldiers, captives, chariots, and engines of war, as depicted by Andrea Mantegna (1431–1506), "Triumph of Caesar." Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena, Italy. Scala/Art Resource, NY.

God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him" (2:14).²⁹ According to Marshall, Paul is not presenting himself as the victor, but the victim, so that "*thriambeuein* in 2 Cor 2:14 is a metaphor of shame which reflects one nuance of the triumphal motif 'led captive in triumph' and is an instance of Paul's typical depiction of himself as a figure of shame."³⁰ Yet Paul opens with thanks to God who leads him in this triumph. Are we to envision God as the victor leading the captive Paul?

29 The verb *thriambeuein* has been much debated. Egan saw no image of military triumph, while Williamson translates the verb "to lead in triumph." Marshall reads the metaphor as one of social shame, which alluded to the humiliation of the conquered. See R. B. Egan, "Lexical Evidence on Two Pauline Passages," *NovT* 19 (1977): 34–62; Lamar Williamson, "Led in Triumph: Paul's Use of *Thriambeuo*," *Int* 22 (1968): 317–32; Peter Marshall, "A Metaphor of Social Shame: ΘΡΙΑΜΒΕΥΕΙΝ in 2 Cor. 2:14," *NovT* 25 (1983): 302–17.

30 Marshall, "A Metaphor of Social Shame," 302.

Rather than a military procession with the captive led to his death, might Paul intend a religious procession the likes of which were common in Corinth?³¹ Duff proposes that Paul “is taking advantage of the ‘tensive’ nature of the metaphor. Because a metaphor is created by describing something from one context with language from another context, the resultant figure, although often capable of saying something which could not otherwise be said, tends toward ambiguity.”³²

Likely, Paul meant that both the image of a military triumph and the image of a Dionysiac-like procession be kept in mind. While the cult processions were enacted on a regular basis, military triumphs were less frequent and much more grandiose in scale.³³ Josephus recounted that the triumph of Vespasian and Titus included public banquets, the mustering and marching of soldiers, parades of captives and the spoils of war, along with movable platforms depicting scenes from various battles (*J.W.* 7.123–57). At the conclusion of the triumph, the captive leader was ceremonially executed at the base of the Capitoline before the triumphant general ascended to the Temple of Jupiter.

Advocating a cultic interpretation of the metaphor, Duff suggests that throughout 2:14–7:4 Paul returns to this processional imagery. In 2 Cor 2:14b–16, Paul compares himself to the incense carried before the statue of the deity: “And through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life.” The imagery of vessels (4:7), and of carrying around a display of the deity (4:10), suggests aspects of an epiphany procession. Finally, 6:13 and 7:2 present Paul as “the herald who walked before the sacred object or image, announcing its presence, and preparing bystanders for the deity’s epiphany.”³⁴

The triumph imagery would be read one way by Paul’s opponents who suspect him of fraud with regard to the collection for Jerusalem (7:2). In their estimation, Paul’s sufferings are divine punishment (6:8b–9). But as a religious procession, the image presents Paul not as a captive but as an active agent of God. His sufferings are the result of his steadfast service. Paul “is a participant not in a military victory parade but in an epiphany procession. He has been captured, not as a prisoner of war, but as a devotee of the deity.”³⁵ Rhetorically, Paul begins his defense against his opponents with a multivalent metaphor that he will subtly redefine throughout the letter fragment. “It is the strange or foreign character of metaphorical language which provokes the imagination of the hearer to create new meaning and it is this new meaning which challenges the hearer’s underlying presuppositions.”³⁶

In 5:18, Paul introduces another concept, that of the restoration of relationships, to explain the purpose and consequences of Christ’s death (5:14–17). As Cilliers Breytenbach and others have demonstrated, the *katallassō/diallassō* word group was commonly used to describe the cessation of enmity between parties or the exchange of things.³⁷ In the Greco-Roman context, the one who offended or broke the relationship had the responsibility of initiating the restoration of the

31 Paul Duff, “Metaphor, Motif, and Meaning: The Rhetorical Strategy Behind the Image ‘Led in Triumph’ in 2 Corinthians 2:14,” *CBQ* 53 (1991): 79–92.

32 *Ibid.*, 83.

33 During the lifetime of Paul, only Claudius was given a triumph for his defeat of Britain in 44 CE. The triumph was enacted with such grandiosity and infrequency that it was the stuff of memories. Could the story of the triumph of 44 have traveled with the Roman Jews, who had been exiled under the edict of Claudius (Suetonius, *Claud.* 25.4)?

34 Duff, 88. Greco-Roman literature presents similar depictions (Apuleius, *Met.* 11.9; Aristophanes, *Ran.* 353–70; Euripides, *Ba.* 68–70).

35 Duff, “Metaphor, Motif, and Meaning,” 87.

36 *Ibid.*, 92.

37 Cilliers Breytenbach, “On Reconciliation,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* (1990): 64–68 (65). Also, see Breytenbach, *Versöhnung*, 118–19.

relationship and ending the enmity. Ancient manuals for Greco-Roman letter-writing provide examples of how one is to repair the relationship in the context of an epistle.³⁸ The offending party admitted his or her error, asked for forgiveness, and appealed to friendship. Occasionally, reparations needed to be made to restore the relationship. The word *katallagē* (often translated “reconciliation”) is a term used in commerce to indicate “exchange,” “settlement,” or “payment.”³⁹ Once the relationship was restored, the reconciled parties were to live in concord. Breitenbach observes: “Paul, by making use of such political concepts, shows that he understood Graeco-Roman political life and used it as a source for his writings.”⁴⁰ But as Fitzgerald rightly noted, it is “what Paul *does* with derived concepts that is theologically significant, not the sources themselves.”⁴¹

Paul radically upsets the paradigm, changing the direction of reconciliation. God, as the offended party, initiates the reconciliation, “not counting their trespasses against them” (5:19), even though humanity continued in sin (Rom 5:8) and remained hostile to God (Rom 5:10). The death of Christ is a reparation within the standard paradigm, but it is God who makes the reparation (Rom 5:10; 2 Cor 5:18–19). Finally, Paul’s role as ambassador is reversed from the standard procedure.

Envoys usually were sent by those who were in difficult and desperate circumstances, and who thus were anxious to end the conflict and resume friendly relations. Therefore, according to the normal paradigm, Paul would have been humanity’s envoy to God, anxious to avert the wrath of an angry Deity. But Paul appears here instead as an ambassador for Christ, having been sent by God to proclaim the good news of God’s act and offer of reconciliation.⁴²

Though acknowledging the Greco-Roman context for *katallassō*, few biblical scholars or those working on the topic of reconciliation posit that the term might be meant metaphorically. Might 2 Cor 5:18–19 also possess that “strange or foreign character of metaphorical language”? The image of triumph owes its rhetorical power to the imperial realm. Likewise, reconciliation in its Hellenistic context has political connotations. Paul will name himself *presbyteros* (an “elder,” “official,” or “envoy”), another term belonging to the setting of conflict and negotiations between parties at odds.⁴³ But envoys were also sent to strengthen relationships and to remind parties of their original obligations. In First Maccabees, Jonathan sends envoys to Rome “to confirm and renew the friendship with them” (1 Macc 12:1). Once in Rome, the envoys announced to the Senate, “The high priest Jonathan and the Jewish nation have sent us to renew the former friendship and alliance with them” (12:3).

In this light, another metaphorical possibility emerges. “In Paul Ricoeur’s terms, the new thing that is taking place in Paul’s use of this metaphor is nothing less than a new semantic event which has the power to redescribe reality for the audience.”⁴⁴ Paul’s concept of *katallagē* may also be understood as an offer of friendship, in which God “makes friends of his human adversaries.”⁴⁵

38 Pseudo-Libanius, *Epistolary Styles*, 63; Pseudo-Demetrius, *Epistolary Types*, 12. See Abraham Malherbe, *Ancient Epistolary Theorists* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988).

39 Fitzgerald, “Paul and Paradigm Shifts,” in *Paul Beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide*, ed. Troels Engberg-Pedersen (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 241–62 (251).

40 Corneliu Constantineanu, *The Social Significance of Reconciliation In Paul’s Theology: Narrative Readings in Romans*, LNTS 421 (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 27.

41 Fitzgerald, “Paul and Paradigm Shifts,” 244; emphasis mine.

42 *Ibid.*, 254.

43 *Ibid.*, 248.

44 Though Johnson is referring to Paul’s use of “firstfruits” in 1 Cor 15:20–28, Paul’s ability to “redescribe reality” is evident by his many and varied uses of metaphors. See Andy Johnson, “Firstfruits and Death’s Defeat: Metaphor in Paul’s Rhetorical Strategy in 1 Cor 15:20–28,” *Word & World* (1996): 456–64 (460).

45 Fitzgerald, “Paul and Paradigm Shifts,” 259.

Barclay's translation of 2 Cor 5:18–20 captures the implications of this metaphorical understanding:

And the whole process is due to the action of God, who through Christ turned our enmity to himself into friendship, and who gave us the task of helping others to accept that friendship. The fact is that God was acting in Christ to turn the world's enmity to himself into friendship, that he was not holding [people's] sins against them, and that he placed upon us the privilege of taking to [people] who are hostile to him the offer of his friendship. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors. It is as if God was making his appeal to you through us. As the representatives of Christ we appeal to you to accept the offer of friendship that God is making to you.⁴⁶

The use of *thriambeuō* is evocative of an imperial triumph and a cultic procession, depending on the audience's interpretation. "We are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life" (2 Cor 2:15). Likewise the ministry of reconciliation signals both the work of negotiators and the extension to friendship. Paul's opponents may envision a general suing for terms of peace, but Paul hopes the Corinthians hear an invitation to deeper relationship. "In view of Paul's deep concern that there be friendship between God and the Corinthians, between himself and the Corinthian church, and among the Corinthians themselves, it is not at all surprising that he should make use of the language of reconciliation."⁴⁷ Without reparations or punishment Paul, the former persecutor, was reconciled by God's grace through Christ's death. The same opportunity awaits the Corinthians, hence Paul's exhortation: "Be reconciled to God" (5:20).

No Reconciliation, No Righteousness!

Paul's theology of reconciliation did not emerge *sui generis*, but rather became an articulation of his own experience of having been reconciled to God.

What (Paul) experiences in this event is not a trial or forensic action but a person: the risen Jesus. So it is not about rules and practices, but an encounter with a living person. . . . A whole new way of reckoning is being introduced. As a result, the law court or the negotiation room is no longer the model for reconciliation; it is, rather, a social space where things are made utterly new.⁴⁸

The hope of former FARC hostage Sigifredo López comes to mind. He longs for the possibility of peace where the past is not forgotten, yet no longer has a stranglehold on the future because both parties have been made new.

In 2 Cor 2:14–7:4, Paul has presented himself as the recipient of God's gratuitous forgiveness and reconciliation. He references his own "disgraceful, underhanded ways" and now pronounces that God has also given him a new ministry. Against the polemical charge that his past as a persecutor precluded his being an authentic apostle, Paul engages the multivalent metaphors of triumph/procession and reconciliation/friendship. Once an enemy of Christ, Paul has now become a captive of God (2:14). But far from exacting sanctions or legislating reparations, God extended the hand of friendship to the enemy, Paul—even going so far as to make him an ambassador on God's behalf (5:20). Thus God, reversing the expectations of diplomacy, initiated reconciliation (5:19). As a "new creation," Paul must now announce the gift of reconciliation to those at enmity with God (and with God's ambassador Paul) and proclaim an offer of God's friendship to those who are in Christ.

46 William Barclay, *The New Testament: A New Translation*, 2 vols. (London: Collins, 1968–1969), 2:72.

47 Fitzgerald, "Paul and Paradigm Shifts," 259.

48 Robert Schreiter, "St. Paul's Vision of Reconciliation," *Origins* 38 (2009): 725–32 (727).



Pietro Magni (1917–1977), “Il taglio dell’Istmo di Suez,” 1963. Marble. Revoltella Civic Museum, Trieste, Italy. Alfredo Dagli Orti/Art Resource, NY.

But while reconciliation and friendship are initiated by God, they must be accepted before either can be fully implemented.⁴⁹

As noted earlier, the process of reconciliation cannot be foreshortened, and it seems that Paul’s ambassadorial efforts were not immediately effective. The five-letter compositional theory provides a glimpse into how the Corinthians responded to Paul’s exhortation. Second Corinthians 10:1–13:10 is a sharp defense of Paul’s apostleship, suggesting that Paul’s visit failed to effect the affirmation he anticipated (12:21; 13:2). Following this “letter of tears” (7:8–12), the letter fragment found in 1:1–2:13 and 7:5–16; 13:11–13 indicates that the Corinthians were duly chastened. They welcome Paul’s envoy Titus who carried the letter, listened to his message, and repented (7:9–10). Paul for his part is comforted (7:13) and rejoices in the Corinthians’ renewed zeal (7:12).

49 “There is the act of reconciliation in Christ, and there is the ministry of reconciliation which consists in the proclamation of this prior act of God in Christ and the declaration of the message, which is then finally specified as an appeal to [people] to be reconciled to God on the basis of this prior act of God in Christ. Manifestly the act is completed only when there is a human response to the imperative demand to be reconciled” (Marshall, “The Meaning of Reconciliation,” 122).

Within this final letter fragment Paul uses *paraklēsis* or *parakaleō* sixteen times (in 2 Cor 1:3–7; 7:6–7, 13). It would seem that the work of the ambassador has finally borne fruit.⁵⁰

Two foundational elements of Christian reconciliation include the divine initiative and the new creation that results for both victim and wrongdoer. As Schreiter has stated, however, another result of the reconciliation process is a vocational change. “Christian reconciliation never takes us back to where we were before. . . . Reconciliation takes us to a new place.”⁵¹ Both victim *and* oppressor come to that new place. Hence in 2 Cor 2:14–7:4, Paul speaks of his ministry of a new covenant (3:6), which he has received by God’s mercy (4:1). Paul puts no obstacle in anyone’s way so that “no fault may be found in our ministry” (6:3). When Paul becomes an ambassador for God’s reconciliation, his transformation is complete, and he becomes “righteous” before God (5:21). But that is not the end of the process. As Morna Hooker writes:

The new creation embraces all who are in Christ. Becoming God’s righteousness is not just a matter of being acquitted in God’s court or of sharing Christ’s status before God. If God’s righteousness is a restorative power, bringing life and reconciliation, then those who ‘become righteousness’ will be the means of manifesting that power in the world. . . . What Christ is to us—righteousness, wisdom, sanctification, redemption—Christians must now be to the world.⁵²

Conclusion

God’s extension of friendship and reconciliation endures, despite our slow efforts to respond. On October 7, 2016, five days after the failed vote in Colombia, President Santos was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.⁵³ The committee applauded the president’s steadfast commitment to peace. The press release read in part, “It is the Norwegian Nobel Committee’s firm belief that President Santos, despite the ‘No’ majority vote in the referendum, has brought the bloody conflict significantly closer to a peaceful solution, and that much of the groundwork has been laid for both the verifiable disarmament of the FARC guerrillas and a historic process of national fraternity and reconciliation.”

On Thanksgiving Day, November 24, 2016, two months after signing the first peace proposal, President Santos and Rodrigo Londoño again stood together and signed a revised proposal that addressed some of the concerns that led to the defeat of the previous proposal. This plan was then sent directly to the Congress for approval. The pen used by both men was crafted from spent bullets. After the deal was signed, the crowd chanted, “*Si se pudo!*” (“Yes, we could!”).

The possibility of a new creation remains.

50 To that end, Lawrence L. Welborn notes, “It is striking how [much] of the vocabulary of friendship from the relevant literature [is] mobilized by Paul in 2 Cor 1:1–2:13; 7:5–16” (*An End to Enmity: Paul and the “Wrongdoer” of Second Corinthians*, BZNW 185 [Berlin: deGruyter, 2011], 383).

51 Schreiter, *Reconciliation*, 56.

52 Morna D. Hooker, “On Becoming the Righteousness of God: Another Look at 2 Cor 5:21,” *NovT* 50 (2008): 358–75 (374–75).

53 https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2016/press.html.

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