

Recovering Reconciliation as the Mission of God: Ten Theses
Emmanuel Katongole & Chris Rice
Duke Center for Reconciliation

1. ***Reconciliation is God's gift to the world, and therefore engaging the world's deep brokenness does not begin with us and our action, but with God and God's gift of new creation.*** Without drawing attention to this story of God, reconciliation may become popular, but it will always remain vague and even contested. We try to fix the brokenness of the world in a way that puts either us or the world at the center. Yet the first question is not what should we do, but what is going on. Otherwise we become actors in a play without a plot. The story of our lives and the story of the world begin with God, with God's plan for the world, with what God has accomplished. The center of that story is Jesus Christ—"If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation." By making the explicit connection with God's story, both the gift and the invitation for Christians to be ambassadors of God's reconciliation in the world is made clear and urgent.
2. ***Reconciliation is not a theory, achievement, technique, or event—it is a journey.*** This is why scripture is central to the ministry of reconciliation both to point to the specific "beyond" to which the journey leads, and to the particular shape and the form of that journey as it engages the deep brokenness of real places and lives. Without the unique stories of scripture, one is not able to cultivate the imagination necessary to live into the gifts and challenges of the journey of reconciliation.
3. ***The "beyond" which the journey of reconciliation presses toward is the shalom of God's new creation, a future not yet fully realized, but which transforms all dimensions of life—personal, social, and structural.*** A key question must be "reconciliation toward what?" Reconciliation is not about merely getting along, nor merely a spiritual feeling of "being at peace with God." It is not merely personal or merely social. It is not merely a political end to conflict, or mediation without healing. It must certainly not become a tool of the powerful to preserve the status quo. Reconciliation is a journey of transformation toward a new future of friendship with God and people, a holistic and concrete vision of human flourishing.
4. ***The journey of reconciliation requires the discipline of lament.*** We say "discipline" because lament involves the ability to see and truthfully name the brokenness of the world. To the extent we have not learned the discipline of lament we deal superficially with the world's brokenness, offering quick and easy fixes, that involves no 'conversion' on our part. The discipline of lament not only allows us to see the depth of the world's brokenness (as well as our own complicity in it), it shapes reconciliation as a journey that involves truth, conversion and forgiveness.
5. ***In a broken world, God is always planting seeds of hope—but often not in the ways we expect or even desire.*** Thus reconciliation not only involves hope, the ability to see hope requires training. So often, the desperate search for 'success' in the efforts for reconciliation masks a desire to short circuit the journey of reconciliation, and also reveals our inability to recognize and live with 'signs'. At the same time, it is easy to despair and give up hope in a broken world. The journey of reconciliation involves training in learning to see and embody "signs" of hope as well as learning to live with hopeful patience in the sluggish present.

6. ***There is no reconciliation without memory since there can be no hope for a peaceful tomorrow which does not seriously engage the pain of the past.*** The two temptations of seeking “reconciliation without memory” and of pursuing “justice without communion” are both failures to remember well—the first by forgetting the wounds of history, the second by forgetting the promise of resurrection and the call to forgiveness. A Christian vision of reconciliation provides resources to avoid both of these temptations.
7. ***The church is needed for reconciliation, but not as merely another NGO or social agency.*** Reconciliation is not the ministry of experts; it is God’s gift to “anyone in Christ.” Christians learn what it means to both be reconciled and be ambassadors of reconciliation in and through the church, which is a ‘demonstration plot’ of the social existence made possible by God’s gift of reconciliation. The church’s call therefore is to be an interruption of the story of violence in the world, through signs and gestures that point to peace of God’s new creation. Without such interruption, one would not even know the concrete difference, the alternative that is made possible by the story of God’s new creation. In order to be a sign and agent of reconciliation, the church must inspire and embody a deeper vocation of hope in broken places. She does so by her presence; her incarnation in local places; and by her everyday and ongoing practices of building communities, fighting injustice, resisting structures and systems of oppression, as well as by patterns of care, hospitality and service.
8. ***The ministry of reconciliation requires and calls forth a specific type of leadership, one that is able to bring together a deep vision with concrete skills, virtues and habits necessary for the long and often lonesome journey of reconciliation.*** We have many experts in reconciliation, but not many leaders. Reconciliation requires leaders who are grounded in a vision of the beyond, and at the same time grounded in the thick stubbornness of the now. It is not training, but formation that produces such leaders, which not only calls for good mentors, but a lifestyle marked by prayer, courage, joy, and practical wisdom.
9. ***There is no reconciliation without conversion, which is the constant journey with God of being changed into new people and new loyalties toward a new future.*** We do not long for what God longs for. The new contends with the old, and the world and its bloodlines of nation, ethnicity, race, sex, and caste resist the new creation and the new community where there is “Neither Greek nor Jew, slave nor free, male nor female” (Galatians). Self-interest easily becomes the goal of relationships, and loyalty to and increasing the power of one’s own group easily becomes the end of all politics. Reconciliation thus requires a transformation of desire, habits, and loyalties. This is a long and costly journey which is impossible without God’s gifts and presence of forgiveness and grace. Yet God has promised to give us everything we need for this transformation.
10. ***Imagination and conversion are the very heart and soul of reconciliation.*** That is what reconciliation is about: to be able to receive and live by a new imagination; to form and shape lives and communities that reflect the story of God’s new creation; to engage the world’s brokenness drawing from that story; to offer concrete examples and ways of how lives and communities shaped by that story go about everyday challenges of peaceful existence in the world. That is why more than skills and techniques, the work of reconciliation is sustained through stories and story-telling, and through receiving the gifts God has given to transform us. It is through stories and through the virtues those stories give life to that reconciliation becomes an ordinary, everyday gift and pattern of life for Christians.