

ministries and reconciliation workshops all across former Yugoslavia and beyond.

We as Christians must constantly both pray and work for peace, justice, and reconciliation. We also need to pray that all the people, now living in seven new nation-states that are the result of the painful break-up of former Yugoslavia, regardless of their ethnicity, religion or social status, will have their basic human rights and dignity restored. Their personal safety, the well-being of their families, and the inviolability of their property should be assured. We Christians need to be at the forefront of the search for peace with justice, which will provide a just solution for all who have been forced to leave their homes. Their right to return to a peaceful and safe life in the place of their birth still remains an unfulfilled dream for many.

As Christians practising holistic mission, we must also continue to support the search for the thousands who are still missing, to ensure their decent burial and dignified closure for the bereaving families. Promoting inter-religious dialogue, ecumenical co-operation, respect for women, and care for the children, along with multicultural education, all remain a task of the integral mission of the followers of Christ. We should strive to be creative instruments of reconciliation and courageous defenders of life and family, demonstrating in humble service our love for all persons as our neighbours. God calls all of us to pray for these worthy goals and ministries, and for many of us to be active participants in the remaining task of rebuilding, reconciliation, and renewal.

THE DRAMA OF RECONCILIATION IN THE POST-COMMUNIST HUNGARIAN LUTHERAN CHURCH

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This paper has grown out of the post-communist contextual experience of Hungarian Lutheranism. Part 1 discusses the term "reconciliation" suggesting that the biblical term has to do with the climax of a theo-drama which calls for theatrical performance within the community of believers, i.e. the church. Part 2 tells the story of how the need for a theatre of reconciliation emerged in a minority church when the community was suddenly faced with the trauma of unveiling former secret agents within their midst, including their respected pastors, professors and even family members.¹ Progress has been made when not only grassroots movements but also the church leadership have taken up the task of promoting research into uncovering the dark side of their church's history, something unprecedented among Hungarian churches. However, the scenario of reconciliation cannot be performed properly when, due to the change in church leadership, the issue is trivialized, when formerly complicit persons are awarded high state decorations, and those committed to the painful exploration of the past are demonized.

1. Reconciliation and its "Drama"

I will use reconciliation and atonement as synonyms following John W. de Gruchy:

"'Reconciliation' is one of the words used in English to describe this experience, though the word 'atonement' has often functioned as its equivalent in theological textbooks. But 'at-one-ment' is a peculiarly English construction, coined to describe God and humanity through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross."²

I am proposing to discuss these terms together as I believe the basis of the healing of all human conflicts is the climax of the drama of the

¹ Tibor Fabiny, "Complicity and Perseverance: Hungarian Lutherans During and After Communism" in *Lutheran Forum*, 42:1, Spring 2008, 43-48. Reprinted in my *The Veil of God: The Testimony of Bishop Lajos Ordass in Communist Hungary* (Budapest: Center for Hermeneutical Research, 2008), 80-94. Some paragraphs from this publication are used in the present article.

² John W. de Gruchy, *Reconciliation. Restoring Justice* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 44-45.

atonement on the Cross of Jesus Christ. The word "atonement" was coined by William Tyndale (1484-1536), but later versions of the English Bible abandoned this original picturesque formula in favour of the Latinate "reconciliation".

Agreeing with Kevin J. Vanhoozer that "drama and dogma" go hand-in-hand,³ we have to recognize that the doctrine of atonement is the most dramatic of all Christian narratives and doctrines. It is indeed the climax of the grand "theo-drama".

Drama, however, never exists in a vacuum. It comes to life only if it is performed. "The purpose of the doctrine of the atonement ... is to help us understand the theo-drama, to clarify our role in it, and to direct us to play our part as well."⁴ We come to understand the theo-drama only in the theatre of the church where we are also involved. Vanhoozer says, "[I]n the church, as the theatre of the gospel, celebrates the person and work of Christ: God with us and for us ... Those who worship in spirit and truth become participants – communicants and celebrants – in the drama of redemption."⁵

What does the performance of the atonement mean in the "theatre of the gospel", i.e. the church? The church is a reconciliatory theatre that revolutionarily proclaims the script of the gospel and prophetically imitates the lives of her martyrs. "[T]he church is itself the end of the goal of theo-drama: the fulfilment of God's covenant promise to make a people for himself and to be that people's God ... When the church participates fittingly in the drama of redemption, then it assumes the role of corporate witness to the reality of the new creation wrought by the Father in Christ through the Spirit."⁶

Christian dogma is substantially dramatic and Christian drama is substantially dogmatic. Drama reanimates dogma, and dogma is not only a proposition but ultimately and originally, a story told and re-enacted. In a world turned upside down, i.e. ruled by an enemy, the theatre of the gospel is necessarily subversive. "The church is a theatre of divine wisdom, a participatory performance of the doctrine of atonement, precisely when it is a theatre of 'holy folly'."⁷

In the life of the church, liturgy always re-enacts the story of our faith. The church is the only forum in this world where sinners and their victims can shake hands, where former enemies can be reconciled with each other – "where the mercy of God becomes concrete in the act of forgiveness and

³ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine, A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2005).

⁴ Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 392.

⁵ Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 409.

⁶ Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 434-5.

⁷ Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 439.

the menace of human existence as well as the overall inertia towards death can be seen in the light of Easter".⁸

2. Performing the Drama of Reconciliation in the Life of the Lutheran Church in Hungary

It is important to see the Hungarian context of the emerging issue of reconciliation. Why and how has the issue of reconciliation entered on the theological horizon of a post-communist minority church? I hope to demonstrate how a minority church struggles, indeed "labours", to be a church, to become what it is meant to be, a "theatre of reconciliation".

This grim and dramatic story has to do with those people within the church who, as it has turned out, collaborated with the communist secret police. Some people say that, during the hurricane of East European communism (1945-90), practically everybody became "complicit" or "muddy". But others argue, rightly I think, that it makes a difference whether your coat, your tongue or your heart became "muddy".

Some clarification of the background is necessary. The transition from communism to democracy was the result of peaceful negotiations between the reform-communists and various branches of the opposition in 1989. Thank God that there was no bloodshed – but neither was there an elevating catharsis. In transferring power there was consensus between the last Mohicans of communism and the victorious parliamentary parties that there should be no "witch-hunting". József Antall (1932-93), the first Prime Minister of the freely elected government, was given a list of those involved with the communist secret police by his predecessor. The Prime Minister disclosed the list only to a small circle in his government. The communist secret police was a very powerful and sophisticated system similar to the East German Stasi. In Hungary, as in some other former Eastern European countries, this collaboration remained hidden for more than fifteen years after the political changes. These lists have frequently been cards in fierce political power games. Hungary is an extremely divided nation between the political left and the political right. In fact, both parties have their own former secret agents, and therefore none of them really supported the uncovering of this past.

There were rumours about some former and present church leaders as well. The archives have, however, not been available to the public until quite recently.

In February 2005, there was an illegal internet list posted by a certain "expert" who identified several Roman Catholic, Reformed and Lutheran church leaders as agents. When two recently retired bishops were

⁸ Sándor Fazakas, *Emlékezés és megbékélés: A múlttal való szembesülés egyházi és teológiai kritériumai* [Remembering and Reconciliation: Church Criteria and Theological Aspects of Confronting the Past] (Budapest: Kálvin Kiadó, 2004), 159.

mentioned among the Lutheran secret agents, it created immediate excitement. Due to the initiative of her leadership, the Lutheran Church was the first to respond publicly to that list in Hungary. Their public statement created much respect for our small church in the secular media. The church leaders in that statement apologized for those who had been harmed by the agents' activity. As a courageous decision, the church set up a "Fact-Finding Committee" in May 2005⁹ to research the archives and identify those who were involved.

Parallel to the official Fact-Finding Committee, a small renewal group of our church (EBBE) decided to launch a series of lectures in the spirit of the South African Truth and Reconciliation movement in the fall of 2005. The purpose of this group was not to hunt for individual cases but to clarify how the community of the church can and should confront this issue from the point of view of the Christian faith. The outcome of the series was a book entitled "Truth and Reconciliation"¹⁰ in May 2006. The aim of "Truth and Reconciliation" was to provide forums for theological, historical and ethical clarification of this issue. The title was, of course, an allusion to the "Truth and Reconciliation" movement in the churches of South Africa after the apartheid system came to an end. The situation of our post-communist churches was in many ways similar, though not analogous, to that in South Africa, since our concern was not the uncovering of the collaboration of church leaders within an apartheid government, but the collaboration of our church leaders with the communist secret police. There was a serious demand for such research, as sixteen years after the political changes, this issue has not been clarified in Hungary, as it has in former East Germany.

It has been repeatedly expressed that a word of apology is required from those involved so that the church can really become a theatre of reconciliation performing the grand drama of atonement.

Bonhoeffer says that confession of sins is necessary in the life of the individual. This is even more valid in the life of the community. In a lecture on Bonhoeffer's idea of community I called the issue of the agents "a *par excellence* community issue".¹¹ The church is a community of sinners where sinners are claimed to be saints because they live from the sanctity of

⁹ Katalin Mitrák (ed), *Háló: Dokumentumok és tanulmányok a Magyarországi Evangélikus Egyház és az állambiztonság kapcsolatáról 1945-1990* [Net: Documents and Studies about the Connections of the Lutheran Church in Hungary and the Communist Secret Police between 1945-1990] (Budapest: Luther Kiadó, 2010), 7.

¹⁰ Tibor Fabiny (ed), *Igazság és kiengesztelődés: Az egyházi közelmúlt feldolgozásának teológiai, történelmi, etikai és gyakorlati kérdései* [Truth and Reconciliation: Theological, Historical, Ethical and Practical Aspects of Assessing the Recent Past of the Church] (Budapest: Evangélikus Belmissziói Baráti Egylet, 2006).

¹¹ Tibor Fabiny, "A közösség mint pneumatikus valóság" ["Community as a Pneumatic Reality"], *Lelekipásztor* (2006), nos. 8-9, 285-92

their Saviour, Jesus Christ, who performed the great act of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18-21). Those who collaborated with the secret police during the communist period were thus expected to openly confess their activities in front of the community of believers since they had harmed the community, as well as from damaging themselves. Confession was expected not only *coram Deo* but *coram hominibus* so that forgiveness, the reconciling drama of our faith, could be manifest. Embracing the sinner and helping him or her to integrate into the community could manifest the power of forgiveness and the love of God.

However, the issue is delicate, as the former agents are today frequently highly respected notables in our church and they fear lest their public image be damaged. Therefore, they would prefer that this aspect of their past remain hidden and would rather not confess in public. Perhaps it is not only their shame and weakness but also the shame and weakness of the community that prevents such an act. The community has not lived up to its mission of being a real theatre of reconciliation. The community is not strong enough to uphold its divine, "pneumatic" potential, which would be able to welcome the sinner and restore him/her into the body of Christ.

The National Assembly of our church was held on May 19, 2006, where the Fact-Finding Committee gave the first official report of their work. It was said that within the Lutheran Church in Hungary there were some fifty agents with pseudonyms. They identified only four; three of them had already died, while the fourth was a retired bishop who had worked for several years for the Lutheran World Federation. Shortly thereafter, in a series of articles, the secular media identified all bishops as secret agents, along with several famous parish pastors and professors of theology.¹²

Addressing this issue through reconciliation was the theme of a nationwide gathering of the Lutheran Church in Hungary in Paks in June 2007 with the motto: "Peace Be with You". Bishop János Ittész was invited to preach on 2 Cor 5:18-21. This was followed by a round-table discussion of Roman Catholic, Reformed, Lutheran and Methodist theologians where the speakers were invited to respond to questions concerning various theological and ethical aspects of reconciliation, including the issue of former agents. It became evident that the most committed and systematic exploration of the church leaders' association with the communist secret police was begun only in the Lutheran church.

We understood that reconciliation should not be limited to former agents. Seven sections were devoted to practical aspects of reconciliation, such as reconciliation in the family, ecumenism or the reconciliation of the churches, reconciliation in a politically polarized Hungarian society, reconciliation among generations, reconciliation between Hungarian

¹² Tamás Majsai, "Öt évzidenen át ügynökök az evangélikus egyház élén IV" [Agents in the Leadership of the Lutheran Church for Five Decades, Parts I-IV], *Élet és Irodalom* 36-40 (September 8-October 6, 2006).

Lutherans at home and abroad, reconciliation with the ethnic (especially Roma) minority, and last but not least, "dialogue with Judaism".¹³ In the political dialogue, the representatives were the Rev. András Csepregi (then quasi State Secretary for Religious Affairs of the socialist-liberal government in 2006-10), and General Inspector Gergely Pröhle (the Number One layperson of the Lutheran Church in Hungary) – representing the conservative side. (Just to illustrate the changes: after eight years, the socialist-liberal coalition lost the elections in 2010 and now the Rev. András Csepregi is a pastor at a secondary school, and Mr Gergely Pröhle, still General Inspector, is now Deputy State-Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the new "Fidesz" government.) The question whether and how this two-day national assembly in 2007 has contributed to the re-enactment of the real drama of reconciliation, is still open.¹⁴

The work of the Fact-Finding Committee of the Hungarian Lutheran Church has been progressing and the first volume of the planned series was published in May 2010 with title *Háló*¹⁵ (The Net). The volume contained only general studies concerning methodology of research and documents as well as reports of the Fact-Finding Committee between 2006 and 2010. The purpose was not to create sensation and therefore only three former church leaders could be identified by the careful readers.

The volume, however, quickly caused uproar mainly among the older generation. This also coincided with the election of the new Rector of the Lutheran Theological University who – after his election, when the facts came to light – had to admit that he had also been a collaborator. His former association with the communist secret police was the main topic both in the secular and church-related media for weeks. Among the many former agents there were only two (a Professor emeritus¹⁶ from the Evangelical Lutheran Theological University) and a former District Dean¹⁷

¹³ We could not, of course, say "reconciliation with Judaism" as our understanding of reconciliation is based on the atoning death of Jesus Christ on the cross in terms of 2 Cor 5:18-21, and this is not accepted by our elder brothers-in-faith.

¹⁴ I even proposed this topic of reconciliation with our past to a gathering of Swedish and Hungarian Lutheran pastors in Vadstena, Sweden, in September 2007, but the local organizers insisted that reconciliation should refer to the reconciling with the "other" in a post-modern world, which meant the discussion was mainly limited to whether or not to endorse same-sex marriages in the church.

¹⁵ Katalin Mirák (ed), *Háló: Dokumentumok és tanulmányok a Magyarországi Evangélikus Egyház és az állambiztonság kapcsolatáról 1945-1990* [Net: Documents and Studies about the Connections of the Lutheran Church in Hungary and the Communist Secret Police between 1945-90] (Budapest: Luther Kiadó, 2010).

¹⁶ András Reuss, "Naivitás és bátorság, okosság és keresség" [Naivety, Courage, Prudence and the Cross?], *Credo*, XV. évf. 2009/1-2, 54-61.

¹⁷ László Kevéházi, "Hozzájárulás a 'Gyógyító beszélgetések múltunkról' témához" [Remarks Concerning the Topic "Healing Conversations About the Past"], in *Keresztyén Igazság* Az Ordass Lajos Baráti Kör negyedévi folyóirata. Új folyam 83.

who were willing to openly tell the story of their association with the communist secret police. Both articles were published by the Lutheran Quarterly *Credo*, which has been committed to such topics ever since the formation of a new editorial board in 2009.

Partly because of the heated controversies concerning the issue of agents in our church and, partly because of the lack of a proper church response, the Hungarian Lutheran Alliance organized another "grassroots" conference on the subject, entitled "Processing the Issues of the Former Agents in the Church in a Theological Perspective". The Roman Catholic clergyman Gyula Szabó as well as the Reformed Professor of Theology, Dr Sándor Fazakas, were invited to give presentations about the processing of the agent issue within their respected churches. In Hungary, the Roman Catholic Church is the largest church body (with six million of a total of ten million inhabitants; by comparison, the Reformed Church has some 1.4 million members while the Lutherans have only 300,000 members). Both guests acknowledged that the Lutheran Church is far ahead of them in this work. The conference proceedings were published in June 2011.¹⁸

The establishment of the Fact-Finding Committee is undoubtedly associated with the name of Bishop Irtész János (1944-), an early opponent of the church leadership's collaboration with the former communist regime.¹⁹ With his episcopal activity (Bishop 2000-11, Presiding Bishop 2006-10), a radically new chapter in the history of the Hungarian Lutherans began. In 2005 it was mainly on the initiative of Bishop Irtész that the Fact-Finding Committee was set up by the Synod.

Following Bishop János Irtész' retirement in 2011, promoting the progress of the work of the Fact-Finding Committee has not been at the top

szám, 2009. ősz, 5-7; Mirák, Katalin, "Nem akarok sötétben maradni ..." Ön-és múltfeltárás: Kevéházi László állambiztonsági kapcsolatáról – személyesen és általánosan" ("I do not want to stay in darkness ..." Self and Past-Exploration: László Kevéházi's Connections with the Secret Police – Personally and Generally), *Credo*, Evangélikus folyóirat, XVI. évf. 2010/1-2, 67-75.

¹⁸ Tibor Fabiny (ed), *Hálóból kerítve: Konferencia az evangélikus lelkészek és az állambiztonság kapcsolatáról* [Drawn into the net: Conference on the Connections of Lutheran Pastors with the Secret Police] (Budapest: Luther Kiadó, Hermeneutikai Kutatóközpont, 2011).

¹⁹ Bishop Zoltán Káldy (1919-86, President of the Lutheran World Federation 1984-86) – an agent himself since 1958 – refused to ordain Irtész following his graduation from the Lutheran Theological Seminary in 1967, because the young graduate refused to praise the Communist state in his farewell speech at the Seminary. Therefore, in the late 1960s Irtész was employed as a manual worker and had to complete a two years' military service. He was nevertheless ordained by another bishop during Káldy's absence in 1970. Then he served as a pastor of various congregations in western Hungary. It was a great surprise when Pastor Irtész, a prominent leader of the Lajos Ordass Friendly Circle, an opposition group to the church leadership during the political changes and after, became the first elected Bishop of the old/new Western (Trans-Danubian) Diocese in September 2000.

of the new leadership's agenda. In the Synod and in the Lutheran media, the new Presiding Bishop has frequently expressed his disagreement with exploring only this "dark side" of the life of the church, though at the end of 2011 he eventually agreed that the work of the Fact-Finding Committee should continue with "caution".²⁰

There are several signs of this "caution". Two years have passed since the publication of the first volume of the *Halo* (The Net) series and the second one was still not out in August 2012. The argument frequently raised views such as: "Why point out only this one dirty spot in the history of some of our most respected elders who have contributed so much with their expertise to the life of our church?" This might have been the logic behind awarding a very prestigious state decoration by the Fidesz government to a well-known retired pastor for his "ministry, theological work, publication activity and exemplary life". No doubt, the nominee deserved credit for his intellectual achievements. However, the Fact-Finding Committee also uncovered records indicating his collaboration.

In my view, such public awards to those who have expressed strong reservations towards this reconciliation process, if supported by the church, led to a confusion of values among church members. If liaison with the former secret police has to remain a taboo, if the past can so easily be swept under the rug, if truth is not allowed to come to light, if real confession is discouraged rather than encouraged, then there is no real chance of forgiveness. If there is no remembering, only forgiveness, Bonhoeffer's "cheap grace" is again around the corner.

From the climax of our redemptive drama on the Cross we have learned that mercy and justice go together. The church itself, when dealing with her own sin, has to recognize both sides of this equation.

A chance for real reconciliation, catharsis or renewal can only take place when the church lives up to her mission to be a church, when she allows that the theatre of reconciliation to be at work in letting mercy and justice operate simultaneously, and not allowing one to annul the other. Then, and only then, will the church function according to her mandate.

GEORGIAN CASE OF RECONCILIATION AND DIAKONIA

Malkhaz Songulashvili

At its National Council in 2006, the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia passed an amendment to its constitution which states "the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia is the Church for Georgia". This amendment was the result of radical changes within the life of the church which inspired its current commitment to preach forgiveness and reconciliation to all in Georgia and to serve all those in need, regardless of their ethnic, religious, or social background.

Background History

The Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia was founded in 1867 in Tbilisi, Georgia's capital, at that time a provincial centre within the Russian Empire in the South Caucasus, known as the Trans-Caucasus. Georgia had been incorporated into the Russian Empire following the Goryevk Treaty, an agreement reached by Georgia and Russia – both Orthodox kingdoms – in 1783. The Treaty required Russia to defend Georgia against Muslim invasions, but King Irakly II of Georgia who signed the agreement did not realize what the consequences would be. In 1801 when King George XI of Georgia died, the Russian Empire violated the Goryevk Treaty, forced the Georgian royal family to abdicate, and ultimately abolished the East Georgian Kingdom of Kart-Kakheti. Soon after, the other Georgian political entities – the Kingdom of Imereti, the Principalities of Guria, Samegrelo, and Svaneti – were also occupied by Russia.

The Georgian Orthodox Church

By the early nineteenth century the Georgian Orthodox Church was in a parlous state, weakened by numerous invasions of Georgia. The British and Foreign Bible Society records have preserved a report which quotes the words of the Georgian Orthodox Archbishop Dosithios of Telavi:

"He spoke with deep concern of the state of education among the clergy, which in general consists in their being able to read the Church service; very few of them having an adequate knowledge of Holy Scriptures. Religion, he