



# *Apostles for Today*

*Prayer and Reflection - October 2015*

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## *Let Us be Apostles of Forgiveness and Reconciliation in Order to Create a New World*

The words of an African musician poet inspired us with the idea of a new world which would be the result of the practice and experience of the virtues of forgiveness and reconciliation. Having carefully observed the tumultuous reality of our time, including the various tensions worldwide, fratricidal wars, the degradation of human beings by other human beings and, adding current news, the influx of migrants to Europe; the poet exclaims: “the world is aging”.

For the poet, in fact, the aging of the world refers to the decline of humanity, characterised by all the atrocities of which human beings are simultaneously author and victim. Hearing news regarding the reality of the present situation of the world, there is nothing to reassure us of a promising future for coming generations. In speaking of the aging of the world, the poet is addressing himself to his fellow human beings. In this way, he questions our behaviour and calls for a realisation, the pledge of a new beginning which requires a change of mentality for a renewal that the world expects of us for our own flourishing. Faced with such a bleak picture which bears witness to the aging or, even more so, the moral decay of which human beings are victim, he asks himself if we have not arrived at the state of which the philosopher Thomas Hobbes spoke, according to which human beings are, by nature, shut up in their own passions and anxious to secure their selfish interests, asserting their animosity towards each other. Hence the phrase “man is wolf to man”. In view of the overall situation of the world today as much in social as in political, in religious as in environmental terms; it is important that human beings examine themselves with a view to building a new world without which such a danger is inevitable.

Saint John Paul II, in his post-synodal apostolic exhortation, “*Reconciliatio and Paenitentia*” of 2 December 1984, notes the catastrophic situation of the contemporary world, calling for conversion with a view to reconciliation. But there can be no reconciliation without a sincere commitment involving a process of forgiveness for a true healing of wounds caused by painful situations lived through and also suffered. Saint John Paul II speaks of the shattering of the contemporary world. He highlights the real divisions which “are seen in the

relationships between individuals and groups, and also at the level of larger groups: nations against nations and blocs of opposing countries in a headlong quest for domination” (cf. § 2). The root cause of these divisions is to be found at the level of human beings who seem to have failed in their original mission received from the Creator according to the book of Genesis (Gen 1:29-30). Human beings, unfortunately, instead of having dominion over nature in order to make a real living space for themselves and all other creatures, destroyed it by their aggression. Hence the cry of alarm that is heard today concerning the dangers of self-destruction due to mismanagement of the environment.

From the social and political perspectives, Saint John Paul II finds destructive imbalances that impair social harmony and thus cause conflicts with disastrous consequences for human society. In this regard, he points to the existence of “the growing disproportion between groups, social classes and countries, to ideological rivalries that are far from dead; from the opposition between economic interests to political polarization; from tribal differences to discrimination for social and religious reasons” (cf. § 2).

Given this situation, it is urgent that the men and women of our time discover the need for the virtue of forgiveness required for a reconciliation that can transform human hearts. The effectiveness of this renewal process must take into account two dimensions without which one cannot speak of successful reconciliation. If we believe that forgiveness and reconciliation are two intimately related Christian virtues, then it is necessary to know in this case that only those who have already pardoned each other can be mutually reconciled.

From the Christian viewpoint, the first dimension to be considered is the vertical relationship between human beings and God. The Christian recognizes that forgiveness is a gift of God and is the fruit of love. In fact, God has loved us first and also wants to forgive us in his Son Jesus Christ, God become man, to save us from sin and death (Jn 3: 16). Therefore, faith being the answer to the infinite love of God, it allows us to gain the strength to forgive our brothers and sisters.

The second dimension for the revival of the harmonious world which we want involves a horizontal movement that engages human beings with each other. If the search for personal fulfilment and other ambitions have blinded us to the point of making us hostile to one another, the coming of a new world requires on our part a conversion to healthy relationships based on love of neighbour (Lk 10:29 -38).

If a simple analysis of the verb “forgive” allows us to grasp that it involves “giving something”, we will then be in a position to consider that forgiveness

leads us to reconstruct a link that no longer exists after a fracturing or rupture of relationships between brothers and sisters.

Forgiveness therefore always places two parties before each other: the offended and the offender, the victim and the aggressor. This double dimension of forgiveness sometimes makes it difficult because it requires that both parties recognise each other in their role or condition (of offender and offended) as well as in the facts that divide or set them against each other. That is why, from the purely social and human perspective, in order to achieve true reconciliation, forgiveness demands that the offender recognise the harm or injury done to the other and express regret. In so doing, the person responsible enters into a process of reconciliation that solicits from the other a getting over of the offense which is expressed through forgiveness. Only forgiveness given and received (because desired) embodies genuine reconciliation.

In the Ivory Coast, for example, after the electoral crisis that the country experienced in 2010, to reconcile the Ivorian people, the new government established the Dialogue, Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CDVR). It could be said that it has done its best to reach the victims in order to help them to understand what they have experienced. And in order to facilitate, even so slightly, the restoration of national cohesion in the particular circumstances, this Commission has had to initiate a dialogue between victims and their tormentors. It can be said that the results of such meetings have not always been exceptional; however, these initiatives have helped each side to express their concerns. As forgiveness is a process that requires willpower, patience and time, it can be humbly recognised without too much pretension, that the efforts made by the said Committee have had some positive impact on calming the tensions prevailing in some parts of the country.

The effort required for effective reconciliation remains considerable and its achievement is the responsibility of every citizen. The Church, beginning with its hierarchical authorities, the pastors and the other faithful, at all levels, must become aware of the need for forgiveness and reconciliation as a basis for peace and social harmony. For this to happen, the preaching of the word of God must play a key role in the conversion of all. Without a true conversion of hearts, it is impossible to achieve reconciliation between people. And since it is God alone who can arouse in human hearts a true desire for unity and reconciliation, we ask him to inspire in us the words and actions needed for the communion of all in peace and harmony. Indeed, the word of God, the good news of the Gospel, must be at the heart of any undertaking to promote forgiveness and reconciliation between people.

Giving part of oneself in order to restore the other in his or her dignity as a human being and child of God is the essence of forgiveness. This involves a

sacrifice and, even more, a death to self for the sake of the other. Nonetheless, faith in Jesus Christ invites us to this. To the extent that we raise our eyes to Christ crucified granting pardon to his executioners that we will be able to go beyond the human dimension of forgiveness that necessarily wants the repentance of the offender. It is at this level that true forgiveness is a gift from God. God, the first to take the initiative of forgiveness, without any process of reconciliation on our part, paying a high price for this: the gift of his Son.

That is why we maintain that it is virtually impossible for people to attain true reconciliation between themselves without recourse to the support and assistance of God from whom comes every perfect gift. If forgiveness involves agreeing to make a sacrifice, reconciliation can be said to be the consequence of this sacrifice. It is, in effect, a force born of wounded or offended hearts which have been healed of all the bitterness of the past. Speaking of reconciliation as the restoration of the strength and will to live together, Denis Saint-Pierre said that it “is more than a goodwill gesture. It is a force that triggers admirable effects”.

Following the example of Christ, who has reconciled us with God by his death and resurrection, let us in our turn, insofar as we are Christians and apostles of Christ, be peacemakers and ask him for the grace to work for communion among our brothers and sisters. Pope Francis reminds us in this regard that “true faith in the incarnate Son of God is inseparable from self-giving, from membership in the community, from service, from reconciliation with others” (Evangeli Gaudium, § 88). By our baptismal promises, we have been made children of God and therefore heirs of the kingdom with Christ, our Saviour; we remain conscious of our mission as apostles of forgiveness and reconciliation. Thus, we can, by our way of living and acting, contribute effectively to the advent of a new world where peace and the joy of living together reign.

***Let us pray through the intercession of St. Vincent Pallotti:***

*“You wish us to be always animated by the humility and love and thus to become like Christ. You want us to glorify God through an apostolic life and to obtain both our own salvation and that of our neighbour” (Pallottine Prayers, Section II, Prayers directed to St. Vincent Pallotti, n. 2, p. 238).*

*UAC Ivory Coast*