

## RECONCILIATION AND RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

- Topic: Testimony and Truth Telling in Processes of Reconciliation  
 Conveners: William O'Neill, Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University  
 Stephen J. Pope, Boston College  
 Presenter: Robert Schreiter, Catholic Theological Union  
 Respondent: Lisa Fullam, Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University

Robert Schreiter's presentation considered two major challenges to peacemaking: first, the non-linearity of most processes of healing, particularly when considered in light of the symbolic and ritual nature of reconciliatory interactions, and second, the difficulties of transmitting reconciliatory insights from one sector across a variety of boundaries, e.g., from the religious to the secular. These issues were considered in light of two processes: witnessing, or giving testimony, and truth telling. The activity of providing a witness includes both bearing witness and various ways, including factual presentation and narrative depiction, in which it is expressed. The complexity of bearing witness shed light on the convention's prophetic theme. Coming into a voice that allows one to give witness includes three dimensions: defiance, resistance, and resilience. All three allow victims to become agents of their own history who have something to say and to whom others ought to listen. The message of the witness, testimony, helps to heal when it is able to take the shape of an ordered narrative that makes sense to both the narrator and his or her intended audience. Such narratives give voice to trauma and help to prevent silence from allowing an erasure of the past. This testimony constitutes an agency enhancing "subjectification" of the witness and a validating "objectification" of the testimony. It changes hearers as well as speakers and invites all interlocutors to embrace important truths that had been obscured or denied in the past. These processes help to build community through establishing a coherent narrative, a shared basis for what the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission called "dialogic truth." Right relationships can thus be forged in common terms that respect the suffering of victims in a way that allows them to understand themselves as survivors.

Fullam's response complemented Schreiter's presentation by calling attention to some important but unaddressed dimensions of bearing witness and testimony. Her response probed the meaning of forgiveness and asked whether forgiveness is what most characterizes our nature as made in the image of God. She raised the problem of internalized oppression that makes it difficult for victims effectively to resist and often calls for a spirituality of rebellion rather than a spirituality of reconciliation or restoration. Rituals and symbols of resistance are also needed, e.g., ritualized "table turning" as well as traditional "foot washing." A related issue concerns beneficiaries, as distinct from perpetrators and victims. How is it possible for witnesses bearing testimony to speak in ways that allows beneficiaries to see their own responsibility to change the conditions that lead to unjust suffering?

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