

Salvation as doctrine of Reconciliation: A theology of Reconciliation in the Context of Conflict between Myanmar ethnic Groups

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ABSTRACT

This research will present 'Salvation' as reconciliation and explore the lack of the Myanmar Churches' missional work. It will also propose the need to engage more in a reconciliation ministry as a part of fulfilling the Christ-given 'mandate. In doing so, this research will attempt to shed soteriological light upon the current situation of the conflict and fight between ethnic people groups in Myanmar. In addition, this research will examine the significance of a Trinitarian theological aspect of reconciliation for mutual forgiveness and love between ethnic people groups in Myanmar.

This proposed study will use a literature survey to determine the meaning of reconciliation from the various perspectives in Myanmar, and it will also use an exegetical study to define the meaning of salvation as reconciliation from the biblical perspectives is. This research will use also a literature study on historical facts of political leaders, religious leaders and individuals to determine what the hindrances of the reconciliation process in Myanmar are. It will use literature analysis and exegetical study on salvation as reconciliation from the biblical perspectives to apply in the context of conflict among Myanmar ethnic groups

Key words

Salvation, reconciliation, conflict resolution, ethnic people groups in Myanmar, Theology of Reconciliation

OPSOMMING

Hierdie navorsing bied 'Verlossing' as versoening aan en ondersoek die afwesigheid van die kerke in Myanmar se missionale werk. Die noodsaaklikheid om meer betrokke te wees by 'n versoeningsbediening as deel van die Christus-gegewe mandaat, word ook voorgestel. Deur hierdie metode te volg, poog die navorsing om die lig van verlossing te laat skyn op die huidige situasie van konflik en onmin tussen etniese groepe in Myanmar. Die navorsing ondersoek verder die betekenis van 'n Trinitariese teologiese dimensie van versoening vir wedersydse vergiffenis en liefde tussen etniese groepe in Myanmar.

Die voorgestelde studie maak gebruik van 'n literatuurondersoek om die betekenis van versoening by die verskillende perspektiewe in Myanmar na te vors, en daar sal ook van 'n eksegetiese studie gebruik gemaak word om die betekenis van verlossing as versoening vanuit bybelse perspektiewe vas te stel. Hierdie navorsing maak ook gebruik van 'n literatuurstudie rakende historiese gegewens van politieke, godsdienstige leiers en individue om vas te stel wat die versoeningsproses in Myanmar verhinder. Daar sal ook gebruik gemaak word van 'n literatuuranalise en eksegetiese navorsing oor verlossing as versoening vanuit die bybelse perspektief om dit toe te pas in die konflik tussen Myanmar se etniese groepe.

Kernbegrippe

Verlossing, versoening, konflikoplossing, etniese groepe in Myanmar, Teologie van Versoening

ABBREVIATIONS

BSPP	Burma Socialist Programme Party
CAN/F	Chin National Army/Front
EAOs	Ethnic Armed Organisations
ISA	Interlinear Scriptures Analyzer
KIA	Kachin Independent Army
KJV	King James Version
Ma Ba Tha	Myanmar Buddhist Tharthana (Association)
NIV	New International Version
NLD	National League for Democracy
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
RCSS	Restorative Council of Shan State
UNCF	Union National Ceasefire Federation
UPC	Union Peace Conference
UPCCP	Union of Peace Conference 21 st Century Panglong
UPDJC	Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee
USDP	Union Solidarity and Development Party

GLOSSARY

Amyo	Tribe. Herein, I referred the Burmese tribe based on Buddhist ideology or Buddhism religious-political movement.
Apyit-phaythe	Forgiving or pardoning one's sins from punishment.
Barthar	Religion or faith. In the other term "barthar" can be related to 'subjects' and 'language'.
Bama-Tatmadaw	Literally means 'the Burma Army', founded by Gen. Aungsan in 1945, with the purpose to dismantle the British rule.
Hma	It is a preposition that indicates "a relationship in between", e.g. "to or from".
Kala	Can refer to a 'darker person, different facial appearance other than ethnic tribes, black Indian and Banglashi's immigrants'.
Ma Ba Tha	Literally mean "tribe, religion, mission" which is the ideology on the Buddhist monks. Ma Ba Tha can be related directly to "saffron movement."
Metta (Pali)	Loving-kindness, fondness and pure love. Thus, Barack Obama coined it as "tolerance".
Min	Observe, see or like.
Nat	A spirit or spirits which the Burmese Buddhist most loved and terrified spirit. There are so many kinds of 'nats', in Theravada Buddhism's concept in Burmese society, the good and the bad.
Pali	A dead language of the old Indian continent's language used during the Buddha time. This language was used by Buddha in his preaching.
Pyitakathonepone	This is the main text that Theravada Buddhism in Myanmar use as their scriptures.
Pokko	It refers to a person or people.
Tamadaw	Myanmar armed forces.
Taya	Literally means "the truth". In other word, it can also mean justice.
Yan-nyiang-saythe	To make appease with enemies.
Zayat	A public resting place or a refuse place for safety.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Definition of key words

Salvation can be defined as deliverance from the eternal punishment which people deserve because of God's wrath against their sin. Christ's death provided atonement for sin, and through this made it possible for those who accept this gift, through faith, to be declared righteous in God's sight. God's people are able to enjoy the benefits of his grace, which include the forgiveness of sin, adoption as His children and peace with God (Berkof, 1996:418). Salvation is available through Christ alone (Jn 14:6; Ac 4:12) and is the work of God, who provides assurance and security to those who trust in Him (Chafer, 1991:13). Webster (2003:112) calls this "the great divine work of salvation." Erickson (2013:937) outlines that "we have seen that the Word of God, whether read or preached, is God's means of presenting to us salvation found in Christ; faith is our means of accepting that salvation." Paul put it clearly in Ephesians 2:8-9 when he wrote that the Word of God (the gospel) and faith are the means of salvation (Ro 2:25). Erickson (2013:827) insists that salvation is the application of the work of Christ in the lives of people. It is characterised by terms such as "conversion," "forgiveness," and "reconciliation."

Reconciliation is the work of God, for mankind, achieved in Jesus Christ through the power of the Spirit. People are transformed from being in a place of enmity against God, to a new relationship with Him (Schwobel, 2003:31-33). Jesus Christ has prepared the way for reconciliation by abolishing the dividing wall of hostility between, for example the Jews and the Gentiles, making the two one, and establishing peace (Campbell, 2003:49). Reconciliation was accomplished once and for all by Christ's sacrifice on the cross, with the result that the believing sinner, by faith in Christ, is justified, made a new creature and regenerated through the work of the Spirit. Through Christ's sacrifice the whole world has the potential to be reconciled to God (Rae, 2003:94).

Conflict resolution encompasses the methods and processes involved in facilitating the peaceful end to conflict and retribution between two parties (Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009:1-2). It often involves facilitating a dialogue between two groups in the hope to bring an end to fighting and harmful competition (Weiderud, 2012:7-8). Conflict between people can often be resolved in the same way that there was reconciliation between mankind and God, through Christ. Christians have a responsibility to engage in conflict resolution.

The ethnic groups in Myanmar include the Kachin, the Kaya, the Kayin, the Chin, the Burma the Mon, the Rakhine and the Shan. There are other groups that are not recognised by the

government such as the Naga, the Pa Oah, the Kokant and the Rohingya. People from these groups are often armed with weapons as a reaction against the political oppression and religious persecution they experience.

A theology of reconciliation is a term used by theologians such as Karl Barth, Erickson, Calvin, Zwingli, Barkrof and Emund. It is used to refer to God's work of bringing about justice and peace. It was through Christ's death on the cross (Col 1:20) that the original relationship between God and his creation (Schwobel, 2003:33) was re-established, this being rooted in fact that the Truine God is a God of love. Reconciliation is a command given to believers as they reflect the salvation that Christ brought to His elect.

1.2 Background and problem statement

1.2.1 Background

Erickson (2013:827) points out that the meaning of salvation may seem somewhat obvious to people who are familiar with the concept. Yet, even within Christian circles there are widely differing views concerning what this means. Soteriology is accepted as the major doctrine of Christian systematic theology. It has traditionally been accepted by the West and includes concepts such as conversion, regeneration, forgiveness of sins, justification, sanctification and the perseverance of the saints (Berkhof, 1996:416). In addition, Soteriology also encompasses aspects such as union with Christ and the unity of the redeemed.

"It was Ritschl (1900:57-78), a German theologian, who restored the theme of reconciliation as a major Soteriological issue in his magnum opus *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation* in the late 19th century. Although Barth (1945:102) attempted to distance himself from the presuppositions and sensibilities of German theologians such as Ritschl, he entitled the second major theme of his *Church Dogmatics* as "reconciliation," not "redemption." He used the word "redemption" for the title of the third main theme of the *Church Dogmatics*. Consequently, for him and Calvin (1960:195), reconciliation was the notion equivalent to salvation, whereas redemption was equivalent to the consummation work of salvation" (Cung, 2017:139).

This research is an attempt to present the idea of reconciliation as a key component of the Christian doctrine of salvation. It will demonstrate how salvation has not only to do with the vertical reconciliation between people and God, but also the horizontal reconciliation between people. Finally, the concept of "dialogical theology" will be presented and the insights from this discussion used to outline possible strategies for promoting reconciliation in Myanmar.

1.2.2 Problem statement

Any conflict situation brings about the need for reconciliation. Myanmar people are influenced by the teaching of Theravada Buddhism. Attempts made by the government to bring reconciliation between the different ethnic groups have focused on being politically correct. In many instances the government has failed to involve religious groups in the peacebuilding process. This has led to an increase in religious conflict and, in some cases, religious extremism.

What then are the roles and responsibilities of the church in the quest for reconciliation in Myanmar? How can conflict be dealt with in a way that promotes peace, unity and harmony, in a country which is ethnically divided? What is a reformed theological perspective on reconciliation? How can Christians learn how to deal with conflict on a day to day basis? How can Trinitarian perspectives on reconciliation be used to develop strategies designed to promote peace? How did the reformers develop a theological understanding of salvation as reconciliation? How can these theological concepts be applied to the broken relationships between different ethnic groups in the social-political context of Myanmar? What models can be used to promote peace? The models used will aim at being theologically (rather than politically) correct and take into account the various cultures and perspectives of the Myanmar people.

What is the most suitable strategy to promote reconciliation and peace in a diverse and pluralistic country such as Myanmar? Hans Kung said “there can be no peace and reconciliation in the world without peace and reconciliation among religions, among others” (cited by Susin, 2003:10). If this is true, what commitment does the church need to make to promote peace and develop social cohesion in Myanmar?

Schwobel (2003:14) questioned, whether there can be reconciliation between the perpetrators of the most serious forms of injustice and their victims. Is there a way to break up the law of mutuality that seems to govern the history of the relationship between different ethnic and social groups, so that their present relationship is not based on retribution and revenge for the sufferings of the past? Where the law of mutuality is not broken, the victims of the past will always be in danger of becoming future perpetrators. Does the rhetoric of reconciliation help overcome the reality of the conflicts? Chalk (2015:5-11) studied, at first hand, the political situation and the different responses that religious and ethnic groups had to the conflict in Myanmar. He observed how politicians and religious leaders failed to promote reconciliation, including ceasefire agreements, between different ethnic groups, and saw the impact which this had on the relationship between people in the country. There will not be peace within the country without intervention from the government.

How can politicians and religious leaders come together to promote reconciliation? How can a dialogue between inter-faith groups (who have doctrinal differences) be encouraged? How can the Church begin to be engaged in reconciliation ministry? Why should Christians promote social cohesion? When does the Church need to get involved in restoring broken relationships between different ethnic groups? How can reconciliation be promoted between people who are diverse in terms of their beliefs, world views and culture? Why have attempts to reconcile the different ethnic groups in Myanmar, over the past six decades, failed?

1.2.3 Central research question

This proposed study will seek to answer these central research questions:

- How should salvation as reconciliation be defined from a doctrinal and theological point of view as a theology of reconciliation in the context of conflict between Myanmar ethnic groups?

In addition, the following guiding questions have been formulated:

- What is the meaning of reconciliation from various perspectives in Myanmar?
- What is the meaning of salvation as reconciliation from a Biblical perspective?
- What are the hindrances for the reconciliation process in Myanmar?
- How can salvation as reconciliation be applicable in the context of Myanmar ethnic groups and the responsibilities as Christian for peace-making process in the country?

1.3 Preliminary literature study

1.3.1 Salvation as reconciliation from Trinitarian theological perspective

This topic specifically discusses the work of the triune God and how salvation, which is for people who don't deserve God's grace, is interpreted in reconciliation theology. Trinitarian theological views on salvation will be presented to bring clarity where there are areas of dispute. From this perspective, salvation means that people are rescued from sin and from an ongoing life of sin. People respond to Christ's gift of salvation by making him Lord over every aspect of their lives. They are renewed as they live in a covenant relationship with Christ. God wants people to have a spiritual likeness to himself, to have the same spiritual attributes as himself, like love and peace (Martin, 1974:115). Human love is conditional, whereas Christ's love is unconditional. As people abide in His love, the Holy Spirit transforms them so that they begin to love God with their heart, soul, mind and strength (Dt 6:4, Mt 22:37). Through the power of the Holy Spirit people are empowered to fulfil the second commandment to "love your neighbour as

yourself" (Mt 22:39). The doctrine of the Trinity is of great relevance in discussions concerning human life and society (Deetlefs, 2019:8). Moltmann (1981:192-200) also highlights that the way that people perceive God impacts the way they organise themselves politically. Trinitarian perspectives are therefore crucial when considering salvation as reconciliation. The research will explicate the role of the father, the role of the Son, and the role of the Holy Spirit to assist with this discussion.

1.3.1.1 The role of the Father

Reconciliation with God is the essence of salvation (Bevans & Schroeder, 2004:324). God is the sole author of reconciliation (Schwobel, 2003:13). God, the Father, is Holy and therefore cannot simply ignore people's sin. He directs his wrath against humans because they have broken his law. God, however, was compassionate and poured out his wrath on his own Son through his death on the cross. He paid the penalty for people's sin and, as a result, those who believe in Christ are made clean and seen as innocent in God's sight. The Holy Spirit enables people to repent of their rebellion against God and put their trust in Him for salvation. Salvation is by grace, through faith. It is a gift from God which is made possible by Christ's incarnation (Milbank, 2003:46). Trinitarian theology emphasises that Jesus was both fully human and yet fully divine (this known as the hypostatic union). Jesus made it clear during his ministry that he did not do anything unless he was directed by the Father (Jn 5:19) and that he came to do the will of the Father (Jn 6:38). God wants everyone to be saved (Jn 3:16, Ro 5:8.) and planned the reconciliation work between himself and sinners through the Incarnation.

1.3.1.2 The role of the Son

People often forget that God the Father initiated the plan of salvation for His people because Jesus' act of taking the punishment for sin through his death was more visible. People often emphasize Jesus' death on the cross, however, the first step in human salvation was the Incarnation (Calvin, 1960:87; Zizioulas, 1997:46). Jesus took on human nature as his own. He became the second Adam, the new leader of all humanity. Jesus came to give all of humanity the opportunity to have a new beginning. Jesus' death brought people not only the opportunity to have their sins forgiven, but the potential end to enmity with God. God instigated and provided the way for people to have a new and enduring relationship with Himself (Schwobel, 2003:23). Salvation can, therefore, be defined as reconciliation between a person and God. "This is not a matter of genetics - it is a spiritual reality that the Incarnation includes all of us in the salvation that Jesus brings" (Thompson, 2013:154). Jesus reconciled people to God. He willed them to follow in His footsteps, reconcile person with person and to teach people to obey everything he had commanded (Mt 28:19-20).

1.3.1.3 The role of the Holy Spirit

Trinitarian theology emphasises that the role of the Holy Spirit is key in human salvation. Jesus talked with his disciples about the Holy Spirit shortly before he died. Then, after Jesus had accomplished His earthly mandate and had transcended into heaven, the Holy Spirit came. The Holy Spirit (the Advocate and Comforter) was sent by Jesus to help believers (Jn 3, 16:7, 13 - 14, 1Co 2:1, 2Th 2:13, Ro 8:13.).

People cannot be saved without the guidance and work of the Spirit in their lives. He convicts people of sin and brings them to the point where they recognise their need for forgiveness through Christ. Salvation is the triune God's work, involving the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, who all work in harmony (Bavinck, 1956:46). The Holy Spirit continues to work in power to produce love, joy, peace and other good attributes in the lives of believers. People's attitudes and actions are transformed by the Spirit, making them more like Christ. This transformation, from the inside out, also enables them to fulfil the Great Commission (Mt. 28:16-20). The Spirit is also a seal that provides a guarantee that a person is a child of God (Eph 1:13).

1.3.2 Salvation as vertical and horizontal reconciliation

1.3.2.1 Vertical reconciliation

There are two main components to Christ's work of reconciliation. "Salvation involves not only vertical reconciliation between God and humanity but also horizontal reconciliation between human beings" (Cung, 2017:140). First and foremost, Jesus became a human being whilst being fully divine, incarnated in a form of a person, in order to restore the broken relationship between God and sinners. He poured out His precious blood on the cross and took on himself the penalty for mankind's sin. Calvin (1960:87) stated that the second person of the Trinity voluntarily emptied himself to reconcile sin-cursed human beings to Himself. Berkhof (1996:384) articulated that this is based on the singular notion that the death of Christ constituted a ransom paid to Satan, in order to cancel the just claims which the latter had on man. Therefore, it is appropriate to observe that Christ's incarnation was geared toward reconciliation (Lacugna, 1991:74). Barth (1945:102) and Calvin (1960:195) discussed the same motive in terms of church dogma when it came to vertical and horizontal reconciliation theory.

1.3.2.2 Horizontal reconciliation

The second dimension to Christ's holistic mission of reconciliation, to a world in need, was to restore broken relationships between people. As people are reconciled, whole communities can be changed for the better. "Horizontal reconciliation urges people to minimize egotism and the

extreme nationalism that can cause problems” (Schwobel, 2003:13-14). It changes the way that people think, their attitudes and worldviews.

In Myanmar some religious leaders get involved in various forms of political conflict, instead of embracing each other. People who belong to extremist religious groups can have biased ideas, which cause them to promote their own interests. This can lead to a “dividing wall of hostility” (Susin, 2003:10) and a “wall between colours, nations, clans and tribes.” Reconciliation involves forgiving and living together in peace with others because “to love God involves loving one’s neighbour” (Tutu, 1983:110).

1.3.2.3 Reconciliation: Reformed theological mandates

Salvation as reconciliation, in reformed theology, is concerned about the redeeming work of God that was accomplished through Christ’s death, as an atonement for sin, through which sinners are reconciled to God. Reformed theology on reconciliation promotes the end of estrangement from God, which was caused by original sin. Calvin (1960:162) describes reconciliation as the peace between humanity and God that results from the expiration of religious sin and the propitiation of God’s wrath. Schwobel (2003:15-17) describes reconciliation in this way: “it is part of the message of Salvation that brings us back together with God. God is the author, Christ is the agent and we are the ambassadors of reconciliation (2Co 5:20).” Reconciliation is not just necessary between God and people, but also between people. Our relationship with God was restored through Christ, similarly relationships between people can be restored. Hate can be changed to love, and discord transformed into peace.

Martin (1993:92-95) suggests that reconciliation is at the centre of Pauline theology. Rae (2003:93-108) suggests that there is a conceptual link between reconciliation, the Greek word *katallage* (or *katallasso*) and the Hebrew word *shalom* (which is generally translated as “peace”). Furthermore, Martin (1974:104-105) highlights that when people become believers they are grateful that their sin is forgiven through Christ, however, they often forget to deal with the hurt which their sin has caused to others. Berkhof (1949:324) outlines that God is the person who is chiefly offended by all offenses and conflict. In conflict situations people often dwell so much on their own hurt and anger that they do not remember that the sin causing them so much suffering is ultimately against their heavenly Father. God does, however, continue to work in and through sinful people, and their emotions, to bring them to the point where they see the need for reconciliation when relationships have broken down (Bavinck, 2006:372). Grudem (1994:538-539) believes that there would not be a need for reconciliation in the world if there was not conflict. Restoring relationships can be a painful process. God empathizes with how difficult this can be. His own son was killed to reconcile sinful people to Himself. He has called

believers to sacrifice their own pride so that they can reach out to others when needed. God has called believers to live peaceably with others.

Although there are only a few remarks in the Pauline letters on reconciliation, such as in Ro 5:10-11; 11:15; 2Co 5:18-20, Eph 2:14-17 and Col 1:19-22, it is an essential term, describing the “material” of the gospel and salvation as reconciliation. Reformed theologians (Barth, 1945:102; Calvin, 1960:195) has explained and applied an important part of church dogma in such ways that it finds applications in Myanmar’s context and situation today. As God has called believers to remember that they are new creations, the old has gone, and that they were first loved when they were enemies. He has reconciled believers with God and asked them to reconciled men.

1.4 Aim and objectives

1.4.1 Aim

The main aim of this study is to define salvation as reconciliation, evaluate it from both a political and theological perspective and apply strategies to promote peace between the different ethnic groups in Myanmar. The research will aim to be theologically, rather politically correct. It will also aim to show how Trinitarian theology plays an important role when defining salvation as reconciliation. The research avoids political arguments and religious bigotry, rather, it intends to highlight the biblical mandate for Christians to promote and be involved in reconciliation work.

1.4.2 Objectives

The specific objectives of the study are:

- To study reconciliation from various perspectives of politics, religions, and history in Myanmar.
- To present the meaning of salvation as reconciliation from a Biblical perspective through biblical persons.
- To study the causes of conflicts and hindrances of the reconciliation process in Myanmar.
- For the church and Christian individuals, how to respond to such issues in order to achieve salvation as reconciliation under the theological foundation that can be applied in the context of Myanmar’s ethnic groups and responsibilities.

1.5 Central theoretical argument

The central theoretical argument of this study is that salvation has not only to do with the vertical reconciliation between a person and God but also with the horizontal reconciliation between human beings. The study of salvation as reconciliation can provide a Biblical application of reformed theology to transform conflict and suggest missional strategies and commitment in order to create sustainable peace through reconciliation in Myanmar.

1.6 Research methodology

This study will be conducted from the perspective of Reformed theology. The following methods are used to answer the various research questions:

- In order to study and evaluate the meaning of reconciliation, a literature analysis is to be conducted to determine the meaning of reconciliation from the various perspectives in Myanmar.
- In order to study and evaluate the causes of reconciliation and the results of reconciliation, an exegetical study is to be conducted to determine how salvation as a mean to reconciliation should be seen from the Biblical perspective.
- In order to explicate and make clear the hindrances of the reconciliation process in Myanmar, a literature study on the history of political leaders, religious leaders and individuals would be done to determine the hindrances of the reconciliation process in Myanmar.
- In order to evaluate who is responsible for reconciliation and which methods are to be used for reconciliation, a literature analysis and exegetical study of Biblical foundations will be applied to the context of Myanmar's ethnic divisions in order to help end conflicts.

1.7 Concept clarification

In this research, reconciliation theology is discussed and identified as a prerequisite for ensuring that there is unwavering peace between communities. This is seen as an indispensable part of a unity building process. Hermann (2004:42) argues that reconciliation is concerned about personal relations between people. Strategies aimed at promoting peace should focus on bringing small groups of people together, whether this may be representatives from organisations or religious leaders, so that they can meet "face to face." According to this approach, social reconciliation is the only process that assists people to firstly find peace within themselves following a period of conflict so that they can then promote peace within their community, religious group or organisation.

1.8 Ethical consideration

Due to ethical considerations, this research will not use primary research to gather information about the given topic. A literature survey will be used to accomplish the aims and objectives of the research.

1.9 Provisional classification of chapters

Chapter 1. Introduction

Firstly, chapter 1 will introduce the background of the study, problem statement, objectives, and research methodology.

Chapter 2. Reconciliation from various perspectives

Chapter 2 will highlight the political and religious context of the conflict between the different ethnic groups in Myanmar and the methods that different groups have used to promote peace will be discussed. Many of these attempts have failed, and in this chapter some of the reasons for this are outlined. New ideas and techniques for conflict resolution will then be discussed.

Chapter 3. Salvation as Reconciliation from the Biblical perspectives

In chapter 3 a Biblical interpretation of salvation as reconciliation will be outlined. It will highlight the need for Christians to develop and implement strategies for promoting social cohesion. Bible stories and passages will be used to demonstrate the biblical foundation of salvation as reconciliation and how this is embedded in Christian theology.

Chapter 4. The hindrances of reconciliation process in Myanmar

Chapter 4 draws out some factors that often hinder the reconciliation progress, including poor leadership, cultures and religious issues. These will be analysed from a classic reformed theological perspective, rather than a political position. Attempts to bring social cohesion and reconciliation between the different ethnic groups in Myanmar have been made for more than 60 years, however, these have largely been unsuccessful. Conflict and tension between the different groups continue and, in some instances, have worsened. The stumbling blocks to effective peace building strategies will be presented in this chapter.

Chapter 5. Applications of salvation as reconciliation in the context of conflicts between Myanmar ethnic groups

In chapter 5, strategies for achieving reconciliation and the responsibilities of the government, churches, Christian individuals, and foreign missionaries are proposed, based on today's situation in the context of ethnic groups in accordance with theoretical points of views.

Chapter 6. Conclusions

CHAPTER 2 RECONCILIATION FROM VARIOUS PERSPECTIVES

In contrast to the West, in Myanmar there is not a division between religion and politics. Political leaders are often also religious leaders. This chapter aims to explore historical facts, from various political and religious perspectives, to excavate the reasons why the reconciliation process in Myanmar has failed. Theological interpretation will also be used as a framework for discussing how the church might respond to the conflict between the ethnic groups in Myanmar to develop strategies to promote peace within the country. Durand (2017:4) mentions that, “to date, neither the international community made up of actors such as states, international organisations, NGOs nor internal actors have been able to provide a suitable way towards long-term and sustainable peace.” In the same way, Hessing (2017:6) rightly points out that religious leaders need to make it clear that they do not support violence. Violence will not pave the way towards peace. Bik (2005:216) highlights that the work of reconciliation between God and people was carried out by the Father, continued by Christ the Son, and is empowered through the Holy Spirit. Religious leaders and politicians have equally important roles in the pursuit of social cohesion. Reconciliation is not only the work of the gods and politicians, but religious groups and their members too.

2.1 Reconciliation from a political perspective

Maung (2015:63-67) showed how, between 1947-1948, General Aung San initiated the Panglong Conference, which was held for representatives from the government, military, ethnic armed organisations, and religious groups to promote peace in the country. His proposal, and the subsequent policy for nation-wide reconciliation, was accepted and the agreement on the unification articles signed on 12 February 1947. However, after a very short period of peace General Aung San was assassinated by Galon U Saw and his armed group. Within an hour of his assassination the union of Myanmar was covered by “political darkness.” The hope for peace that the establishment of the Constitution of the Union of Burma (September 1947) had brought suddenly faded and one of the biggest fears of the ethnic and religious groups had become a reality.

On 4 January 1948 Myanmar (or Burma) gained independence from Britain and U Nu became the leader of the country. He proposed that Buddhism be the State religion. On 28 October 1958 Ne Win became the Prime Minister and ruled the country with an “iron fist.” In 1962 there was a military coup and this led to an increase in military control within Myanmar. Buddhism became the state religion of the Union of Myanmar in August 1961 (Ling, 2018:7). From this time onwards, until Thein Sein came into power in 2011 (six decades in total), Buddhism was

promoted and those who were not Buddhist were persecuted. He laid the foundation for the opening of the “Burma Centre for Ethnic Studies: Peace and Reconciliation,” a vital component in the country’s peace building process.

When looking back at the history of Christianity in Myanmar, Maw (2014: 33) recalled how Portuguese merchant soldiers arrived in Rangoon to exercise power and exchange techniques with the military in Myanmar. During their stay they started doing bible studies with people and spread the gospel of salvation among the Burmese. They were both military trainers and spiritual guides. They left their mark on the people’s lives because they had showed them how to build peaceable relationships with their neighbours. The good news of the gospel also changed the lives of many of the Burmese people. Many of the Burmese kings were not very conservative in terms of their religious beliefs; therefore, they allowed the Westerners to preach the gospel to the local people (Nyunt, 2014:276). However, some of the Burmese kings and their successive rulers asserted that Buddhism was the greatest religion in the world (Ling, 2014:48). Catholic missionaries came to Rangoon after the Portuguese merchant soldiers had left.

In 1813 the first American Baptist missionaries, Adoniram Judson and his wife Ann Hasseltine Judson, arrived in Myanmar. Felix Carey and his fellows, who were Baptist missionaries from England, were in Myanmar prior to this. Adoniram and Ann started home churches, free schools, free holistic mission and medical centres, and language training. Since the centres and schools belonged to the missionaries, the education that the people received was influenced by Christianity. All of the students, including Buddhists and Muslims, had to study Christian theology as a minor subject (Ling, 2014:38-39). In this way, Christianity was introduced to the people in Myanmar by soldiers and missionaries. Hluan (2016:32) praised the British colonial rule and outlined the positive influence which it had for Burmese women because formal education for girls, which had previously only been available to the mostly male elite, was introduced to them through monastery education. However, under Japanese colonial rule Buddhist teaching spread widely in Myanmar.

Maung (2015:119) highlights that when Ne Win rose to power in 1962, Christian centres, schools, hospitals and churches were closed down by the armed forces under the authority of the government. Ne Win claimed that Christianity was the religion of Western countries, and that it did not fit into the culture and belief system of the people of Myanmar. Many of the buildings that were built by missionaries are still standing today and are used as government offices or public buildings. Religious groups, particularly Christians in Kachin, Kayin and Chin states, started to be persecuted. Conflict between different groups arose, riots broke out and

various ethnic armed groups were formed. A military defensive started between ethnic groups and the government. According to Myint (2010:34), it was a religious war imposed by religious politicians.

Since 2011 Myanmar has been advancing in terms of democratic change and freedom of worship has been promoted once again. There have been many stumbling blocks to the peacebuilding process since the beginning of the ceasefire negotiations. The issue of the right of secession from the union has been an issue of contention and, at times, has led to the near collapse of some peacebuilding negotiations. In March 2015 members of the Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAO's) and the government came together and agreed on a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. This was signed by President Thein Sein on 31 March 2015. The three national causes that were agreed upon were; non-disintegration of the union, non-disintegration of national solidarity and the perpetuation of sovereignty. "A direct interpretation of the non-disintegration of the union is the pledge to non-secession from the union (Bullet, 2017:15)."¹ "Without this promise to the non-secession commitment the government of Myanmar would never have negotiated with the ethnic armed groups, and there would not have been a peace process such as political dialogue, security reform, natural resource-sharing and the ethnic right to self-determination" (Wansai, 2018). According to Durand (2017:7), "strictly speaking, Myanmar does have an ongoing peace process because all of the ethnic armed groups have agreed to consolidate the territorial integration of the Union of Myanmar."

At the 21st Century Panglong Peace Conference held in May 2017, 37 points were discussed and agreed on by representatives from the government, military and ethnic armed organisations, and included a commitment to restructuring the state as a "Union based on democracy and federalism" (Kipgen, 2019). The subsequent Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, which was signed following the conference, can be considered as a significant step towards building a democratic federal union and durable peace in Myanmar. Kap² (2017:43-45, 75) points out that at the conference agreements about national security issues were not made because it was too difficult to reach a consensus between the representatives who were present. Despite this, a meaningful exchange of perspectives over national security and defense took place. Politicians and religious leaders should come together to discuss the

¹ PM Bullet is a religious and political activist in Myanmar. People from Myanmar are different from people from other Asian countries. In Myanmar, politics and religion come together, although some people may not understand this or believe that this is beneficial for the country. The politicians in Myanmar are also religious leaders, their political views are influenced by their religious faith.

² Pu No Than Kap accepts the nature and structure of politics and religion in Myanmar, namely the division of the state and religion. He insists that politicians and religious leaders serve the country by working together in the reconciliation process. He argues that the people of Myanmar should not adopt western approaches to reconciliation and therefore urges them to adopt contextualised methods for promoting sustainable peace.

unrest in the country and the need for harmony and unity between people from all ethnicities, religious groups and political parties.

According to Thawng (2017:75-81), at four of the six political conferences set up to facilitate national dialogues to promote peace, proposals were made that the non-secession clause be included as one of the basic federal principles of the country. The talks that took place included the Pa-O national level dialogue and the Shan, Pegu and Tenasserim state dialogues. The fact that four out of the six national level dialogues included the non-session clause in their federalist proposals meant that members of the working group for politics could not ignore it. Therefore, it was included in the principles of the Myanmar federation, which was then submitted to the Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC). Exercising its decision-making power, legitimate representatives from the government, ethnic armed groups and political parties, who attended the 2nd Union Peace Conference on 12 May 2017, adopted a non-secession clause as one of the basic principles for the Myanmar federal system.

In saying this, the “non-secession from the union” clause could not be ratified at the 21st Century Panglong Conference in July 2018, as proposed by the UPDJC, because concerns were raised by the ethnic armed groups over the explicit stipulation of the clause as one of the basic principles for a federalist state and the fact that there had not been a national level dialogue held for the Shan people. In May 2017 the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS) (2017:41-43) had issued a statement stating that they would not sign any agreement at the UPDJC. Therefore, they were unwilling to sign the agreements that were made at the Panglong Conference. Opposition to the move to include the non-secession clause was advocated by various ethnic political parties and groups. Hessing (2017:72) writes that the government of Myanmar, especially the Tatmadaw, insisted that the non-secession clause be included, despite the 2008 constitution strongly affirming that no part of the country can secede. The majority of the representatives of the ethnic armed organisations objected to its inclusion. They debated back and forth, trying to find a way forward, but they could not reach a middle ground.

During the 3rd Union Peace Dialogue, as a reaction against the ethnic armed organisations objections to including the non-secession clause, the Tatmadaw turned down some of the most important and basic principles of federalism, which ethnic national minorities had long demanded (Thawng, 2017:81-83). The most obvious one included the right to self-determination and its five sub-clauses, and the right for member states (federal units) to draw up their respective state constitutions (without contradicting the national constitution). Cung (2016:59) writes that “as the Tatmadaw negotiated with the EAOs in a package deal for their federal demands, the EAOs were not able to obtain any of those important federal principles during the

3rd Union Peace Dialogue, as they were not able to agree to the explicit writing of the non-secession clause. This means that the ongoing negotiation of the peace process for more than 60 years is now a “failed-try-again.”³

Wansai (2018) wrote concerning the 2nd Union Peace Conference (21st Century Panglong UPCCP), that “the most salient political issue facing the formal peace process is the non-secession question, which can no longer be ignored, no matter how sensitive or difficult it becomes.” As much as it is very difficult for some of the ethnic nationalities to accept the non-secession clause, it is equally difficult for the Tatmadaw to function without it, especially considering the tension and passion around this issue. As it stands, “not including the non-secession clause could lead to a collapse of the entire peace and reconciliation process”. The stakes too are too high with inaction. The question is, “can all stakeholders of the peace process find a negotiated settlement to this non-session debate?” May (2016:83) goes on to suggest that “before the next round of the actual negotiations over this non-secession clause there needs to be a free, frank and real debate with each stakeholder: ethnic armed organisations, political parties, the government, the Pyithu Hluttaw⁴ and the Tatmadaw.” She writes that “the key factor of reconciliation is solidarity.” She also pointed out that “the time and circumstances surrounding the peace process require key people to provide decisive leadership for the entire nation, and that no action is not an option anymore.”

2.2 Reconciliation from Theravada perspective

Theravada is a conservative form of Buddhism, which is widely practised in Myanmar.⁵ Panwamady (2015:96), a Buddhist monk and influential scholar, asserts that the Buddha created incentives so that people admit to poor behaviour. Modern day sociologists have identified five basic strategies that people use to avoid accepting blame when they have caused harm. The strategies include: 1) to deny responsibility, 2) to deny that harm was actually caused, 3) to deny the worth of the victim, 4) to attack the accuser and 5) to claim that they were acting in service of a higher cause. Pali⁶ teaching on people’s moral responsibility

³ The phrase “fail-try-again” was first used by a Japanese politician called Simahun. It is a comment on the “Burmese Way to Socialism” proposed by Saw Maung, this challenging the ideas of the previous “invaders” (the British) who had sought to change the lifestyle, culture and beliefs of the Burmese people. Simahun referred to the Myanmar socialist system as “public loneliness”.

⁴ “Pyithu Hluttaw” is a national level bicameral legislature in Myanmar. In 2016 it was composed of 390 members, 135 from the House of Nationalities and 255 from the House of Representatives. From representatives of the winning party (NLD) in the election, 25% were military officials. Of the 390 members, 25% seats were taken by the military and 75% were from Parliament (this being approved by President Htin Kyaw and his governing body). Technically speaking, Hluttaw is the most important body in the country in every way.

⁵ There are 2 main forms of Buddhism which are practised today. Theravada is practised by Buddhists in Myanmar and Mahayana is practised by South Korean and Japanese Buddhists. The teachings are similar, but their interpretation of the Pali and Sutra is different.

⁶ Pali is the language which was used by Gautama. It is an ancient language from India and it is still in use in Buddhist teaching in Myanmar.

challenge these. According to Panwamady (2015:99), the Pali principles for accepting blame when people have caused harm to others are as follows:

- (1) People are always responsible for their conscious choices.
- (2) People should always put themselves in the other people's shoes.
- (3) All things/people are worthy of respect.
- (4) People should be grateful to those who point out their faults because this provides an opportunity for personal growth. (Monks are required to show respect to those who criticise them, even if they do not plan to change their behaviour following the criticism).
- (5) People should be humble and not repeat behaviour that has offended others.

He points out that, in setting out these standards, the Buddha established core values that encourage parties, who want to be reconciled, to use "right speech"⁷ and engage in honest self-reflection (Panwamady, 2015:101). These are basic principles in Dhamma⁸ teaching. In this way, he set the standards for good behaviour, in the hope that people can build deep and long-lasting relationships based on trust. In addition to creating external harmony, which is in line with Dhamma teaching, the process of reconciliation also becomes an opportunity for inner growth.

Brouneus (2007:6) emphasises that reconciliation is a social process that involves the mutual acknowledgment of past suffering. Destructive attitudes and behaviours need to be modified so that relationships can become constructive, this paving the way towards sustainable peace. In the same vein, Galtung (1985:5) suggests that there are twenty points where Buddhism is strong in terms of its peacebuilding philosophy in relation to reconciliation. It reflects the *ahimsa* doctrine, which encompasses the principle of non-violence towards all forms of life, including animals. "*Ahimsa* should not be seen in terms of egoism or altruism, rather a simple norm not to hurt others because hurting others is the same as hurting oneself."

Panwanmady (2015:101) points out that the Buddha admitted that not all disputes can be resolved. There are times when one, or both parties, are unwilling to exercise the honesty and restraint that true reconciliation requires. Even then though, forgiveness is still an option. Therefore, the distinction between reconciliation and forgiveness is important in Buddhist teaching concerning the philosophical concept of Dhamma. It encourages people not to settle for forgiving others, or being forgiven, when genuine healing through reconciliation is possible. According to Theravada's teaching, this is possible through forgiveness, love, and compassion.

⁷ "Right speech" is a term used by Buddhists. It encompasses more than just correct speech. It encompasses 4 basic requirements. 1) Abstaining from lying. 2) Abstaining from slandering others. 3) Abstaining from rude, impolite or abusive language. 4) Abstaining from idle talk or gossip.

⁸ Dhamma does not have a single definition or meaning when the word is interpreted. It is usually translated as "cosmic law or Order." It is related to truth, but is very different to the concept of "truth" from a Christian perspective.

Loving others and doing good deeds were core components of the teaching of Gautama (otherwise known as the Buddha), on whose teaching Buddhism was founded. Similarly, Dhammadasa (2017:5) stressed that “loving-kindness” means that people try to understand the feelings and needs of others. People are encouraged to take positive action when they are presented with an opportunity to help those who are in need. Human beings are interdependent and for this reason they should love each member of society.

Buddhism promotes peace. It also encourages people to be generous to others and to avoid conflict in the hope to be free from suffering in the life-cycle. If Buddhists follow in the footsteps of Buddha, then there can be reconciliation between people in Myanmar. According to Pitakathonebone, Buddha preached that “hurting others is hurting oneself.” “Love unconditionally, share the love with gratefulness, help others with what they need and live a peaceful life under Dhamma - which is the focal point of life and the outcome of good deeds for the next life (Panwamady, 2015:68).”

A far-right wing religious political organisation, called the Ma Ba Tha, led by U Wirathu, posted a message on social media (Facebook) in 2017 insisting that Myanmar becomes a Buddhist country and that its citizens value Myanmar culture. Buddhists were urged to protect Buddhism and all Myanmar traditions. They also asserted that everyone should respect Buddhism and its beliefs should influence the whole country. Subsequently, the Ma Ha Na refused to join the Ma Ba Tha and opposed their intolerant policies and political ideology. Statistics, given by U Wirathu, show that in 2012 the number of members of the Ma Ba Tha increased to more than 21% of the Buddhist population in Myanmar. Disputes among different Buddhist groups, and intolerance towards others religious groups, have been two of the problems effecting the people of Myanmar. Therefore, the first and most important issue to solve is religious intolerance. Political propoganda is second. The political ideology, policies and statistics from the Ma Ba Tha are shown in the following table.

Table 0-1: Ma Ba Tha – Myanmar Buddhist Political Organizations

FormalName	Ma BaTha ⁹
Central Office	Insein, Yangon

⁹ The Ma Ba Tha. The *Ma* refers to “a Burmese Tribe”, *Ba* refers to “Buddhism” in Myanmar and *Tha* refers to “the mission of Buddhism or Buddhists.” The organisation calls itself the ‘969 nationalist movement. “969 is a symbol for the Buddha, the Philosophy of Buddhist practice and the Buddhist community.” Similarly, a Muslim organisation in Myanmar is known as ‘786’. See the following website for further details.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patriotic_Association_of_Myanmar

<p>The Relationship between States And Religion in the Constitutional or Foundational Documents</p>	<p>On 26 August 1961, when the U Nu government came into power, a third amendment was made to the 1947 Constitution of the Union of Burma that declared Buddhism as the State Religion of Burma. The fourth amendment was made on 28 September 1961, guaranteeing the religious freedom of minority religions. However, both of these became ineffective when General Ne Win came into power on 2 March 1962 following a coup. He ruled the country by decree until 1974 and then another constitution (the Constitution of the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma) was adopted. Due to their different political ideologies concerning the Constitution, the 1974 Constitution did not give Buddhism a special position as the majority religion. Buddhism in Myanmar became divided into two groups (the Ma Ha Na and the Ma Ba Tha) Section 361 of the 2008 Constitution states that “the Union recognises the special position of Buddhism as the faith professed by the great majority of the citizens of the Union.”</p>
<p>Form of organisation</p>	<p>Ma Ba Tha - Far right-wing nationalist political organisation.</p>
<p>Is the regulation of religion one of the functions of the State? If so, which government body or institution should oversee this?</p>	<p>The Buddhist Sangha is, in theory, under the direct supervision of the State Sangha Mahanayaka Committee (<i>Ma-Ha-Na</i>); however, the Department of Religious Affairs (under the Ministry of Religious Affairs) regulates ordinary Buddhist affairs. To some extent, the Department of Religious Affairs also regulates the activities of minority religions. The Department for the Promotion and Propagation of Sāsana is solely responsible for Buddhist mission at home and abroad. It is questionable whether the State Sangha Mahanayaka Committee is independent and no longer under the influence of the government.</p>
<p>Total Population</p>	<p>51,419,420 (2016 Census)</p>

<p>Religious Demography in 2014</p>	<p>Buddhist, 87%; Ma BaTha 21% and Ma Ha Na 66% Christian, 6% (Baptist, 3% and Roman Catholic 1%); Muslim,3%; Animist,1%; <i>Nat</i>¹⁰ worshippers 3% Other,3%.</p>
<p>Changing Religious Demography (in ten-year intervals)</p>	<p>Detailed data is not available. The second to last census was completed in 1983. The most recent census was conducted between March-April 2014, but detailed religious demographic data is not available. Since then, the Christian and Muslim population have each been estimated at between 3 - 5%. Buddhists have been estimated at around 88% - 89%. The demography of animists has not been documented, but they are estimated to comprise of around 1% of the total population. An overlap between animism and Buddhism exists since many people observe a mixture of Buddhist and animist practices (their exact numbers are not known). These figures have important implications for the drafting of a new constitution which will promote religious freedom (<i>amyo, bather</i> and <i>sagar</i>) and reconciliation in the 21st century.</p>

Sixty-six per cent of the Ma Ha Na¹¹ Buddhists disagree with the Ma Ba Tha’s ultra-nationalistic views and policies which are intolerant of other faith groups. Half of the leaders of the Ma Ha Na accept and support the Ma Ba Tha’s religious and philosophical doctrine, which supports Buddhism’s cultural heritage and maintains that “religious involvement in politics is a necessity for the country.” However, they strongly oppose the Ma Ba Tha’s stance that every citizen must be a Buddhist and speak the Burmese language (*Amyo, Bathar* and *Sagar*).

From a traditional Buddhist perspective, it is important to be tolerant of people who have different opinions from oneself. Tin (1920:55) highlights that non-violence and peace are at the heart of Buddhist thinking and behaviour. The Burmese Pali translation of the word “violence” is

¹⁰ *Nat* means “soul,” “spirit,” “devil,” or “ghost.” There are two kinds of Nats in Buddhist philosophy. The bad Nat and the good Nat. People worship the good Nat to have good fortune and avoid the inflictions of the bad Nat.

¹¹ The Ma Ha Na, and the Ma Ba Tha are two Buddhist groups which have opposing political views. They have both participated in the peace and reconciliation dialogues held in Myanmar and both continue to be involved in discussions with politicians and other religious leaders. See detail <https://www.mmtimes.com/national-news/yangon/26710-new-name-of-ma-ba-tha-is-bid-to-deceive-ma-ha-na-minister.html>

a-dhamma, which literally means “violation of the law” or to “distort the truth.” Despite the Buddhist teachings against violence, there were some instances of dispute, quarrels, divisions and violence between Gautama’s (the Buddha’s) followers. “O Dirghayu, my sons! Do not look long, do not look short, for not by hatred is hatred appeased: hatred is appeased by not hatred’, said Gautama to one of his disciples” (Ling, 2005:46). Tin (1920:59) showed how violence was not part of the Buddha’s teaching, the principle of non-violence being central to Buddhist beliefs. He goes on to suggest that violence is not only an evil phenomenon that occurs, but that it starts at an individual level by affecting people’s moral values. It then escalates, until people’s values are changed at a national level, this occurring in different political, cultural and religious contexts.

2.3 Reconciliation from UN and world leaders’ views on Myanmar

In 2012 Barak Obama delivered a speech at the University of Yangon calling on the Myanmar government to promote peace based on *metta* (tolerance towards others).¹² He outlined that if it wants people to enjoy prosperity, freedom and unity, then it should commit to promoting reconciliation between all the ethnic groups. He also commented that in the countries where freedom is celebrated there is unity in diversity, and the people are those who have power. There is no excuse for persecuting ethnic minorities. Reconciliation takes time, but it is worth pursuing peace for the sake of the dignity of the country and the future generation. If leaders, from both religious organisations and political parties, want the people to live in peace, unity and harmony, then they need to stop showing favouritism towards one specific religion. He also emphasised that hate and incitement to violence need to stop, and that reconciliation can only be achieved through mutual respect and understanding. He ended the speech by stating “if you unclench your fists the United States is welcome to work with you.” Similarly, Hilary Clinton (2011) had intensive discussions with the government (USDP)¹³ when she visited the secretary of State at Aung San Su Kyi’s house in 2011. At the time the US had been imposing sanctions against Myanmar due to human rights violations. During the talks she made it clear that the government’s actions needed to match their words. If they wanted to partner with the US, then they should not persecute the country’s minority groups. Yanghee Lee (UN Special Rapporteur on the situation on human rights in Myanmar, 14 June 2017) criticised the government in

¹² The word *metta* comes from the philosophical teaching of Buddha and it can be translated in various forms to “love,” “harmony,” “peace,” “reconciliation” and “unity.” Barack Obama coined the word as “tolerance.”

See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JD3dlzaM0M>

¹³ USDP: The (Union Solidarity and Development Party) was registered on 2 June 2010 by the Union Election Commission. Most of its members are from the military, or work for the government, and are far right wing nationalists. The USDP currently stands as an opposition party and is the successor to the Burmese government’s mass organisation. In the 2010 general election, the USDP won 883 seats out of the 1154 available, 259 seats were from PyithuHluttaw, 129 were from Hluttaw and 495 seats were from Region and State Hluttaw.

Myanmar for treating religions unequally and accused the military of “genocide,” when referring to crimes against people from specific ethnic groups. She proposed that the UN introduce tougher sanctions on military leaders for human rights violations against civilians in Myanmar. The government responded by immediately closing the UN Centre for Peace and Reconciliation and banning her from revisiting Myanmar. The following table shows the recent conflicts and subsequent proposals that have been made in the pursuit of peace in Myanmar.

Table 0-2: Conflicts Resolution Proposal, Articles, and Signatures

International Document	Year of Signature	Year of Ratification/	Reservations/Declarations
UN Convention on the Rights of Religions (CRR)	1991	1991	Articles 15 and 37 withdrawn on 19 October 1993.
UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Minority (CEDAM)	2006	2006	Article 29.
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	2011	2011	Articles were deactivated
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of religions, freedom of worship and the abuses of minority religious groups Acts	2012	2012	Articles proposed by secretary of the US were deactivated
A statement was made by the United States government appealing for harmony in Myanmar. Blame was attributed to the government for the persecution of Christians and Muslims.	2013	2014	
Kofi Anna and his team appointed to lead a UN Commission to investigate the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar.	2015	2015	Articles were terminated

UN representatives from Rakhine State visit Myanmar. Muslim and Buddhist reconciliation. Religious conflict.	2016	2016	
Yanghee Lee's envoy to Myanmar to investigate allegations of human right abuses against Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine state.	2017	2017	Myanmar banned Yanhee Lee from revisiting the country.

World leaders need to highlight the need for reconciliation between the different ethnic groups in Myanmar, and focus on solutions to the civil wars, instead of implementing sanctions against the government. Imposing sanctions does not help to shape the leadership of the country or solve leadership problems. In some instances it worsens conditions for innocent civilians and causes them more harm, whilst at the same time fails to impact the leaders. For example, between 2016 -2017, there was conflict between the Rakhine (one of Myanmar's ethnic groups) and the Rohingyas (Muslim immigrants from Bangladesh),¹⁴ which resulted in thousands of people losing their lives. World leaders have repeatedly imposed various sanctions on the Myanmar government. The result has been that, rather than promoting reconciliation between these two ethnic groups, the conflict has worsened.

2.4 Reconciliation from historical perspective in Myanmar

Since the Panglong Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation was overridden by the ideology and policies of the incoming government in 1948, religious conflict has continued in Myanmar. The mass murders during civil wars and disasters throughout the country highlight the need for reconciliation ministry. A brief survey of Myanmar's historical background demonstrates that this has been the longest ongoing civil war that the world has known (Rieffel, 2016). General Gun Maw (2014:35) stated that "successive central governments have fought a myriad of ethnic and political rebellions." Some of the earliest insurgencies were by Burmese-dominated "multi-coloured leftists" and the Karen National Union (KNU). After 1948 the KNU and the Karen National Army (KIA) fought to carve out an independent state out of the Southern part of

¹⁴ A recent topic of controversy has been the "Rohingyas Muslims" in Myanmar. The Rohingyas claim that they are an ethnic group of Myanmar, whilst the government considers them to be illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. It means that they do not have the opportunity to become legal citizens of the country; therefore, the only option is for them to live in Myanmar illegally. According the Myanmar Citizenship Rules of Law, the Rohingyas are not given legal status because they do not speak Burmese or any of the Myanmar dialects. Also, they worship Allah and do not share the same values or culture as the people of Myanmar.

Myanmar. Kap (2017:49) wrote that rebellions by various ethnic groups only broke out in the early 1960s following the assigination of General Aung San. The central government, led by General Ne Win, adopted a dictatorship style of leadership and supported a unitary state, rather than a federal union.

According to the Latt (2016:3), since the early 1980s, politically oriented armed insurgencies have largely withered away. But, ethnic-based insurgencies have remained alive, with the insurgence stronger and well equipped. Since the first civil war started in 1940, civil wars between ethnic groups and people from different religions have continued. These wars would not have ended through military intervention, instead what was needed was a nationwide peace keeping and ceasefire agreement. Often a dictatorship style of leadership was adopted by those in power, and this leads to an increase in the number of ethnic armed groups. Divisions between people were reinforced, this leading to tension and civil war, to the point where the country almost collapsed.

After long periods of civil war, many insurgent groups have been supported or used by foreign countries, this exacerbating the situation. Many acquire weapons and receive training in the border areas. Power and territorial disputes have got worse, and fights have broken out among ethnic armed groups due to political propaganda. Many of the foreign countries back the ethnic groups so that they can benefit from natural resources in the country (Aung 2013:70-78). Tin (2015:1-3) wrote that the British supported the Karen (KNU) throughout the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Bangladesh backed the Muslim Rohingyas on their border, the Middle East backed India who, in turn, supported to KIA. China assisted the Wa (United Wa State Army) and the Naga armed group. Meanwhile, the United States supported the Kuomintang, and a wide variety of rebel groups in Thailand, essentially creating buffer states or zones. Prior to the ceasefires, the largely Burman-dominated armed forces made annual dry season campaigns, only to see rebels return home, making their efforts futile. During an interview about wartime experiences, the veteran war historian Pu Hnok Cin (2017) said that reconciliation and ceasefires dialogues were the most important mission for all religious leaders and politicians. Peace, however, was difficult to achieve because of their political propaganda and religious jealousy.

Shortly after Thein Sein was elected in 2011 various attempts were made by the Myanmar government to negotiate peace, develop a reconciliation process and instigate a nationwide ceasefire agreement (NCF).¹⁵ Various peacebuilding organisations were founded so that

¹⁵ NCF is short for the National-wide Cease Fire reconciliation body established by Thein Sein and his government in 2011 to promote peace between the ethnic armed groups, political parties and religious organisations in Myanmar. Even though cease fire agreements were signed and unity between different political parties was achieved, they failed to bring reconciliation between the religious groups (Muslims and Buddhists, Buddhists and Christians and Christians and Muslims).

harmony could prevail again in the country. From time to time the NCF's have been ineffective because the leaders of the different groups have conflicting interests and ideas concerning federalism. In some instances, the leaders have rewritten constitutional laws. However, despite this, gradual positive changes in the country have been witnessed. One of the greatest concerns in the field of peace and conflict studies is, undoubtedly, how to ensure that peace is sustainable. Maw (2014:38) claimed that it is also necessary to think about the means by which peace is achieved (i.e. the processes that take place to ensure that it can be maintained). In this way, people should explore the notion of peacebuilding in conflict afflicted societies to demonstrate how an 'effective' strategy can be achieved using the concept of reconciliation. In 1992 UN General Secretary Boutros-Ghali defined peacebuilding as "an activity or action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict." This definition reveals how the United Nations has commonly dealt with the issue of peace and reconciliation. The focus is not on the agents, but on the structure and the formal mechanisms needed to promote lasting peace. This, in turn, means that peace can, and should, be achieved by modifying these formal structures. Lederach (1990:81) referred to the need for "a holistic and multifaceted approach" to drive the focus of peacebuilding away from traditional state-centred action and diplomacy. Chanbaneau (2012:71) stressed the need to look into the characteristics and criticisms of a "mainstream" peacebuilding approach, and to then work towards an alternative. Edward (2012:19-33) points out major steps that are usually taken by post-conflict societies in order to achieve some degree of peaceful agreement. Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes consist of three components. Firstly, the process of disarmament, secondly, demobilisation, which refers to the discharge of fighters from the armed forces, and lastly, the reintegration of soldiers to their civilian life. Sakhong (2017:83) said that "there are usually top-down approaches (mainly mobilized by the socioeconomic and political elites) to peacebuilding." He moves on to suggest that "such a traditional view of peacebuilding is heavily criticised by authors who consider this model as an expansion of the Western market-oriented way of life." Edward (2012:22) adds to this by linking the Western approach to the concept of "psychological imperialism," to demonstrate how the memories and experiences of local people tend to be overlooked when peacebuilding through reconciliation takes place within this frame.

Sakhong (2017:97) said that "in order to subvert this paradigm (and taking into account the failures of peacebuilding operations during the last few years), it is now deemed appropriate and necessary to take a different road in dealing with the aftermath of conflict resolution." The first steps have already been taken in the form of the so called "truth commissions," which work as a tool to recall memories and rewrite history. Lefrance (2012:34) makes the distinction between truth commissions and what she calls "dialogue-based" initiatives. Truth and

reconciliation commissions aim to reveal the past wrongdoing by a government and are a tool for establishing an official historical narrative in the hope to resolve conflict. They are not independent from the state and are possibly a tool for the establishment of an official historical narrative, which may discard other voices. “In their task of re-writing historical events in order to acknowledge victims and perpetrators, how much is left behind? How are the narratives of those who do not fit into the official post-conflict historical narrative dealt with?” These questions are the main reasons why truth commissions alone cannot be an effective tool in achieving sustainable peace in the reconciliation process? Quinn (2009:3) explains that the concept of “transitional justice” (whereby measures are implemented to ensure that there is justice where there have been human rights violations) “is very relevant to post-conflict societies as a process by which societies move from war to peace or from repressive/authoritarian regime to democracy.” In these cases, the concept of reconciliation can be more useful. Grainne (2009: 287) wrote that one of the shortcomings of this approach is that there is a “religious connotation usually linked with the subject of forgiveness.” Brandon stated further that it is fair to say that the notion of reconciliation rests upon two basic characteristics: firstly, the emphasis on rebuilding social and interpersonal relationships, therefore, repairing the damaged social issue that results from conflict; secondly, of the dynamic nature of such a process. Quinn (2009:20) also suggests that reconciliation is a “permanently-constructed concept, which shifts and adapts to better suit each society.” “It is criticised by some as a ‘soft concept’ which may leave room for impunity”. Govier (2009:40-41) points out that reconciliation is not a “magic” concept, free of constraints or critiques. It is quite a tricky and time-consuming concept to put in practice because in order to reconcile with a violent and/or traumatic past society must go through a phase of existential acknowledgment of these events and a phase of praising positive aspects or successful events. He highlights that difficulties can exist at the second stage of this process, where the demands of the victim/perpetrator can meet resistance from the other side. One party may try to justify their actions, stating that it is for a higher purpose or for state interests. It is likely that this would be the case if this method of promoting reconciliation were used in Myanmar. Govier goes on to state that “the very purpose of reconciliation should be the benefits of all citizens equally, all religions in harmony, equity in inequality.”

According to the Human Rights Council (2017:12), “Myanmar remains one of the most minded countries in the world, with 159 casualties reported 2015, numerous others in 2016” and mass killings in 2017. The price of conflict is high, causing many to be injured or lose their lives. This is clear from looking at international documents where deaths in armed conflict between religious groups and the military are reported. They demonstrate that reconciliation is needed in places of conflict.

Hamber and Kelly (2009:291-292) state that “reconciliation can be achieved through a persistent and continued social initiative which seeks to re-humanize all the parts in conflict.” In order to do this society must undergo four stages towards successful reconciliation:

1. Sharing of a common vision for the future.
2. The acknowledgment of past experiences, which must then be dealt with (the role of memory and testimony).
3. The building of positive relationships, and cultural and socioeconomic change.
4. An exchange of interests and bargaining to reaffirm coexisting constitutional laws to protect confidentially.

Pugh (2005:23-42) highlights “some aspects on two terms commonly associated with reconciliation: coexistence and consensus, which are usually presented as synonyms of the former. That is not always the case concerning coexistence (two or more groups can coexist without violence without truly being reconciled) and this is certainly not the case of consensus in a broader sense.” Paul (1997:76) suggests that two groups or more can have conflicting views on an issue, which can be sorted out through debate and dialogue, without them viewing the other as an enemy (rather as a temporary adversary) and, most importantly, without resorting to violence and/or aggression.

2.5 Reconciliation from a theological perspective

From a theological perspective, “God and God alone takes the initiative for reconciliation” (De Gruchy, 2002:52). According to the Bible, the whole of the creation process began with the idea of relationship, stewardship, and interdependence (Woodall, 2015, 58). When Adam sinned and, as the result of his rebellion and disobedience to God commands, sin entered the world. Sin is described as transgressing the divine command or breaking the universal covenant. Sin caused separation between people and God; they also lost joy, harmony, peace and success in their lives (De Oliveria, 2001, 96-97). They were unable to create a new relationship with God and had nothing with which they could appease Him.

To restore the original relationship between God and mankind, God made reconciliation possible as a divine gift through Jesus Christ. “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, no longer holding people’s misdeeds against them” (2Co 5:19). Reconciliation was achieved through Christ’s death and resurrection. “Sinless Christ is identified with human sinfulness so that sinful humans may be identified with God’s righteousness” (Schwobel, 2013:17). Therefore, God and people are reconciled. Through reconciliation the distortion to creation, which was brought about by sin, was removed. “For in him all the fullness of God was

pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross” (Col 1:19-20). De Gruchy (2002:53) explains that in this verse “not only humanity, but the whole created cosmos is included in God’s act of reconciliation in Christ, thereby linking redemption and creation.”

Reconciliation means to make peace; to restore unity and harmony after enmity or conflict; to restore fellowship between two parties (De Oliveria, 2001:96). God provided the means for reconciliation through Christ, so that evil turned into good, enmity and hostility turned into peace, and hatred turned into love. In this way, a new relationship was developed between God and the whole of creation. Making peace and reconciliation are a necessity, not only between God and people, but also between people themselves.

Humans must respond to God’s gift of reconciliation by making Christ Lord over every aspect of their lives. They are renewed as they live in a restored relationship with Christ. God wants people to have a spiritual likeness to himself, to have the same spiritual attributes as himself, like love and peace (Martin, 1974:115). Human love is conditional, whereas Christ’s love is unconditional. As human abide in His love, the Holy Spirit transforms them so that they begin to love God with their heart, soul, mind and strength (Dt 6:4, Mt 22:37). Through the power of the Holy Spirit, human beings are empowered to fulfil the second commandment to “love your neighbour as yourself” (Mt 22:39).

The essence of reconciliation is about the renewal of all broken relationships. Reconciliation must focus on Christ and His teachings, and this must then be put into practice. Christ’s core principles need to underpin one’s actions and interactions with people from all cultures. Christ’s followers should engage in reconciliation work because His followers are called to love. As Jesus said, “love one another as I have loved you” (Jn 13:34; 15:12 and 17). He also called His followers to bear each other’s burdens (Gal 6:2). Because of His unconditional love, Christ reconciled human beings to God. Horizontal reconciliation paves the way for vertical reconciliation. Christians are commanded to live at peace with, and to love and care for, each other and to flee from immoral acts. Calvin (1964:74) advocates that firstly, it is the vocation of Christians to be the “word of reconciliation” (2Co 5:19), which means to be witnesses of the gospel, the “power for salvation” (Ro 1:16). Secondly, “it is the vocation of Christians to be practitioners of reconciliation” (Ziegler, 2012: 5). According to Lee (2008:28), “Christ reconciles men to God and He also reconciles men to men which is the Trinitarian perspective of salvation as reconciliation theology.”

2.6 Conclusion

Examining various peacebuilding, from various perspectives, has helped to develop an understanding of why the reconciliation process in Myanmar, until now has failed. The people of Myanmar are influenced by Theravada Buddhism. Politicians and religious leaders are not willing to promote reconciliation, including the development of ceasefire agreements between the different ethnic groups. The difference between political reconciliation processes, which have failed, and theological reconciliation were discussed. Attempts made by the government to promote social cohesion between the different ethnic groups have focused on being politically correct. In Myanmar, the church might be able to respond to this by helping to carry out the reconciliation task. The following chapter examines salvation as reconciliation from Biblical perspectives.

CHAPTER 3 SALVATION AS RECONCILIATION FROM THE BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

This chapter aims to clarify the way in which the biblical terms salvation and reconciliation are used in the bible, including an analysis of their etymologies. A full exposition of the doctrine of reconciliation will be presented from a reformed theological perspective to demonstrate the Christian mandate for reconciliation ministry. This will then be discussed in the context of the ongoing conflict between different ethnic groups in Myanmar. John (2016:207-249) said that “the direct call and term “reconciliation” does not exist in the Old Testament. The allegorical implication can be observed from etymological studies of the term and the significance of metaphorical statements which are clearly observed throughout the entire fabric of the history of redemption.” For example, he highlights how Adam’s fall into sin brought spiritual “death,” which is defined as the separation between a Holy God and filthy sinners, (that is, segregation between the two (Ge 3) which had consequences not just Adam, but the whole human race. It affected the relationship between man and God, the relationship between people, and impacted creation. Therefore “if God’s agenda in salvation is the complete reconciliation of all things in Christ (Eph 1:9), it would seem that that must include not only a profound reconciliation with God, but also a profound reconciliation with one another” (Uk, 2017:29).

DeYoung (2009:77) outlines that “the biblical story commences in an ideal garden setting in Genesis, with God creating the world and breathing life into the first human couple. The Bible concludes with Revelation in an envisioned future utopian paradise where all of humanity is gathered around the throne of God in perfect unity.” He highlighted that there is one overarching theme throughout the whole bible when he stated that “between creation and eternity the biblical story juxtaposes human alienation and God’s desire for reconciliation.” For Aagaard (2003:50) “for those who live in a post-biblical, pre-paradise world, the Bible still remains a powerful source for understanding separation and God’s hope for reconciliation. The separation between God and man was a broken union which caused eternal enmity.” Grudem (1994:577) points out that, without Christ, “there would be no hope because there would be no way to live again and earn perfect righteousness before God.” Malekar (2001:82) coins the term “vertical reconciliation” to refer to the divine work of God whereby he made peace with people, who were his enemies. Through the incarnation, and Christ’s death on the cross, the wrath of God against people’s sin was appeased. “Horizontal reconciliation” is the work of the Holy Spirit and refers to the restoration of broken relationships between people.

3.1 Common terms for salvation in the Bible

The Bible uses several terms that shed light on the concept of “salvation.” The term is ‘*salvatio*’ in Latin, ‘*soteria*’ in Ancient Greek, and ‘*yasa*’ in Hebrew, and refers to the idea of ‘being saved’ or ‘protected from harm’. The word ‘*yasa*’ can also be translated as ‘restoring a broken relationship.’ Commonly, the deliverance of which the Old Testament refers to is physical in nature and includes material preservation. It usually signifies deliverance with a special spiritual significance. In addition, the scripture uses salvation to denote “health, well-being, and healing.” Saving from harm, protecting from the threat of destruction or disaster are also components of a biblical concept of salvation. It can also mean “to forgive one’s sin unconditionally” (Graves Jr, 2011:9, 22, 75).¹⁶

In the same way, Min (1989:6-13) suggests that “salvation is the overriding theme of the entire Bible, but it is a multidimensional theme with a wide range of meanings, simple deviations are impossible.” He believes that the biblical writers used the term to refer to something, or someone, being rescued in a physical sense, but it also has a spiritual, individual, communal, objective, subjective, and eternal aspect to it. Their view of salvation also has a historical and a temporal dimension, which encompasses the past, the present, and the future, which then deepens the concept. Newman (1982:55) insists that “salvation is a process with a beginning and an end. The Bible constantly refers to salvation in the context of a simple and concrete relationship between God and His people.” Meanwhile, Min (1989:13) suggests that God is the main actor throughout the Bible when the term salvation is used: from the deliverance of Noah’s family from the flood, to the great multitude who shout in one voice “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne and to the Lamb” (Rev 7:10, NIV). In addition, salvation not only refers to freedom from sin, but also the physical deliverance from harm and the threat of destruction seen throughout the Old Testament narrative. In contrast, Erickson (2013:931) suggests that salvation is eschatological in nature, and therefore has a future dimension. He also insists that salvation involves economic, political, and racial equality for all.¹⁷

Another Hebrew term used to describe salvation is ‘*yeshu ‘ah*’, which is linked to the concept of being rescued, delivered, and helped. It is a passive concept (i.e. it is something that is received, rather than given). The most fundamental meaning of the concept of salvation seen in the Bible relates to God’s deliverance of those who are in need and the restoration of their

¹⁶ Graves Jr, in his linguistic analysis in interpreting the words, uses the literal meanings of the word into a redemptive context. Thus, he eventually employs textual apparatus to articulate the meaning of the text in his concluding statement. I, however, used biblical dictionaries or commentaries’ translations of the original meanings without any forms of textual apparatus. (see p. 34, 43 below).

¹⁷ Millard J. Erickson insists that God’s work is accomplished through various means, not just through the church and the outworking of people’s faith. He suggests that salvation is effected primarily through political processes, and even on occasion by revolution and violence (see. Millard J. Erickson (2013: 931–932).

relationship with Him, others, and the world (The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, 2009:45). Malekar (2001:105) notes that the Old Testament writers see salvation more as a physical rather than a spiritual reality. He also outlines that where individuals are singled out it seems to be for the good of the community. For instance, Uk (2017:31-38) points out that the Genesis narrative develops the theme of God's blessing that rests on certain individuals and renders them as agents for a great work of God, which is of benefit to others. For example, God saves Noah's family and the animals that were with him in the ark in response to Noah's faithfulness (Ge 7-10). Similarly, the promise given to Abraham was that God would bless not only his descendants, but all the families on earth (Ge 12:1-3). God also used Moses to deliver the Israelites from Egypt into the Promised Land (Ex 1-12) and through Esther the Jewish people were spared annihilation (Est 7). Parker (2004:81) states that despite the fact that God uses people as His agents, salvation is attributed to Him alone. Only He can save (Isa 43:14; Hos 1:7). Jeremiah 3:23 outlines that idolatry is "deceptive." The people at the time were trusting in something other than God for their salvation, but they were reminded that "the salvation of Israel can only be found in the Lord."

According to the New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (2009:55-60), in the New Testament "salvation is God's project of deliverance and restoration effected through Jesus Christ as the climax of Israel's story and the culmination of creation itself." The New Testament uses the word salvation '*soteria*' to refer to worldly physical restoration, but it also has a spiritual connotation. There are seven dimensions to the term salvation. These are as follows:

- The restoration of individuals and communities to wholeness
- Forgiveness of sin and restoration in the covenant relationship between human beings and God
- Liberation/redemption from sin and evil powers
- Justification/reconciliation/participation in Christ
- Reconciliation with both God and one's neighbour
- Resurrection and eternal life
- Escape from the future wrath of God

These crucial dimensions focus attention on Jesus Christ as both the ultimate restorer and the final conqueror (Woodall, 2015:61).

As the above mentioned, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament the term salvation is connected to the following concepts.

- Atonement - Covering at a price or to make amends for wrong doing. Sin has been covered through Christ's blood which satisfies God's righteous demands.
- Propitiation - Satisfaction or to satisfy (the act of appeasing God after someone has done something wrong)
- Redemption - The act of being saved or set free in exchange for a payment
- Justification - To reckon or to declare someone as righteous before God
- Reconciliation - To restore friendship and fellowship with someone

Salvation is the work that has been carried out by God to reconcile people to himself and to restore their original image. Salvation is the process by which God redeems His creation through the atoning sacrifice of his Son; not by human effort or merit.

3.2 Common terms for reconciliation in the Bible

According to the Baker Illustrated Bible dictionary (2013:143), the word "reconciliation" (Hebrew: "*Kaw-far*" lit.) is related to the verbs to "cover, to remove, to forgive, to appease and to redeem." However, the King James Version (KJV) and the ISA translate the word to "to appease, to make atonement, to cleanse, to disannul, to forgive, to be merciful, to pacify, to pardon, to purge, to put off and to reconcile." For example, according to Vince (2000: 312), in the KJV the word reconciliation is translated as appeasement (*kaw-far*) in Lev 8:15, 2 Ch 29: 24, whilst in the NIV it is translated as atonement (*kaphar/kaw-far*). However, in Ezekiel 45:15 and 17, and Daniel 9: 29 the word "*kaw-far*" is translated in the ISA as "to make a propitiatory shelter." The word "reconciliation" in English translations, particularly in the KJV and the ISA in the Old Testament, is translated to "to appease" whilst the NIV refers to it as "atonement." In most of English versions of the Old Testament the word "reconciliation" usually refers to the interaction that brings restoration in the relationship between God and His people.

The Greek word for reconciliation in the New Testament (*ka-tal-lag-ay*) literally means "exchange" or restoration to (divine) favour (Eaton's Bible Dictionary, 1897:142). The ISA version of the English translation of Hebrews 2:17 uses the word "reconciliation," but the Greek word "*hil-as-kom-ahee*," as noted by Constantineanu (2006:61), literally means "to conciliate" or "propitious" (which is a very different meaning to the 2 Corinthians translation of the same word). In the KJV and the NIV the word in Hebrews 2 is translated to "*hil-as-kom-ahee*," "to be/merciful." In the context of the Bible as a whole, terms which relate to the word 'reconciliation' include; (1) Restoring a relationship, reunited in peace and atonement for sin. (2) Unmerited mercy, fixing a broken union, unconditional forgiveness and the undeserved pardon for one's mistakes. (3) Covering one's mistakes or sins and to give favour to someone else.

According to the ISA concordance (2004), the word “reconciliation” appears 8 times in 8 verses, “reconcile” 3 times in 3 verses and “reconciled” 7 times in 6 verses in the English translation of the Bible. However, the same word in Hebrew and Greek is translated as “atonement,” “placated,” “conciliation,” “merciful,” “appeasement” or “forgiveness” in English versions of the Bible, including the NIV, the NKJV and the ARSV. Interestingly, Bloomfield (2006:6) wrote “that reconciliation’s basic problem is that no-one agrees how to define it or do it.” He suggests that there is ‘terminological confusion’ over certain words. Bloomfield believes that “reconciliation is a theme with a deeply psychological, sociological, theological, philosophical, and profoundly human root-and nobody really knows how to successfully achieve it.” The Burmese Bible, translated from the Hebrew Bible by Judson in 1831, offers the most appropriate and clearest definitions of the word “reconciliation” in the New Testament and the Old Testament. The Burmese translation uses just two words for the term “reconciliation” as “*apyit-phaythe*” for the Old Testament (to pardon one’s sins) and “*yan-nyiang-saythe*”¹⁸ for the New Testament (to make peace with one’s enemies).

DeYoung (2009:88) wrote that “the Hebrew Scriptures illustrate the story of God’s relationship with people, highlighting a particular association or closeness between Himself and Hebrew people. The narrative emerging from the Hebrew Scriptures describes a cycle of separation and reunion in the people’s relationship with God.” For Min (1989:8), the Old Testament narratives on reconciliation highlight that God paved the way for the relationship between Himself and people to be restored. One of the most powerful stories which illustrate God’s love for His people is found in the writings of the prophet Hosea. Hosea’s relentless pursuit of his unfaithful wife serves as a prophetic parable of God’s constant pursuit of a relationship with humanity. The theme of reconciliation between God with His people and “atonement” is found throughout the scriptures. According to DeYoung (2009:78), there are also many examples of people being estranged from their families, but later, through God’s intervention, they are reconciled. Some examples include Adam and Eve, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers, queen Esther (representing the Jews) and king Ahasuerus (the Persians). Scriptures offers insight into the dynamics which help relationships between people to develop and strengthen.

DeYoung (2009:78) suggests that “in the New Testament Gospels, Jesus of Nazareth is the model of reconciliation with God and others. The Gospel writers went to great lengths to present Jesus as a radically inclusive person and an exemplar of reconciliation. Their accounts of his birth and upbringing describe a relevant preparation for his reconciling task.” Karkkainen (2011: 365) highlights that Jesus is the role model of reconciliation between people including slaves

¹⁸ The Burmese translation of the Bible, which was translated by A. Judson in 1918 from the original Greek and Hebrew, uses two words for “reconciliation.” In the Old Testament it is related to ‘forgiving’ or ‘pardoning one’s sin’ and in the New Testament to the “end of enmity” or to make “peace with one’s foes.”

and their owners, the rich and the poor, the Jews and the Gentiles, the Levites and the Sadduces. Paul was an effective ambassador for Christ which was demonstrated through his commitment to sharing the message of reconciliation with others. The same goes for the disciples of Jesus, Paul and the John the Baptist. The unconditional love that God has for people, shown through his saving work on the cross, is the foundation and motivating force for reconciliation between people. As Moo (2005:474) writes, “Paul insists that Christ came at the appointed time to redeem enslaved sinners, and he further specifies that Christ did this work of redemption by becoming a curse for us. This is a significant contribution to our understanding of Christ’s atonement for sin which paves the way for vertical, and horizontal, reconciliation.” Therefore, reconciliation is related to the Christian doctrine of salvation. God, and God alone, takes the initiative for reconciliation between Himself and His people (De Gruchy, 2002:52). Salvation has not only to do with the vertical reconciliation between mankind and God, but also the horizontal reconciliation between mankind (Robinson, 2011:25).

3.3 Reconciliation in Biblical narratives

Many scholars have defined the term reconciliation in their respective contexts. Biblical narratives that relate to reconciliation will be discussed to shed light on this particular subject.

In the Bible reconciliation is a theme that occurs throughout salvation history. It is primarily about the restoration of the broken relationship between God and His people. Although the word reconciliation does not appear in the Old Testament there are many stories that relate to this concept (Schreiter, 2013:12). “The Bible has stories of conflicts, strife, enmity, war and other evil acts. It describes that God has desire and urge humans toward restoration of justice, negotiations for peaceful reconciliation and restoration of broken relationship. This means that conflict is always in the human society and people need reconciliation regularly” (John, 2016: 143).

Schwobel (2003:31-33) outlines that God took the initiative to carry out his reconciliation mission to made appeasement for Adam’s sin after their relationship was broken (Ge 3). Disobedient Adam was cursed because of his sin, but this was forgiven by God and the two were reconciled because of God’s mercy. Several of the narratives and testimonies in the Bible glean from the Old Testament background.

The Psalms and Isaiah refer to Jesus as the “Suffering Righteous One,” and they are connected to Jesus and His Gospel. These passages and stories shed light on the reconciliation work of Christ during his earthly ministry.

Schwobel (2003:31-33) writes that Jesus (the Messiah and son of God) reconciled people to God through Christ's blood on the cross (Eph 2:16, Col 1:20). The Levites were priests who were chosen and in charge of offering animals sacrifices on behalf of the Israelites on the altars in the Temples, so that God's wrath towards their sin could be appeased. Throughout biblical history the reconciliation between God and his people was an important task, and it was carried out by the prophets, God's people, and the apostles. The way in which they performed reconciliation ministry was different, but their focal mission was to reconcile man to God and man to man. Karkkainen (2011:349-350) writes that "the narratives employed to highlight and explain the death of the Messiah were drawn from various cultural and religious sources familiar with the contemporary culture. They include the court of law (e.g., justification), world of commerce (e.g., redemption), personal and communal relationship (e.g., sacrifice), as well as a battleground (e.g., triumph over evil)." He believes that "all of the metaphorical narratives related to these domains and others are interwoven, not only in the passion narrative and execution, but also in the whole history of Jesus Christ, including the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost. It entails reconciliation and propitiation." DeYoung (2009:83) articulates that "it also effects not only pardon for sin but release from the power of sin. It involves not only the salvation of God, but also the reconciliation of the Messiah". Barth (2004:93) outlines that "among the various concepts and metaphors by means of which the reality of salvation is attested in Scriptures, the language of "reconciliation" is notably prominent in traditional Protestant doctrine and continues to be so today. Its close association with ideas of atonement, justification, and forgiveness, as well as its suggestive personal, ethical, and political valences combine to recommend it." Thawng (2017:71) writes that "the theme of reconciliation in the New Testament is found in the so-called subjective theories of the atonement, but they fail to do justice to expiation, satisfaction, and propitiation - the "vicarious suffering". Ziegler (2012:39) writes that spiritually speaking "the divine gift of reconciliation seeks and finds us in a situation of enmity and estrangement, which is to say, in a situation of hostility and opposition to God, both open and obscured. This situation bespeaks our captivity to the false lordships of Sin and Death, as well as our active and passive complicity in the disintegration of our own humanity under their sway." Barth (2004:94) maintains that "reconciliation breaks in upon the disobedient, the faithless, those whose lives are *"incurvatus in se"* and so are loveless parables of contempt for God and neighbour."

In the Old Testament the first reconciliation mission was initiated by God who, in the Garden of Eden, called to Adam (his enemy), "where are you, Adam?" (Ge 3:9). God called to Adam, and in so doing, initiated the conversation with the aim of restoring the broken relationship. Then he specifically chose to perform the task of *"kaw-far"* to bring peace, harmony, justice, and forgiveness between God and people. In today's world, in both Christian and non-Christian

contexts, followers of Christ are well placed to help prevent conflict and to promote peace and reconciliation.

Everyone falls short of God's glory and deserves death because of Adam's sin (Ro 5:12). But God sent Jesus Christ into the world to reconcile people to Himself. Jesus achieved this by pouring out his blood on the cross to pay the price for people's sin. As Cousar (2006:84) said "reconciliation is the work of a divine justice that makes for human peace and the work of a divine peace that delivers human justice throughout biblical narratives as a whole." Grudem (1994:577) poses the question "who requires Christ to pay the penalty for our sins? The answer given by the Scriptures is that the penalty was inflicted by God the Father as he represented the interests of the Trinity in redemption."

3.3.1 Requirements in the process of reconciliation

There are some requirements that are needed in the process of reconciliation. These include repentance (or a recognition of sin), confession, forgiveness, and conversion.

One of the great stories of reconciliation in the Old Testament is the story of Esau and Jacob. In this story (Ge 25-33) reconciliation is a journey, which leads to peace. This is a "story of jealousy, parental preference, personality and career differences, cheating, anger and vengeance" (Say Pa, 2018:5). The conflict started when the twins were in their mother's womb. When Rebecca gave birth, Esau was born first. He had red hair, and his body was hairy. The second baby (Jacob) came out holding his brother's heel. The strife between them continued until they were grown up. Esau grew to be his father's favourite, and Jacob was his mother's favourite. The twin brothers went their separate ways.

Esau was the strong one, the outdoors type, who was good at hunting, and was uncultured, Jacob was unlike his brother, who lived in a tent, and his occupation was more civilized. He was a nomadic shepherd. Because Jacob liked staying at home, he was in the right place at the right time to deceive his ailing father. It caused Esau to lose the birth right, which was rightfully his. Therefore, Esau hated Jacob and swore to kill him because he had been deceived. Esau's anger and hatred caused enmity between him and Jacob. This lasted until they met face to face, later on in their lives, which was the majority of their life time (Ge 33:1) (Robinson, 2011:22).

Jacob fears seeing Esau's face (Ge 32:20), but "the forgiving face of Esau is life-changing." Jacob humbled himself when he saw his brother by bowing down and referring to himself as his "servant" (Ge 33: 3-5). Esau forgave Jacob, which is represented through their embrace and kiss. Their two families were finally allowed to meet (Gn 33: 4-7). "Now Jacob is reassured that

the past is forgotten and forgiven, and peace and reconciliation have begun” (Say Pa, 2018: 8). The journey towards peace and reconciliation is a long process, but the first steps towards this are important.

The story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10 shows the requirements for reconciliation. De Oliveira (2001:125) comments that “repentance of sins and recognition of wrong doing are indispensable elements in reconciliation”. If someone intends to seek reconciliation with others the first step is to realise one’s sin (Lotter, 1987:38). Zacchaeus recognised his wrong doing even though Jesus did not question him about this. He said to Jesus, “Look, Lord, here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.” He not only recognised his sins and repented, but also confessed them. “Confession leads to forgiveness and forgiveness restores relationships” (Wyrzten, 1991:160-164). 1 John 1:9 states that ‘If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sin’. Jesus forgave Zacchaeus his sins and justified that that very day salvation had come to his house, because he was a son of Abraham (v 9). Zacchaeus’ salvation had benefited his whole family. This story shows salvation as the reconciliation that takes place between people and God, and their neighbours. “There can be no reconciliation with God without reconciliation with neighbour” (The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible, 2009:59). In this instance, the whole community was transformed, including Zacchaeus’ family, and those whom he cheated because he was reconciled in his relationship with God.

3.3.2 The result of reconciliation

The reconciliation that takes place between God and man, and also between people, leads to the healing of past wounds and peace within society (Pau, 2015:71). In the current socio-political situation in Myanmar, Christians have become increasingly oppressed, and reconciliation between the different ethnic groups has remained elusive. Relationships between indigenous people and the Burmese, unity among Christians, and effective working partnerships between the churches have been somewhat challenging.

Pathrapankal (2013:6) states that “in the Bible, as in modern usage, reconciliation means a deep improvement in relationships, not only between God and humans but among humans themselves and also between the humans and the environment. From a biblical standpoint, the empowerment to develop healing and growth-producing relationships among people, however, is given by God.” According to DeYoung (2009:78-79), reconciliation is the supreme gift of God expressed in the saving death of Jesus of Nazareth who thereby enables people to be redeemed and saved. Reconciliation continues to be offered and sustained through the church. Grudem (1994:577) suggests that “reconciliation is the sum and essence of God’s work in

Christ, and the expression of grace in our relationships with one another.” His view on reconciliation is biblical. He stresses that people are justified through Christ’s sacrifice and therefore the price for sin has been paid. Forgiveness is a gift that cannot be earned.

Hence, a biblical reconciliation model is different from a secular perspective on justice and forgiveness. As Wirzba (2015:166) writes, “since Christ reconciled all of creation with Himself, our ministry is not only to reconcile ourselves with the people close to us, those in our families, churches, and communities, but also to reconcile all”. He states that the idea of “making peace with the land” refers to people who are from different groups within a community being reconciled to one another and united. He points out that it involves creating unity with a positive process and hope for “renewal.” Reconciliation turns conflict into peace, discord into unity, misperception into understanding, and hatred into love. It brings unity, peace, harmony and eventually development. After reflecting on Paul’s theology from his epistles, Constantineanu (2006:54) wrote that the concept of reconciliation was concerned about the interpersonal relationships between people and that it did not have further social and political implications.

Avtzi (2013: 34) suggests that reconciliation seeks to create harmonious cooperation between people who were once enemies so that they can work together to build peace, based on the foundation of respect and dignity for humanity. Reconciliation also demands unity, which involves carrying a burden with others to reach a peaceful coexistence through mutual respect and love in a forgiving atmosphere. Denny (2012:233) outlines that the “ultimate truth about reconciliation is not touched by the fact that the Christian experience of it comes to us through Christ. For Christ, in achieving the reconciliation of the world to God, is doing the work that the Father gave Him to do.” In the same way, Lyonnet (1970:58) highlights that “the one term by which His work can always be described in relation to God is obedience. He is the righteous servant of the Lord. He is in the world not to do His own will, but the will of Him that sent Him.” Schreiner (1998:287) stresses that through the obedience of Christ (that is through his death on the cross) the many shall be made righteous (Ro 5:19). Adam was disobedient, but Christ was obedient on behalf of people. Reconciliation between God and man was accomplished through the atoning work of Christ on the cross.

3.4 Guidelines for salvation as reconciliation

It is through faith alone that the redeemed are saved and reconciled to God. God became “flesh” in the Incarnation, and in so doing God took the initiative and undertook the task required for His people to be saved. Bavinck (1956:280-282) suggests that reconciliation “must deal first with the person of Christ who by His passion and death is to achieve salvation. Next, it must point out the way in which the Holy Spirit causes the elect to share in the person of Christ and in

all His benefits. And in the third place it must give some attention to the people who come to share in the salvation wrought by Christ and must treat of the church as the body of Christ. He is the only, true, and perfect Mediator between God and men. That which the various religions in their belief in a mediator have surmised and hoped, that is actually and perfectly fulfilled in Christ.” To understand salvation as reconciliation some guidelines from teachings of prophet Isaiah, Jesus and Paul will be discussed.

3.4.1 The teachings from the prophet Isaiah

The prophecies recorded in the book of Isaiah have important implications for the doctrine of reconciliation. Shifferd (2014:4) provides detail on the historical context of the book and states that this was a very unsettled period politically, which resulted in there being a great deal of international struggles at the time. Assyria interfered constantly with Palestine. Schreiner (1988:114) outlines that, in 722 B.C., one of its rulers, named Sargon II, took people from the northern Hebrew tribes into captivity. In 701 B.C another Assyrian ruler named Sennacherib gained power over Judea. The only place that was not taken over was Jerusalem. Some of Judea's kings tried to make an alliance with Egypt, which the Prophet Isaiah had warned them against. Later, the rising nation of Babylon also invaded Palestine. There was a great deal of conflict between the two small states that made up Palestine. The Philistines and Hebrews fought frequently. The Hebrews, who were God’s people that had been chosen to be his representatives to the other nations, fought a 20-year civil war. It ended only when the Hebrews, from Samaria in the Northern part of the country, were exiled to Assyria.

Isaiah’s prophecy is not about a political propaganda or ideology, but rather it is about the coming of Immanuel who will bring salvation to His people and reconcile them to God. In Isaiah (7:12, 9:6) the titles Immanuel, Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Prince of Peace, and the Everlasting Father are used as a prophetic reference to Christ. These are often quoted by the synoptic writers. In Isa. 16:1 Christ, the Prince of Peace, is referred to as the “lamb” the sacrificial lamb who would be killed on behalf of sinners. The prophecies of the prophet Isaiah were fulfilled (Mt 1; 1Jn 1) when Jesus died on the cross, and in so doing he brought salvation and reconciliation between God and people.

3.4.2 The teachings of Jesus

Jesus’ whole ministry was about forgiveness. He preached a universal message of reconciliation (Avtzi, 2013:31). Jesus clearly said “if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions” (Mt 6:15, 18:35). According to Peterson (2015:4), in the New Testament the Greek word (*apheimi*) generally translated as “forgive” is frequently used in

a business sense for forgiving a debt. In such cases punishment is cancelled and the former debtor is able to regain his ability to function in the community. Jesus' death on the cross enabled people to be reconciled to God. This is the victorious glory of the Messiah. Jesus said, "a new commandment I give you, that you love one another, as I have loved you, so you must also love one another (Jn. 13: 34). Smith (1982:xxi-xxii) points out that through Jesus' death the relationship between God and people, who were previously at enmity with one another, is now reconciled. God is, therefore, the ultimate peacemaker. The teachings of Jesus on reconciliation are different from secular ideas, which are often based on justice. Monsma (1975:596) suggests, when considering the Hebrew term for reconciliation, that in the Old Testament no command is given by God stating that people should forgive one another. The term is only used to refer to God forgiving His people of their sin. There is not a record of this term being used to convey forgiveness towards another person. As Smedes (1996:32) has observed, "forgiving seems almost unnatural. Our sense of fairness tells us people should pay for the wrong they do." This means people need a divine transformation, which changes their fallen and self-centred nature.

Malekar (2001:113) highlights that Jesus' model of reconciliation is based on unconditional love and forgiveness and not on people's works, or the amount of material possessions they have. Forgiveness through Christ brings an entirely different kind of peace and harmony. Jesus' model of reconciliation depends on people understanding the cost that was involved in them receiving forgiveness from their sin. When people understand this, then subsequently they will respond towards others who have sinned against them with grace and forgiveness. Wirzba (2015:166) highlights that seeking to reconcile with others is important and that a concerted effort must be placed on stressing the importance of forgiving others in any cultural setting. "It must be advocated and not relegated to a later stage that is generally never reached". The greatest debt of all has already been paid. Sin is always at the heart of conflict, and its debt has been "nailed to the cross (Col 2:14)." Ziegler (2012:43) also says that "reconciliation by genuine forgiveness is a response to the redemptive work that God has accomplished, not a response to the injuries felt by people."

Conflicts arise because two parties, or more believe that they are right, and they fight against one other in response to this. DeYoung (2009:83-84) stressed that Christ's model of reconciliation begins with "responding to the bad/evil with good." One of the last requests that Jesus made to his disciples, towards the end of his ministry, was for believers in Christ to forgive others when they have been sinned against (Mt 18:35). Denny (2012:132) highlights that when Jesus taught about forgiveness what He emphasised was its freeness. This is an important lesson from the parable of the prodigal son. "The son did not buy his forgiveness, nor

did anybody buy it for him. His father forgave him because he was his father and loved him with a indefeasible love, stronger and more wonderful than all his sins.”

3.4.3 The teachings of Paul

Schreiter (2013:75) notes that in the New Testament the language of reconciliation is largely to be found in the Pauline writings. Indeed, Paul’s message has been called a “Gospel of reconciliation.” Paul had first-hand experience of being reconciled to God, as did the followers of Jesus through a gracious act on the part of God, not due to anything they had done themselves. DeYoung (2009:81) outlines that Paul brought up the ethnic gap between the Jews and the Gentiles in his epistles. The Jews and the Gentiles had resorted to “name-calling” and antagonising one another. They did not have a real desire to be together. Paul stresses Christ’s reconciliation mission between these two groups of people. He engages with them by highlighting Jesus’ instructions on relationships and, in Ephesians 2:12 he reminds them of what it was like to be excluded from God’s family. Wilmer (2007:151-160) states that “reconciliation means the holistic restoration of relationships - this is the very achievement of the cross, according to traditional Christian theology. This is captured by Paul in his letters by implication that ‘reconciliation is vertically between God and human beings; [his] words and actions show that He also expects reconciliation to be practiced horizontally between human beings.’” Christians need to recognise “that the love of God cannot be separated from the love of the neighbour.”

Merdassa (2014:8-13) states that the biblical foundation for reconciliation can be drawn from Ro 5:1-11, 2Co 5:17-18. Wilmer (2007:158) outlined that “since sin has separated man with God (Ro 3:23, 6:23), the only way to redeem this lost relationship is reconciliation through salvation in Jesus Christ, and so from such a background one is able to coexist peacefully with self and others.” King (2008:2) contends that “the trinitarian concept of reconciliation is related to forgiveness, but with a different goal. The biblical word for reconciliation, in literal terms, means ‘to come back together with.’” Reconciliation refers to the repair and restoration of a broken relationship. “Reconciliation is made possible through forgiveness. The wrongdoers have to willingly appeal for forgiveness by confession, repentance and restitution” (John, 2016:129).

In the strictest sense, the concept of forgiveness in the Bible has to do with releasing from punishment. Forgiveness enables a sinner to be seen as innocent before God and set free from the punishment they deserve. King (2008:2) highlights that “Paul seems to abide in the context of the Old Testament’s background of God’s forgiveness to His people as reconciliation or forgiveness that was performed by His chosen people through sacrifices.” Therefore, Paul’s theology salvation as reconciliation emphasises the work of Christ, the sacrificial Lamb of God

who through his blood which was shed on the cross enabled sin-cursed people to be reconciled to God. Schreiter (2013:75) stated that “theological literature on reconciliation focused on what has been called the “vertical” dimension of reconciliation; that is, God’s reconciling humanity to God’s own self, according to Romans 5.” This has long held a privileged place in Reformation theology, inasmuch as it is a key passage for understanding justification (among Lutheran theologians) and reconciliation as expiation (among Reformed theologians).” However, Trinitarian perspectives on reconciliation give scope for both of these theologies concerning the exegetical interpretation of scripture on salvation as reconciliation.

3.4.4 Salvation as a means to reconciliation

Salvation as a means to reconciliation because the idea of reconciliation is related to the Christian doctrine of salvation. Schwobel (2003:23) highlights that “the reconciliation act occurs through Christ’s death. The new state that is achieved through God’s reconciling act in Christ is one of peace, understood not only as the end of enmity but as the establishment of a new enduring relationship to God in Christ.” The synoptic Gospels and Pauline epistles clearly record that Christ’s incarnation was to restore the broken relationship between God and people. Christ was the advocate or agent who achieved reconciliation between God and people, once and for all, and for eternity. Graham (1965:113-124) stressed, that “there is no reconciliation without conversion, the constant journey with God into a future of new people and new loyalties. Broken by sin, people do not desire what God wants. The world and its dividing lines such as nation, ethnicity, race, sex, power, and caste resist the new creation of God’s beloved community where there is ‘neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female’ (Gal 3:28). Self-interest easily becomes the goal of relationships, and loyalty to one’s own group easily becomes the aim of politics.” John (2016:116-117) states that “reconciliation thus requires a transformation of desires, habits, and loyalties.” This is a long and costly journey which is impossible without God’s forgiveness and grace. God promised to give people everything needed for this transformation.

An excerpt from Easton’s Bible Dictionary (1897:236) indicates that the word ‘atonement’ does not feature in the Authorized Version of the New Testament (AVNT), except in Romans 5:11. In the Revised Version the word “reconciliation” is used. In the Old Testament it is used frequently. The meaning of the word is simply “at-one-ment,” that is, the state of being one or being reconciled. In this way, atonement is reconciliation, and it is used to denote the effect resulting from the death of Christ. People who, in their sinful condition are alienated from God, are invited to be reconciled; to Him, to accept the provision God has made whereby their sins are remitted through Christ’s blood, and they are justified before Him.

However, Wilmer (2007:93) notes that the word atonement “is also used to denote that by which this reconciliation is brought about - the death of Christ itself; and when used thus it means satisfaction, and in this sense to make an atonement for one is to make satisfaction for his offences (Ex 32:30; Lev 4:26; 5:16; Nu 6:11). Christ stands for humans as a priest (Melchizedek) who sacrifices to God, as a prophet who proclaims salvation as reconciliation through him, and as the King who sits on the throne at the right hand of God.” Grudem (1994: 624) writes that therefore, “we can look again at Christ’s work, now thinking about the perspective of these three offices or categories. Christ fulfils God words to us; as a priest, he both offers a sacrifice to God on our behalf; as a king he rules over the church and over the universe as well and as a prophet he reveals God to us and speaks God’s word to us.” Berkhof (1996:356-357) views Christ’s three offices as prophet, priest, and king, as three offices united in one person, who presents before God as a mediator between God and men, restoring a relationship as an official character.

Metaphorically, Christ was a servant; a servant of God, who carried out the will of the Father and who paid the price for people’s transgressions on the cross on behalf of sinners. For Grudem (1994:579) Christ is an advocate: Christ holds his office as an advocate in order to achieve salvation through reconciliation. He is also a mediator, not only between God and man, but also between people. Christ gave instructions to people, which are written in God’s Word, highlighting that his followers should obey God the Father in the same way that he was obedient to him. He urges his followers to love one another, in other words he commands Christians to reconcile with one another, even their enemies. The phrase ‘love one another’ appears 13 times in 12 verses in the New Testament according to the Interlinear Scripture Analyzer [ISA]. Jesus urged people to love their enemies (Mt 5:44; Lk 6:27). This is a direct command which is compulsory, rather than something that is optional. Grudem points out that people tend to hold on to offenses when they have been sinned against. “Christians as a whole by association, lose credibility as long as forgiveness is not realized” (Grudem, 1994:580). Therefore, perpetuating the status quo not only harms communities in tangible ways (such as through violent acts), but it also damages the credibility of what Christians believe, which is the contrary to Christ’s message of reconciliation. Wilmer (2007:151) explained that, based on the atoning work of the Messiah, “the grace of God implies forgiveness which enables sinners to have faith in Him is the unconditional love of the imperial God.”

In the context and concept of Theravada Buddhism in Myanmar, salvation is achieved through one’s own efforts or deeds, which is purely contrary to the concept of salvation in the Christian doctrine. Judson preached for six years without winning a single Burman Buddhist soul for Christ. One of the main reasons why Burmese Buddhists do not convert to Christianity is the

fact that the church in Myanmar is predominantly western in its theology, its form of worship, its church governance (ecclesiology), and its strategy for mission (missiology). The church adopts a western style not necessarily because of the input of missionaries from the West, but because the colonial rulers were Christians. From that time onwards, Christians have been seen as invaders who demean Buddhism and devalue Myanmar culture. The church is seen as a training ground for Christians to learn how to denigrate Buddhism. Sharpse (1977:104) was right when he said, "Christianity in Burma is tarred with a colonialist brush." The church, which is influenced by western ideals, remains an objective of suspicion for the government. This, to some degree, holds it back from being an effective 'light' amongst people in the community. In the same way, Chain (2003:9) argues that one of the reasons that the church in Myanmar has been and is still experiencing various forms of suspicion and pressure, is causing an unnecessary delay in, and disruption to, many church activities. Therefore, it is important for the church to reconcile with interfaith groups, preach the gospel and to share the message of salvation as a mean to reconciliation. There is only one way that the church in Myanmar can be eased from its suffering and win more souls, namely through reconciliation.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed salvation as reconciliation from Biblical perspectives. It has demonstrated, point by point, the need for the Church to be involved in ministries that promote salvation as reconciliation in their everyday lives and also in the world of politics. The Biblical foundation for this is drawn from Romans 5:1-11 and 2 Corinthians 5:17-18. Common terms for salvation as reconciliation were discussed. Reconciliation is the work of God for mankind, achieved in Jesus Christ through the Spirit to transform people from a place of enmity with God to a new enduring relationship with Him. The idea of reconciliation, therefore, is related to the Christian doctrine of salvation. From a Biblical perspective, salvation has not only to do with the vertical reconciliation between people and God, but also the horizontal reconciliation between people.

Reconciliation seeks to create harmonious cooperation between people who were once enemies, so that they can work together to build peace based on the foundation of respect and dignity for humanity. Presenting salvation as reconciliation is the responsibility of the church. In Myanmar, peace is impossible without reconciliation. The following chapter will present the hindrances to the peace process in Myanmar so that new methods of promoting reconciliation can be developed and implemented by the church.

CHAPTER 4 THE HINDERANCES OF RECONCILIATION PROCESS IN MYANMAR

Oo (2017:34) examined the political situation in Myanmar and highlighted that there are issues of mistrust towards the government and the military and provided a historical overview of the factors leading to this situation. These issues are also experienced by the church in the arena of peace building and are aggravated by the underlying intolerance towards religious groups that are not Buddhist.

There are three main categories when one considers hindrances to reconciliation between the ethnic groups in Myanmar from political and theological points of view. These are (1) Amyo, (2) Bathar, and (3) Sagar¹⁹. Towards the end of 2007 there were a series of protests that were related to the economic and political situation in Myanmar. This was called the 'Saffron Revolution' and was led by thousands of nationalist monks. Since then the number of religious extremists have risen. Kap (2017:38-41) blames extremist religious political leaders, who reinforce divisions between the different religions, tribes, clans and genders, for this increase. This trend has been evident since the beginning of church history in Myanmar.

According to Ling (2015:65), the political propaganda imposed by religious leaders and politicians, and the church's lack of commitment to reconciliation ministry, have been major hindrances to the reconciliation process. The church needs to promote peace and harmony, even if it does not actively get involved in politics. Htoo (2016:99) outlines that reconciliation is the first step to freedom, freedom provides a step towards spreading the gospel effectively, and the gospel can bring peace and hope to people. Sakhong (2011:4)²⁰ also points out that in societies that are multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural, there is always friction and conflict when a government implements a peacebuilding process, whilst their underlying ideology promotes "one religion, one language, and one ethnicity."

¹⁹ *Amyo* means "tribe" (the Burmese tribe), *Barthar* means "religion" (Buddhism) and *Sagar* means "language" (the Burmese language). There are 8 main tribes, 7 states and 7 geographical divisions which are dominated by from the Burmese tribe (Amyo). One hundred and eleven languages are spoken by the people in the tribes. All the minority groups have to practice Barthar (Buddhism) and everyone must use Sagar, (the Burmese language). General Nay Win promoted coercive nationalistic propaganda when he was in power, and this was built on by almost all of the consecutive Prime Ministers, including General Nay Win, U Saw Maung, Dr.Maung Maung, Than Shwe, and Khin Nyunt

²⁰ Lian H. Sakhong is the Vice President of the Union Peace and Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC) and the Chin National Front (CNF). He was the founder of the Burma Centre for Ethnic Studies: Peace and Reconciliation. He believes that all the states and divisions should govern themselves and be free to practice the faith of their choice without interference from majority groups. For example, he argues that Chin state should be a Christian state, the same goes for Mon state. He refuses to adhere to the Burmese nationalistic ideology of "one nation", "one language", "one ethnicity" and "one religion" (Amyo, Barthar, and Sagar).

4.1 Religious involvement in politics

In Myanmar, religion and politics are interconnected. The following study will show the involvement of different religious groups in politics. The representatives who signed the Panglong Agreement in 1947 envisaged that Myanmar would become a peaceful country, where freedom of worship and diversity, in terms of people's religion and culture, and a federal union could be cultivated. Shortly after independence from the British in 1948, communist insurgents sort a replacement for democracy (Sakhong, 2011:64). The country became a quasi-federal union; however, in practice it functioned more like a unitary state (Htoo, 2016:99). The communists were a single ethnic group called the Burman who exercised power over the state and the governing systems within the multi-ethnic pluralist union of Myanmar. Christians became oppressed and persecuted. Sakhong (2011:51) continues, when he comments that another major problem that faced the nation of Myanmar was what social scientists call "state formation conflict," which can lead to civil wars breaking out soon after independence.

Key components that contributed to the outbreak of civil war included the strengthening of the Burmanisation ideology, which promoted Buddhism and the assimilation of people into the Burmese culture (Sharpe, 1977:104). This was a move away from the progress that had been made towards the "equality for all" envisaged in 1947. Christians were persecuted, churches, and other religious centres, were closed or burned down; therefore, the right to religious freedom was taken away. Htoo (2016:21) clearly wrote that any sort of ethnic values and practices, which deviated from the norm, were banned from the union's official values.²¹ Religious groups had no choice but to react. Throughout the history of religious movements, conflict has been instigated by religious leaders who were extreme in their beliefs and whose political beliefs were influenced by this. For instance, civil war in Rakhine state started due to conflict between Muslims and Buddhists in that area, the "969" or "Saffron Revolution," which resulted in people being killed and many arrested, was led by Buddhist monks and lastly, the Ma Ba Tha was formed of Buddhist monks. As Smith (1999:51) points out, the cause of conflict is not merely due to political propaganda, but religious ideology. When someone's political views are influenced by their religious beliefs, it leads to hostility from people who are from a different religion. Almost all of the politicians in Myanmar are religious, and their political views are influenced by their beliefs.

²¹ A water festival in Myanmar takes place every year between 13-16 April. Even bars are closed for this national holiday. During this time Buddhists symbolically wash their sins away with water. The water festival in Myanmar is similar to the Choseok holiday in South Korea.

4.1.1 Replica theologies

The churches in Myanmar have adopted Westernised Baptist theology since the time that Adoniram Judson came to Myanmar, from the US, to spread the gospel. The theology, worldviews, and traditions of the West have influenced Myanmar's Christians (who are from diverse ethnic groups), and this is seen as unacceptable to many Burmese Buddhists. Norman (1967:53-55) observes that "the first American missionary to Myanmar dominated whatever theological thinking there was among the ethnic Christians and early Burman converts of the nineteenth century. Myanmar Christians are still following centuries-old missionary teachings verbatim, without critical questioning and without reevaluating their content being spoon-fed as such by foreign missionaries." Than (1976:58-61) also commented that Western ideas have completely influenced theology among Christians in Myanmar. He further stresses that this is disappointing because Western theology fails to take into account the differences in culture, worldviews, traditions, and ways of living seen amongst the various ethnic groups in Myanmar, especially the Buddhist Burmese. As a result, Christians in Myanmar are seen as betrayers, who seek to denigrate Buddhism and are loyal to the West. Therefore, reconstructing theologies and missional strategies, which take into account the cultural background of the ethnic groups in Myanmar, are important roles for the church. In addition, the church should develop its own critical theology, so that the Buddhist Burmese can view Christianity positively and accept Christ. As Wa (1963:42) wrote "the king inquired and asked Judson the following question: your customs and our customs are completely opposite in so many ways. If the Burmese Christians were real Burman, why don't they dress like other Burman?" "Christians have been seen as traitors who are destructive to Myanmar culture, and are destroyers of Buddhism." Naing (2010: 44) points out that sometimes a Burmese person is killed if they renounce Buddhism. These cases are rare, but this does still happen in Myanmar, particularly in Rakhine state. Christians are seen as traitors in the eyes of Buddhists.

From 1948 onwards Myanmar was a post-colonial country experiencing an "internal crisis,"²² which was partly due to colonialism. This has contributed to the recent tension between ethnic minority groups and fueled religious disputes and intolerance. Buddhists claim that Christian ideologies are divisive, and that Christians want Christianity to spread at the expense of Buddhism. In the same vein, Ling (2014:15) states that the church in Myanmar is viewed as an object of suspicion by the government and that the "colonialist tar," representing the influence of Western ideals and ways of living, need to be removed from the life of the church in Myanmar.

²² The British, who were from a "Christian" country, invaded Myanmar three times and colonized it with authoritarian rule. They adopted a "divide and rule" method to take over the country. The British were in a strong financial position and this helped Christianity to spread throughout the country. From this time onwards Christians were seen as traitors, and as those who want to destroy Buddhism.

This will help to reduce distrust and cynicism. Erick Sharpe, a former missionary to India, also remarked that “Christianity in Burma is tarred with a colonialist brush” (cited by Ling, 2014:128). Therefore, the Christians in Myanmar must reconstruct and contextualise their own theologies to enable them to fit with local people’s traditions and cultures.

Another hindrance to reconciliation is that the church is not even close to achieving peace within itself. This can be seen as “replica theology.” The members of the church in Myanmar must be reconciled to Christ, and then to each other, to carry out effective reconciliation ministry, because without Christ there cannot be genuine reconciliation.

4.1.2 Doctrinal disputes

In a pluralistic country, one of the biggest challenges facing the church is to minimize the number and severity of doctrinal disputes that happen between different churches. Ling (2014: 16) outlines that the most undesirable issue facing the church is the doctrinal disputes which often arise among churches. These cause division, and sometimes cause people to adopt “divide and rule” strategies within and between congregations. Likewise, Win (2014:31) also notes that disputes among churches, and the disputes between Buddhists, are a huge challenge to the peacebuilding process, especially when people have their own political agendas. Doctrinal disputes are particularly difficult to overcome in multi-cultural environments and can also hinder the reconciliation process. It is rare to find churches that do not engage in these disputes in a negative way or those that have built strong working relationships with other churches. An old Burmese proverb reads: “*lettheseih daw lehttetna*,” which literally means that “hurting a single nail hurts the whole body.” Doctrinal disputes in Myanmar negatively impact the church. They create room for division, disunity, and lead to ineffective missionary work. Paul urges the church in Ephesus to “keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Eph 4: 1-13).

Doctrinal disputes within Christian communities are not only a problem for the church itself, but they alter the effectiveness of the church’s witness in the community, particularly to Buddhists. Therefore, Naing (2010:48) strongly urges the church to resolve them and to reconcile, one church to another, in order to do effective missionary work. The church in Myanmar needs to be humble and should look for a mutual point of contact to start discussions, so that communication between Christians, and between Christians and people from other faith groups, can take place peacefully. Theological and doctrinal differences should not harm the unity of the church through Christ, but they should shape the life of the church and missionary work in a unique way. Salvation as reconciliation must show itself in people building strong Christ centred relationships. The church should look to be reconciled within itself, with people

in their local community, with other religious groups and with the nation as a whole. Christians and the churches in Myanmar must reconcile firstly before engaging in interfaith dialogues (Naing, 2010:52). In addition, whilst there is not unity among the churches and Christians, there is little hope that reconciliation ministry can be carried out effectively in the country. Unity among Christians within the body of Christ should be the aim in doing reconciliation ministry in Myanmar.

4.1.3 Missional strategies

Smith (1999:26) said that “in many areas, decades of war, human rights abuses and confrontation have created a climate where nothing is ever certain for Christianity.” This is true for Christians in Myanmar. The desire for a peaceful coexistence may be widespread across the country, but the fact is that fear, opportunism or survival have often been the key motivation for action, rather than a genuine desire for reconciliation and reform, which require long-term thinking and support. John (2016:106) said that the churches in Myanmar should not keep “silent” during times of social disaster. Dialogue between Christians, Buddhists, and Muslims is urgently needed in the pursuit of reconciliation and social cohesion in Myanmar.

In Myanmar, every ethnic group has its own political party, armed group, religious leaders and language. For example, in Chin state there are 53 tribes (clans). Every single tribe uses its own language and practices its own faith (which is Nat or ancient worship). Four million people live in the State.²³ There are more than 60 unofficial languages in use by the Chins. Therefore, it is important that mission strategies are contextualised, so that the message of reconciliation can be communicated to people, including the Chins. It is important that the gospel is presented in a way that people can understand and accept. Ling (2015:32) also states that models of reconciliation for uncivilized communities, developed in the United States and by the UN, and western ideas of freedom, in reality, are not always compatible with the way the people in these communities think and live.

4.2 Hindrances to the conflict resolution process

One of the hindrances to the conflict resolution process in Myanmar is the lack participation in them by the various religious groups in the country. John (2016:98) writes that the churches in Myanmar are not actively engaged in peacebuilding activities. They demonstrate “political holiness” whereby people participate in church activities and pray for the issues in the country,

²³ The Chin State is situated in the Western part of Myanmar. There are 53 tribes and 9 townships within the Chin state. In many places different languages are spoken by the people in each village or city. Each dialect is so distinct that people who speak different dialects are unlikely to understand each other. One of the biggest challenges missionaries are faced with is the language barrier between them and the local people. It is also difficult for them to understand their culture (<https://ethnomed.org/culture/chin/chin-cultural-profile>).

but they do not actively promote peace at a societal level. Thawng (2017:45) also writes that “religions and their leaders are armed with heterodoxies and destructive weapons to fight against each other, instead of arming themselves with the sound teachings of their scripture[s]/bible[s] that promote peace and harmony.” As One (2016:84) wrote, Muslims are armed with butcher’s knives, not the Quran. Christians are armed with destructive weapons from the West, not with their Bibles. Buddhists are armed with “969,” not with their “*Phitaga thonebone*” or the Pali. This is the biggest problem in the country. Reconciliation cannot be achieved without the participation of religious groups. Religion is the key to the reconciliation process in Myanmar, not the politicians (Kap, 2017:41). Thawng (2017:138) points out that “religion is a dice which politicians use for their own gain.” It seems that the separation between religion and politics cannot happen in Myanmar.

Myanmar is a geographically large and it is a complex nation. It is also a nation of ethnic diversity, with each ethnic group having different cultural and moral values, which interact with social, economic, and political issues. There are more than 135 different ethnic groups in Myanmar each with its own history, culture and language. The Burma is a large ethnic group which makes up around two-thirds of the population, which controls the military and the government. The minority ethnic nationalities, making up the remaining one-third, live mainly in the resource-rich border areas and hills of Myanmar. The 7 ethnic states make up approximately 60 percent of the national territory.

The Aung San Suu Kyi led administration has been committed to tackling the challenges faced by the people of Myanmar by prioritising peace, economic prosperity, and the overall national development of Myanmar. President Barack Obama issued a statement in 2016 at Yangon University declaring that Aung San Suu Kyi’s appointment as State Counsellor “represents a historic milestone in the country’s transition to a democratically elected, civilian-led government.” But the challenges ahead are immense and are not limited to the ongoing conflict amongst ethnic minority groups in the areas where they live, widespread poverty, unemployment, drugs, and corruption. For the new government to make a success of its intention to bring the change that Myanmar needs, it must focus on a bottom-up approach to promoting peace and reconciliation within the country.

4.2.1 Cultural taboos

There are more than 100 different ethnic groups in Myanmar. The country is endowed with huge natural resources. Myanmar gained independence from Britain on 4 January 1948. Differences between the ethnic groups are phenomenally wonderful. For instance, in the lowlands in the western part of Myanmar women tattoo their faces for beautification. In the

middle of the north western part of the country women do not wear clothes or cover their upper bodies. For Burmese women, not wearing a shirt in public is a taboo. In the southern part of Chin State, it is a custom to serve strong home-made alcohol as a sign of respect to strangers who visit one's home. Strangers or guests in people's homes can hug each other as a sign of friendship, but this may be unacceptable to people who live in the West. People from Kayin, and the Burmese, show hospitality to strangers by serving them hot green tea and candy. Hugging is also a taboo for them. Meanwhile, serving alcohol to strangers or guests is a taboo for other ethnic groups.

Buddhism is a way of life. For Christians, Christianity and its traditions are also a way of life. When referring to the cultural context in Myanmar, Johnson (1988:146) highlighted how touching someone else's body with one's hands while talking to another person is a taboo. Equally, for a Buddhist monk from the Burman culture, to see men and women sitting together can be shocking because for a man to sit with women is a taboo. Similarly, talking about sex in public, in a group, or in an educational context is shameful for people from some particular ethnic groups. Swearer (2010:49) noted how communicating with someone you are in a relationship with or getting married to someone from a different tribe is strictly prohibited in the tribal communities in Myanmar. In Burmese this is called "*amyophyatte*," which is a term linked to the denigration of your character, and this also impacts the way in which a person's tribe is perceived by the rest of society²⁴.

In the same way, approaching and consulting diviners, sorcerers, palm-readers and magicians is taboo amongst ethnic Christians in Myanmar. However, in the Burman Buddhist culture these practises are highly valued and encouraged. Therefore, it is important that Christians are culturally sensitive when they are among Buddhists. This includes being sensitive to objects, people, and behaviour that is related to religious rituals or social customs, which could be a cultural taboo. As an old Burmese proverb goes, "*pokko-khin-hma tay-amin*." This saying emphasises the importance of listening when communicating with someone, because in the Burmese culture this is key in any friendship.

4.2.2 Diversity of Language

There are 111 official languages in Myanmar and, according to Htoo (2016:82), there are more than 100 unofficial languages in Myanmar. All of the ethnic groups have their own unofficial languages. The nucleus clans also use different languages and have their own unique cultural

²⁴ Marriages between people from different tribes is not supported by families in Myanmar. People believe that marrying someone from a different tribe, rather than one's own tribe, is called "*amyophyatte*" (which is a term connected with the denigration of your character).

taboos too. Language barriers between different tribes, clans, villages, and men and women, can be difficult to overcome. Some words and jokes in the Burmese language can be insulting to some people from particular ethnic groups. As an old Myanmar proverb goes, “*Ma pyawtat yin hse tha lo, ma htai tat yin phae tha lo,*” which means if something is not said correctly then it is an insult. It also emphasises the importance of women sitting in a position that protests their modesty. Language and cultural differences between the different ethnic groups are huge; therefore, creating harmony between them will be a difficult and long journey. Reconciliation techniques that come from the West are unwelcome, unwanted and are unacceptable to people from different cultures and traditions in Myanmar.

4.2.3 Diversity in religious practices

Peacebuilding between the different religious groups in Myanmar is also a big challenge. Four per cent of the Muslim population in Rakhine state demand that Sharia law is implemented in their state. Six per cent of the Christians in Chin, Kayin, Kachin and Sagai²⁵ want their states to be Christian. However, Buddhists demand that Myanmar becomes a Buddhist country, reflecting their way of life and philosophies. The same demands are made by the ethnic minority groups, who practice other religions. One (2016:84) depicts the complex situation in Myanmar as follows: “one in many”, “many in one, all in one and one in all.” “One in many” refers to the fact that there are many ethnic groups in the one country (Myanmar), “many in one” indicates that there are many different tribes within one ethnic group, “all in one” represents the fact that the tribes are still seen as one particular group, and “one in all” highlights that they all make up one nation. He jokingly said that you cannot mix protons and atoms, similarly you cannot expect people in Myanmar to live in the same room. Both of these examples emphasise that the people in Myanmar are extremely diverse. He goes on to stress that religious diversity is the root cause of disarray in Myanmar, and that the different religious groups are guilty of dividing communities and societies (Naing, 2010:72).

4.2.4 Racism

Skin colour amongst the people of Myanmar is varied. The people with light, fair skin are called Chinese immigrants, those with black skin are called kala²⁶ and those with red skin call themselves “natives”. Racism exists more or less everywhere in the world. In Myanmar, racism within society, politics and the different religious groups can be witnessed on a daily basis. Most

²⁵ The majority of Chins, Karen, Kachins and Sagais are protestant Christians. These tribes have been fighting with the Burmese for more than 50 years. There is a Karen (Kayin) proverb which states that “we (Kayin) will even refuse to go to heaven with the Burmese.” The word of God will help them to live peaceably with the Burmese.

²⁶ The word “kala” is an abusive word for black people in Myanmar. It is comparable to the offensive word “N” for black people that is used in the USA. The Kala have dark skin and originally migrated to Myanmar from India and Bangladesh in 1785. These people are still not allowed to have a National ID card, which means they are not allowed to work in government offices, companies or factories.

of the violence among Myanmar's ethnic groups is started due to racial intolerance. The term racism, according to Oo (2017:122), is the belief in the superiority of one race over another, which often results in discrimination and prejudice towards people based on their race or ethnicity. Today, the term "racism" does not easily fall into a single definition. In Myanmar, one of the most challenging issues is racism between ethnic groups and the Burmese. A person's skin colour has a huge impact on the way they are seen in society and the religious group they become part of. It affects religious communities, the church, the extent to which there is unity in society, and even politics.

4.3 The Church's lack of involvement in reconciliation ministry

The church has failed to promote peace in Myanmar because of its internal doctrinal and theological disputes. Ling (2009:85-99) noted that the following theologies and ideologies can hinder reconciliation.

1. Dualistic theologies - can fail to address social problems. These theologies highlight the sufficiency of individual salvation without seeking to promote positive social transformation, or they emphasise the importance of social involvement without personal conversion to Christ.
2. Ethnocentrism, racism, sexism and nationalism - promote the fallacy of self-sufficiency and promote loyalty to one's own group as an end in itself. For example, the Ma Ba Tha, is organised and led by monks, who promote Buddhism and attack Muslims verbally and physically. Similarly, jihadist groups of Muslims in Rakhine state, led by Imams, defend Islam. They also seek citizenship in the country. God demands that people's ultimate loyalty is to Him, the Saviour and Lord, who calls people to love their neighbours, as well as their enemies.
3. False beliefs - concerning God's creation (which are contrary to Trinitarian perspectives of salvation and the theology of reconciliation from a reformed perspective). In this way, one group of people believes that they are superior to another. Therefore, they justify permanent boundaries between themselves and others. For example, Hamitic ideology teaches that God cursed the descendants of Ham, Noah's son, creating separate orders of people; some inferior and some superior. This ideology is rooted in racial segregation in Myanmar.
4. Individualism - which promotes disunity and competitiveness within the church. This ideology stops the church from seeing the country's need for reconciliation and therefore hinders the extension of God's kingdom on earth.

Reconciliation is, according to Oo (2017:253), about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous inhabitants of the country. In order for that to happen, there has to be an awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, repentance for the root cause of sin, and action to change behaviour. John (2016:163) states that in doing missionary work in Myanmar, winning people for Christ takes first priority and, of course, this impacts the growth of Christianity. He goes on to outline that, in some instances, the way in which the church's public worship services are conducted is not sensitive to the needs of the culturally conservative people of Myanmar. For example, a Buddhist may find it difficult to be in a worship service where men and women sit together if, in their own culture, they are used to sitting separately. This, in turn, effects the way in which they perceive the church, and ultimately Christ. Moe (2017:104-105) said that in the country of Myanmar, where the situation is complex and the people are ethnically diverse, reconciliation can be achieved if politicians and religious leaders are willing to work together. The church in Myanmar has failed to engage in a mission of peace, unity, and reconciliation. Lian (2013:23)²⁷ says that "there cannot be a desire for cooperation and unity with interfaith religions when spreading the gospel if the church does not commit to a mission of reconciliation." Therefore, the church has the responsibility to demonstrate that it is possible to be diverse, yet unified. If the church does not reflect this in its theology and missionary work, then it will eventually have a negative impact on the future generation of the church.

4.4 Reconciliation as the Church's mission in Myanmar

According to Oo (2017:122), conflict in Myanmar ranges from individuals to communities, from the church to the state and from one state, tribe and clan to another. The church's methods of promoting peace and reconciliation have become popular and gained attention in conflict ridden countries across the world. He condemns the church in Myanmar for its reluctance to be involved in politics. He highlights that some churches have established local and regional mission organisations which help to ensure that, at whatever level, people co-exist peacefully. Some of these institutions, including Commissions, are governed by religious leaders. Henry Van Thio²⁸ (2017) says that there is need to investigate the theology of reconciliation in relation to the restoration of relationships between communities on a nation-wide scale (i.e. the healing of the whole nation). In an effort to ensure that there is effective peacebuilding, the process of reconciliation should involve elements of both "healing" and "forgiveness".

²⁷ Dr. Rev. John Siam Lian is the founder of Love in Actions Ministry (LAM). He contributed millions of copies of the Myanmar version of Bible free of charge to people who do not have access to the gospel. He the author of more than 40 books. He is the Senior Pastor of a church and an active politician who is fighting for reconciliation through ceasefire agreements among all of the armed groups in Myanmar.

²⁸ Henry Van Thio was the first Christian to have a seat in the country's parliament office. He is the Second Vice President of Myanmar, and he works closely with representatives from the different ethnic groups in Myanmar.

In “Ideals and Methodologies of Missional Strategies” from *Communicating Christ in Myanmar: Issues, Interactions, and Perspectives* Ling (2014:218-221) laid the foundation for missional strategies in Myanmar. He proposes that Christians should:

1. Repent of the mistreatment and wrongdoings committed by previous Christian missionaries in Myanmar and ask non-Christians for forgiveness for this.
2. Change the Christian attitude of indifference towards other religions and show an interest in what other people think, believe and practice.
3. Avoid having offensive views, and using negative language, when referring to non-Christians and their religions. For example, sometimes Christians refer to Buddhists as demonic, false, and hell bound.
4. Avoid having a “holier than thou” mentality. Avoid comparing Christianity with the other religions in terms of the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’.
5. Rearticulate the exclusive aspects of missionary teachings to ensure that they use terms and customs that are relevant and understood by people from other religious groups.
6. Relate concepts and elements of other religious worldviews, which are congruent with Christianity, and consider them to be vital components of Christian theology in Myanmar.
7. Avoid being isolated from people from other faith groups and religious traditions. Try to forge closer relationships, and/or engage in creative dialogue with them.
8. Promote mutual learning and sharing so that each religious group may develop a culture of cooperation and peace.
9. Develop close working relationships that can promote both “intra” and “inter” religious cooperation, thereby finding common ground across these religions.
10. Attempt to address common issues, problems and concerns in society and look for ways to establish a network of working relationships to promote solidarity at different levels.
11. Be humble when communicating with people and avoid developing a teacher-student relationship. Ensure that the communication is two-way, which means avoid saying a monologue.
12. Always avoid extreme, one-sided, aggressive, offensive and exclusive religious language.

4.4.1 Reconciliation as the restoration of broken relationships

Karkkainen (2011:431) suggested that “casting the doctrine of atonement in a proper Trinitarian framework and in the context of God’s faithfulness to his creation helps us widen and make more inclusive the work of atonement by focusing on the multifaceted meaning of the term “reconciliation” - healing and bringing together broken relationships”. Langmead (2008:6)

surmises that out of all the metaphors of salvation, reconciliation has the potential of being the most inclusive and comprehensive, encompassing ideas such as “cosmic reconciliation, the Hebrew notion of *shalom*, the meaning of the cross, the psychological effects of conversion, the work of the Holy Spirit, the overcoming of barriers between Christians, the work of the church in the world, peacemaking, movements towards ethnic reconciliation and the renewal of ecological balances between humanity and its natural environment.” Again, Schwobel (2003:26) highlights that the motif of the restoration of relationships underlies many of the facets of reconciliation. Pannenberg (1994:449-450) also stated that reconciliation has as its goal “the restoration of the sin-broken fellowship of humanity with its Creator, the source of its life.” However, this does not mean the elimination of, but rather the positive affirmation by God of the limited human independence given to creatures. “Affirming independence from God, humanity gets stuck with the slavery of sin and finally death, separation from God.” However, the work of the Triune God, in reaching out to people, is aimed at restoring and reaffirming their limited God given independence, exemplified through the life of Jesus. The adoption to “filial Sonship” that people see perfectly in Jesus happens through the Holy Spirit. Hence, through the Spirit people are reconciled to God and then begin to do “good works”, which are the evidence of their faith. The Spirit enables believers to trust in the completed work of the cross, and he assists them between the “now” and the eschatological consummation. According to Fiddes (1989:15), “forgiveness is not only concerned with “cancelling a debt” that is owed, but it is also about restoring a broken relationship, leading to a new covenant-based relationship of mutual love and commitment.”

A good way to test the usefulness of the Trinitarian approach to salvation is to look at what Henriksen (2009:270-273) proposes as a “satisfaction model.” whereby sin is “juridical,” retributive and a failure of people to render to God what is due to Him.” Where relationality fades into the background and where problems begin with a contemporary reading of Anselm’s narrative is the “transformation of the relation into one that can be built upon a system of debt, guilt, and payment of satisfaction.” This economic approach fosters and concentrates on an external, impersonal notion of salvation, rather than the repairing of a broken relationship between the Creator and His people. Henriksen believes that from this “economic” perspective, salvation is not free, and given by grace, nor is it an unconditional parent-child relationship between God and His people, but rather it is an instrumentalised economic exchange. From his model the “externalization of the process of satisfaction and atonement seems to render Christ’s witness and ministry as being of little or no relevance to this process of atonement.” Therefore, Henriksen underscores the need for the incarnation as the divine initiator of salvation, but he underplays the seriousness of sin and therefore distorts people’s relationship to God. His satisfaction model also undermines the importance of Jesus’ life and ministry in its focus on his

death. (Even the need for Christians to be obedient to God in life is derived from the innocent “payment” for sin which took place on the cross). In addition, its view of sin as merely violation of honour is hardly biblical.

Reconciliation is “more than self-sacrifice, redemption, and substitution-even though for its validity it assumes those aspects. Alongside the cross, it includes resurrection, Christ’s cosmic rule, the founding of a Christian community for the sake of proclaiming and embodying the gospel of reconciliation” (Karkkainen, 2011:433). For Schwobel (2003:19), the language of reconciliation “refers both to an event in the past and to an enduring relationship in the present, which is claimed to be eschatologically ultimate.” In addition, reconciliation also forges an important link between creation, atonement, and the forthcoming consummation. As Fiddes (1989:17-22) also notes, if the God of redemption, who is revealed in Jesus Christ, is also the Creator of the world and the human race, then people must view his saving work as an expression of his faithfulness to his creative work.

In the Pauline epistles, the main passages about reconciliation are about communal and racial reconciliation, as well as the cosmic restoration of relationships (Fee, 2004:60-62). Colossians 1:16-22 highlights that having lifted up Christ as the principle agent of creation, Paul speaks of his role as the head of the church and then bursts into a glorious hymn: “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who once were estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death” (Col 1:19, 22) (Schwobel, 2013:20-22). Karkkainen (2011:434) highlights the wide scope of the Christian view of reconciliation: “Christ, our peace who has made us both one, making peace, reconciled both Jews and Gentiles to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end” (Eph 2:14-16). Campbell (2003:39-65) comments on the remarkable statement made by Paul in Galatians 3:28 that reads: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” He highlights that in this passage “oneness” is referred to in terms of race (Jews and Gentiles), people’s position in society (masters and slaves), and gender (female and male). This is the culmination of the great narrative of atonement and reconciliation that begins with the crucified Christ and the reception of the Spirit with miracles (Gal 3:1-5).

According to Farrow (2003:83), “reconciliation is a metaphor that in an inclusive way, speaks of the various dimensions of the salvific work of the Triune God. In many ways it supports and strengthens the ancient recapitulation view.” He suggests that the Pauline idea of peace through reconciliation in Christ can be seen in Ephesians 1:10; 1:22; 2:5; 2:13-14.

Aletti (2004:104) points out that it is important to note that reconciliation is one of the key metaphors of salvation, which is a widely used concept in theology, despite its origins deriving from the secular Hellenistic language of diplomacy. Even though salvation can be seen as an event and process initiated and brought about by the Triune God, its relevance goes beyond the elimination of hostility between individuals and God. He also suggests that salvation has above all everything to do with reconciling people to God. As a result, reconciliation can take place on a wider scale (i.e. between groups of people), and this includes the socio-political arena.

The recent conflict in Myanmar, between the Tatmadaw and the ethnic armed forces, have brought the need for reconciliation to the fore. In the same way, reconciliation between people, people groups, and nations requires “truth-telling and love,” “remembering and forgetting,” and “giving and receiving” (Langmead, 2008:6). Based on this theological framework for understanding the gospel of reconciliation, the church’s responsibility to be “missional” and engage in peacebuilding activities will be discussed.

4.4.2 Proclamation of the gospel of reconciliation

Fiddes (1989:14) states that “while Christ’s death for us was final (Heb 10:10), the process of salvation is continuous: salvation happens here and now. It is always in the present that God acts to heal and reconcile, entering into the disruption of human lives at great cost to himself.” Thus, salvation is an event or process. If people are not tolerant of each other, then forgiveness and reconciliation between people cannot be achieved. Tutu (1999:59) also said that “there is no peace without forgiveness.” The Triune God, who completed the work of atonement through Christ’s death, grieves when His people fail to obey His commands. On the human side, the finished work of reconciliation, to which we cannot add anything (Heb 10:10), continues through the church’s missionary proclamation of the gospel (Fiddes, 1989:22). It is very important to discern the integral relationship between the profound statement about the reconciliation of the world by God and the sending out of Christians to issue an appeal to all men and women to be “reconciled to God.” When looking at the New Testament as a whole, it is clear that God “has committed to us the message of reconciliation” (2Co 5:19). Wright (2006:35) goes further, stating that the “call of the gospel is for the church to implement the victory of God in the world through suffering love. The cross is not just an example to be followed; it is an achievement to be worked out, put into practice.”

The missionary proclamation of the gospel is needed for the purpose of communicating the benefits of the finished work of Christ to men and women. “One must formulate the integral connection between the finished work of Christ and the mandate of proclaiming the message of the gospel of reconciliation - most profoundly evidenced in Paul’s teaching in 2 Corinthians 5”

(Karkkainen, 2011:436). The “proclamation is itself part of the making of reconciliation” as Christians in Christ’s stead. As Paul writes, “appeal to all people to be reconciled with God” (2 Co 5:20). Here the gospel comes to the fore as the “power of God for salvation” (Ro 1:16), and in it the life-giving power of the Spirit is at work for reconciliation (Pannenberg, 1994:454).

Rae (2003:94, 102) argues that “the alteration of the human situation” is brought about through Christ, and this works itself out in the fact that there are, and will continue to be, Christian communities and Christians in the world. According to him this insight helps to make the important link between the doctrine of atonement and ecclesiology, a theme to be developed in the following discussion. Salvation and reconciliation are Christ’s redemptive work. Connecting this to the church protects the theology of atonement from the danger of individualism, which is so rampant in the church in Myanmar.

4.5 Contextualising the gospel of salvation

It is very important to develop theologies which contextualise the gospel, to ensure that the message of salvation is communicated to people in their context (Nyunt, 2010:11). Christianity needs to meet the soul-searching needs of the Burmese people in their own situation. “It is important to understand how to re-interpret the Christian message in terms relevant to the Buddhist cultural setting and religious mindsets that have preconditioned their perceptions of the nature of human existence, the philosophy of life, and praxis of religious virtues.” Aagaard (2003:60) states that it is crucial to effectively communicate Christ to Buddhists in their context, “sharing Jesus in Buddhist words.” In the same way, Nyunt (2010:87) rightly wrote that “traditional western Christianity and missionaries have failed to address this belief in spiritual power which intersects with daily life. All Christians who want to proclaim the good news of salvation to the Burmese, should create a suitable theology of reconciliation which directly addresses the actual Burmese beliefs and life.” The word “salvation” is used, and heard, across Myanmar via social media, or through people having direct contact with missionaries or evangelists. However, in more than 200 years of spreading the gospel of salvation, only 6% of the people have accepted this message. The majority of the Burmese people do not accept Christ because culturally Christians are very different from themselves, for example in terms of the way they dress and live their lives on a day to day basis. When referring to Christianity, Burmese people often say, “it is not for us,” “it is for the Westerners” or “it’s for people who are white.” “Our religion is good for us and their religion is good for them.” Therefore, the majority of Christians in Myanmar are not people who have converted from other faiths but are those who have grown up as part of an ethnic group where there have been Christians for many generations.

When Adoniram Judson, the first official missionary to the Burmese in Myanmar, experienced the stubbornness of the Burmese people he said, “converting a Burman is like drawing a tooth from the mouth of a live tiger.” Judson had worked for seven years among the Burmese people, but had only seen one convert to Christianity. He was called U Naw. However, unlike Judson, U Naw witnessed the conversion of more than ten Burmese people within a short period of time (Wa, 1963:12-19). The shy and modest Burmese people could not accept a different faith and way of life which did not fit into theirs. Old fashioned mission strategies and terms to communicate the gospel are still being used today. Therefore, the church needs to engage with people in different ways so that the message of salvation is clear and hopefully accepted by them. As Paul demonstrates in his letter to the Corinthians 1 Corinthians 9:20-22, mission strategies and the gospel, need to be contextualised to take into account the needs of the people one wants to reach, what they believe, and how they see the world.

4.5.1 The Messiah and the Saviour of the Nations

According to the Bible, the Jewish people (whom God had made a covenant with) anticipated the coming of the Messiah to liberate their nation from foreign oppression and to restore it. In the New Testament, their expectation was that the Messiah would be a political leader who would defeat the Romans. But, when Jesus the Messiah came, he moved the covenant people to conversion to God (Song, 1994:148). What was God’s plan for those who were not his covenant people? Jesus did not do away with the first commandment in the Bible, but rather he lived it out in a radical way. He let his life be consumed with service to his Father and asked his followers to put aside everything that would hinder total devotion to God (Mt 6:33). “The relationship between Christ’s ministry and passion, and particularly the cross to religious faith needs much careful consideration, as an expression of the capacity of God to bring good out of evil” (Ge 50:20) (Farrow, 1999:195). When considering Christian theology, one has to conclude that it was only after the rejection of people around him that Jesus’ death on the cross made him the “Saviour of the nations.” Ironically, the Messiah of the covenant people died for the people outside the covenant, in other words, also for the Gentiles. “This is not to deny the validity of Jesus’ death for the people of Israel; it is rather a Christian theological statement about the universal efficacy of the salvific work of Messiah” (Rauschenbusch, 1917:10 -19).

It is therefore critical, for the church’s relationship with non-Christian people, to put the delicate matter of the cross into proper perspective (Aletti, 2002:213). As Song (1994:145) wrote, “if the church has developed an interpretation of the cross that sees it as the point of God’s rejection, rejection of Jesus, of the loss of their inheritance, and of transference to the church, then it must reckon with the fact that Jesus died for the nation before he died for the scattered children of

God beyond boundaries.” So, “Christian theology is convinced that what began with Judaism must finally end with the nations, and Christians are the go-between, and that hope includes the consummation of the divine plan that all nations will be saved” (Ro 11:26). Ling (2014:342) comments that the Messiah was rejected by the Jews as their Saviour, therefore it is no surprise that a Buddhist rejects Christ as their Saviour. Rosenzweig (1950:49) calls the Messiah “*The Star of Redemption*” who came to affirm the role of the Christian church in the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles. The Christian theological standpoint on the universal and unique salvific role of Jesus Christ has to challenge the non-Christian reasoning that involves the idea of religion and Christianity as two roads that lead to the Father. Hoefler (2005:243) argues that this is not to deny, but rather confirm, the biblical notion that “salvation is for the elect” (Eph 1:4). Christ died for all.

Bu (2017:24) believes that wearing a cross as a culturally-religious symbol is highly offensive to non-Christians, Muslims and Buddhists. The only exception in the twenty first century is when non-Christians wear a “crucifix” as a fashion statement. However, even this idea is not this simple. Uk (2017:86) comments that in Myanmar, a Buddhist country, Jesus has not only been seen as a victim, but perpetrator as well (because he took on himself people’s sin). The New Testament’s attitude to non-Christian people, particularly the implication of telling the narratives of Jesus, and the Trinitarian work of salvation as reconciliation in terms of the conflict with Buddhist people, is a highly complicated and complex issue. Bu (2017:24) outlines that rather than reaching out to Buddhist people, and seeing the passion story of Jesus as a way of identifying with the suffering of the Messianic people, the Christian church has often interpreted the passion stories of the Gospel in a way that promotes hostility towards some specific groups of people. In doing so, Mofokeng (1983:26-29) suggests that the church has missed the opportunity of seeing Jesus’ death as a means of “bearing in his own body the judgment he foresaw as the God of Israel’s incarnation, sacrificing himself as the ‘for all’ had done before him, on behalf of the people.”

As Uk (2017:86) said, “an important task here is the comparison between Buddhist, Muslim, the Nat worshippers (or Ancient worshippers) and Christian theologies of atonement,” a topic that, surprisingly, has not loomed large in the agenda of mutual talks. Both sides have much to learn from each other. According to Young (2005:92-99), the idea of the vicarious atonement from a Christian interpretation, with a view to the salvation of the world rather than for the benefit of the nation, seems strange and foreign to Buddhists who believe that the problem of sin has already been dealt with in the Pali. However, Bu (2017:24) again points out that first of all, Buddhist theology does not of course hold to the Christian Biblical view of “the fall” (in any of its main forms of interpretation), which would negate the divine initiative such as death on the cross.

Hanh (1990:37), a Buddhist scholar, remarks that it was on the basis of Hebrew Scripture, such as Isaiah 53:4-6, that Christian theology came to interpret the vicarious suffering of their Messiah. Wright (2006:60-72) seems to have this idea when he writes, “redemption from the new perspective.” He suggests that the search for continuities-in the midst of radical discontinuities between the Christian and non-Christian has nothing to do with atonement, which is more than an attempt to find a pedagogical contact. It has to do with the material and systematic structures of both traditions. Hence, according to Bu (2017:25), a complicating factor here is that even contemporary Buddhist philosophy tends to operate from the Christian idea of atonement that is one-sided and limited, implying that it is mainly about the shedding of blood and sacrifice, as well as focused (almost exclusively) on the salvation of individuals. In other words, Wright (2006:37) extracts that “the kind of Trinitarianism, more comprehensive and multifaceted ramifications in Christian theology, developed in this work and widespread in various kinds of contemporary Christian writings, seem to be unknown even among the most acute and informed Buddhist and Muslim interpreters”.

According to Kepnes (2015:77-79), Buddhist scholars may gain insight into the meaning of salvation through the lens of the biblical notions of purity and impurity, the sacrificial offices and systems, and the Buddhist temple and pagodas. Reference to the Lamb who takes away sin is based on the slaughtering of lambs for the expiation of sin. Christ’s self-sacrifice also connects with the Muslim and Buddhist liturgical days. This is not to say that Buddhist and Muslim faith does not know the substitutionary suffering for others. Lyden (1992:50) states that of course it does, both in terms of the “Suffering Servant” of Isaiah and the righteous martyrs during the Maccabean era. Still, the finished self-sacrifice of Jesus from a Christian interpretation is markedly different from the continuing sacrificial cult administered by the monks in Buddhism. Not only has the finality of the sacrifice of Jesus, but also its universality set it apart as different from the understanding of sacrifice from non-Christian traditions. Jesus’ sacrifice, even as the work of the Triune God, is contingent on this relationship, a claim without parallel in non-Christian circles and a stumbling block to monotheism (Parrinder, 1968:204). The role of the church is to serve as the agent of reconciliation, not as the one who reconciles; only Yahweh can do that. Finally, a foundational difference has to do with the offer and object of the sacrifice. Whereas in Buddhism, Islam and Judaism, people offer the sacrifice to a god or God (Yahweh), in Christian theology (2Co 5:17) it is God who reconciles the world to himself. According to Parrinder (1968:109), both the differences and similarities between the religions should be acknowledged in the hope to rediscover the central meaning of atoning theologies, as well as for continuing mutual dialogue and invitation.

Geschiere (1999:74) said that one can see that Islam and Christianity express the same basic ideas about atonement, but in different ways, whilst Buddhism and Islam have the opposite concept of salvation and the role of the Messiah. Their views about this idea do not create an incommensurable rift between the two religions as it once may have seemed; rather, it is important to observe significant similarities that connect the two, in spite of their differences. If the views of Judaism and Christianity are as close as they seem to be at this point, then there must be hope that a comparison of their respective views will lead to greater understanding, a new recognition of commonalities, and a way to mutual appreciation. Further, he suggests that one must be mindful of the dangers of bad apologetics. The profound differences between the religious traditions in relation to the understanding of atonement should not be “artificially softened nor eliminated”. In the same way, in the spirit of mutual learning and love, as well as the integrity of confession and identity, a new exploration of the possibility of common ground should be explored (Rosenzweig, 1950:165-167). The search for common ground does not mean denying either religion the right to share their own testimony or to try to persuade the other. Nausner (2004:184) stated that “this allowance may seem like an unfair admission to the Christian church in light of the scriptures, the fact that, unlike the Buddhist, Muslim and the interfaith dialogue with the Christian faith is missionary by nature.” This is the legacy of the message and mandate of the church founded by the Messiah. If God was in Christ and reconciled the world to Himself, then the “ambassadors” are sent out to make the plea that all people, whether Jews or Gentiles “be reconciled to God” (2Co 5:19-20).

The church in Myanmar has the continuing mandate to share the testimony of Christ with interfaith groups. The church should not be “silent,” since Christ’s followers have been given a unique and special place in the divine economy. Rae (2003:104) highlights the conviction that Christ died to all who believe (Jh 3:16). In order to make progress in this foundational issue, there is a challenge to religious groups. To extend the above statements, the problem with the church in Myanmar is that it has been silent and not engaged in the reconciliation task where needed. Doctrinal disputes, replica theology, cultural divisiveness, spoon-fed church administration, dogmas, ineffective missional strategies, and uncontextualised theology have become hindrances to people presenting the saving work of Christ as reconciliation in Myanmar.

4.6 Conclusion

Myanmar has experienced civil war for more than six decades, following post-colonial rule. Peace and reconciliation are challenging issues for the country during this transitional period. Myanmar is a pluralistic country. Hindrances to reconciliation are not merely political. Religious ideologies, cultural diversity, doctrinal disputes within the church, old fashioned missional

strategies, and historical struggles are some of the reasons why the conflict between the ethnic groups in Myanmar continue. Christians are marginalised for social and political reasons, and their right to religious freedom is restricted. The following chapter will propose missional strategies for the church and Christian individuals to adopt as they proclaim salvation as reconciliation.

CHAPTER 5 APPLICATION OF SALVATION AS RECONCILIATION IN THE CONTEXT OF CONFLICTS BETWEEN MYANMAR ETHNIC GROUPS

This chapter outlines theological reflections on the church's responsibility to promote reconciliation in Myanmar. It analyses the affect that the silence of the church, in its failure to challenge oppression and injustice in society, and the divisions that are evident between and within it, have on its effectiveness to promote the gospel of peace. This research places the biblical concept of holistic reconciliation at the core of Christian mission in the 21st century and, as a response to this, strategies that could be adopted by the church in Myanmar will be presented. It is an urgent call for the church to share the gospel, in the hope that this will bring social transformation.

5.1 The church's responsibilities and strategies

Religion promotes faith and social harmony in society. There is no such thing as faith devoid of culture or culture that is devoid of faith. Faith serves several functions within society. In Myanmar, religion, culture, and society are interconnected, especially for the Buddhist Burmese. Religion and faith are forces that can transform society. Ling (2014:236) also asserts that religion is a tool for promoting social harmony and peace. The church should communicate salvation as reconciliation when sharing Christ with people from the various ethnic groups in Myanmar.

Marcon (2017:4) points out that "the church's weak faith is evident during times of conflict. Its lack of involvement in social affairs is contributing to the world's brokenness and it is damaging its gospel witness." Ling (2009:23) categorised Christian mission strategies in the Myanmar context, and criticised the church for refusing to get involved in the reconciliation process. Ong Myint (2017:112), a Burmese Buddhist, also said that Christians are guilty of withholding love from their neighbours. Therefore, church mission fails to manifest God's love, and its witness is weakened because its members are not actively involved in challenging the oppression experienced by the different ethnic groups in the country.

Win (2015:190-192) said that conflict resolution in Myanmar is a mandate given to the church by God. The church needs to focus on discipling its members, so that they become mature in their faith and do not perpetuate the sins committed by Christians in the past, which have resulted in divisions within the church and people separating themselves from other religious or ethnic groups. The churches need to develop strong interdenominational partnerships, so that they

can be outward focused and challenge the oppression and persecution experienced by some of the country's marginalised groups. Naing (1997:48-51) criticises the churches for being "passive bystanders", who refuse to become constructive agents of reconciliation amidst the divisions and conflict between different ethnic groups in Myanmar. The church should follow the Lord's mandate to Paul, "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you" (Ac 18:9-10). In the midst of the country's profound brokenness and crisis, the Holy Spirit is at work powerfully through evangelism, which seeks to reconcile humanity to God and humanity to each other (Tin, 2013:192).

However, in opposition to the above claims, McGrath (1999:220) quoted the Schleithem Confession (1527) and argued that it is not appropriate for a Christian to serve as a Magistrate (or in worldly government affairs) for a variety of reasons. The role of a magistrate is connected to the "flesh," but the Christian's life should be led according to the Spirit. From his perspective, the affairs of the government are of this world, but a Christian's affairs are the affairs of a heavenly city since their citizenship is in heaven. The weapons of war and conflict are physical and against the flesh, whereas the Christian's weapons are spiritual, against the fortification of the devil. Non-Christians are armed with steel and iron, but the Christian is armed with the armour of God, with truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and the word of God. However, McGrath's interpretation of spirituality is one-sided because it is based purely on theology. His arguments cannot be applied to the socio-political context of Myanmar. He asserts that the church should not be involved in secular affairs, but in Myanmar religion and politics are intrinsically linked. Christians need to be in the world as witnesses among interfaith groups to help to deal with the presenting issues at the time, and the Gospel of salvation to people. In a same vein, Erickson (2013:992) rightly points out that Jesus teaches that his followers are to be the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world" (Mt 5:13-16). They are to influence the world in a positive way for Christ. Christians need to be involved in the structures of society, whilst still maintaining their distinctiveness as "salt" and "light." The ideal laid down by James should be the goal of every believer: to be kind and compassionate towards people, but to keep oneself "pure" in this world (Jas 1:27).

Robinson (2011:73) proposes that throughout the years of conflict in Myanmar it has been possible to trace a connection between the stability of the social context and reconciliation between the government and ethnic groups. Phan (2002:82) highlighted the need to establish a theology of reconciliation that exists under the umbrella of traditionally understood local theology in conflict ridden areas. Both Robinson and Phan's arguments depend on the religious beliefs of the people in question. The church should discern the needs of the people they are sharing the gospel with to ensure that they have a flexible reconciliation ministry strategy. If the

church does not respond to situations in ways that fit the culture and traditions of the local people, then it cannot be effective in reaching people with the gospel. It will be dormant, and not the “salt” and the “light” which it is called to be. Healing the wounds of the past and creating a harmonious community to bring hope for the future, are key components of the reconciliation mission of the church. Chapman (2016:16) also said that “peace, in this case, is not simply a matter of stopping violence. It involves helping people overcome what others have done to them, and overcoming what the government have done to others, so that they can move forward in their lives. There is a need to challenge the world to ponder the political potential of forgiveness.”

5.1.1 Sending missionaries

Jesus’ followers are called to embody the good news of Christ’s salvation in their socio-cultural context. This will always give a particular shape to their Christian witness (Coheen, 2009:67). Newbigin (2006:78) also wrote that incomparably the most urgent missionary task for the next few decades is the mission to “modernity.” For both Coheen and Newbigin, mission reformation ought to encompass a comprehensive vision for life, but it also needs to be adaptable and translatable into all cultures. Myanmar is religiously diverse; the presence of churches, temples, mosques, shrines, pagodas and zayat²⁹ are signs of religiosity. This phenomenon indicates that religion is at the very heart of the people. In the same way, Weber (1963:151-165) said that culture shapes religion. Religion functions as a shelter, a refuge and protection for people in society. During periods of political unrest and social crises people look to “religion” for healing, liberation, freedom, peace, consolation, reformation and transformation. It has also been a massive force for social change in Myanmar’s history. In the name of religion monarchies were reunified and re-established. Ling (2009:81) articulates that due to religious motives, people revolted when there was conflict and failed to promote peace. Culture is the soul and religion is the heart of the people.

Religious and ethnic conflict have led to misunderstandings, mistrust and prejudice between Christians, Buddhists, Muslims, Atheists and Paganists in Myanmar. According to Ling (2015:9), the history of the early Church must be critically appraised before healing and reconciliation can be achieved. Sending missionaries to Myanmar is necessary to overcome the current “impasse,” so that relationships built on mutual understanding, respect and peace can be built. Christians in Myanmar need to promote peace in order to overcome the negative

²⁹ Zayats are public buildings in the villages in Myanmar which are used as accommodation for travellers. A. Judson used a zayat as a place to share the gospel and this model for outreach was then used by other people. There were free pamphlets outlining sermons, Bibles, hymnals and bible study materials in the zayats. There was also free education for the poor who could not afford to go to school.

memories of the past. Therefore, the church's role to promote reconciliation is a crucial task to be carried out by missionaries. Ling (2014:32) pointed out one of the weaknesses of the church in Myanmar is that missionaries are not sent to proclaim the gospel to the people who live in the neighbourhoods surrounding them, or to other countries. In this way, churches that do not promote reconciliation, and are therefore "neutral" (in a political sense and fail to bear "fruit" (i.e. they do not see new converts joining the church).

The church in Myanmar is entering into a new era for mission initiatives which promote reconciliation. Mangai (2015:107) comments that "this is marked by dialogue and reconciliation." The reconciliation task should be carried out by missionaries and different forms of dialogue, between different groups of people, advocated. "No religions can exist in isolation anymore; religion that is not open to others becomes irreligious as exemplified in fundamentalism and religious fanaticism." "The church now considers the religious "others" as equal partners in dialogues aimed at promoting harmony" (Mercado, 2000:101). The goal of promoting reconciliation between different groups of people is achieved through proclaiming the gospel of peace and salvation. Dialogue creates the opportunity to discuss each other's faith and gives the "other" a chance to tolerate different viewpoints. When missionaries aim to promote dialogue as a means to social transformation, rather than to simply convert people, their approach is holistic. This means that missionaries are one of the best ambassadors for bringing the good news of reconciliation, unity, harmony and tolerance in society, which can open doors for the gospel of salvation to be shared with others.

5.1.2 Engaging in dialogue through seminars and outreach

After Thein Sein became President of Myanmar in 2011, one of his strategies for the unification process was the implementation of a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. Various national and local political dialogues took place and political prisoners, who had previously campaigned to advance democracy, were released. Christians started doing outreach to advance the gospel, and also ran seminars to promote unity and social cohesion. The seminars and outreach facilitated dialogue between different ethnic and religious groups, which in turn, had a positive impact on society (Bwa, 2015:73, 77).

However, the church did not have an ongoing commitment to these strategies and gradually stopped being involved in politics. John (2016:97-98) coins the term "political holiness"³⁰ to

³⁰ "Political holiness" is a political agenda for the wellbeing of all. This agenda could provide a practical ground for applying religious values, spiritual and altruistic principles of harmony, peace, justice solidarity, compassion and reconciliation for the wellbeing of all.

describe the church's reluctance to be involved in the political arena. Seminars and outreach to facilitate dialogue are not just important from a political standpoint, they play an important role in spiritual revival, behavioural transformation and reconstructing one's worldview. Therefore, it is hoped that these strategies will ease some of the tensions between diverse ethnic and religious groups in Myanmar. Keenan (2012:1-12) also candidly observes that reconciliation can proceed through interreligious based dialogue. This interchange will enhance the church and open up a new strategy for carrying out missionary work. Prior (2000:22) outlined that without dialogical conciliation with people in each local context, the local church will simply reflect the theology and cultural background of its missionaries. In the West, "models" and "paradigms" are frequently used to describe theories relating to a particular topic.

Dialogue based seminars and outreach should not be conducted as a method or theory, rather, they should respond to the needs of the people they are hoping to benefit. In contrast to the West, in Myanmar the way of life, the way of truth (dhama), the way of compassion (ahimsa) and the way of dao (incarnated God) are not usually considered as models, strategies, approaches and paradigms (Mang, 2016:148). The followers of Christ should adopt the "best" strategies for promoting social cohesion, which are "dialogical strategies," with interfaith groups (this known as interreligious dialogue) to ensure that "mission is accomplished."

Sakhong (2011:65–67) highlights certain principles that would assist the reconciliation process in Myanmar. The country is pluralistic therefore the Burmese need to search for harmony in a holistic way, and in a way that complements the needs of the different people groups. Harmony can be developed through social reconciliation. The theology of harmony should be experiential and nourished by salvation as reconciliation.

5.1.3 Building reconciliation ministry

The churches in Myanmar have a unique, relevant and specific role to play in promoting peace and reconciliation. Bevans and Schroeder (2004:391-392) highlight four levels of reconciliation that the church should be involved in, according to its capacity. These include (1) Personal reconciliation, (2) Cultural reconciliation, (3) Political reconciliation and (4) Reconciliation within the Church itself. They suggest that there is not a "ready-made road map" for this. The message of reconciliation has to be contextualised, and the church needs to be among local people to search for new ways to promote it.

John (2016:210) comments that the modern world is changing, evolving and expanding and, therefore, mission contexts are also changing. Missionary work can help to put the church back

into its proper place in society. He suggests that missiology must be the foundation of ecclesiology. If people start to plant churches, and then consider ways to do outreach in the communities around them, then “mission” will probably be lost. However, if Christians start with mission, then it is likely that a church will be planted whilst maintaining a missional emphasis. Mission is the starting point for the renewal of the Church. The ministry of reconciliation involves proclaiming the good news of salvation. If the church is missionary by nature, the local church will regard the people in the immediate area as its mission field. From a missional perspective, the church’s own unique social context is a rich source of information, which discerns reality in the light of faith and has the potential to help provide a mission focussed response to problems. Therefore, if mission is reconciliation, then reconciliation is the mission of the church.

5.1.4 Promoting peace and harmony

In Myanmar religion has been politicised by the junta. The military is aware that the majority of the Burmese Buddhists are “religious.” It takes advantage of this and incites violence against practitioners of other religions, using faith as a tool to promote their own propaganda. Therefore, people from other faith groups, including Christians, are persecuted; however, the church remains “silent.” The church without mission is like a family without an income or work. Promoting peace and harmony is another way to do missionary work. En (2011:115-123) said that Christianity and mission have had an almost symbiotic relationship from a theoretical paradigm. Linn (2013:125) also stated that crisis is characterised by danger and opportunity. She argues that there is a crisis in the church regarding the understanding, praxis, urgency and relevance of mission. “Mission” is a challenge in transition. The church is guilty before God when it is “silent” when the people in its community or country are in trouble, and it fails to respond. Thus, “raising its voice” to challenge oppression and injustice to change society for the better is a way of promoting peace and harmony, and in this way the gospel of salvation can be proclaimed.

5.2 Christian individual responsibilities and strategies

Christians in Myanmar have avoided being involved in politics. The reason for this is linked to the teaching of the first Baptist American missionaries to Myanmar, who taught that Christians should not be involved in political issues since the church was separated from the state. Religious beliefs and politics were not seen as interrelated. However, in the present situation it is impossible to hold this view in Myanmar, where religious individuals are politicians whose political views are shaped by their beliefs. In addition, the church struggles to contextualize the gospel as it is influenced by Western ideas, many of which are liberal, such as the views of the first Catholic missionaries to

Myanmar. As Coheen (2009:77) said, “at least to some degree, redemption must involve the restoration of human life (as opposed to being merely a flight to the spiritual world)”.

Multiculturalism and religious diversity characterise the scenario in Myanmar today. Secular and postmodern ideas influence society. The interaction between people from diverse religions and cultures has created opportunities, but also problems. Engaging with interreligious groups is a part of the missional work that the church, and Christian individuals, must be committed to (Ling, 2014:51). Christians are unique agents of the church. John (2016:49) comments that whilst hate speech and religious intolerance have been seen on social media, Christians are solely responsible for ensuring that Christianity is seen in a positive light. Every Christian must use social media moderately, as a means to promote peace and harmony with interreligious groups, rather than conflict.

For Knitter (2009:183), the Buddhist practice of *metta* (loving kindness/mercy) and *karuna* (compassion) extends to all beings. Christians insist that “if you want peace, work for justice,” whilst the Buddhists insist that “if you want peace, be peace.” Likewise, if people want to promote reconciliation among others, they need to be reconciled to God through faith in Jesus as their Saviour. A violent person can hardly be a peacemaker (John, 2016:97). Only a “healed” and “reconciled” person can be an agent for reconciliation. Christian individuals are not merely people of faith, they are actors who convey the message of salvation and reconciliation through the way in which they live their lives.

5.2.1 Being a Christ - like model in the world

One of the biggest problems for modern day Christianity in Myanmar is that Christians are not becoming “more like Christ” in society, in their communities and amongst their friends. People from other religions judge Christians by the words that come out of their mouths, rather than their deeds. An old proverb states that “actions speak louder than words.”³¹ Therefore, it is crucial that Christians are Christ-like models through their words, character, love, humility and purity. The church in Myanmar should imitate Christ in order to bring the message of salvation to non-Christians. According to the gospel of Matthew, Christ saw himself as a model for His followers to follow. In Jesus’ words: “for meek am I and humble in heart” (Mt 11:29). Paul imitated Christ and wrote to the church in Corinth stating that, “I, Paul, am entreating you, through meekness and the leniency of Christ” (2Co 10:1). Rice (2005:11) argues that Christians need to be humble and meek when promoting reconciliation amongst interfaith groups who are

³¹ “Actions speak louder than words” means that people’s actions show their real attitudes, rather than through the words they say. This expression is sometimes used to advise a person to do something positive. <http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/actions-speak-louder-than-words>.

culturally diverse. Therefore, mission strategies must not only encompass mission in the world which people find themselves, they must address the needs of people further afield.

5.2.2 Being an ambassador for Christ

The mission of God to a broken fallen world from the beginning of humankind, in the Garden of Eden, was reconciliation (Ge 3:8-9). Rice (2005:5) said that this mission has not changed since the fall, to the ascension of Christ and to its fulfilment in the coming of Jesus in the eschaton. Reconciliation between people is only accomplished through the atoning work of Christ on the cross (Schreiner, 1998:264). God's reconciliation mission involved the kingdom of God, as realised through Jesus' incarnation. Reconciliation was God's initiative and restoring a broken world was his intention by reconciling "to Himself all things" through Christ. This includes the relationship between God and human beings, the relationship between human beings themselves and the relationship between people and creation. Thus, Rice concludes that Christians participate in God's mission on earth by being ambassadors of reconciliation.

According (John, 2016:131), the "message of reconciliation" (2Co 5:19) is the gospel, and the "ministry of reconciliation" (2Co 5:18) is Christian mission. Thus, it is the role of Christians today to be reconcilers. God reconciled people to Himself through Christ. Christ reconciles people to God and people to each other. The Christian theological foundation for reconciliation encompasses the basic theme of God's intended purpose of his relationship with people.

Christians are ambassadors who represent Christ (2Co 5:20), the church and Christianity. Christians are called to be like Jesus Christ, sustained by the Holy Spirit, to be a witness and to represent the reconciliation of people to God to the whole world. The "message of reconciliation" (2Co 5:19) is the gospel, and the "ministry of reconciliation" (2Co 5:18) is Christian mission (John, 2016:131). This involves being an ambassador for Christ among people from different cultures and religions. Linn (2013:125) writes that as ambassadors for Christ, people should promote reconciliation between people where needed.

Being an ambassador for Christ is an expression of Christian spirituality. Haight (2014:x-xi) outlines that this has six characteristics. Firstly, a person's spirituality can be seen through their actions or behaviour. Secondly, it is dependent on the way in which people frame their everyday actions as part of a wider religious narrative. Jesus' life serves as a paradigm. Thirdly, spirituality can be seen as is a living organism which develops over time. Fourthly, it is a priority within the church. Fifthly, it is a priority in, and the basis of, theology and ecclesial doctrines. Finally, spiritual acts as a bridge to facilitate ecumenical communication and mutual

understanding. Spirituality is a constituent part of the church in Myanmar. It is time for Christians to act on this and become involved in promoting reconciliation in the country.

According to the Bible, all believers (adults and young people) are called to be witnesses for Christ. Young people also have role in proclaiming the message of reconciliation to God in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. The activities of the local churches in Myanmar must include missionary education, in order to encourage and challenge young people to be witnesses for Christ through their lives and through their verbal testimony (Bynum, 1968:324).

Involving young people in the current peace process is one way to ensure that peace is promoted. This will promote unity, which is the source of peace, since there will be greater collaboration between them, social organisations and politicians. By acknowledging the essential role that young people can play in the peace process, and giving them opportunities to recognise their strengths, will help them to establish goals and develop their knowledge and skills, which can be used to promote social cohesion. They can help to prevent and resolve conflicts by being flexible and resilient, making a positive change in society by developing new ideas. If youth are engaged in the peace process, a culture of peace will be developed at a family level, this in turn can change communities and, in this way, it is more likely that sustainable peace will be achieved.

Fresh perspectives on the conflict between the ethnic groups in Myanmar can be provided by young people. These can help to shed light on the underlying causes of the conflict and possible solutions. Young people can be a major force for peace development once they are empowered and catalysts for changing society. Women are also often the ones who trigger peace mechanisms.

5.2.3 Reconciliation in extra-Biblical approach

Reconciliation between diverse ethnic groups and different religions will hopefully overcome some of the tension among people in Myanmar. According to Maravilla (2014:48), the missiological approach *mission inter gentes*³² can be employed by the church in Myanmar. This is still an alien concept to the church in Myanmar, even though it is spoken about in relation to mission as inculturation, liberation and dialogue. John (2016:211) proposes that the church rethink the task of doing mission work in Myanmar as mission “among” the nations (*missio inter gentes*), instead of mission “to” the nations (*mission ad gentes*); through “triple dialogue” (mission through dialogue with people, cultures and religions). Because Myanmar is culturally

³² “*Mission inter gentes*” means “mission among the nation”, whilst “*mission ad gentes*” means “mission to the nations.” The ideas are purely based on context-critical theology of mission that demand contextualized theology.

diverse, and this makes *mission inter gentes* relevant in this particular context.

Missiologist Jonathan Y. Tan (2011:502) argues that *mission ad gentes* needs to be replaced with *mission inter gentes*. That means, that according to Javier (2015:100), mission in Myanmar needs to reconcile *mission ad gentes* with *mission inter gentes*. *Missio inter gentes* does not mean “moving from the old to the new frontiers,” but building “bridges between (inter) all the divides.” For him, triple dialogue is a method for doing *mission inter gentes*. *Missio ad gentes* and *mission inter gentes* must be seen as complementary. They must be integrated and in harmony with each other. Interestingly, Menampamppli (2012:314) proposes that Myanmar needs new “capital” for mission. By capital he does not mean land, buildings, tools or equipment, but rather skills, knowledge, social cohesion, and motivation. Analogously, mission “capital” includes, faith, dialogue, networking, creativity, innovation, collaboration, sacrifice, spirituality, hospitality, charity, compassion, mysticism, and much more. To extent this, if mission “capital” is already within the local church, this should be utilised, because it is more sustainable than importing assets from elsewhere. The local church needs to be resourced and flesh out its “capital” for sustainable *mission inter gente* by using contextualized missional approaches. The “sunshine policy” is a useful strategy that can be adapted to the local church context to unify people from other religious faiths. This model demands that people adopt a moderate way of life or a unitary missional approach in doing dialogue.

5.3 Inter-faith base reconciliation model

Phan (2004:62) wrote that Christians were regarded as the allies of Western people by Buddhists in Myanmar. Historically, religion has been deeply intertwined with people’s ethnicity. Buddhism and people’s ethnicity are connected to the nationalist movement in Myanmar. Fundamentalism, according to Roy (1992:99-101), arises due to fear of plurality and diversity. It fails to embrace cultural diversity, religious pluralism, different worldviews, and ways of life. Ong Myint (2017:126) highlights that the ethnocentric nationalists also appear to be fundamentalists. They promote Burmanization policies. Burmanization,³³ for Ling (2014:225-226), is synonymous for “Buddhistization.” This philosophy is religion base nationalism. Since the post-colonial era, this ideology has been a great challenge, and even a threat, to the national identity of every person in Myanmar who was not Buddhist. The nationalists believe that the country belongs to a particular ethnic group and religion. Hence, these nationalists are a threat to the current ceasefire negotiations, peace talks, and the reconciliation process. Their

³³ The term “Burmanization” called in Burmese as *Amyo*, which means the Burmese tribe alone. This ideology has been proposed by Buddhist nationalist monks since 2007. Since then, it has been called the “969 movement” or the “Saffron Revolution.”

ideology has ignited chaos in society and has divided people. They use offensive hate speech and are intolerant towards people from other religions. This has resulted in increased division between people in the country, and more religious conflict.

Langmead (2008:6) says that ethno nationalism continues in modern times. In Myanmar to be Burman is to be Buddhist (*Amyo* and *Bathar*). Burmese culture is intrinsically linked to Theravada Buddhist philosophy. So, Buddhism in Myanmar reflects the Burmese culture. This highlights the interwoven reality of religion and ethnicity for the Burman (the Burmese people). This is not to undermine the fact that Myanmar is a pluralistic country, with people from many different cultures and religions. Therefore, it is necessary for the church and the community to be tolerant and understand the interfaith based context it finds itself in. This is critical when doing missionary work. There have been terrible acts of violence, which were committed in the name of religion by Buddhist nationalists, and radical Muslims in the country. Ling (2009:172) said that mistrust, hatred, hostility, conflict, and even violence in certain areas, is due to people having different faith practices. Recently, Muslim-Buddhist relationships have been so tense that any incident could spark religious hostility. John (2016:65) also suggests that “rumours have, at times, incited people to violence. Hate speech in the social media has caused tension and resulted in some relationships breaking down across the nation.” And so, the church has the responsibility to create a better community, and to promote harmony in society, so that interfaith groups will come to love Christ and see Christianity as a religion of love and harmony.

In the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:34), Christ our Lord pronounced the “golden rule” of “agape love,” which encompasses loving both our neighbours and our enemies (Mt 22:36-40). The golden rule reflects Christ’s ministry, and how God’s Kingdom on earth can be actualised (Mt 6:10). This is seen in the Gospels and was inaugurated in the Sermon on the Mount. It is of utmost importance for Christians, as followers of the “way, the truth and the life” (Jn 14:6).

Maozami (2008:65-77) highlights that the Zoroastrian religion discourages people from doing to others what is not good for one’s self. This rule brings harmony and order in society. In the West, moral philosophy (from Origen to Luther), or the golden rule is regarded according to (John, 2016:92) as the “first natural law” (Mt 7:12: Ro 2:13-16). It is from nature itself, inscribed by God in man’s heart.

In Islam submission of oneself to Allah’s will and law are connected to the golden rule. The Quran reads “Pay, Oh Children of Adam, as you would love to be paid, and be just as you would love to have justice” (Quran 83:1-17). This model establishes an important ethical and moral principle. It suggests that one’s interaction with others should mirror one’s relationship

with God. This is the basis for social contracts, civic virtues and involvement in society (Homerin, 1992:99-101).

Scheible (2008:116-128) states that in Theravada Buddhism the golden rule is as follows: “one who loves himself should not harm another.” The model begins with self-understanding. “Do unto others, since you understand the experience; you know it what it would be like, so don’t do violent.” One of its core values is that people should not harm others. “It [the golden rule] matters for non-harm or nonviolence (ahimsa) in present society and for the ceasing of samsara (circle of births) and continued rebirth. The golden rule in Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and primal religions is bio-centric. The latter demands respect for all forms of life. The golden rule in these religions can be seen as a guide for promoting peace, reconciliation and harmony among people in Myanmar.

From looking at the recent religious conflicts, it is clear that there is a need for peace and justice, which can only be achieved through a commitment to strategies which promote reconciliation, such as negotiation and dialogue between the different people involved. The church must come together with interfaith groups for mutual dialogue, in order for the nation to develop peacefully and harmoniously. Ko (2016:332-335) proposed that churches and Christian individuals commit to the following:

- To support non-violent and peaceable political movements that are against the tyranny of military dictatorship. Christians should support non-violent strategies aimed at promoting the prevalence of full democracy, justice, and freedom in Myanmar.
- To equip people with the knowledge and skills to build a just and peaceful society in the context of the ethnic and religious conflicts in Myanmar. The church must make an effort to train church leaders, missionaries and Christian individuals in areas such as human rights, gender justice, peacebuilding, conflict transformation and interfaith dialogue or cooperation.
- To promote solidarity among the ethnic Christian churches so that minority Christians might “raise their voices” in the communities surrounding them and in the world. The Myanmar Council of Churches should encourage their member churches to promote solidarity, especially in times of crisis and situational change.
- To encourage interfaith dialogue and cooperation among religious communities, to work together for the common good and for a brighter future. They should work together to address humanitarian concerns, which include caring and supporting victims of natural disasters, and diseases such as HIV/AIDS. These would be significant steps towards promoting peace.

Samartha (1998:192-194) suggests that religious pluralism is a reality in modern time, and this is applicable to the situation in Myanmar. Living in a pluralistic society provides the opportunity for interaction between people from different religious traditions and, to some extent, can lead to an appreciation of faiths and traditions which differ from one's own. It is an undeniable fact that religious pluralism enriches people's lives and relationships. It demands that people come out into the public arena to defend their religion. This leads people to have a new perspective on life. In modernity, religion and religious issues have not been considered important, but with the advent of postmodernism this view is being radically challenged. Western or Burmese Christian traditions and traditional mission strategies are no longer the norm. It is simple: one can gain insight and wisdom from other's faith and religious traditions, whilst remaining faithful to the essentials of one's own faith. McGowan (1991:214-216) agreed that a Christian living in a postmodern era is constantly engaged in a process of creative negotiation between his or her faith concerning issues such as religion, politics, the economy and social affairs. There is a need for negotiation between people who hold diverse world views which can, in turn, lead to the exchange of ideas concerning various spheres of life. In doing mission work, negotiation should not mean "compromise." However, negotiation does not necessarily lead to compromise, rather it is another form of dialogue.

5.3.1 Mutual forgiveness and understanding

The Lord's Prayer is a plea for God to "forgive our debts as we forgive our debtors" (Mt 6:12). Forgiving others is, therefore, a practical outworking of faith. It also shows that being merciful and, therefore, forgiving people of their sin, is part of God's character. Without forgiveness, conflicts cannot be resolved and there cannot be harmony between people. For John (2016:131) "forgiveness is the best weapon³⁴ to heal the past. To forgive, however, does not mean to forget. It is important that atrocities are not repeated. Forgiveness is a requirement for establishing a new beginning." Kodithuwakku (2011:219) states that "without forgiveness there really is no future, no life, no new beginning, and no lasting peace. Without forgiveness people remain victims of the past. Those who cannot forgive dwell on the past. He stresses that, "the way to reconciliation is through forgiveness and justice." For Amaladoss (2003:160), "healing comes to those who can forgive the culprits. When there is forgiveness and restorative justice, healing and transformation are on the way." Therefore, being gracious, and forgiving others, must be part of the character of Christians; as Jesus said, "love your enemies." Jesus did not give advice, but rather he instructed people to obey his teaching and follow in his footsteps. Jesus prayed on the cross "forgive them for they do not know what they do" (Lk 23:34).

³⁴ Maung John insists that forgiveness is the fruit of faith. A Christian cannot bear fruit of faith apart from Christ's forgiveness. Forgiveness is a must for Christian individuals and the church to achieve peace with interfaith groups. He proposes three components in the reconciliation process: forgiveness, dialogue and flexibility.

Misunderstandings are the root cause of conflict in Myanmar. These develop due to selfish ambition whereby people perceive themselves to be superior to others. Misunderstandings can be dealt with through sound teaching, but not physical force. Grau (2004:173-175), however, highlights that misunderstandings cannot be healed through simply understanding another party's perspective alone. Religions teach that healing can take place when there is mutual understanding and respect. Daley (2004:170-172) suggests that understanding other points of view or motives is the remedy to healing. Therefore, evangelism amongst unbelievers, and pastoral care for Christians, must be based on the biblical teaching of love, forgiveness and understanding. God's kingdom on earth (as it is in heaven) will come through salvation as reconciliation, which leads to forgiveness. Restitution, reparation and forgiveness are central to Christian reconciliation. Forgiveness is the remedy for healing the past, restoring relationships, and creating harmony, which can lead to a new era for humanity.

5.3.2 Missional dimension to reconciliation

The Church needs to discern what it can contribute when the ruling class, political parties and the ethnic armed groups make a call for national reconciliation through religious dialogue (Phan, 2004:98). The people of Myanmar need healing in every aspect of their lives, due to the years of religious, political and ethnic turmoil and conflict they have endured. In other words, healing needs to be inclusive and holistic. As Ling (2014:98) highlights "healing must be understood in a holistic or, as we say today, multi-dimensional way, which encompasses physical, mental, social and also spiritual dimensions." If Myanmar does not have a future without reconciliation, then the Church must do its part to promote reconciliation to help build the country's future. According to Forum_Asia³⁵ (2012:1-2), mission as reconciliation is possible by upholding spiritual ideals in Myanmar, such as harmony, nonviolence, peace, truth, justice, forgiveness, and healing. Mission promotes the spiritual ideal of reconciliation. In the same way, as Myint (2012:51) said, "by looking at the nature of the country, its people and culture, philosophy and belief, reconciliation is more of a mission, a religious act, and a spiritual virtue than a strategy, apolitical program, a secular concern, and a civic project." Therefore, the church must do mission work as part of its reconciliation ministry in many areas, at various levels, and according to its capacity (Mang, 2016:172). When a reconciliation model is adopted by the church as a new way of doing mission, the church develops as community through the reconciliation process. For John (2016:208), "religion is a tool for promoting social harmony and peace. Mission is about bringing reconciliation, which reflects the gospel of

³⁵ The "Asian Forum" is organised, twice a year in Asia by both scholars from the west and the east to discuss problems and possible solutions to the persecution of the church today and the slow growth of church in Asia. This forum discusses the development of missional strategies, possible ways to unify churches, revival, and the promotion of peace between interfaith groups.

salvation.”

The lack of involvement of the church in reconciliation work in Myanmar is important because it has stirred other religions. Monks and imams have criticised the church when fights have broken out between Buddhists and Muslims because Christians have not done anything in response to this. A nationalist monk, called Wirathu, posted on social media that the time will come for Christians and Buddhists to stop being “silent”, when they watch people in their country suffering and dying. In the same way, recently many of the Muslim imams have been verbally abusive towards Christians on social media. From a Trinitarian perspective on salvation as reconciliation, Kepnes (2015:78-80) highlights that to achieve justice and peace, interfaith groups should no longer remain as distinct separate bodies. There should be collaboration between interfaith groups, and ecumenism amongst churches, to address the interrelated issues of justice, peace, reconciliation and humanitarian care. Effective working partnerships have not been created yet. Networking among the dioceses, and many other religious groups, will also enhance the mission of the local Church.

Longkumer (2011:362) suggests that a “Marian dimension of mission,”³⁶ which empowers women for mission to accomplish reconciliation work, should be adopted. He believes that mission has to include women, who need to articulate a common vision of a healed and restored community. From a women’s perspective, the church’s mission is one of reconciliation between men and women in the church. Mission today, especially in Myanmar, needs to include women, as both the “agents” and “subjects of mission,” who should be seen as equal to men in the mission task. “It is sad to know that the violence done against women and to the environment is closely interrelated.” Women have to manage the delicate balance between caring for people and women’s empowerment. In addition, the challenge of misogyny, heterosexism, racism, cultural genocide and racial ethnocide should not be forgotten by the church. The church must reconcile men and women as a constructive element to peace building. In this way, society will reflect the perspectives of women (John, 2016:220-222). Smith (2007:198) outlined that “feminist missiology”³⁷ is a new concept, which is being taken on board as women identify ways of involving themselves in ministry that observes and respects the insight offered by feminist biblical hermeneutics and theologies.

³⁶ The “Marian Dimension of Mission” focuses on the social affairs work that women in society are involved in. This model reinforces the need for, and empowers women to be engaged in, activities that promote justice and equality. This involves challenging cultural practices which oppress women.

³⁷ Susan E Smith points out that men and women equally reflect the image of God. He believes that they have different levels of responsibility in the church, society and the family and also in carrying out mission work, in the church. He compares men and women with fighters on the battle field: men are frontline fighters whilst women take up the rear.

Christian ministry is not “world-denying but world-fulfilling and world-affirming” (Ndlovu, 1999: 196). Instead of being divided and separated by the differences, Christians need to find out the distinctiveness and the value of all these differences as the raw material of unity and peace in the field for the future (Bwa, 2007:10). Therefore, salvation as reconciliation must be characterized by relationship and interdependence. The church should seek to reconcile itself, its members (male and female), the community, religious groups and the nation as a whole.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter highlights the need for the church to promote salvation as reconciliation as a way of doing mission in Myanmar. It outlines strategies for the church to adopt in proclaiming salvation as reconciliation. Missionary work involves crossing boundaries to encourage effective communication with people from different cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds, in the hope to facilitate reconciliation. The role of the church, and the contribution of every Christian individual, in mission was outlined. The missiological dimension to reconciliation from Trinitarian perspectives, in the light of God’s mission on earth was pointed out. This includes the transformation of nature, culture, the cosmos, and the spirit world. Therefore, in being involved in reconciliation work, the church must seek to effectively represent Christ.

It is hoped that this research can be seen as a positive critique of the churches, who can then actively participate in its peacebuilding mission by proclaiming salvation as reconciliation to people and communities, but especially to the ethnic groups in Myanmar.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

Cultural diversity, religious plurality, political issues and historical struggles are just some of the reasons for conflict between the ethnic groups in Myanmar, and these are territorial in nature. Myanmar has experienced civil war for more than six decades since colonial rule ended. Tribal conflict has resulted in violence, which has developed into a nationwide problem. The country is fragmented, but there are signs of peace and hope for the future because the political situation is rapidly changing for the better. Promoting peace and reconciliation are challenging issues during this transitional period.

The socio-religious, political and economic roots of the conflict, which have hindered political dialogue, religious freedom, peace processes and reconciliation were analysed in this research. For more than six decades reconciliation strategies have failed. Intolerance, hate speech, hate crimes, and genocide are still prevalent. The ethnocidal junta promotes Buddhism and, at every level, seek to minimise the influence of the West. Some constructive proposals for promoting reconciliation and peace in Myanmar were made, because the country has to urgently face this challenge.

Possible religious-cultural approaches to reconciliation and the elements required in this process were discussed. People from the different cultures and religions in Myanmar have positive resources for peacebuilding and reconciliation. Reconciliation, which politicians have failed to achieve, is significant amidst brokenness, violence, and division.

The foundation of the Christian doctrine of reconciliation from etymological studies, theological reflections, and biblical narratives and perspectives in the context of Myanmar were investigated and assessed. Further ideas concerning the biblical concept of reconciliation were outlined, alongside how various biblical narratives demonstrate the need for Christians to be peace-makers. There was also a brief discussion on reconciliation in Myanmar from a historical perspective. The contemporary mission context in Myanmar and the hindrances to peacebuilding processes were also considered. The research highlighted how the proclamation of the gospel, to people of all religions, can fruitfully engage with the dogmatic agenda for national reconciliation.

The need for the church to promote salvation as reconciliation as a way of doing missionary work in Myanmar was made clear, and various strategies that the churches, and Christian individuals, can adopt in the reconciliation process were outlined. The missiological dimensions to reconciliation, from Trinitarian perspectives, in the light of God's mission on

earth were pointed out, and the proposition, that multiple protagonists are needed to facilitate holistic reconciliation, was made. Thus, in promoting reconciliation, the church must seek to honour Christ and be effective ambassadors for him.

Missionary work involves crossing boundaries to encourage effective communication with people from different cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds, in the hope to facilitate reconciliation. The role of the church in facilitating this was outlined. The research also advocated for a spiritual approach to reconciliation.

New missional strategies, which encompass context-critical theology, were presented and the need to re-examine the nature of interfaith relationships in the context of reconciliation ministry in Myanmar was stressed. It is hoped that this research can be seen as a positive critique of the churches, so that they can actively move forward in their peacebuilding activities by proclaiming salvation as reconciliation to people and communities, including the ethnic groups in Myanmar.

This research gives a glimpse into the complex issues related to the concept of reconciliation from the perspective of context-critical theology. The idea of salvation as reconciliation needs to be developed further and given more detailed attention. Three recommendations for areas of further study are outlined. These have practical implications for missionary work in Myanmar today.

Firstly, Myanmar is a pluralistic and diverse country. People in Myanmar merely co-exist without acknowledgement, recognition, acceptance, and constructive engagement in society. Systematic research will be helpful, to gain a deeper understanding of the politico-economic problems in the country.

Second, Myanmar is a country greatly influenced by religion. Buddhism was used by the State as an instrument for social and political control. A systematic study of the socio-religious issues effecting the people of Myanmar will help in the development of strategies to deal with the conflict between the different ethnic groups in a more creative and relational way.

Third, religious beliefs are the primary foundation which people build their lives upon in Myanmar. Further study on peacebuilding, justice-making, and truth-telling will support positive interfaith engagement.

Proclaiming salvation as reconciliation in the Myanmar context is an important missionary task that has to be carried out by the church. Old fashioned or traditional missional strategies must be modified so that they are in line with the cultural and social context of the people

they are trying to reach.

In short, the proclamation of salvation as reconciliation is a new way of doing relevant missionary work in Myanmar today. Salvation without vertical reconciliation is impossible. Vertical reconciliation, without horizontal reconciliation, will mean that peace remains unachievable. Salvation as reconciliation should be conveyed with love to interfaith groups, using a dialogical strategy in the context of Myanmar.

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