

## CHAPTER 3: TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN IMAGES OF RECONCILIATION

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

(Colossians 1:19-20)

### 3.1 Introduction

How did Jesus Christ achieve reconciliation? The problem has always been clear: for as long as religion existed, God has been defined by otherness; for just as long, humans have feared that alienation between humankind and God was increasing. The solution was reconciliation (or atonement) to re-establish the unity with God (Van Biema, 2004:39).

But exactly how this took place in the life and death of Christ, have kept theologians guessing, theorising and debating. Although the doctrine of reconciliation is a central concept in Christian theology, the church never developed an official explanation of reconciliation similar to that of the Trinity or the two natures of Christ. The only conviction articulated in the ecumenical confessions was that *propter nos homines et propter nostram salutem* (for us human beings and for the sake of our salvation) he came down and became flesh” (Nicene Creed). Exactly how his life and death benefited us was not worked out in the formulation of these early confessions (Nicene Creed; Athanasian Creed art 36; Van der Kooi, 2002:104-105).

## **3.2 The Old Testament**

The Old Testament offers various perspectives on reconciliation. For the purposes of this study – and with specific reference to the reconciling work of Christ – it is interesting to look at the Old Testament traditions concerning sacrifices as a means of achieving reconciliation.

Piet Venter (2005:22-24) explains that according to the Book of Leviticus, humans could be reconciled to God by means of sacrifices. The sacrifices took on different forms: The Israelites made burnt offerings as a sign of dedication, peace offerings to establish communion with God, and purification offerings to expiate guilt. The climax was the on the Day of Atonement when a goat was sacrificed as a sin offering on behalf of the people of Israel.

Interestingly, this sacrifice was usually seen as a petitionary or even a propitiatory gift to God, rather than a ransom or compensation for the damage caused by sin. The emphasis was always on forgiveness: “God waives the penalty for transgressions. The results of the disobedience is wiped away, wiped clean or purged. The penalty is not ransomed, but rather eliminated” (Venter, 2005:25-26).

## **3.3 The New Testament**

The New Testament hints at many possible models to understand Christ’s reconciliation, as Theodore Jennings explains: “The New Testament is just all over the map ... [Its] writers are all persuaded that something really drastic, fundamental and dramatic has

happened, and they're pulling together all kinds of ways to understand that" (in Van Biema, 2004:39).

The Letter to the Hebrews directly appropriates the Jewish sacrificial metaphor, with the added aspect that Jesus is both priest and sacrifice, spilling not the "blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption" (Hebrews 9:12). The Gospel of Mark favours the Roman legal language for the freeing of slaves: "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Meanwhile, the First Epistle of Peter poses Jesus' trials as a model for imitation: "because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps" (1 Peter 2:21). Finally, Paul's letter to the Colossians pauses only briefly at the cross on its way to the triumphant image of the risen Christ parading demonic enemies in chains: "And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (Colossians 2:15) (Duling & Perrin, 1994:396-398; Van Biema, 2004:39).

The various authors of the Bible thus interpreted the death of Jesus on the cross differently, according to their particular situations and communities. But neither in the New Testament, nor in the works of the Fathers do we find any exclusively normative model of interpretation: "There is a diversity of interpretations, shading into one another, at many levels" (Küng, 1974:420). Thus, juridical, cultic, financial and even military categories of interpretation have been used to explain how Jesus' death reconciled man to God (Küng, 1974: 419-420).

### 3.4 Three Models

A number of reconciliation models have been proposed in the history of the church. Some early theologians understood Christ to be the divine bringer of knowledge: “the fountain of God, most abundant and most full, is open to all; and this heavenly light rises for all, as many as have eyes” (Lantantius); others understood Christ’s reconciliation as a kind of recapitulation: “Jesus Christ became incarnate and was made man, and in himself he recapitulated the long line of human beings ... so that what we had lost in Adam, we recover in Jesus Christ” (Irenaeus), or as the deification of man: “the Son of God suffered to make us sons of God” (Cyprian). Eventually, three of these reconciliation models or myths became dominant in the church (Barclay, 1961:97-99, 104-105; Van der Kooi, 2002:104-105).

#### 3.4.1 Victory over the devil

This is why it says: “When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.”

(Ephesians 4:8)

It was Paul’s model that first caught on. For roughly a thousand years, the church fathers seem to have viewed Christ’s suffering and dying less as salvation’s all-important fulcrum than as one more necessary step in God’s triumphant campaign into the human world and the devil’s precincts. Theologians like Athanasius saw the incarnation and the resurrection as far more important than the cross to reconciliation and as a new start for humanity (*deificatio hominis*) (Berendsen, 2002:165; Van Biema, 204:39; Van der Kooi, 2002:107).

Thus, Origen writes: “Through his resurrection he destroyed the kingdom of death, whence it is written that he freed captivity”, and the Gospel of Nicodemus (6:22) describes that on Jesus’ arrival in Hades, the legion of devils was stricken with terror, and Hades cried out: “We are overcome! Woe unto us!” (Barclay, 1961:103)

This position is still maintained by the world’s 250 million Eastern Orthodox Christians, as Frederica Matthewes-Green explains:

It is like a fire fighter who goes into a building and comes back out covered with wounds and scars but carrying in his arms a baby he was able to grab from the crib. The victory is that he did snatch eternal life out of sin and death. And that’s what Orthodox Christians focus on.

(In Van Biema, 2004:39-40)

When the church fathers did pick up on the scriptural language of Christ’s death as a ransom, the payee was not God but the devil, who some felt had a legitimate claim on humanity because of Adam’s fall. Others such as Gregory of Nyssa, preferred another scenario: to see the crucifixion and Jesus’ subsequent descent into Hell as a bait-and-switch scheme, whereby the devil thought he had claimed a particularly virtuous human victim, only to discover that he had allowed into his sanctum the power that would eventually wrest humanity back from his grasp (Berendsen, 2002:165; Heyns, 1978:265, 270, 274; Jonker, 1977:43-45; König, 1983:147; Küng, 1974:420; Van Biema, 2004:38, 40; Van der Kooi, 2002:107, 114-115).

Basically, [this position] ... explains that the human nature, which is common to us all, is taken hostage by the devil and his henchmen. It is in respect to this that the Son of God descends to the world, assumes our flesh and becomes human. The devil has a deep respect for the Son of God, but when Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane breaks out in a cold sweat, Satan forgets for a moment with whom he is dealing. When Jesus appears overcome by the situation, the old enemy is deluded into thinking that he is confronting an ordinary human being, ordinary flesh, which he can defeat. He seizes him and kills him on the cross. On the cross however, comes the unexpected finale, rightly called the apotheosis. The devil is

tricked. The human flesh of Jesus turns out to be the bait, and Satan takes it. But hidden in the human flesh is the divinity of the Son. As a fish swallows the bait and gets caught on the hook, so Satan is overmastered by the divinity of Christ. Like a fish he is drawn out of his natural element and the human race is no longer dominated by his power. The death of Jesus on the cross defeats the power of the devil, the overwhelming power of death. Since Christ went through death, the power of death has been forever changed.

(Van der Kooi, 2002:107-108)

St Augustine likened the devil to a mouse, the cross to a mousetrap, and Christ to the bait.

Others were content to leave the transaction's precise content a mystery, but they were emphatic in their view of a decidedly non-victimised Christ as a great champion against a real and formidable evil force (van Biema, 2004:40).

For centuries the picture of Christ who defeats the dragon was brightly and colourfully painted for the eyes of the faithful. It excited the imagination and was the dominant model.

This conception survives in Martin Luther's great hymn "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God"

(Heyns, 1978:265, 270, 274; Theron, 1996:135; Van Biema, 2004:40; Van der Kooi,

2002:108), and some remnant of it can be found in the first question and answer of the

Heidelberg Catechism:

What is your only comfort in life and death? That I, with body and soul, both in life and in death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ; who with His precious blood has fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil....

(Heidelberg Catechism, 1986:22)

### **3.4.2 Objective substitution**

... the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

(Mark 10:24)

In 1098, Anselm, the Archbishop of Canterbury, composed one of the most influential theological tracts ever written: *Cur deus homo?* – “Why God became man?”. Anselm too read the New Testament lines calling Christ’s death a ransom, but he could not believe that the devil was owed anything. He restructured the cosmic debt and explained the cross with the aid of juridical concepts, such as law, guilt, penalty, reward, penance, expiation, ransom, satisfaction, reconciliation and restitution: Humanity owed God the Father a ransom of “satisfaction” for the insult of sin. The problem was that the debt was unpayable – not only did we lack the means, since everything we had of value was God’s to begin with, but humans also lacked the standing, like a lowly serf helpless to erase an injury to a great lord. Eternal damnation seemed unavoidable, except for a miracle of grace.

Anselm started his *objective* theory from “above”, explaining from God’s standpoint why the cross had to be: Human beings, as active participants in the relation between the Creator and his creation, have not fulfilled their obligations. They have not lived up to their responsibilities. As a result, God’s honour was infinitely offended and it was therefore absolutely necessary to restore His honour (restitution). This was, according to Anselm, not possible through sheer mercy (*sola misericordia*), but only by rendering appropriate satisfaction. Thus, two options were open to God. God could punish humanity, that is, bring the human race to an end. But God’s honour prohibited that. He would then not achieve the goal of his work in creation, namely, a humanity that willingly serves Him. So God chooses another way, that is, he chose to restore the relation. Therefore, He offered the way of compensation or satisfaction. Human beings were offered the possibility of once again becoming subjects. God sent his Son to make compensation possible. Thus God himself facilitates reconciliation (Berendsen, 2002:165; Duling & Perrin, 1994:396-398; Heyns, 1978:270, 274; Heyns, 1992: 242-246, 251-255; Hayes, 1998:175; Jonker,

1977:46-47; Küng, 1974:421-422; Turaki, 1999:277; Van Biema, 2004:40; Van der Kooi, 2002:110).

The God-man Jesus Christ is on the one hand a representative of humanity. In Jesus the human race willingly offers the obedience due to God. But there is more. The God-man Jesus Christ does more than he is obliged to do. He lays down his life voluntarily, and thereby offers a satisfaction that counterbalances the whole weight of the sin of humanity. The voluntary offering of his life creates a surplus value that suffices to compensate for every human slight to God's honour (Berendsen, 2002:165; Duling & Perrin, 1994:396-398; Heyns, 1978:270, 274; Heyns, 1992: 242-246, 251-255; Hayes, 1998:175; Jonker, 1977:46-47; Küng, 1974:421-422; Van Biema, 2004:40; Van der Kooi, 2002:110).

Anselm's formulation, often called substitutionary reconciliation, has been restated in countless ways over the centuries. Even before Anselm thought of it, Tertullian asked: "Who ever paid for the death of another by his own except the Son of God? He had come for this purpose that he himself, free from all sin and altogether holy, should die for sinners" (Barclay, 1961:118).

The church eventually extended its concept of the sin for which Jesus died beyond Adam's disobedience to everybody's transgressions. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, John Calvin endorsed this model, but replaced Anselm's feudal king with a severe judge furious at a deservedly cursed creation. This Calvinist interpretation features in the Belgic confession and the Heidelberg Catechism, questions 12-19 (Barth, 36:88-94; Berendsen, 2002:165; Calvijn, 1931: 549-555; Heyns, 1992:242-246,251-255; Belgic Confession, 1986:11; Heidelberg Catechism, 1986:24-25; Van der Kooi, 2002:109-110, 114; Van de Beek, 2004:35).

### 3.4.3 Subjective Model

But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.

(Luke 22:26-27)

From the 18<sup>th</sup> century on, various thinkers developed a bill of complaints about substitution. The enlightenment theologians turned to the insights of another medieval theologian Peter Abelard. Abelard addressed Jesus' role in reducing sinful humanity's distance from God without recourse to a tit-for-tat transaction. His reconciliation took place less as a contract between God the father and God the son, and more in the hearts of believers cleaving to the message of Jesus' life – and the love most dramatically expressed in his willingness to die rather than renounce his calling. "Love answers love's appeal" wrote Abelard. With Jesus' example before it, humanity, its deaf ears opened, could now gain salvation and reconciliation with God. While in the substitution theory the problem between humanity and God is one of debt, in Abelard's theory, the problem is one of ignorance (Berendsen, 2002:165; Van Biema, 2004:41; Van der Kooi, 2002:107).

Abelard also read Augustine, but this time in conjunction with the Gospel of Luke (Luke 20:9-19; 22:24-30). In doing so, he developed his *subjective reconciliation* theory. According to this theory, Jesus' death revealed God's love for creation and it set an example to be followed, rather than being an objective satisfaction of God's anger. In this model, the decisive moment is there to be seized. The initiative for reconciliation and restoration that comes from God seeks a response from human beings. A restored relation is only realized where the human in full freedom repents and shows love in return. Jesus Christ serves as an example to be followed (Duling & Perrin, 1994:396-398; Van der Kooi, 2002:113).

Although Abelard is credited for formulating this subjective model, some of the earliest church fathers understood that Christ lived and died to be our example. Polycarp, Irenaeus, Lactantius and Augustine all speak of Christ's death as a perfect example for us to follow. Clement of Rome wrote to the warring church in Corinth and quoted Isaiah 53, explaining: "You see, beloved, what is the example which is given to us, for, if the Lord was thus humble-minded, what shall we do, who through him have come under the yoke of grace?" (Barclay, 1961:96)

The subjective model was adopted by the Socinians in the sixteenth century and became influential in the Liberal Theology of the Nineteenth century. Abelard's ideas have been followed and developed by numerous theologians, from Friedrich Schleiermacher to Dorothee Sölle, interpreting reconciliation as an existential event – reconciliation as a personal experience instead of an objective fact. Wiersinga explained this model by saying that we are not saved because someone else is killed in our place, but because Jesus displays unconditional love, even to his enemies. The acknowledgement of this love evokes love in us and changes our lives. Both the negative "death of God" philosophers like Kant and the more positive postmodern thinkers see the passion, or at least the *kenosis*, as the event that changes Christianity from a "cult" into (the only) "moral religion", wherein Christians are called to action (Barclay, 1961:96; Cupitt, 1998:230-231; Derrida, 1998:10-12; Derrida, 1997:177; Hart, 199:165; Jonker, 1977: 128-135; König, 1983:138, 146, 150; Van de Beek, 2004:45; Van der Kooi, 2002:113-114; Ward, 1998:234).

Milbank (1997:272) remarks that God suffers a contradiction until all make for themselves the offering already made by Christ: "the 'incarnation' has no meaning, therefore, except

as ‘the beginning,’ the foundation of the Church, a new sort of community of charity and forgiveness, as a space for the possibility of this offering”.

### **3.5 Evaluation of Models**

Each of these models has both failings and strengths – and they are often two sides of the same coin.

#### **3.5.1 Victory Model: Victory over the Powers or Outdated Myth?**

While Orthodox Churches, many Charismatic, Pentecostal and Third Wave Christians, and modern day practitioners of “spiritual warfare” see reconciliation in terms of the victory model, most mainstream Christians feel somewhat uncomfortable with the victory model’s vivid presentation of the state of affairs. The devil and dragons are far removed from our experiences and our framework, and the picture of Christ, the vanquisher of the dragon, is of little comfort in a world in which we have bigger problems than dragons!

But this image may yet be very useful and relevant. Modern Christians may regard themselves as self-confident and free individuals who are able to make their own choices. Nobody is to have power over us. Is that true, or are we dealing with an active myth? In the last century the banner of individual autonomy has been torn to shreds (Bosch, 1989:148; Van der Kooi, 2002:107-108).

More than we had ever recognised our actions turn out to be dictated by anonymous processes, economic interests and nationalistic sentiments that can be ignited into a murderous firestorm in which one collective flies at another. ... [Our] chances of understanding the words of the first question and answer of the

Heidelberg Catechism increase the more we realise how often we ourselves are trapped in the bondage of processes, anxieties and enslavements.

(Van der Kooi, 2002:107-108)

### 3.5.2 Objective Model: The Unforgivable or the Unforgiving?

The *objective model* raises its own set of questions. It is not based on the Old Testament concept of God's justice and mercy, or the New Testament's concern for grace and love, but rather on the Roman design of jurisprudence, which leads to an untenable concept of God the Father. It is too foreign, too cold and too unsympathetic, even absurd that the Father of Christ's moral universe somehow seems to require his death. Likewise, it is questionable whether the demand for compensation agrees with Anselm's own concept of God as sovereign God. Would submission and repentance not suffice? Venter (2005:26) insists that the blood in the Leviticus sacrifices was only meant to remind the Israelites of God's mercy as the source and sustainer of all life, and that the idea of sacrifice working as a substitution, that a sacrificial victim can endure God's punishment on behalf of a different sinner, is certainly found in the Old Testament notion. This is far removed from the Anselm's view of God (2005:28-29; c f Von Rad, 1965:250; Human, 2005:52; Wessels, 2005:67; Jeremias, 1971:180; Breytenbach, 2005:84-87; König, 1983:69-73; Milbank, 1997:273; Barclay, 1961:113)

William Barclay (1961:122-123) writes that:

If we think in terms of sacrifice or in terms of substitution, it almost necessarily means that something that Jesus did changed the attitude of God to men, that before the action of Jesus God could only punish and condemn men and that after the action of Jesus God was able and willing to forgive them ... [There] can be no doubt that this is a view which finds no support in Scripture. Nowhere does the New Testament speak of God being reconciled to men; always it speaks of men being reconciled to God ... [It] was never the attitude of God to man which had to be changed; it was the attitude of man to God.

The substitution model likewise undermines Christ's position. In the Reformed world, this view was often used within an infralapsarian framework. According to the infralapsarian position, salvation was not intended at the creation, but became necessary because of sin. Thus, Christ was only needed to solve the problem of human sin and guilt. It relegates Christ to being an emergency measure and somewhat less than an ideal self-revelation of God (Van de Beek, 2004: 36).

Furthermore, according to Küng, Anselm's theory of satisfaction is fundamentally flawed (1974:422-424). The very presupposition of this theory – the idea of an original paradisiac-unspoilt world, of a primal sin of the first human pair, and above all the Augustinian theory of an inherited sin – seems problematic. "The first pages of the Bible cannot and are not meant to explain *how* – historically and scientifically – the world, man and woman, sin came to be" (1974:422-423).

Hayes (1998:175) points out that Anselm's model changed the way Christians understood sin. "Instead of seeing sin primarily as something that God rescues us from, Western European Theology came to see sin primarily as something God punished us for". This was aided by the idea of the privatisation of religion, where religion was seen as something concerned only with one's relationship with God, and divorced from the rest of life.

And, of course, it is objective. Humanity is disempowered as its redemption is being negotiated well above its collective head. It is objective, and as such human agency seems to be precluded (Kuitert, 1992:143).

John Dominic Crossan calls the objective reconciliation theory: "... the most unfortunate successful idea in the history of Christian thought ..." because it gave the church worldly power by creating a sense of debt and a lever for social control. He continues: "If I can persuade you that there is a punishing God and that you deserve to be punished but I have some sort of way out for you, then that's a very attractive theology" (in van Biema, 2004:42). It also delivers a disempowering message: "Countless women have told me that their priest or minister had advised them, as 'good Christian women' to accept beatings by their husbands as 'Christ accepted the cross'. An overemphasis on the suffering of Jesus to the exclusion of his teaching has tended to be used to support violence" (Susan Thistlethwaite in Van Biema, 2004:42).

On the positive side, this model acknowledges the depth of the offence (or in Anselm's words, the "weight of sin").

Anyone who ignores the disorder or argues that "It isn't all that bad" or glosses things over with the contention that victims should stop complaining and start forgiving, shows too little appreciation for the depth of injury that afflicted people experience. The perpetrator must do something; there must be some form of compensation. When people hurt one another, it is as if they rob one another, as if something is stolen. The injury remains. One can think of marriages that have broken up, leaving the shattered pieces everywhere, of people who have been damaged by their upbringing, of people who were injured because they were violated bodily and spiritually, as in cases of incest and rape. What is necessary in such cases is first of all acknowledgement.

(Van der Kooi, 2002:111)

The Anselmian model acknowledges the seriousness of sin – that some offences are indeed unforgivable – and offers a different way to deal with it.

In a sense, human beings are not denied any responsibility. Humans are honoured as actors, held responsible for their sins. We are not unresisting victims of a cowardly attack

without a will of our own; we cannot exculpate ourselves by taking on the role of victims. But we are not able to repair the relationship either (Van der Kooi, 2002:112).

### **3.5.3 Subjective Model: Example or Hopelessness?**

The *subjective model* of reconciliation has in view situations that can still be turned around and people who can do something about them, people for whom turning around still matters. Some critics note that this theory short-changes sin and evil, giving the impression that there is nothing wrong with the world that can't be cured by human endeavour. But what has the church to offer in the case of hopeless situations, when there is nothing left to repair and everything is totally blocked. What if we cannot respond or there is no response to make? (Van der Kooi, 2002:112; Van Biema, 2004:42).

Critics of this model have held that it had no particular use for Christ's divinity. Any virtuous martyr might do. One wit remarked that the Bible could have ended with the death of Abel, a decent enough man (Van Biema, 2004:42).

The strong point of this model is that it takes the appeal, the command seriously. God is interactive in his contact with people. He tries to draw us onto the playing field, to involve us. Berendsen also emphasises the example character of this kind of reconciliation model. She points out that people are only reconciled through following the example of people who do not just live for themselves. Reconciliation between humans happens when people emulate (secular) saints (2002:173-175).

### 3.6 What about new models?

All three of the above-mentioned models have a long tradition, and have been used in Christendom. But it appears to me that within the Dutch Reformed Church and probably in many other mainline Protestant churches, Anselm's theory has pride of place, so that reconciliation is seldom explained in any other way. The subjective model may be widely considered and accepted by theologians, but it seems to feature less prominently from many a Reformed pulpit. The victory model, on the other hand, has only been popular in the Orthodox, Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions. This causes a problem. Although much can be said about and learned from Anselm's model, the exclusive emphasis on it causes a one-sided, unbalanced and dated teaching of reconciliation. Johan Heyns, following the Reformed confessions, for example, fully develops the objective model, lightly alludes to the victory model and completely ignores the subjective model (1978:265, 270, 274; 1992: 242-246; c f Barclay, 1961:111, 121; König, 1989:133).

Anselm's theory does not so much reflect New Testament teaching as the theology of the Middle Ages and the juridical-rational idea or order then prevailing. His intention was admirable: he made the old tradition understandable to a new generation with a new background of experience, using forms of thought and language common to believers and unbelievers of his day. Küng (1974:424) asks:

... if this was permitted to medieval theology, can we forbid to modern theology its own fresh approach? We can no more commit ourselves now than in New Testament or patristic times to a particular conceptual framework – whether juridical, cultic, metaphysical, or even scientific, technical, physiological, sociological – for the interpretation of the highly complex event of the redemption.

The theory, therefore, of the death on the cross as an expiatory sacrifice, understandable for Jewish Christians at that time, is only one and not the most important model for the

interpretation of Jesus' death. Since cultic sacrifices are no longer offered in the modern environment, the concept of sacrifice is not related to any experience and has thus become largely misleading and unintelligible. The permanent, definitive and irrevocable significance and effect of Jesus' death must be freed from the restrictions of the older terminology and interpreted in modern man's horizon of experience, in order to have an impact in the modern world (Küng, 1974:426).

In recent times various viewpoints have been promulgated by European theologians. Bultmann argued that concepts like death as the punishment for sin and the pre-existent Christ's expiatory death are part of a primitive juridical mythology. Our interpretations of Jesus' death must demythologise these myths (Jonker, 1977:133). Since then, theologians have conceded that demythologisation is inevitable (Küng, 1974:219), but also limited (Küng, 1974:413).

Recently, Kuitert (1999a:146; 1999b:166-168, 169-170) has reminded Christians that reconciliation is originally a ritual that comes from "below" – set up by human beings. God did not devise it, and then reveal it, so that we have to believe it; it comes from human beings who mean something by it. He continues:

The view that God has revealed himself as the one who demands satisfaction (so we have to believe that), or conversely as the one who has revealed that he does not require satisfaction (so that we don't have to believe that) misses the point of the ritual and ends up involving God in our ecclesiastical disputes over reconciliation. 'Reconciliation' is a ritual and thus from below, from people who were aware that they had become transgressors, were guilty; they had to do something about it, and so they offered the scapegoat or a sacrificial animal.

(1999a:147)

Humans have devised the rituals themselves, but not simply because there had to be rituals. The rituals of reconciliation are a sign of an awakened conscience. People know

about God's order and their own transgression of it and want to make that good. The ritual is thus an attempt from below to make things good above (Kuitert, 1992:148-149; 1999a:151).

When we see God as the only one who has the ghastly privilege of not being able to forgive without a *quid pro quo* (as Von Harnack complained), we forget that reconciliation is an enterprise from below (Kuitert, 1992:149).

...people wake up, become aware that they have to do something if they are not to be overwhelmed by God's anger, and turn to God with repentance, with a confession of guilt, a prayer for forgiveness, and a promise to improve their lives.  
(Kuitert, 1999a:155)

The idea that God takes over this rite and makes our role his own, "...is not a truth fallen from heaven but a belief, an expectation, a hope, a form of wishful thinking if you like" (Kuitert, 1999a:155).

### **3.7 Conclusion**

This leaves us with three historic models of reconciliation. All three have shortcomings; all three have important contributions to make, addressing variously the reality of powers, the gravity of sin and the importance of human participation in and for reconciliation. It seems that the majority of Christians use none of the theories exclusively. They would at times understand Christ's reconciliation as exemplary, and at times as objective, according to their experiences and context. This fits with the postmodern notion of contextuality and the importance of narratives (Van Biema, 2004:43).

Furthermore, our reconciliation models are just that – models. They were devised and thought out by humans (to address a human need) and not revealed from above. Fortunately, God revealed himself and his reconciliation through our models and continues to do so. It is thus right and proper for us to imagine models and images of God's reconciliation that are more in keeping with modern experience and to interpret his love and dealings through these new models. Recently, theologians like Wolfgang Huber devised models for understanding Christ's reconciliation not in terms of the three traditional models, but rather with reference to present-day issues such as justice and responsibility. I will turn to their insights in the concluding chapters of the thesis.

In order to deconstruct the traditional Christian reconciliation models, I will have to do two things: firstly, investigate the dominant discourses and secondly, look at possible alternatives. In this chapter I have given an overview of the traditional models, their histories, contexts, strengths and weaknesses. In the next chapter I will continue with the deconstruction by putting the traditional models in brackets for a moment, and looking at alternatives. Deconstruction does not entail the breaking down of traditional ideas, but rather exploring different options.