

A COVENTRY WAY

INTRODUCTION

Jesus commands each of us “take up your cross and follow me”¹ and lavishes on us the means to do so². Our lives are fulfilled when we respond to Him and find ourselves on the path to life forever³. More than that we become His means to transform the world in which we live, bringing light in its darkness and salt to preserve it from its own brokenness⁴.

This double task of the struggle for obedience and the call to transform the whole world is possible because of God’s empowering Spirit, and because we are called to be in company with other Christians. Together we find power to stir up the apathetic, carry the weak, heal the wounded, receive the outcast and above all love one another and the world around in practical service⁵.

The question is the “what should we do?”, both individually and together. The needs of the world seem infinite and every Christian has to live their daily life, working, seeing friends, shopping, sleeping and being part of the world we seek to transform. Again, Jesus meets us in the busyness of our lives, and renews His call, “take up your cross and follow me”, in the middle of all that we do, converting the most everyday tasks to a holy work⁶. In everything we are to work as for Him, and to be His ambassadors of reconciliation⁷.

On the night of November 14th, 1940 the City of Coventry was bombed. Amidst the

carnage and terror, the ancient Cathedral burnt. The following morning Dick Howard, provost of Coventry, stood in the smouldering ruins and proclaimed Father Forgive. From that moment of light, in the years after World War II, a movement of reconciliation grew, first between the wartime



¹ Mark 8:34

² Philippians 4:13

³ Ephesians 2:10

⁴ Matthew 5:14-15

⁵ Ephesians 2:21-22

⁶ Colossians 3:17

⁷ 2 Corinthians 5:20

enemies and then spreading throughout the world. Today it is seen in more than 170 centres of reconciliation in over 28 countries, united by their commitment to reconciliation in their own place, and each having a symbol of a Cross from the nails that fell from the burning beams of the old Coventry Cathedral.

This elementary and simple rule of life is intended to help those associated with this ministry of reconciliation and any others who wish to make use of it. It is a successor to editions of what has been called "The Coventry Discipline", going back to the 1950s.

"A Coventry Way" is based on three circles of life and reconciliation. In it we are challenged at each level of our meeting with others. We begin with our personal, inner journey with Christ. From there we move out to our journey in company with other Christians, the church, both local and distant, strong and suffering. At the same time this Way calls us to look out into God's world and carry in practise and prayer its pains so that reconciliation may be a characteristic of all of our lives.

THREE CIRCLES OF RECONCILED LIFE

1. My Life with God

All reconciliation begins with God⁸. He is the source and fountain of peace; when we are reconciled to him streams of living water flow from us, we are light and salt, we can comfort the sorrowing, serve the poor, refresh the weary, bring peace and hope. Psalm 1 says that we will stand like a tree by water, always green even in the scorching heat. For that to become our normal habitual selves, we must grow in our reconciled life with God, who began the story for each of us by reaching out in the open arms of Jesus Christ. At the centre of reconciliation there is a journey with God, through Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit of God.

A Coventry way calls for six personal commitments:

1.1 Prayer and scripture.

How each of these will happen must vary according to the circumstances of life. Those commuting to work, or with young children keeping them awake at night, or retired or even ill, will all find different routines are better. The essence of the commitment is regularity. Prayer should be normal, preferably daily, perhaps in several short periods. It is good if it covers not only

Many people who commute read the bible and pray on the way to work. One person goes to a Benedictine monastery for the week-end before Lent. Another wakes in the night and prays for an hour before going back to sleep. It is all a matter of what each person can manage, given their lifestyle.

If possible use a system for reading the bible, published by someone like the Bible Reading Fellowship. Places for quiet days can be found in England in many church directories. A church may be a good place for a half day of quiet and prayer

⁸ Ephesians 2:14

our own circumstances and those around us, but takes in items on the news, and those far away. It may be based around a formal book of prayer, or be spontaneous and impromptu. The devotional reading of scripture is more than studying the bible. It is the process of listening to what God says to us through it. To do this we need to read systematically, either using our own scheme or one someone suggests, and spend time reflecting on a passage⁹. There are many techniques for reading scripture, this Coventry way asks only that time be given to it so that we hear the voice of God.

Quiet and retreat, if only perhaps a two day retreat once a year, are also essential for reflection and renewal¹⁰. Quiet may come from spending time (perhaps just an hour, perhaps a day) regularly alone, with God, perhaps using a journal, perhaps just praying, perhaps thinking about issues with Him. Retreat may often be arranged and guided by the local church or to somewhere that makes a longer period of reflection possible. Silence in prayer is a wonderful opportunity for the reconciling and peace building presence of God to renew our own sense of being reconciled; even a few minutes in a day makes a huge difference.

1.2 Study

Christians need to be well informed, ready always to answer with graciousness¹¹ and respect questions that are put to them about the hope that they have in Christ. This may be organised in small groups, but ought also to be important for each person,

Read a serious paper once a week, or listen to a BBC Radio programme like "From our Own Correspondent", or go to hear someone speak who knows about an area of controversy or interest. When you have read or listened pray, look at the bible and think about what a Christian view is. Remember that Christian leaders can be prejudiced and mislead. Above all, in any area think about what reconciliation has to do with it.

developing their personal understanding of the world, and above all of their God. This leads to ideas that formed by the Spirit of God and not taken second hand from culture, ethnic background or family. Reconciliation with others very often involves each of us becoming aware of and laying aside our accumulated prejudices, and letting the light of Christ shine on our opinions.

1.3 The small group (often called foyers)

Each of us is called by the love of God to know and serve Christ, but also to serve Him in serving one another. This is the command of Jesus¹². Part of our personal commitment to Christ is thus a commitment to other Christians, not neglecting to meet them both in small groups and in worship together. The foyer is where we develop the skills of listening to each other, and seeking to learn from each other, not merely convince the other of our own opinion.

⁹ Psalm 119:118

¹⁰ Mark 7:24

¹¹ 1 Peter 3:15

¹² John 13:14

1.4 The local church¹³

(in many churches often including the Holy Communion/Eucharist/Mass/Lord's Supper) and to reconciliation through building one another up and the absence of grumbling, faction and manipulation. Even the discipline of meeting in small groups can become too comfortable. By meeting to worship together we recognise that it is God who draws us into the church¹⁴, and our reconciliation with Him begins to make opportunities for the expression of reconciliation to others.

One member of a CCN centre in the Holy Land was known in their community for making peace when disagreements and rivalries happened. It was done without drawing attention, and sometimes without the quarrelling parties knowing. But God knows.

1.5 Reconciliation as witness¹⁵.

Our own Christian faith should run through every

part of our lives; there is nowhere off duty. Our constant call is to be peace makers, bearers of reconciliation. Part of our quietness and retreat will be to review the ways in which we do this in all the mundane aspects of daily life.

1.6 Sharing our Christian faith¹⁶.

The basis of all reconciliation is reconciliation with God. Christians are called to be urgent¹⁷ in their sharing of the good news of Jesus Christ, so that others may find faith in God through Him, but at the same time to do so as reconcilers, peacefully and graciously¹⁸.

It is helpful to think through how you explain what being a Christian means to you, in simple and unreligious terms. We should be ready to explain why it is so important, if asked.

2. Our lives together as Christians.

The Christian community is intended to be a beacon of reconciliation and healing open to those outside it, accepting of all, centred on the worship of God through Christ. Very often a Cross of Nails centre is a church, but many are other forms of organisation such as schools, universities, radio stations or groups of churches. A Coventry Way asks for a Cross of Nails centre to commit itself corporately to the values that its members commit to individually. The members of the Centre may be the



Presenting a Cross of Nails in Burundi, after the civil war.

¹³ Hebrews 10:25

¹⁴ John 15:16

¹⁵ 2 Corinthians 5:18

¹⁶ Matthew 28:19

¹⁷ 2 Timothy 4:2

¹⁸ 1 Peter 3:15-16

The Rule of St Benedict from the 6th century, sets 7 daily times of prayer, many for less than 10 minutes. The key is a local pattern that suits local people, especially those who are not clergy!

same as the members of the institution, or a group within it, as the Centre decides, but either way they will have a common discipline based on a culture of encouragement and building one another up.

A Coventry Way calls for each centre to have five common areas of encouragement:

2.1 Common prayer¹⁹

Space will be made as the highest priority for prayer together, aloud or in silence, formally or informally, always drawing on scripture. Prayer will be taught individually, in small groups and together so as to enable all members to have assurance of reconciliation with God. Such assurance sets every human person free to love.

2.2 Study

to see more clearly the right way of life, worship and ministry together²⁰, and to understand the call to be a reconciled and reconciling people. Often Centres will find the resources for this from within the members, but they will not hesitate to invite outsiders to instruct them. The causes of division and sin are often deeply founded in our societies, and unconsciously we reinforce them in each other. Through study and reading and reflection and we overcome local, historic or cultural prejudices, not conforming to the world, but being transformed by the Spirit of God.

In one country in Africa people gather every two or three weeks to hear a local expert on some area of life, from HIV/AIDS care and prevention to agriculture. Combining this with prayer equips the people of that Centre to play a fuller part in their society.

2.3 Small groups/foyers

that are not factional or like minded, in order to practice reconciliation with each other, and to experience the reconciling power of God. The foyers at some centres reform every 6 months or a year, so that over a period every member is in a foyer with every other member. Other stay together for a long period becoming a source of support. The essential commitment is to practising reconciliation together.

2.4 Common worship

in which reconciliation with God and within the community is celebrated, and the offer of reconciliation revealed to the outsider, who is always to be treated as Christ Himself. This

A good foyer evening: meet at the normal time for an evening meal. Pray an extended prayer of thanks, either separately, each person or some people praying, or together with a formal prayer. Over a simple meal (the test is that any member of the foyer can afford and manage to provide it) talk about the issues of the members, the Centre, or anything else. Read a passage of scripture (perhaps one of the readings for the following or previous Sunday) and talk a little about it, learning from each other. After the meal (washed up together), pray formally or informally (many use a version of Compline or Night Prayer), but very simply. Do not do anything that any member could not do. Do not gossip or grumble.

¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 14:26

²⁰ Daniel 1:17

will often include Holy Communion, but will be in a style suitable to the tradition and culture of the Centre.

2.5 Speaking faith.

By building confidence through training and discussing together the basis for their Christian faith, and by thinking together how to explain that in their own culture, the members of the centre will grow in depth and confidence of spiritual life, and through their own understanding of being reconciled will become more effective in reconciliation.

3. *Living reconciliation in a tortured world.*

Jesus said "a city set on a hill cannot be hidden"; St Paul calls us to be "ambassadors of reconciliation". Christians living reconciliation who find their vision in love to one another in the Christian community will be unable to avoid carrying a heart for reconciliation into the world around them. Seeing those locked in conflict, at work, at home, among friends, in society or internationally, they will cry out in prayer for peace, and as they do God will impel them into peacemaking. As Isaiah recognised his need of forgiveness and was purged, he cried out "Here am I, send me".

A Cross of Nails Centre will have a global vision lived from a local base, of reconciliation as a gift of God through His people to the world. Global vision calls us out to reconciling action at every level:

A Coventry Way has four vocations for a Centre:

3.1 Praying globally²¹,

at all times interceding for conflicts and struggles internationally and in their communities, drawing on the commonly discerned sense of the will of God, seen especially in Scripture. There must be a place for outward looking prayer of intercession through which clarity of vision comes and our hearts are stirred together.

Some places use 'prayer walls' ; a prayer wall is a place at the centre where people can stick or pin their global prayer concerns, with notes, newspaper articles or pictures. The presence of the wall reminds people to pray.

3.2 Partnership

with groups involved in the search for justice and peace and reconciliation, at all levels from the local to the global. The spirit of reconciliation requires a Spirit of generosity

and inclusion²² demonstrating the far reaching love of God by seeking to see good done, whether we ourselves receive the credit or not. Where other groups are established, or expert

²¹ 1 Timothy 2:1-3

in the work of reconciliation we will bless them. What we give in time, energy and money in secret will be seen by God and that will be our pleasure²³.

3.3 Reconciliation projects

A genuinely reconciled community will instinctively seek to share the blessing of reconciliation. In prayer and through their studying they will find themselves seeing clearly both needs and a calling.

One centre trains members in reconciliation, so that they are equipped to play a part formally in conflict management in their work place. Another supports traditional reconcilers in the community, giving extra training and support in prayer. In Europe and the USA the Mennonites run good courses in mediation. Coventry Cathedral has developed a course in reconciliation, which can be made available for training.

Projects range from working with local youth gangs to enable reconciliation with each other and with families, to trained mediation centres, to supporting a CCN centre in an area of post conflict. One of the UK's leading mediators said recently, "reconciliation is the most important act of mission for the 21st century"

As a Centre be in passionate and vivid contact with the world around, with a view to reconciliation²⁴.

Play an active role in sharing knowledge and experience and ideas with the CCN globally, receiving and giving in every way, and seeking to contribute from the local

understanding gained by study. Do not look at just churchy things but reach out into the work place, and the local community.

3.4 Welcoming²⁵.

If a centre is caught up in the miracle of being reconciled to God, and if reconciliation is overflowing into the conflicts and struggles of the world then it will make it easy for the members

to share their faith and have occasions for inviting those who are seeking faith and reconciliation with God. This will never be manipulative, concealing its intention, or simply a membership drive, but rather an honest and open presentation of good news in ways that are easy for those in its area and culture to understand, it will be a part of gracious hospitality.

One centre has a regular "spirituality day" for those who have spiritual experiences and longings which can be fulfilled in Christ. Others run simple courses explaining Christian faith. Yet others have services or events with a meal to which those seeking faith may be invited.

²² John 3:16

²³ Matthew 6:2-4

²⁴ Revelation 3:15

²⁵ 1 Corinthians 2:1-5