



Embrace the Spirit

The Caribbean Initiative

Walking Towards Reconciliation: Leaving Behind Resentment

By: Alix Lozano

Group Prayer

The feet of the world walk today on asphalt roads of violence, but the heart of the humble is stronger than tanks.

Peace will not come from outside, nor will it be built with nuclear arms, nor will it be produced by agreements between governments.

It is present in the heart of the universe and all things go towards peace.

A dawn comes for this mistreated world, almost tired, and will come from the hands of the simple, the humble, and poor of this earth. It will be announced by the mouths of children and by the sound of the music of courageous young people.

It will be like dew on this dry land.



Introduction

Our history of violence is long, starting at the time of conquest and colonization. In recent history, Colombia has suffered more than 50 years of abuse. These difficulties are not over. Colombia's stories are intertwined with a difficult and complex present. The children of violence have not yet been born, and this fact means that

the challenge of disarming our history requires bolder responses from different parts of society, including churches.¹

Colombia is a deeply polarized country with deep feelings of resentment, pain, and desire for revenge and justice. The past is still alive, but with rage; its wounds do not close or heal, and each time they go deeper - opening new fresh feelings of resentment, which must be overcome in order to give way to reconciliation.

We see the hope that comes with the end of the conflict and we project ourselves into a future where the task will be peace; where we will choose a story without prejudice that includes reconciliation at the service of peace. A story that does not speak of defeat or victory, overcoming inherited languages and accepting that there is no one truth and no one reality, but many. We can choose to live anchored in resentment or in reconciliation.²

The word resentment (“resentimiento” in Spanish) comes from Latin and is the sum of three words: the prefix *re-* is synonymous with repetition, and the verb *sentiré* which is equivalent to “will feel” and the suffix “miento” that can be translated as a “medium.” So resentment is the action and effect of “*re-feeling*” (feeling angry again or feeling regret for something). Resentment is reflected in various feelings and attitudes, such as hostility towards something or someone, anger, etc.³

Biblical Reflection

Genesis 4: 1-9⁴

¹Now Adam knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, “I have produced a man with the help of God.” ²Next, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground. ³In the course of time, Cain brought to God an offering of the fruit of the ground, ⁴ and Abel for his part brought of the firstlings of his flock, their fat portions. And God had regard for Abel and his offering, ⁵ but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was furious, and his countenance fell. ⁶ God said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? ⁷ If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it.” Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let us go out to the field.” And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. ⁹ Then God said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” He said, “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?”

This passage is an example of resentment among brothers, and the outcome is the death of one of them. Cain feels that his effort to please God with his offering is not recognized or valued. God asks, "Why are you resentful with your head down? If you do well, you will walk with your head up. But if you do evil, sin lurks at the door of your house to subdue you, yet you can control it"(v. 6-7).

God reminds us that feelings are inevitable, but we are responsible for what we do with them. If these feelings are not handled correctly they open the door to many emotions, wounds, and even rage that blinds. Human

¹ Congreso Internacional Construir la Paz en el Siglo XXI (2014). Memoria Histórica, Responsabilidad Social, Reconciliación y Post-conflicto. Bogotá. Universidad La Salle. http://www.edificarlapaz.org/es/eje_temático_memoria_histórica.asp, recuperado: 19 de febrero del 2015.

² Ibid.

³ Wikipedia. Resentimiento, (en línea) <http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Resentimiento>. Recuperado 19 de febrero de 2013.

⁴ Schökel, Luis Alonso. (2008). The Bible of Our People. Bible version of the Latin American Pilgrim. Bilbao: Ediciones Mensajero, S.A.U.

beings should be able to recognize these feelings and use reason to face them so that they can stop being a slave to the negative feelings they generate.⁵

Francesc Torralba, in his paper "*Historical Memory, Reconciliation, and Postconflict*," states that reconciliation must be deepened and studied in depth.⁶ If trauma is not resolved, it accumulates and then explodes, creating chaos. Resentment is not something a person decides to harbor; it is not a conscious act, so he raises the origins of it in the following categories:

Comparative Tort: "They don't recognize my rights but offers them to another." This occurs between equals, for example between siblings, and is born of a subjective perception. This resentment may arise from the subject or may have a root in marginalization.⁷

Mistreatment: "I did not say that, and I kept quiet because of fear." There is aggression, insult, and vexation.⁸

Inferiority complex: "She or he has succeeded, I have not. He or she has been recognized, given positions, has advanced, and I have not." The inferiority complex is born of a comparative spirit and feelings of resentment. It is not born of aggression nor of comparative grievance. The person does not value themselves. It cannot be blamed on the other.⁹

Historical Resentment: The narrative of someone who predisposes the younger generations to hatred and resentment for what has happened in the past. It has not been experienced or suffered, it has been constructed. It burdens present generations. The executioner's son is not the hangman. The victim's child is not the victim. If the new generation is not liberated from resentment, it is impossible for the grandson of the victim and victimizer to be able to play in the same public square.¹⁰

Where is your brother Abel? (V. 9) Cain responds: "I do not know, am I my brother's keeper?"¹¹

The resentments in our world are due to forgetting the principle that it is an obligation to be the guardian and to take care of other people because to care for another is to care for oneself. This is mutual care. We are interdependent beings, interconnected, and created in the image and likeness of God. What happens to one affects the other.

Feelings of anger, rage, and revenge can reach all people. However, the problem lies in its perpetuation. The erratic path that many take to try and liberate oneself individually of resentment is one of the causes of conflict and its unworthy practices. Neither revolutionary war, nor the illegitimate paramilitary defense, nor the concert of insults and disrespect can be methods of eradicating resentment. On the contrary, forgiveness must be the way to open a space for peace in our nation.

Cain assumes the consequences of his actions, but life remains sacred, even that of the murderer. "God put a mark on Cain so that whoever finds him will not kill him" (V. 15).

⁵ Lozano, Alix. (2014). Predicación en la Iglesia Menonita de Teusaquillo, bajo el tema "Cristo nuestra paz". Bogotá: texto sin publicar.

⁶ Torralba, Francesc (2014). Ponencia Memoria Histórica, Reconciliación y Postconflicto, presentada en el marco del II Congreso Internacional Edificar La Paz En El Siglo XXI. Bogotá: Universidad de La Salle.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Op.Cit. Schokel.

Identifying the origin of resentment is important. Lasting peace means eradicating resentment and taking a step towards reconciliation. Otherwise any of the above categories can become historical resentment that will eventually affect whole families, society, and the whole country.¹² So it becomes necessary to heal resentment communally in order to build peace.

The path of reconciliation requires repentance; leaving bitterness behind through forgiveness. With repentance, there can be reconciliation.

In Colombia, reconciliation is necessary and urgent at both the personal and societal levels. It is necessary that through collective action we learn to forgive, so that we may cast off resentment and not let the conflict of war survive, which prevents our desire for peace and prosperity from becoming a reality.¹³ The Colombian conflict is a fratricidal war that, like Cain and Abel, has left many brothers dead. God's call to Colombia is to remind us that the other is my responsibility, because we are part of an extended family where we must love and care for one another.

Questions for Reflection

1. Why is there so much anger toward individuals, groups, or institutions? How should we handle this kind of anger?
2. What does it mean that we are not to repeat mistakes, but to remember without resentment?
3. How do we resolve, in the present, the idea of a breaking point between a violent yesterday and a peaceful tomorrow?

About the Author

Alix Lozano is a Colombian Anabaptist theologian, teacher, and pastor. She has been the President of the Mennonite Church in Colombia. For 17 years, Lozano worked at the Mennonite Seminary of Colombia in Bogota, 10 years of them as the Director. She is a member of the Anabaptist Women Theologians Network within the Mennonite World Conference and co-founder of the Latin American Anabaptist Women Theologians Movement. She volunteers twice a year with Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) in conflict zones in Colombia. Her work accompanying rural communities in the midst of conflict provides her with the opportunity to participate in the practical construction of peace and energizes her more theoretical work.

¹² 12. Op. Cit., International Congress Building Peace in the 21st Century.

¹³ Azuero, Manuel. Resentimiento, oxígeno del conflicto (en línea) disponible en www.vanguardia.com/historico/25980-resentimiento-oxigeno-del-conflicto#sthash.g0IFd1T9.dpuf. Consultado febrero 16 de 2015.