

**Institute of Spirituality and Religious Formation**  
**TANGAZA COLLEGE**  
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**BRINGING PEACE AND RECONCILIATION TO SIERRA  
LEONE WITH  
REFERENCE TO 2 CORINTHIANS 5: 16-21**

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*This long essay is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a  
diploma in Religious Formation*

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### STUDENT' DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this long essay is my original work achieved through my personal reading, scientific research method and critical reflections. It is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Diploma in Religious Formation. It has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit. All sources have been cited in full and acknowledged.

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this piece of work to my parents and the Congregation of Christian Brothers most especially the West African District.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I thank the Lord almighty for keeping me well and fit throughout my two years of studies. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the leadership team of the Congregation of Christian Brothers, West African District, for giving me the opportunity to pursue my studies in spirituality and religious formation. I appreciate the support given to me by my brothers in the international house of studies.

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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

My topic of choice is: "Bringing Peace and Reconciliation to Sierra Leone in Light of 2 Corinthians 5:16-21.

To reconcile is to reunite, to bring back to harmony. Reconciliation implies therefore, that division has taken place, separation and rupture. Two realities, two persons, two people are at odds, do not relate well as they should. There is discord, disunity, disharmony; oneness has been ruptured.<sup>1</sup>

Sierra Leone is one country in Western Africa that has experienced all the above because of the ten years of brutal war which saw the rebels resorting methods of unimaginable savagery: killing tens of thousands of people and children, leaving them as living symbols of terror. Paul's preaching as a source of reconciliation is marvelous; it is, "one that holds within it the entire Christian mystery: reconciliation of human beings with God, among one another, and with the whole cosmos."<sup>2</sup> Paul's preaching of reconciliation, breaks new theological ground. "He deliberately makes a fundamental correction. He said it is not God who needs to be reconciled to human beings, but it is human beings who need to be reconciled to God."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> H. DOOHAN, *The Corinthian Correspondence, A Spiritual Commentary*, 26.

<sup>2</sup> Initial Document on Reconciliation 3.

<sup>3</sup> D. J. HARRINGTONS *2 Corinthians*, 104.

Reconciliation and righteousness, or justification, are terms Paul utilizes to express what God has done for us through Christ; both are connected with the crucified Christ.<sup>4</sup> By focusing on Paul's idea of reconciliation, and looking at the causes and effects of the war on the people of Sierra Leone, and how the Inter-Religion Council and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission came in to preach the message of reconciliation, I hope to deepen my knowledge of Paul's idea of reconciliation, and his reference to "new creation". The "new" which has come now that the old has passed away locates Paul's ministry of reconciliation within the new creation, the new way of existence brought about in the death and resurrection of Christ.<sup>5</sup> According to Rev. Fornah Usman, a minister of the inter-religions council, with the "suffering, death and resurrection of Christ, no matter what those guys ("those guys" referring to the rebels) may have done, there is room on the side of the Lord to forgive them and to bring them back on the road they are supposed to be on."<sup>6</sup>

This essay is made up of three chapters. The first chapter will focus on the history of Sierra Leone beginning from its location in the continent, geographical and political divisions, its natural resources and how it gained independence. The chapter will also at look the causes and effects of the war on the people of Sierra Leone after independence and the divisions created as a result of the war.

In chapter two, I will look at Paul's idea of reconciliation, how he faced division in Corinth, the socio-political and religious situation at the time. It will also look at how Paul's preaching is a source of reconciliation and the outcome of Paul's preaching. In chapter three,

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<sup>4</sup> B. JANECKO, *The Bible Today, Forgiveness and Reconciliation* 30.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>6</sup> "Civil Society and Peace building: The role of the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone" 23/7/04,4-5.

which is my final chapter, I intend to use five to six principles from chapter two, which may shed light upon how Paul's theology can be concretely applied. Chapter three will deal with the various movements for peace as a result of the war, the emergence of the Inter-Religious Council and the "Truth and Reconciliation Commission." (TRC). As a congregation, many young men every year aspire to join the congregation and these young men have experienced the bitterness of war. This chapter also makes an attempt to look at how our formation houses can become places where these young men joining can feel free to tell their stories of the war, own them, forgive themselves and God. A place they experience reconciliation and begin to live a normal life.

I do not intend to depict formation houses as therapeutic communities but communities that can listen, accommodate and help the young people discern God's will for them. These people might not end up becoming religious at all but might have benefited after living with congregation for a year or two. The essay will close with a general conclusion in which the ideas of the three chapters will be summarized. The ideas and insights that make up this essay are taken from sacred scriptures, the magisterial teaching of the church, and from reliable literature on the topic. It is my hope to express to you a vision of a ministry of reconciliation.



## CHAPTER I

### THE SOCIO-POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC SITUATION BEFORE AND AFTER INDEPENDENCE IN SIERRA LEONE

#### 1. Introduction

The topic of interest is peace and reconciliation in Sierra Leone, in the light of 2 Corinthians 5:16-21. This chapter hopes to offer a brief history of Sierra Leone and how natural resources in the country have become a source of conflict. The political instability in the country, the start of the war in 1991, its causes and effects on the people of Sierra Leone. John L. Hirsch in his book *Sierra Leone Diamonds and the Struggle for Democracy* puts it well when he said, "Sierra Leone's history reflects a fundamental paradox before independence it was, at one level, a remarkable example of peaceful co existence among people of diverse religious beliefs and backgrounds. Eighteen different ethnic groups lived according to Islamic, Christian and animist traditions. Intermarriage was common and there was little ethnic tension. Yet geographically base ethnic tensions between Mendes in the south and Temnes and Limbas in the North, manipulated by politicians, were to be at the root of the states progressive collapse in the nearly four decades since independence.<sup>7</sup> This chapter will present a vivid picture of the country's historical background, its wealth by way of natural resources, and how these resources became a source of conflict and caused ten years of brutal

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<sup>7</sup> J. H., HIRSCH, *Sierra Leone Diamonds and the Struggle for Democracy*, 24.

war. We will also examine how the war affects the lives of the poor Sierra Leoneans who could not escape the wrath of the rebels, and the division created as a result of the war.

## **2. Brief History of Sierra Leone**

Sierra Leone is a small country situated on the southern part of the western bulge of the African continent. By size, it is 27,925 sq miles. It's northern neighbour is the republic of Guinea, while on the southeast it is bounded by Liberia. On the Western side there is the rugged coastline on the Atlantic Ocean. Sierra Leone has a population of about five million, spread fairly evenly over the country.<sup>3</sup>

"The indigenous population is made up of 18 ethnic groups. The Temnes in the north and the Mendes in the south are the largest. About 60,000 are Creole, the descendants of freed slaves who returned to Sierra Leone from Great Britain and North America and slave ships captured on the high seas. In addition, about 4,000 Lebanese, 500 Indians, and 2,000 Europeans reside in the country."<sup>9</sup>

European contact with Sierra Leone was among the first in West Africa. In 1652, the first slaves in North America were brought from Sierra Leone to the Sea Islands off the coast of the southern United States. During the 1700s there was a thriving trade bringing slaves from Sierra Leone to the plantations of South Carolina and Georgia where their rice-farming skills made them particularly valuable.

In 1787 the British helped 400 freed slaves from the United States, Nova Scotia, and Great Britain return to Sierra Leone to settle in what they called the "The Province of Freedom." Disease and hostility from the indigenous people nearly eliminated the first group of returns. This settlement was joined by other groups of freed slaves and soon became known

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<sup>8</sup> C. M., FYLE, *The History of Sierra Leone, A Concise Introduction*, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Profile: "People, History, Government, Political Conditions, Economy and Foreign Relations" 21/12/04. 2-8.

as Freetown. In 1792, Freetown became one of Britain's first colonies in West Africa. Thousands of slaves were returned to or liberated in Freetown. Most chose to remain in Sierra Leone. These returned Africans or Creole as they came to be called were from all areas of Africa. Cut off from their homes and traditions by the experience of slavery, they assimilated some aspects of British styles of life and built a flourishing trade on the West African coast.<sup>10</sup>

### **3. Geography, Climate and Vegetation of Sierra Leone**

If one is entering Sierra Leone by ship into its harbour at Freetown the first impression would be that the entire country is mountainous but this is not exactly true. The peninsula, which is the initial view one gets, is hilly, but on leaving the peninsula and traveling inland, one discovers that the low coastal plain stretches for miles around. The country is well watered by rivers running in a north easterly to southwesterly direction. These, from the earliest times, dictated the pattern of population movement settlement in Sierra Leone. There are two major seasons in Sierra Leone, the rainy and the dry seasons. The former lasts usually from May to October while the dry season with almost no rain, lasts through the rest of the year. It is usually hot throughout the year, but about December and January cold, dry winds from the Sahara bring in a short season called Harmattan. It is not really cold then, but in the extreme north, the weather conditions are similar to those in spring in the Northern Hemisphere.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> "Profile: People, History, Government, Political Conditions, Economy and Foreign Relation," 21/12/04, 2-8.

<sup>11</sup> C. M., FYLE *The History of Sierra Leone, A Concise Introduction*, 2.

#### 4. Political Divisions

For purposes of administration, Sierra Leone is divided into four major regions. The Western area, covers the entire peninsula is already mentioned, including the capital city Freetown. The southern province with headquarters at Bo town, the Eastern province which has Kenema as its headquarters; the Northern province based in Makeni town. The provinces have within them a number of districts that are further sub-divided into chiefdoms. The central government that rules the entire country is based in Freetown.<sup>12</sup>

#### 5. Independence

Sierra Leone's history, reflects a fundamental paradox, before independence it was, at one level, a remarkable example of peaceful co-existence among people of diverse religious beliefs and backgrounds. Eighteen different ethnic groups lived according to Islamic, Christian, and animist traditions. Intermarriage was common and there was little ethnic tension. Yet geographically, based ethnic tensions between Mendes in the south and Temnes and Limbas in the north, manipulated by politicians, were to be at the root of the states progressive collapse in the nearly four decades since independence.<sup>13</sup>

The colonial history of Sierra Leone was not placid. The indigenous people mounted several unsuccessful revolts against British rule and Creole domination. Most of the 20th century history of the colony was peaceful, however, and independence was achieved without violence.<sup>14</sup> After the First World War, constitutional developments were gradually to move Sierra Leone into a unified form of government. This was slow at first, but after the Second

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<sup>12</sup> C. M., FYLE, *The History of Sierra Leone*, A Concise Introduction, 3.

<sup>13</sup> J.H., HIRSCH *Sierra Leone Diamonds and the Struggle for Democracy*, 24.

<sup>14</sup> Profile: "People, History, Government, Political Conditions, Economy and Foreign Relations" 21/12/04 2-8.

World War a wave of decolonization developed and the colonial powers began giving political concessions to their colonies. Protectorate and colony in Sierra Leone were brought together in a legislative council to the great displeasure of the Creole. By 1960, independence was a foregone conclusion and Sierra Leone marched eventually to a one party system of government under president Siaka Stevens.<sup>15</sup>

## **6. Natural Resources As a Source of Conflict**

Sierra Leone is one of the countries in Western Africa that can boast of most of the major minerals on the continent. Though small in size, the country has diamonds, which are considered to be amongst the best in the world. Gold, iron-ore, chromites, rutile are also found in the country. Oil is also believed to be in the country after prospectors graphed the land along the Atlantic Ocean. Though the country is rich in minerals, Sierra Leone is one of the poorest countries in the world. Lack of accountability and transparency of then successive leaders of the country have totally drained the country's resources. The rich are becoming richer while the poor become poorer. Despite all this, "mineral exports remain Sierra Leone's principal foreign exchange earner. Sierra Leone is a major producer of gem – quality diamonds. Though rich in this resource, the country has historically struggled to manage its importation and exportation. Annual production estimates range between \$70-250 million; however, only a fraction of these passes through formal export channels (1999: \$ 1.2 million; 2000: \$ 16 million; 2001: projection \$ 25 million) the balance is smuggled out and has been used to finance rebel activities in the region.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> C. M., FYLE *The History of Sierra Leone, A Concise Introduction*, 137.

<sup>16</sup> Profile: "People, History, Government, Political Conditions, Economy and Foreign Relations" 21/12/04 2-8.

John L. Hirsch in his book *Sierra Leone Diamonds and the Struggle for Democracy* puts it well when he said, “Sierra Leone’s misfortune has been geological as well as political. Diamonds were a major factor for the combatants in the cross-border war that has Kono region in the east is rich in alluvial diamonds, easily accessible to anyone who can get here with a shovel and a sieve. The economic power of the diamond trade has been a major source of conflict in other African countries, most notably Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Liberia. Sierra Leone diamonds have financed the rebel movements of both Foday Sabana Sankoh, leader of Sierra Leone, and Charles Taylor also a rebel leader who later became the President of Liberia. Successive mining ministers agreed to provide mining concessions to various foreign entrepreneurs for large bribes or they join in the mining and smuggling themselves, either openly or as silent partners.”<sup>17</sup>

“Arms purchases and financing of other illicit activities have led some to characterize Sierra Leone’s diamonds as “conflict resources”. Recent efforts on the part of the government to improve the management of the export trade have met with some success. In October 2000, a United Nations approved export certification system for exporting diamonds from Sierra Leone was put into place and this led to a dramatic increase in legal exports. In 2001, the Government of Sierra Leone created a mining community development fund, which returns a portion of diamonds export taxes to diamond mining communities.”<sup>18</sup>

## **7. Causes of the War**

For twenty-three years after independence, the country remained under one party rule headed by president Siaka Stevens. His party is the All People’s Congress (APC). Twenty-

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<sup>17</sup> J.H. HIRSCH *Sierra Leone Diamonds and the Struggle for Democracy*, 25.

<sup>18</sup> Profile: “People, History, Government, Political Conditions, Economy and Foreign Relations” 21/12/04 5-8.

three years of misrule witnessed corruption in its highest peak. There was high-level corruption in the government, judiciary, army, civil service, and among local chiefs. Teachers often would be left for six months without salaries. “*Where a cow is tied is where it should eat*” was the slogan of the day. Thus, if you are in position, grab what you can grab, before you are removed from power. The government became so self-centered that the people were left to fend for themselves. The “who you know not what you know” syndrome was the order of the day. The children of politicians do not study in the country, all their studies are done either in Europe or United States. For 23 years, the ordinary Sierra Leoneans saw all of these with their naked eyes. A few people impoverished the country. The conduct of the government disgruntled most Sierra Leoneans. There was deep-seated anger amongst the people. Kofi Annan, Secretary General, United Nations had this to say about the internal factors that promote conflict,

Include the nature of power on the continent, a winner-takes-all mentality, zero sum political games, centralization and personalization, lack of accountability, lack of transparency, lack of rule of law, lack of peaceful transition mechanisms and absence of human right, all of which are set against poverty, lack of education and primordial background of deep rooted ethnic and religious mindsets.<sup>19</sup>

This was the characteristic of twenty-three years of rule by the All People Congress. Two major issues led to the conflict. One of them was warfare arising from state degeneration or state collapse and the second one was protracted conflict between politicized militaries. When the National Provisional Ruling Council headed by Captain Valentine Strasser seized power through a *coupe d'état* on Wednesday April 29, 1992, the whole country went out to rejoice.

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<sup>19</sup> OMOIGUI, N. A., “Public Health Implications of Conflicts in Africa” 29/12/04 1-11.

At this time the people hailed the plotters of the coup because everybody wanted a change from the twenty-three years of misrule which saw Sierra Leone become the poorest country in the world. The National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) did a good job in their first two years in power. However, in their third year, they incorporated old politicians from the previous government who corrupted the young soldiers that once held good intentions for the country. Once more, people's hopes were dashed. Corporal Foday Sabana Sankoh who launched his rebellion in 1991 had no problems getting young men to join his rebellion to fight against the Government of the (NPRC). During this period, two *coup d'etats* took place. In January 16, 1996, the government of Captain Valentine Strasser was overthrown by Brigadier General Julius Maada Bio who later handed over power to Alhaji Tejan Kabba after a national election. Alhaji Tejan Kabba was in power for only one year when Major Johnny Paul Koroma overthrew him on Sunday May 5, 1997. With all these changes, confusion brought about by power thirsty people, there was no central authority in the country. Corporal Foday Sabana Sankoh leader of Revolutionary United Front took advantage of the situation and penetrated the country. Between 1998 and 1999, 70% of the country was in the hands of the rebels. The government was in control only of the capital city Freetown, which was also later attacked by the rebels who subsequently controlled more than half of the city.

## **8. Effects of the war on the People of Sierra Leone**

The ten years of brutal war affected the people socially, economically, physically spiritually, and emotionally. Many lost their lives and infrastructure was destroyed.

The war pushed the country further down the economic ladder and exacerbated the plight of women (particularly rural women). Ten years of widespread violence and general insecurity devastated rural Sierra Leone, particularly in the Southern-eastern part of the country, where the conflict has been most severe. The near total-collapse of rural social structures and the fear of violent RUF rebels attacks drove a large segment of the rural population to abandon their



homes and flee to urban areas, including the capital, Freetown, which until the present crisis was virtually untouched by the destruction visited on the rural areas. Many of the rural displaced were women and children who stayed either with relative or at refuge camps scattered around urban areas. A lot of people were living in these camps in appalling conditions at the time of the May 25th Coup, which brought the country to a stand still and further exacerbated the economic situation.<sup>20</sup>

Another effect of the war in Sierra Leone, is how it hijacked the lives of men. They either fought or searched for work in conflict-free areas. Even when men were available to the household, gender ideologies put a disproportionate burden of reproductive work on women. Women were left behind with the burden of providing for their immediate and extended families. This burden was compounded by the destruction of traditional support systems and livelihoods that occurred in conflict zones. Lack of basic services such as health, education and infrastructure further undermined the ability of women to provide for their dependents in these situations. Apart from their domestic responsibility, women coped with menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth and child care, often while on the move. Moreover, women and girls were targeted as a tactic of war. Many became victims of rape, non-sexual assault, and atrocities such as the evisceration of pregnant females, which was practiced by the RUF rebels. It is also reported that unaccompanied girls were often captured by combatants and civilian men alike and used either as forced labourers by families in need of domestic workers or as wives. Women and girls coped with little or no support systems when faced with unwanted pregnancies and children rearing from acts of rape. Severely ostracized, these women and girls were forced to leave their homes for the relative safety of refugee camps. In

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<sup>20</sup> "Dialogue on Justice and Reconciliation" 29/12/04, 1-4.

Sierra Leone, as in the rest of the world, women and children make up the majority of refugees and internally displaced persons.<sup>21</sup>

Even when these women and girls travel to refugee camps, life there is only slightly better than the hardships and terror these women left behind. Services are as basic as possible and focus on nutrition and the supply of antibiotics. Boredom is a common ailment of refugee women, as well as men. There are usually no educational or training facilities for these women and their children. Access to healthy services for their children and themselves is limited to essential medicine for malaria, cholera and diarrhoea. The availability of contraceptives is rare, whilst women and girls were further victimized by sexual and physical violence in refugee camps. Some would go from a life of decision-making and relative economic independence to a life of total dependency. The implication for women refugees is that whatever self-esteem they have had quickly eroded as a displaced person or refugee. More often than not there were no counseling services to help women to cope with such issues.<sup>22</sup>

Child combatants had also a major effect on the population. RUF rebels particularly targeted women and children. Children were regarded as the “best fighters”. They boosted their courage by giving them hard drugs. Some RUF recruits were as young as eight years old.

Female fighters in RUF were mostly the spouses or partners of the male fighters. They were used strategically by RUF. For example, after an area had been captured, the female fighters would loot and occupy the area, freeing the men to move on and attack more areas. The ‘civilians’ were the men and women who were not trained in combat and provided labour

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<sup>21</sup> “Gender and Conflict in Sierra Leone” 29/12/04, 1-4- 2-4.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 29/12/04, 2-4.

force for farming and domestic work. The majority of the 'civilians' were girls captured as 'wives'. Their primary role of 'wives' in the camps was hellish. Opportunities to leave were not common. Moreover, those caught while attempting to escape were killed to serve as a deterrent to others. As a survival strategy, many 'wives' co-operated with the male fighters, who, in turn, protected them.<sup>23</sup>

Apart from 'wives' associated with men known as "commandos" the rest of the women were communal property and all men had sexual rights over them. According to some of the girls, gang sex was a daily occurrence in the camps. As a result, sexually transmitted diseases (especially gonorrhoea) were rampant, as well as unplanned pregnancies and child bearing.

Another devastating thing among the forces at war, were the women and girls of the rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF), who received the least attention from the media and researchers. Of Sierra Leone's already severely unemployed female population, the woman and girls associated with the RUF, either willing or by force, are probably the most marginalized of the marginalized.<sup>24</sup>

Having had no psychological counseling and having witnessed and taken part in atrocities during their RUF years, these women and their children had difficulties re-adjusting to normal society. They manifested behavioral problems and were sources of tension and conflicts in both their communities and in refugee camps where some had sought shelter. Some were said to be very proud and boastful of their RUF association. But others were very ashamed to talk about their experiences. Maladjusted in their new environments and with little

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<sup>23</sup> "Gender and Conflict in Sierra Leone" 29/12/04, 2-4.

<sup>24</sup> BAR, K. A., Rural Women and Girls in the War in Sierra Leone" 29/12/04, 1-5.

to look forward to, many returned to their former combat lives, with the reconstituted RUF, the people's army.<sup>25</sup>

## **9. Division is Sierra Leone as an Effect of the War**

The brutal civil war lasted for ten years, from 1991 to 2001. When the war was in its early stages, those living in the capital city Freetown dismissed it as a rural war for those living up country. Those in the east and north would say it's a war for those living in the south since the war started in the south. When the leadership of the (RUF) was discovered, those living in the north were blamed for bringing war into the country simply because the leader was a northern Corporal Foday Sabana Sankoh. The whole country, especially those living around the area of, the war, blamed the northerners. The question asked by these people was, "Why didn't he start the war in the north! Instead he started it in the south where there are very few of his tribes-mates." At one stage of the war, there was conflict between the Army in the north and that in the south and east.

What saved the country from a tribal war was the inter-marriage that had taken place during the time of peace. 60% of the business class in the south and east are Temnes from the north, who have intermarried with the Mendes in the south and east. Evicting or killing any one of them is like killing a Mende and at the same time killing a Temne. This was the reason that the war never degenerated into a tribal war but remained a civil war. Now that peace has returned to the country, these stories are all around about who started the war. Politicians tried to persuade the people to look at war as tribal, and how different tribes started killing each other, but they later realized that the war was not tribal.

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<sup>25</sup> "Gender and Conflict in Sierra Leone" 29/12/04, 3-4.

The formation of the Inter-Religious Council and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has helped many people to talk about what happened to them during the war, what they saw happening to other people, how they have reconciled with themselves and those people who brought suffering to the whole country and to God.

## 10. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have looked at the Sierra Leone's historical background before and after independence, and how natural resources with particular reference to diamonds fuelled the war in Sierra Leone. John H. Hirsch puts it well when he said "Sierra Leone's misfortune has been geological as well political. Diamonds were a major factor for the combatants in the cross-border war that has engulfed Sierra Leone for most of the past decade. Sierra Leone diamonds have financed the rebel movements of both for Foday Sabana Sankon rebel leader of Sierra Leone and Charles Taylor the then president of Liberia. Successive mining ministers agreed to provide concessions to various foreign entrepreneurs for large bribes, or joined in the mining and smuggling themselves, either openly or as silent partners."<sup>26</sup> This chapter has also explored the causes and effects of the war on the people of Sierra Leone and the division created. In the following chapter I will look at the scripture, church teaching, solid text with particular reference to Paul's ministry of reconciliation.

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<sup>26</sup> J. H., HIRSCH *Sierra Leone Diamonds and the Struggle for Democracy*, 24.

## CHAPTER II

### PAUL'S MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION

#### 1. Introduction

The preceding chapter has set the foundation for us. It touches on the history, geography and climatic pattern of Sierra Leone and it also touches on the political divisions, independence and causes and effects of the war on the people of Sierra Leone. This second chapter is specifically constructed to look at Paul's ministry of reconciliation. It will highlight a number of the challenges Paul faced in his community and the social stratification in Corinth. It will also look at the social-political and religious situation in Corinth and how Paul's preaching is a source of reconciliation and the fruits his preaching yielded. The text I will focus on is 2 Cor 5:16-21.

#### 2. The Challenges Paul faced in the Community of Corinth

The geographical location of Corinth gave it great significance both commercially and politically. Julius Caesar made Corinth a Roman Colony in 4BC because of the immense traffic across the Isthmus the city which was a magnet for people of all sorts. From the time of Homer the area had been characterized as "wealthy".<sup>27</sup> During Paul's time in the City, he noticed the wealth of the Corinthian citizens and their haphazard economic and social mobility. Some of the conflicts that Paul encountered in Corinth had economic and social implications for "the most active and most important church members who probably belonged

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<sup>27</sup> W. F. ORR & J. W., WALTHER, *The Anchor Bible 1 Corinthians*, 118.

to a small group of Corinthian Christians with high social status". He challenged this community to renounce titles and honors that belonged to them, a radical departure from first century attitudes to religious organization.<sup>28</sup>

### 3. Social Stratification

The reality of social stratification affected the church in Corinth and Paul deals with the tensions, struggles and implications of this environment in his preaching and his writing. While we may have different views of class and status than the Pauline Christians, these aspects of life affect our social relations and our daily choices. They impact our liturgical celebrations and our community life causing distancing or separation among church members, a factor considered by Paul and by ministers in the church today. Likewise, social context affects the biblical text itself in its language, style, issues and perspective.<sup>29</sup>

I agree with James D.G. Dunn in his book *"The Theology of Paul the Apostle"* when he describes a situation of inequality in 1Cor 11. He says "Here it is evident that the tension was basically between rich and poor Christians, that is, between those who have enough food and drink and their own houses and those who have nothing". Presumably it was the well to do that was going ahead with their meal before the poorer members arrived. Since these were "house churches", which are always in view, we may also assume that the common meals were hosted by wealthier believers in their own homes. Those of higher social status may well have kept the best food for their social peers and provided poorer food for their social inferiors and clients. The problem at Corinth would then have been that some came early and began eating (either from their own provisions or from the common stock) before others

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<sup>28</sup> H. DOOHAN, *The Corinthian Correspondence. A Spiritual Commentary*, 20.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 20.

arrived. Moreover, those arriving later would probably have had insufficient time or money to prepare enough food for themselves.<sup>30</sup> Arriving late, they would discover that most of the expensive and substantial food had already been eaten. Furthermore, latecomers might well find that there was insufficient room for them in the triclinium (“dining room”) and would have had to sit in the atrium (the courtyard off which the dining room normally opened). The traditional Greco-Roman dinner party often took place in two phases, a “first table,” during which several courses were served, would be followed by a break. This would be followed in turn by a “symposium” (drinking party) at a “second table,” often with newly arrived guests, at which wine, food and desserts were served. It is possible that then, the problems in the Corinthian Church emerged. Richer Christians maintained the practice of the first table and treated the Lord’s Supper as the second table alone.<sup>31</sup>

#### **4. Immorality and Religious Practices in the Community**

The tremendous variety of religious and of peoples in Corinth furnished a wild environment, chaos of customs, and all kinds of immorality. Paul might have come to the city not primarily because of the challenge presented by its particular wickedness, but because its importance in international commerce made it strategic for his program to evangelize the gentile world.<sup>32</sup>

A man has his father’s wife, that is, a male member of the Corinthian Church was cohabiting with a woman who had been or was still married to the man’s father. From Hebrew usage it is probable that the woman was the man’s stepmother or another wife of his father in polygamous relationship. There is nothing in the text to indicate whether the father was dead, though this has often been the assumed. It is also possible that the father and the woman had been divorced. At best, the woman was the man’s widowed stepmother.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> D. G., DUNN, *The Theology of St Paul the Apostle*, 609.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* 609.

<sup>32</sup> W. F. OOR & J. A., WALTHER, *The Anchor Bible I Corinthians*, 119.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 189.



The Jews had learnt to live in a kind of uneasy truce with paganism, indeed, here as elsewhere there may even have been accommodation on the part of some Jews to certain other religious beliefs. The religious culture of the city acquainted people with theological and religious intercourse in which deep religious emotions were disciplined by dialogue. People entering the Christian Church undoubtedly brought with them a habit of free discussion about rites, and principles.<sup>34</sup>

The people of Corinth perceived their public and private lives to be in some measure dependent upon the favour of the gods. In Roman Corinth, as elsewhere, the evidence of these beliefs, however superficial they may have been, was present on every side: in the temples and religious sanctuaries of the city, in its sculpture, on its coinage, in the inscriptions and in its major civic institutions – not least, in the case of Corinth, the Isthmian games dedicated to the god Poseidon. Even during the century between the destruction of the Greek city and the refounding of the Roman colony a number of old Greek cults remain active at the site. One of the most important religious establishments of Roman Corinth, situated about half a mile north of the forum, was the Asclepeium a sanctuary of Asclepius, the god of healing. It attracted a larger number of people seeking cures from their infirmities. It consisted of a temple, facing east, with an altar before it, an abaton (sleeping quarters) for those awaiting directions from the god on how to be cured. Paul was faced with all of these.<sup>35</sup>

The first part of 1 Corinthians discusses disturbing reports which Paul had received concerning threatened schism among various parties in the church, a mysterious and perplexing case of apparent incest, and an alarming practice of fellow church members filing lawsuits against each other even in heathen courts. The second part discusses matters that had been raised in a communication from the church to Paul concerning marriage, eating food

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<sup>34</sup> W. F. OOR & J. A., WALTHER, *The Anchor Bible 1 Corinthians*, 119.

<sup>35</sup> V. P., FURNISH, *The Anchor Bible 2 Corinthians*, Vol 32A, 15.

offered to idols, spiritual gifts, the resurrection of the body and the collections for the poor in Jerusalem.<sup>36</sup>

## 5. The Socio-Political and Religious Situation at the Time of Paul

From the beginning of its existence as a colony of Rome, the importance of Corinth was primarily commercial (Salmon 1969: 135). Its location at the site of the old Greek City made this inevitable. By commanding the Isthmus it automatically commanded the premier sea route from Rome to the eastern Mediterranean. Julius Caesar, and later the emperor Gaius Caligula (37-41 C.E.), had hoped to be able to join the Saronic Gulf (to the east) and the Gulf of Corinth (to the north) by means of a canal across the Isthmus, and Nero (54-68 C.E.) actually inaugurated the project, with considerable fanfare, on 28 November in the year 66 or 67 (Suetonius, Julius XLIV, 3; Caligula XXI; Nero XIX, 2; XXXVII, E; cf. Gebhard 1973: 86 – 87; Wiseman, 1978:48, 74 – 75 n.21).<sup>37</sup> As the Capital of the Province of Achaia (27 BCE), Corinth developed as a commercial center with its share of trade, banking and government administration. The city was also known for arts, crafts and Corinthian bronze, a metal more precious than gold, with some of its unearthed treasures dating from the sixth century BCE.<sup>38</sup> Ancient writers offer testimony to the prestige of Corinth and its reputation. In a fascinating book called, “*St Paul’s Corinth*”, Jerome Murphy-O’Connor gathers the testimony of the historian philosophers and other writers of the inter-testamental period to offer us a glimpse of the glory and enigma of this city. The remains of the city walls, colonnades, baths, theaters, temples, roads, homes and shops allow the modern visitor to imagine everyday life in this

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<sup>36</sup> V. P., FURNISH, *The Anchor Bible 2 Corinthians*, Vol 32A. 15.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 7-8.

<sup>38</sup> H. DOOHAN, *The Corinthian Correspondence. A Spiritual Commentary*, 12.

stimulating environment.<sup>39</sup> With the vitality Corinth displayed as a cosmopolitan city, we can well imagine the spirited level of religious inquiry, influences, and practices. Various philosophical currents of thought permeated the atmosphere; Hellenistic ideas and thought patterns prevailed; religious rituals and cults were part of life. A major city like Corinth would have a sizable Jewish population, as would all the Pauline communities, even though Paul's letters do not explicitly mention contact between the Christians and the Jewish synagogue (Meeks 168).

Because of these factors, the Corinthians would be familiar with Jewish scriptures and teaching, as well as Greco-Roman ideals and ideas.<sup>40</sup>

First Corinthians is primarily devoted to emphasizing the unity in diversity that must prevail within the Christian community, yet the root of the problem is not factionalism as such. The manifold and quite different dangers the Christians face appear to find their common origin in the difficulty of living a true Christian life in a Hellenistic pagan milieu. Paul seems to be concerned with the surfacing of a Gnostic-like element in the community. With their wisdom speculations and enthusiasm some members were likely to claim a gross moral freedom or, quite the opposite, some practiced an exaggerated sexual asceticism. Further more, must the emotional spiritual manifestations during public worship not be linked to a still-persisting influence of pagan cults? Apart from that, dualistic Greek philosophy does not allow for a bodily resurrection.<sup>41</sup>

Paul uses imagery from these various traditions in his preaching and writing and in this approach, translates a Palestinian – based gospel for a Gentile audience.<sup>42</sup> However, Paul also brings his strong Jewish heritage to the Corinthian Church. His missionary activity, belief in resurrection and afterlife, and interpretation of scripture come from his pharisaic background. Paul appreciates and understands the Gentile world from his own experience as a diaspora Jew. Paul assumes familiarity with the approaches of Greek thought and Jewish

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<sup>39</sup> H. DOOHAN, *The Corinthian Correspondence. A Spiritual Commentary*, 12.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>41</sup> D. J., HARRINGTON, ed., *Sarcra Pagina 2 Corinthians*, Vol.8, 4.

<sup>42</sup> H. DOOHAN, *The Corinthian Correspondence*, 25.

ways in the Corinthian Community. Their intensity and enthusiasm allowed them to appreciate the diversity of approaches that various religious traditions offer. Syncretism, a blending of various religious elements into the practice of one's own faith, usually has negative connotations in this period. The background of the Corinthians prepares them to embrace a new teaching of wisdom and knowledge and to generate enthusiasm about the gifts of the spirit, but they have difficulties with resurrection of the body and preaching of the cross. Rather than hope in future life, these Christians prefer to enjoy spiritual ecstasy in the present, a real concern for Paul in his teaching on the end times. Radically different eschatological views are at stake. These religious differences, along with social stratification, contribute to the conflict Paul encounters in the church.<sup>43</sup>

## **6. Paul's Preaching as a Source of Reconciliation**

Walter J. Burghardt in his book *"Towards Reconciliation"* said "To reconcile is to reunite, to bring back to harmony. Reconciliation therefore implies that division has taken place separation rupture. Two realities, two persons, two peoples, are at odds, do not relate well, as they should. There is discord, disunity, disharmony, oneness has been rupture".<sup>44</sup>

The Bishops of Africa during the 1983 Synod initiated document on reconciliation and had this to say, "The theme of reconciliation is a marvelous one, one that holds within it the entire Christian mystery: Reconciliation of human beings with God, among one another, and with the whole cosmos". The Bishops went on look at the situation of today's world, in a search for reconciliation that often appears hopeless, in a world that is, "a daily theatre of war, caused by injustice, violence, power and conflicting ideologies. The root cause, beneath and

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<sup>43</sup> H. DOOHAN, *The Corinthian Correspondence. A Spiritual Commentary*, 26.

<sup>44</sup> W. J., BURGHARDT, *Towards Reconciliation*, 1.

beyond all these other causes is sin-which splits the person apart, so that division in society simply reflects this inner division. We cannot achieve reconciliation but can accept it as God's gift. The paschal mystery of Christ is the center of this reconciling action of God, which calls for inner conversion on the part of human beings. Reconciliation without change of heart would contradict human dignity and freedom. God's reconciling action is personal, but also social and cosmic, and the church is its sign and instrument in the world."<sup>45</sup>

## 7. Theological Reflection

In his letter Paul infrequently uses the "interpersonal" category of reconciliation. Therefore, some exegetes (especially Ernst Kasemann, "some thoughts") have looked for tradition in vv. 18-19 as well. Yet one may presume that Paul himself is at work here. For the first time in his writings he employs the idea of "reconciliation" (between humans) to describe what took place between God and humans. Already a Hellenistic-Jewish writing a horizontal category was applied vertically: God is reconcile (cf., for example, 2 Mac 5:20., 7:32-33; 8:29). But Paul is breaking new theological ground. He "deliberately makes a fundamental correction. It is not God who needs to be reconcile to human beings, but it is human beings who need to be reconcile to God".<sup>46</sup> Reconciliation and righteousness, or justification, both are terms Paul utilizes to express what God has done for us in Christ, and both are connected with the crucified Christ. In 1 Corinthians 1:24, the crucified Christ, whom the Corinthians neglect in their charismatic enthusiasm is the power and wisdom of God. In 1 Corinthians 1:30 Christ becomes for us wisdom from God, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Second Corinthians 5: 17-21 may have been influenced by Isaiah 52, which includes a

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<sup>45</sup> *Initial Document on Reconciliation*, Vol.25, 3.

<sup>46</sup> D. J., HARRINGTON, *Sacra Pagina 2 Corinthian*, 104.

description of the messenger who proclaims peace, and the servant song of Isaiah 53, which describes the suffering of the innocent one whose suffering brings us peace (Is 53: 5) and justifies us (Is 53:7).<sup>47</sup>

## 8. 2 Cor 5: 16-21

The death of Christ should make everything new - we are no longer the same but new people. People who have been transformed in the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ. 5:16 Christ's death is the transformative event for all of life. Nothing is the same after that. First among the radical changes brought about by Christ's death is the way people should live. They live no longer for themselves but for the one who died and was raised for them (5:15). The transformation begun in Christ's death and resurrection will be expanded until they encompass the entire universe (*Koous Kosmos*, 5:19, which fits the Roman 8 pattern, where the whole of creation longs for the freedom the children of God already experience; see Rom 8:21-23). Another constitutive change involves how believers now view other: no longer *Κατασάρκα* (*Kata sarka*), literally, "according to the flesh".

Paul's lead up to the passage has established how this phrase must be understood. Believers must look to the inner person and not take primary clues from the outer person; they must consider the heart and not the face. This is like saying the coat does not matter but the man in the coat does. You do not judge a man by just looking at him. Christ's death gave us a new turn as human beings that is why we now live for him who died and rose from the dead.<sup>48</sup> In 5:17, Paul's accounts for this transformative shift "If one is in Christ" and all

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<sup>47</sup> B. JANECKO, *The Bible Today Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, Vol 40 No 1, 30.

<sup>48</sup> J. P., SAMPLEY, *The New Interpreter's Bible* Vol 11, 92.

believers by definition are, “he or she is a new creation”. Those who are part of the new creation can no longer be considered (*Kata sarka*), according to the standards of the world. The phrase “new creation” is evocative and enigmatic. It is used only one other time in Paul’s letters.<sup>49</sup> The reference to “new creation” and the “new” which has come now that the old has passed away locates Paul’s ministry of reconciliation within the new creation, the new way of existence brought about in the death and resurrection of Christ.<sup>50</sup>

In 2 Cor 5:18 Paul says, “All these, however, (come) from God who reconciles us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation”.<sup>51</sup> “All these” most probably refers to the content of the previous 5:14 – 17, especially the saving action of Christ depicted in 5:14 – 15. In 5:18 God is described as the one who initiates reconciliation “through Christ”, though the appeal in 5:20 indicates that human response is necessary. It is precisely this human response that Paul seeks to elicit.<sup>52</sup> The “us” who are reconciled include at least Paul and his fellow apostles, though it may refer to all Christians and in view of the reference to “reconciling the world” In 5:19 probably can be taken to include all of humankind.<sup>53</sup> Just as the death and resurrection of Christ reconcile us with God, so is the death of an elder in the Community can reconcile the whole extended family. It is the custom of the Sierra Leoneans, at the death of an elder, all the family members come together not just to bury the dead man or woman, but on the third day the family seats together and air out all their grudges and they reconcile with the dead man or woman, spirit world, ancestors and the unborn. When the family disperses from the funeral house they go back as new people who

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<sup>49</sup> J. P., SAMPLEY, *The New Interpreter's Bible* Vol 11, 92.

<sup>50</sup> B. JANECKO, *The Bible Today, Forgiveness and Reconciliation* Vol 40 No 1, 28.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 29.

have been reconciled with "The most High" (God) and the community. This is why I agree with James D.G. Dunn in his book *"The Theology of Paul the Apostle"* when he said, "The imagery is obvious. It presupposes a state of estrangement or hostility between God and humankind. The idea that a death can bring about reconciliation may in itself evoke the idea of martyr theology (as implied also in Rom 5:7).

There are several notable features in the text. One is the strong insistence on reconciliation between God and the world. It is the fundamental creator/creature relationship, which is being restored here. Christ is the medium of reconciliation, not the one who is reconciled. Another is the equally strong insistence that God was involved in the act of reconciliation, - "through Christ" (V.18), "in Christ" (V.19). The emphasis is equivalent to what we have already seen in Rom 3.25, not to mention 2 Cor. 5:21. The image is not of God as an angry opponent having to be cajoled or entreated, but of God, the injured partner, actively seeking reconciliation. Equally striking is the correlated or alternative metaphor - "not counting their transgression against them. The image of forgiving or choosing to ignore active hostility can be as effective as that of sacrifice for sins. Not least is the confirmation that the message of reconciliation, focused in the cross (5:21), is the heart of the gospel. If Christ is the representative of God in effecting the reconciliation ("God was in Christ"), the apostles are the representatives of God in proclaiming it ("God makes his appeal through us").<sup>54</sup> This is why at the death of an elder; an elder whom the community feels is living a good life and can become an ancestor when he dies mediates the reconciliation process.

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<sup>54</sup> D. G., DUNN, *The Theology of St Paul the Apostle*, 229.



## 9. A Desired outcome of Paul's Preaching

The whole of Paul's defense of his ministry (2:14 – 7:4) has been required because of the Corinthian Christians' doubts regarding Paul's status as an apostle in view of significant opposition and criticism of him in Corinth. His twofold appeal in 2 Cor. 5:20, "Be reconciled to God" and "Do not receive the grace of God in vain", are directed specifically at the Corinthians whose doubts about Paul's apostleship put them in danger of placing themselves outside God's saving purposes.<sup>55</sup> Though as human beings we are weak as Paul was, the elder in the community leads the reconciliation process. The elder is someone who has spent most of his life doing good in order to avoid major criticism and opposition from the community.

In 2 Cor 5:21 Paul's chief interest in this particular recasting of the old story lies in getting the bearers to identify with Christ – as Christ identified with them by becoming one with them in their sin. Paul wants them to know and believe in the change represented in the purpose clause: "Our becoming the righteousness of God in (Christ)". Paul is not concerned about theological deliberation regarding the "sinfulness" or "sinlessness" of Christ. Instead, he is eager to remind the Corinthians of their having been brought from sin to righteousness in Christ by God's grace (this term appears in 6:1) and by Paul having been given the ministry of reconciliation.<sup>56</sup> Even if a particular family member has committed the worst sin against his family or the community, when the death of a significant elder occurs, the sinfulness of that person is no longer considered. Instead, the family/community concentrates on how to bring the person back into the community after a cleansing rite.

The duty of making peace extends personally to each and every member of the faithful. If it is not fulfilled, even the sacrifice of worship which they intend to offer (Mt 5: 23 ff.) remains

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<sup>55</sup> B. JANECKO, *The Bible Today Forgiveness and Reconciliation* Vol 40 No 1, 29.

<sup>56</sup> J. P., SAMPLEY, *The New Interpreters Bible* Vol.11, 96.

ineffective. Mutual reconciliation, in fact, shares in the very value of the sacrifice itself, and together with it constitutes a single offering pleasing to God. In order that this duty may be effectively fulfilled and that reconciliation which takes place in the depths of the heart may have a public character just like the death of Christ that brings it about, the Lord has conferred on the Apostles and on the Church's pastors, their successors, the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5: 18).

We take on the person of Christ, that is permanently deputed "to build up (the) flock in truth and holiness". The Church therefore, is the place of reconciliation because she is a "reconciled world." The church is also a reality by nature permanently reconciling. As such she is the presence and the action of God, who Christ was reconciling the world to himself (2 Cor 5:19). This action and presence are expressed primarily in baptism, in the forgiveness of sins and in the Eucharist celebration, which is the renewal of the redeeming sacrifice of Christ and the effective sign of the unity of the people of God.<sup>57</sup>

Reconciliation is at the heart of life's business. If the most important single factor about any of our likes is God's having reconciled us to God's very self, then the proper celebration of our reconciliation is to share it with others by fostering reconciliation and atonement wherever and whenever we can. (If that is not the most significant single factor in your life, you might consider engaging in some deep reflection about idolatry). Reconciliation as a ground of life would mean that when your friend makes some negative or judgmental comment about a neighbour, you would resist joining in. Indeed, instead you might respond by noting something you have appreciated about the same neighbour. Thus you may help two of your acquaintances come to understand each other better.<sup>58</sup>

A person who is fond of speaking ill about another member in the community must be watched keenly in case he is also doing the things he claims the other person is doing. This is why reconciliation is not just between two people but happens between "The most High" (God), the spirit world, ancestors, community and the yet to be born.

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<sup>57</sup> P. J., PAUL, To the episcopate to the clergy and to the faithful of the entire world on Reconciliation within the Church, 4.

<sup>58</sup> J. P., SAMPLEY, *The New Interpreter's Bible* Vol 11, 98.

## 10. Conclusion

We have explored well Paul's ministry of reconciliation. As the Bishops of Africa in the 1983 synod puts it, "The theme of reconciliation is a marvelous one, one that holds within the entire Christian mystery; Reconciliation of human beings with God, among one another, and with the Cosmos."<sup>59</sup> Nothing is the same after Christ's death. First among the changes brought about by Christ's death is the way people should live. No longer for themselves but for the one who died and was raised for them. (2 Cor 5:16). Therefore "If one is in Christ" the all believers by definition are, a "new creation"<sup>60</sup> The reference to "new creation" and the "new" means that the old has passed away. It locates Paul's ministry of reconciliation within the new creation, the new way of existence brought about in the death and resurrection of Christ.<sup>61</sup> This is why "Paul advocates for practical reconciliation that translates into concrete ethical considerations. The process of healing and salvation is essentially corporate not individual." At this point, the next chapter will look at the movement for peace in Sierra Leone. We will examine the formation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as well as the, achievement of the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone. We will seek to discuss the concrete way that all of these initiatives for peace put into action Paul's call for a ministry of reconciliation begun in Christ

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<sup>59</sup> *Initial Document on Reconciliation*, Vol.25, 3.

<sup>60</sup> J. P., SAMPLEY *The New Interpreter's Bible, A Commentary in Twelve Volumes* Vol.11 93.

<sup>61</sup> B. JANECKO, *The Bible Today, Forgiveness and Reconciliation* Vol.40 No 1 28.

## CHAPTER III

### BRINGING PEACE AND RECONCILIATION TO SIERRA LEONE

WITH REFERENCE TO 2 CORINTHIANS 5: 16 – 21

#### Biblical Principles and Concrete Recommendations

##### 1. **Introduction**

In chapter II, we have explored Paul's ministry of reconciliation in Corinth. I am adopting four biblical principles from the previous chapter to apply them in this chapter. This third chapter will explore the effort of the government, international bodies, religious groups and other significant people in advocating peace and reconciliation. It will also touch on the formation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone and how the people themselves can reconcile their hurts with others and with God. The focus here is specifically centered on young people especially those who think they have a call to religious life after all they have gone through during in this brutal war. This chapter will explore ways of helping these young men when they come to our formation houses. It will suggest ways of telling their stories, owning them, forgiving themselves and others and giving God.

##### 2. **Biblical Principles and Concrete Recommendations**

###### 2.1. *Biblical Principle One*

Reconciliation has as its source the reconciliation wrought by God in Christ. (2Cor 5:18-20) But is not a passive expectation bestowing reconciliation from the heavens (cf p 28)

but is the injured partner who searches out first in love in order to reconcile.<sup>62</sup> God is always the one who takes the initiative. Even when we go far from Him, He goes looking for us and asking us to come back. This is why I agree with Pope Paul VI, in his book "to the episcopate to the clergy and to the faithful of the entire world had this to say, "This initiative of God was then actualized through a direct divine intervention. God in fact has not simply pardoned us, nor has he made use of a mere man as an intermediary between himself and us: he has established his "only begotten Son an intercessor of peace". For our sake God made the sinless one into sin so that in him we might become the goodness of God" (2Cor 5:21). In reality, Christ, by dying for us, has cancelled out "every record of the debt that we had to pay; he has done away with it by nailing it to the cross" (2:14). And by means of the cross he has reconciled us with God: "In his own person he has killed the hostility" (Eph 2: 16).<sup>63</sup>

When the civil war in Sierra Leone started in 1991 a lot of people didn't think it would last long. People thought it was only going to last for a few months or a year and that the government will be able to stop it before reaching the interiors of the country. When the war got into the second and third years, people were alarmed and they started attacking the government for not doing anything about the war. A lot of groups preaching for peace and reconciliation sprang up. Among the first to emerge was a group from the North of the country a group called the "Tamaboro". Tamaboro is a local name meaning local hunters who possess supernatural powers. The group had both a military and political wing. They were fighting the rebels in the front and at the same time negotiating for a peaceful settlement. This lasted for two years yet the war was escalating. Another group sprang up called the

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<sup>62</sup> J.D. G., DUNN, *The Theology of St Paul the Apostle* 229.

<sup>63</sup> Pope Paul VI, *To the episcopate to the clergy and to the faithful of the entire world on reconciliation within the Church*, 3.

“Kapas”. Kapas mean local hunters. They also had both a political and a military wing. They were negotiating with the rebels at the same time making advances on the war front. This group also did not make much difference. The “Kamajors” from the south also sprang up. They were fighting alongside with the national army to help wipe off the rebels. They also had a political wing. At this time, the war had almost reached in all head quarter towns. The government was in control of 40% of the country; the rebels who were making their way into the country through Liberia controlled the rest. Among the last groups to emerge is the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone. This is the group I am going to elaborate on more since their emergence made a lot of difference in the country.

## **2.2. *Biblical Principle Two***

Paul advocates a practical reconciliation that translates into concrete ethical considerations. The process of healing and salvation is essentially corporate not individual (1Cor 3: 12-15) Paul’s understanding of what was fitting drew both upon his experience of the Church and what was good already found in the culture (Rom 12: 9; 21) as a whole<sup>64</sup> I agree with Pope Paul VI when he said “The duty of making peace extends personally to each and every member of the faithful. If it is not fulfilled, even the sacrifice of worship, which they intend to offer (Mt 5:23ff) remains ineffective. Mutual reconciliation, in fact, shares in the very value of the sacrifice itself, and together with it constitutes a single offering pleasing to God.” Pope John Paul VI.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> J. D. G., DUNN, *The Theology of St Paul the Apostle*, 684.

<sup>65</sup> Pope Paul VI, To the episcopate to the clergy and to the faithful of the entire world on reconciliation within the Church, 3.

### *2.2.1. What is the IRSCL*

The Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone (IRCSL) is a national multi-religious organization dedicated to promoting co-operation among the religious communities of Sierra Leone for peace, while maintaining respect for religious differences. Founded in April 1997, IRCSL is inclusive of broad religious communities and works for the following objectives:

- (a) To identify common religious commitments and principles conducive to the peace of the human community and to undertake actions for peace.
- (b) In a diverse society such as Sierra Leone, multi-religious co-operation for peace can be more effective than the efforts of single religious group acting alone.
- (c) Moreover, representing a significant majority of Sierra Leone's population, co-operation among religious groups can serve to promote tolerance in circumstances where people might otherwise be divided.

### *2.2.2. Why Multi-Religious Co-operation?*

Due to their unique position of trust within each local community and the country as a whole, the religious communities in Sierra Leone have significant potential for assisting in the rebuilding of the nation. Religious communities are proven agents for the delivery of basic social services such as primary education and community health. They also possess the moral resources and social infrastructure that can be utilized to facilitate reconciliation, support responsible governance, promote human rights, protect the interests of people and co-operate in other peace building initiatives.

Because the challenges facing Sierra Leone often cut across social, ethnic and political boundaries, collaborative responses to address critical problems are more effective both

substantially and practically than when groups act alone. As potential major contributors to the re-establishment of health civil society in Sierra Leone, religious communities have experienced that in many instances they are able to greatly leverage their perspective concerns both symbolically and concretely through multi-religious co-operation.<sup>66</sup>

#### 2.2.3. *Religious Communities Participating in IRCSL*

The present membership of IRCSL is comprised of the major religious organizations/institutions from the two main religious in Sierra Leone Christianity and Islam communities.

#### 2.2.4. *Christian Community:*

- Council of Churches in Sierra Leone
- The Evangelical Fellowship of Sierra Leone
- Pentecostal churches in Sierra Leone
- The Catholic Church in Sierra Leone

#### 2.2.5. *Islamic Community:*

- Federation of Sierra Leone Islamic organizations
- Federation of Muslim Women Associations of Sierra Leone
- Muslim Brotherhood Islamic Mission
- Sierra Leone Muslim Congress
- Sierra Leone Muslim Missionary Union

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<sup>66</sup> KOROMA, A. P., “*Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone*” 23/7/04, 1-7.



- Supreme Islamic Council
- United Council of Islam<sup>67</sup>

From modest beginnings in April 1997, the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone (IRCSL) emerged as the strongest expression of civil society in the war-torn West African nation. Convened by Religious for Peace to assist in establishing traditions of democracy and a culture of human rights, the (IRCSL) has become Sierra Leone's most effective facilitator, mediator and advocate for peace. As the country has begun to rebuild its society, the IRCSL has begun the crucial work of encouraging reconciliation and creating a culture of peace.

The IRCSL is Sierra Leone's only multi-religious organization that includes representatives from all the country's major religious groups. Sierra Leone has a long history of deeply rooted religious traditions whose institutions form the most highly developed social infrastructure in the country. In late 1996, Religious for Peace recognized that collaborative religious efforts could be a powerful force for social reconstruction in Sierra Leone and began to work with religious leaders to forge a coalition to tap these resources. Support for the initiative was received from many quarters, including president Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, local Non-Governmental Organizations and representatives of the international diplomatic community.

Due to the unreliability of the nature of the peace, the "Truth and Reconciliation Commission" was set up. Civil society groups first suggested the concept of the TRC to the government in early 1999. It subsequently was discussed during the negotiations between the government and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF)/Armed Forces Revolutionary

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<sup>67</sup> KOROMA, A. P., "Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone" 23/7/04, 2-7.

Council (AFRC). They agreed to include provision for a TRC in the Lome Peace Agreement in 1999. In 2000 parliament passed the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act, a law to create the TRC, after consultation with Civil Society groups and the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights. The law specified how the TRC would be set up and how it would operate. It then took some time to set up the TRC. The commission finally was inaugurated in July 2002 and is now operating.<sup>68</sup>

#### 2.2.6. *Achievements of the IRCSL*

The Bishops of the 1983 Synod affirmed this when they said, "Reconciliation without change of heart would contradict human dignity and freedom. God's reconciliation is personal, but also social and cosmic, and the Church is its sign and instrument in the world."<sup>69</sup>

Amongst its numerous achievements, the IRCSL showed great initiative and played a significant role in facilitating dialogue and building confidence among the different parties to the conflict, both prior to and after the Lome peace talks. The IRCSL earned the respect of Civil Society, the parties to the conflict and the international community. The council achieved this status through a variety of actions such as consultative meetings with all the key players in the crisis, press releases, communiqués experience sharing, prayers and preaching of God's message of repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation.<sup>70</sup> This is why I agree with his Holiness "Pope John Paul VI" in his book (To the episcopate, to the clergy and to the faithful of the entire world on Reconciliation within the Church) when he said "The church therefore,

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<sup>68</sup> P. J. ALLEN-S.B., S. LAHAI-J. O'CONNELL *Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Special Court: A Citizen's Handbook*, 2.

<sup>69</sup> *Initial Document on Reconciliation*, Vol.25, 3

<sup>70</sup> "Civil Society and Peace building: The role of the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone" 23/7/04, 4-5.

because she is a reconciled world”, is also a reality that is by nature permanently reconciling. As such she is the presence and the action of God, who Christ was reconciling the world to himself” (2 Cor 5:19). This action and presence are expressed primarily in baptism, in the forgiveness of sins and in the Eucharist celebration, which is the renewal of the redeeming sacrifice of Christ and the effective sign of the unity of the people of God.<sup>71</sup> Reconciliation is at the heart of life’s business.<sup>72</sup> Christ’s death and resurrection is permanently reconciling us with God and humankind. We experience this reconciling presence of Christ in our community prayers and Eucharistic celebration.

Amongst the council’s achievement also is when Rev. Fornah Usman, a Wesleyan Minister from Makeni and IRC SL members, conveyed the spiritual dimension of the council’s approach:

We are always preaching the ministry of reconciliation. No matter what those guys may have done, there is room on the side of the Lord to forgive them and to bring them back on the road they are supposed to be on. We don’t want to take sides in a conflict, because as religious ministers we are supposed to be on top of the situation. If any of the factions is not doing something right, we must be in a position to tell them the wrong things they are doing. For those things that are correct we can applaud them.<sup>73</sup>

The IRC SL was very practical in their approach. They never took sides in the conflict unlike politicians who were mediating before the formation of the council. Their achievement comes as a result of their impartiality and fairness in dealing with the warring factions.

It is extremely difficult to determine the relative impact of the IRC SL vis-à-vis the other players who facilitated the peace talks. The council took the bold step to initiate the

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<sup>71</sup> Pope John Paul VI, To the episcopate to the clergy and to the faithful of the entire world on reconciliation within the Church, 31.

<sup>72</sup> Pope Paul vi 32.

<sup>73</sup> “Civil Society and Peace building: The role of the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone” 23/7/04, 4-5.

first meeting between Corporal Sabana Sankoh leader of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and president Tejan Kabba after the invasion of the Freetown. Their visit to Monrovia prior to the Lome talks helped to recognize Charles Taylor president of Liberia as a key player capable of prevailing on the rebels to lay down their arms. It also provided recognition of the improved relationship between the two governments. Perhaps the greatest impact of the council's involvement was helping to build confidence between the rebels and Civil Society – a trust shaken, however, by the return to military confrontation in May 2000.<sup>74</sup>

Other significant people that made statements on reconciliation are Zainab Bangura, Director of the campaign for good governance. This is what she had to say:

The first thing we need to understand is that whatever has happened in Sierra Leone, we will never be able to forget. We might be able to forgive. And if we are to deal with that, it is very important to know exactly what happened, why did it happen and how it happened. Something must have gone wrong somewhere that our brothers and sisters can resort to being less than beasts. We need to be very honest. Maybe they themselves need healing. But we need to understand it. And until we are able to do that, we cannot put our lives together as a nation, because that psychological problem will always be behind us to say it will happen again. If we do not reconcile I mean real reconciliation where people can be honest with each other and know the truth of what happened and commit ourselves that it should never happen again in the history of this country, these cannot be true reconciliation. The perpetrators need to ask for forgiveness and the victims need to be able to forgive. The issue of vengeance should not come into it". The Bishops of the 1983 Synod affirmed this when they said, "Reconciliation without change of heart would contradict human dignity and freedom. God's reconciliation is personal, but also social and cosmic, and the church is its sign and instrument in the world."<sup>75</sup>

Father Giorgio Biguzzi, Bishop of the Diocese of Makeni also had this to say:

The thrust, the spirit, of the TRC is very positive. The aim is not in a sense punitive; it's let's go beyond. Let's rebuild. There are a lot of misconceptions among ordinary Sierra Leoneans about the commission. Some might think it's a way – just like with a sponge – to clean up the whole thing and go forward. Legal amnesty is different from getting religious amnesty from God, which implies that it touches my soul, my inner being. I have to understand what I have done, accept, and repent, if I am the perpetrator, so that I can be healed. I will receive eventual amnesty from God and that will bring me to a point where I can be healed and my

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<sup>74</sup> "Civil Society and Peace Building: The role of the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone" 23/7/04, 4-5.

<sup>75</sup> "Dialogue on Justice and Reconciliation" 23/7/04, 1-4.

brother or sister can accept me, but if he is also ready to forgive. Forgiveness is a religious experience, an ethical and moral act.”<sup>6</sup>

Such statements from such significant people went along way to help transform the minds and hearts of the warring factions. If these significant people can make such significant statements, and these statements went along way to help transform the country, in religious life also there are people who are chosen to journey together with those young men who will show interest in joining the congregation. In this journey, a lot of things can be discovered. Some of what can be discovered is the faith journey of the candidate, background with regards to family, education, and relationship with others, self and God. The candidate’s temperament, attitude and his suitability for religious life are all part of the journey. For a country like Sierra Leone that has seen ten years of brutal war, formators have a huge role to play in journeying with the candidates in their search for God’s will in them. Chapter one clearly explained to us what the people of Sierra Leone had to go through as a result of the war. These young men coming to join us are not exception to what happened to other people during the war. This is why I strongly feel that formation houses should be equipped to journey along with these men who might come with all their experiences of the war. How can we as formators help them to reconcile with themselves, others, the cosmos and God.

### **2.3. *Biblical Principle Three***

The foundation stone of any program of reconciliation is love. (Rom 12: 9, 1 Cor 13:1-13). The vision of a reconciled community is impossible without love. This includes

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<sup>6</sup> “Dialogue on Justice and Reconciliation” 23/7/04, 2-4.

most especially responding positively in love to the faces of evil.<sup>77</sup> The purpose of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was to produce an accurate and fair historical record of the civil war and to foster national reconciliation and healing. It would do so by gathering information on the violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in the Sierra Leone civil war from 1991 to the signing of the Lome Peace Agreement in July 1999. It will give victims, perpetrators and everyone affected by those atrocities the opportunity to tell what happened to them. Many victims want the nation to hear what they suffered and the TRC gives them the chance to be heard.

The TRC will analyze the information it gathers from victims' perpetrators and others and will also do its own research. It will use this entire information to write a report that explains what happened during the civil war. The report will indicate the causes, nature and extent of abuses of human rights, the circumstances in which they occurred and whether they were part of a plan or policy by rebel groups, the government, or any other group. The report may also make recommendations about how to prevent the civil war and the terrible acts that happened during it, from ever occurring.<sup>78</sup>

I agree with the Bishops of Africa during the 1983 Synod in the "Initial Document on Reconciliation" when they said "The theme of reconciliation is a marvelous one, one that holds within it the entire Christian mystery: Reconciliation of human beings with God, among one another and with the whole cosmos. The Bishops looked at the situation of today's world, in a search for reconciliation that often appears hopeless, in a world that is 'a daily theatre of war, caused by injustice, violence, power and conflicting ideologies. The root

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<sup>77</sup> J. D. G., DUNN, *The Theology of St Paul the Apostle*, 675.

<sup>78</sup> Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation, 2

cause, beneath and beyond all these other causes is sin – which splits the person apart, so that division in society simply reflects this inner division'. We cannot achieve reconciliation but can accept it as God's gift. The paschal mystery of Christ is the center of the reconciling action of God, which calls for inner conversion on the part of human beings.<sup>79</sup>

Therefore reconciliation is not isolation but it involves the participation of the victim and the perpetrator if it is to be meaningful.

#### **2.4. *Biblical Principle Four***

Christian conduct grows out of the expression of faith (2Cor 5: 19; Rom 14: 22-23) a unique and intimate relationship must be forged between God and the human person within the context of community in order for reconciliation to be possible. (1Cor 8-10; Rom 14: 4-12) Jesus' own sacrificial death is the supreme example of a love, which is both sacrificial and forges the hands of intimacy (Rom 4:19).<sup>80</sup> Therefore, the first recommendation is to make formation houses places of reconciliation.

My intension here is not to turn formation houses into therapeutic communities they are more than that. My attempt here is to see how far we can encourage our candidates, while they are with us in information to share their stories about the war. Stories like what happened to them and their families, friends, loved ones, what role they played in the conflict itself, the hurts and pain they carry within them etc. Sierra Leone went through ten years of war, which was described by the international body as the most gruesome war in modern times. It is possible that some of the candidates coming to join us might have gone through these bitter experiences of war. Some might even be traumatized and have never talked about

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<sup>79</sup> *Initial Document on Reconciliation*, Vol.25, 3

<sup>80</sup> J.D.G., DUNN, *The Theology of St Paul the Apostle*, 685.

what happened to them during the war. As a formation house, if we encourage our candidates to share their stories, own them, forgive themselves and others and even forgive God, this will serve as a source of healing their pain and hurts about what happened to them during the war.

### 3. Telling our Stories:

Recommendation two: Within the context of community and prayer let the wounded tell their stories. Our candidates should be encouraged to tell their stories about what happened to them during the war. This can take place either in our community prayer, one to one accompaniment, spiritual direction or counseling. This is why I agree with Gregory Baum and Harold Wells in their book. "The Reconciliation of Peoples" when they said:

Every people has a story to tell, something to say to themselves, their children and to the world about how they think and live, as they determine their reason for being ... when people can no longer listen to the other people's stories, they become enclosed within their own social context ... and then they feel they must destroy other people's stories.

We need to tell one another stories. It is perhaps the only basis for recognizing and yet transcending our differences. It is perhaps the only basis for gaining an understanding of both ourselves and the hopes and fears of others. It is the only basis on which different stories, different memories, and different histories can emerge as the basis for an inclusive nation – building exercise. H. Richard Niebuhr has reminded us that:

Where common memory is lacking, where men [sic] do not share in the same past there can be no real community and where community is to be formed common memory must be created ... The measure of our distance from each other is in our nations and our groups can be taken by noting the divergence, the separateness and the lack of sympathy in our social memories. Conversely, the measure of our unity is the extent of our common memory.<sup>81</sup> I agree with Margaret Hill, Harriet Hill, Richard Bagge and Pat Miersma in their book "Healing the Wounds of Trauma". "People get pain out of their hearts by talking about it. Usually people need to talk to another person about their pain before they are ready to talk to God about it. If they are able to talk about their bad experiences, then after a while their

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<sup>81</sup> G. BAUM-H. WELLS ed, *Reconciliation of Peoples Challenge to the Churches*, 31.



reactions will become less and less. But if people are not able to talk about their pain, and if there is no one to help them, these reactions may continue for months and even years. They may get worse as time goes on rather than better.<sup>82</sup>

If we encourage our candidates in their initial stage of formation to tell their stories of hurts and pain and how they felt during the war, this will go along way to help heal their hurts and pain. The formators should know that listening to these stories of our candidates they are invited into “Holy grounds” where they should take off their shoes put aside pre-conceived ideas and treat these stories as sacred. This is why I will emphasis that this sharing should be done during prayer sessions.

#### **4. Owing our Stories**

Recommendation three: Offer creative opportunities for the sacrament of reconciliation where people both own their stories and seek, receive and offer forgiveness. Reconciliation and righteousness, or justification, both are terms Paul utilizes to express what God has done for us in Christ, and both are connected with the crucified Christ.<sup>83</sup>

Sharing/telling their story is one way our candidates will heal themselves from their hurts and pains. The next stage is to encourage them to own their stories as part of their stories of growing up. They should be encouraged to own rather than deny these stories. Denial will only lead to more hurt and pain. Owing their stories is a way to integrate their hurts and pain as part of the reality of their lives. The formator/formation team should do all they can to facilitate this process. If they are not well informed in this area, they should invite

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<sup>82</sup> M. HILL-H. HILL-R. BAGGE-P. MIERSMA, *Healing the Wounds of Trauma* 28.

<sup>83</sup> B. JANECKO, *The Bible Today, Forgiveness and Reconciliation* Vol.40 N0 1, 30.

experts to help facilitate this process. When this is achieved, the candidate will be ready to move to the next stage. That is forgiving himself.

## **5. Forgiving Ourselves**

This can only take place if the candidate is encouraged to come face to face with the reality. The reality of what happened to him during the ten years of conflict. Forgiving ourselves is a grace we can receive if we talk to God about it. There is the tendency for one to blame himself for what happened and forgetting what the grace of God can do in our lives. I agree with Johann Christoph Arnold in his book *"The Lost Art of Forgiving"* when he said, "sometimes we are unable or unwilling to forgive ourselves. We need to look to God for help. We received forgiveness as a gift of love, reaching us at the very place where we feel least worthy to receive it. Only this gift can free us wholeheartedly to forgive others and commit ourselves to change".<sup>84</sup> The formator/formation team has a huge responsibility to help the candidate reach this stage. The work itself is done by the candidate the formator/spiritual director can only guide the candidate to reach this stage of forgiving himself.

## **6. Forgiving Others**

**2cor 5:16** Christ's death is the transformative event for all of life. Nothing is the same after that. First among the changes brought about by Christ death is the way people should live: no longer for themselves but for the one who died and was raised for them. It is obvious that some of the candidates joining our formation houses experienced the bitterness of the war. Some saw their sisters, mothers raped before them. Some saw the amputation of their

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<sup>84</sup> J. C., ARNOLD, *The Lost Art of Forgiving*, 116.

loved ones, while some of them are subjected to inhuman treatment. Some might have even killed because they were forced to do so. They come to join us with all this conflict in their life. J. Paul Sampley puts it well when he said,

Reconciliation is at the heart of life's business. If the most important single factor about any of our lives is God's having reconciled us to God's very self, then the proper celebration of our reconciliation is to share it with others by fostering reconciliation and atonement wherever and whenever we can. Reconciliation as a ground of life would mean that when your friend makes some negative or judgmental comment about a neighbor, you would resist joining in. Indeed, instead you might respond by noting something you have appreciated about the same neighbor. Thus you may help two of your acquaintances come to understand each other better.<sup>85</sup>

As formators we have a role to play in helping our candidates come back to their real selves. This is why I agree with the authors of *"Healing the wounds of Trauma"* when they said forgiveness is not:

- Saying the offence didn't matter;
- Saying we were not hurt by what the persons(s) did;
- Acting as if the event never happened;
- Dependent on the offender apologizing first or changing their behavior;
- Letting the person who did wrong avoid the consequences of their action;
- Letting the offender hurt us or other innocent people again;
- Trusting a person again right after they hurt us;

But forgiving someone means that we recognize the person(s) has/have wronged us, and we accept the pain their sin has caused us. We bring our pain to the cross and release it to Jesus. As Jesus heals the pain, we will be able to forgive those who have hurt us. If we think forgiving is too hard for us to do, we are right. God is the only one who can enable us to

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<sup>85</sup> J.P., SAMPLEY, *The New Interpreter's Bible* Vol.11, 98.

forgive. Forgiveness does not happen all at once. It is like a journey where we lose our way repeatedly.<sup>86</sup> This is where the formator or whosoever is contracted to help the candidate has a big role to play. To keep the candidate on the journey/the process of forgiving those who have hurt him.

## 7. Forgiving God

Recommendation four: Ways to religious houses to offer pastoral counseling and spiritual guidance to people involved in the violence to come to grips with the larger spiritual issues such as “How can I forgive God”

Paul’s account for this transformative shift. “If one is in Christ” and all believers by definition are he or she is a “new creation”. The reference to “new creation” and the “new” which has come that the old has passed away locates Paul’s ministry of reconciliation within the new creation, the new way of existence brought about in the death and resurrection of Christ.<sup>87</sup> (2Cor 5:17)

In normal circumstances when certain things happen to us we blame God for not preventing what happened to us. We can carry that anger for a long time. Sometime we even think God is not strong enough to defeat evil. In a war situation like the one Sierra Leone experienced, there will be no doubt that a lot of people will blame God for what happened to them. Some may even ask Questions like:

- Why should an all-loving God allow this to happen to us?
- Is God really alive?
- Can good triumph over evil?

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<sup>86</sup> M. HILL- H. HILL- R. BAGGE- P. MIERSMA, *Healing the Wounds of Trauma*, 88.

<sup>87</sup> J. P., SAMPLEY, *The New Interpreter's Bible* Vol.11, 93.

They don't have answers to these questions and this may increase their anger more. I agree with Johann Christoph Arnold in his book *"The Lost Art of Forgiving"* when he said.

When we speak of forgiveness, we usually speak of forgiving the hurts we do to each other, but there are times when there just doesn't seem anyone to blame. Since the emotions we experience at times like this, are often the same as those we experience when there is clearly a guilty party, many of us – rightly or wrongly – tend to blame God for allowing us to suffer without apparent reason or justification. Full of anger and pain we ask: "How can a merciful God permit this?" Can we "forgive" God?<sup>88</sup>

Paul in 2 Cor 5:18 says "all these", however, (comes) from God who reconciles us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. "All these" most probably refers to the content of the previous 5:14-17, especially the saving action of Christ depicted in 5: 14-15. In 5:18 God is described as the one who initiates reconciliation "through Christ", though the appeal in 5:20 indicates that human response is necessary. It is precisely this human response that Paul seeks to elicit.<sup>89</sup>

We can learn to forgive God when we hold him responsible for hurting us, just as we learn to forgive other people when we feel hurt by them. The solution lies in our developing a willingness to learn from our experiences, to grow from them and produce something positive out of our lives. Where there appears to be no reason for our suffering, we need to give it one. A crisis need not only be a crisis, it can also be an opportunity.<sup>90</sup> The formator/spiritual director has a role here, to help the candidate understand/be aware that God is not responsible

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<sup>88</sup> J. C., ARNOLD, *The Lost Art of Forgiving*, 125.

<sup>89</sup> B. JANECKO, *The Bible Today, Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, Vol.40 NO 1 28.

<sup>90</sup> J. C., ARNOLD *The Lost Art of Forgiving*, 126.

for evil. It is we human beings who choose to be evil and not God. Make the candidate be aware that “Good will always triumph over evil”.

## **8. Concrete Recommendations**

- Make formation houses places of reconciliation

A country like Sierra Leone that has gone through ten years of brutal war, still have young men who are attracted to religious life. It will be unfair to these young men if we are to allow them to automatically become religious without helping them reconcile their pain right from initial formation.

- Within context of community and prayer, let the wounded tell their stories.

A story never told will not make an impact or teach a lesson to anybody. Our candidates should be encouraged to tell their stories about what they experienced during the war if they are to heal themselves. Prayer and community living unites us together and make us feel as one.

- Offer creative opportunities for the sacrament of reconciliation where people both own their stories and seek, receive and offer forgiveness.

Christ's death has reconciled us. Our task is to make this reconciliation a reality in the way we live our daily lives. The sacrament of reconciliation if practiced even monthly in our communities will enable us seek, receive and offer forgiveness to one another.

- Propose ways to religious houses to offer pastoral counseling and spiritual guidance to people involved in the violence to come to grips with the larger spiritual issues such as how do I forgive God.

In a situation where the formator cannot offer pastoral counseling or spiritual direction, experts should be employed to carry this function. Candidates should be helped to go

beyond themselves and face the reality of a bigger God who will deliver them from all their troubles.

- Form a network of religious houses to discuss the values and the need for constant reconciliation in our lives as Christians.

Reconciliation is not just for those who have suffered violence but its for all. Christ did not chose who to reconcile with. Even those who nailed Him on the cross he said “Father forgive them for they not know what they are doing.”

- Since some of our communities are cross-cultural, use African symbols that are of meaning and other symbols pertinent to other members of the community in the process of reconciliation.

Symbols play a very important role in the process of reconciliation. Symbols have a deeper meaning that penetrates the inner being of the person. A few African symbols I will suggest are: Water, Soil, Salts, Clay, Palm wine in the case of West Africa, Husk rice, wood, coal pot, Chicken and a prepared meal to be eaten at the end.

- Do a thorough research on the meaning and significance of the symbols especially the African symbols.

The more meaningful the symbols the greater the impact they will make in the lives of people.

- Involve elderly lay members of the community to help facilitate the process of reconciliation.

Elderly lay members of the community know the culture well and can facilitate a meaningful reconciliation ritual.



- Create an atmosphere in which members will be free to share their stories without fear.

A honest and deeper sharing will only take place if the atmosphere is made conducive enough for candidates to share without the fear of being blame of what happened to them.

- Reconciliation should not be forced since it is not man made but a gift from God. Patience and tolerance to wait on the God's will is very important. We cannot earn God's gift.
- Remember being part of these telling of stories is an invitation to Holy ground. Therefore, one should put away all judgment and pre-conceived ideas about an individual(s)

Do not judge others so that you will not be judged.

- Where the perpetrators of the violence are not physically present, the mediation of the ancestors should not be neglected.

Ancestors are people who lived a good moral and responsible life. They live to a ripe old age. Because of their up rightness, when they die they are closer to God. Whatever befalls the community, their spirit should be called upon to mediate between God and the living.

- Remember reconciliation is not just about the perpetrators but it covers one's self, the community, the ancestors, the spirit world, the cosmos, God and the unborn.
- Reconciliation is not about who is right or who is wrong it's about Christ self sacrificing on the cross that has reconcile all of mankind.

We have a responsibility to make sure everyone else shares in this self sacrificing of Christ on the cross so that we may live life to the full. This is achieve in our daily life interaction of the poor around us, our relationships in and out of community, and being aware of our limitations and constantly seeking God in our lives.

## 9. Conclusion

We have discovered that true reconciliation can only come about when the people are ready themselves. This is why Paul advocates for a practical reconciliation that translates into concrete ethical considerations. The process of healing and salvation is essentially corporate not individual (1Cor 3: 12-15) Paul's understanding of what was right and fitting drew both upon his experience of the Church and what was good already in the culture (Rom 12:9, 21) as a whole. "The duty of making peace extends personally to each and every member of the faithful. If it is not fulfilled, even the sacrifice of worship, which they intend to offer (Mt 5:23 ff) remains ineffective.

Mutual reconciliation in fact shares in the very value of the sacrifice itself and together with it constitutes a single offering pleasing to God.<sup>91</sup> Pope John Paul VI therefore said, "Reconciliation without change of heart would contradict human dignity and freedom. God's reconciling action is personal, but also social and cosmic and the church is its sign and instrument in the world."<sup>92</sup> This is why I strongly feel that if people are ready to tell their stories, own them, forgive themselves and others and forgive God then there will be true reconciliation. This true reconciliation will only come about with true love.

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<sup>91</sup> Pope Paul VI, *To the episcopate to the Clergy and to the faithful of the entire Church on Reconciliation within the Church*, 4.

<sup>92</sup> *Initial Document on Reconciliation*, Vol.25, 3

## General Conclusion

To conclude, I want to recapitulate all that the three chapters have introduced us to. Sierra Leone is a small country situated in the southern part of West Africa. A country which size is 27,925 sq ml and very rich in mineral deposit. One will expect that every Sierra Leonean should not go to bed hungry. With a population of five million, every Sierra Leonean should be able to meet his basic needs and live a decent life. After Australia, Sierra Leone is the second largest exporter of rutile in the world and our diamonds are considered to be one of the best gem diamonds in the world.

We see what happened after the country gained independence from Britain in 1961. The country came under one party rule for twenty-three years under president Siaka Stevens. These twenty-three years of misrule saw the country going down the drains. There was corruption in all sectors of life. Corruption in the government, army, judiciary, civil service, local chiefs to name but a few. The poor were deprived of their rights in court and even what they have worked for was not forth coming by way of salaries. Salaries of teachers and other civil servants were diverted to other funds where they could make interest. There was deep-seated anger in the people that was not expressed anywhere.

When Foday Sabana Sankoh lunched his rebellion in 1991, it was easy for Sierra Leoneans to join him because they were disgruntled with the then government. Most Sierra

Leoneans thought things were going to be better when Captain Valentine Strasser overthrown the government of president Joseph Saidu Momoh. People thought things are going to change but things turn out to be worse. We also see how the war escalated beyond people's imagination. Lives were lost, property destroyed, women raped while others were forcefully conscripted to join the RUF movement.

A lot of people were displaced internally and in neighbouring countries. Impact of the war on the people was great. We also see the efforts of the groups that preached peace and reconciliation. Namely, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone. These groups preached peace and reconciliation by allowing the people to talk about what happened to them during the war, and what they saw happening to other people and how they were able to reconcile the hurt within themselves, the perpetrators, and with God. "The theme of reconciliation is a marvelous one, one that holds within it the entire Christian mystery: Reconciliation of human beings with God, among one another and with the whole cosmos".<sup>93</sup> St Paul in 2 Cor 5:16 said, "Christ's death is the transformative event for all of life. Nothing is the same after that. First among the radical changes brought about by Christ's death is the way people should live. No longer for themselves but for the one who died and was raised for them."<sup>94</sup>

And in 5:17 Paul said "If one is in Christ" and all believers by definition are, "he or she is a new creation" Those who are part of the new creation can no longer be considered Kata Sarka according to the standard of the world. The reference to "new creation" and the 'new' which has come now that the old has passed away locates Paul's Ministry of

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<sup>93</sup> *Initial Document on Reconciliation*, Vol.25, 3.

<sup>94</sup> B. JANECKO, *The Bible Today, Forgiveness and Reconciliation* Vol 40 NO 1 30.

Reconciliation within the new creation, the new way of existing brought about in the death and resurrection of Christ.<sup>95</sup>

True reconciliation is when people can be honest with themselves and with each other and know the truth of what happened and commit themselves that it should never happen again. The bishops of the 1983 synod put it well when they said, “reconciliation without change of heart would contradict human dignity and freedom. God’s reconciling action is personal, but also social and cosmic, and the Church is its sign and instrument in the world.”<sup>96</sup> This is why I strongly recommend in my third chapter that, since we are a congregation of brothers, young men who have experienced bitterness of the war are attracted to us, something must be done by way of helping them tell their stories and to own these stories as part of them. Forgiving themselves, others and God who they might hold responsible for not preventing what happened to them, should be part of our formation programme. The formator or formation team should be able to help these young men heal their hurt during the initial formation. If they are not well informed in this area, they should contract experts to help. This does not turn the formation house into a therapeutic community but a place where people can freely share their lives without feeling judged or blamed for what happened to them. With such help in initial formation, candidates will be able to recognize the goodness of God despite what has happened to them and realize that, good will always triumph over evil.

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<sup>95</sup> B. JANECKO, *The Bible Today, Forgiveness and Reconciliation* Vol.40 No.1 28.

<sup>96</sup> *Initial Document on Reconciliation*, Vol.25, 3

## ABREVIATIONS

APC	All Peoples Congress
AFRC	Arm Forces Revolutionary Council
COR	Corinthians
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
IRCSL	Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone
NPRC	National Provisional Ruling Council
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission

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# Forgiveness

## OPENING PRAYER

See page 8.

## INTRODUCTION

God's forgiveness is one clear sign of the reality of the kingdom. His forgiveness challenges us to new relationships with God and with each other. Luke's gospel contains many parables and stories of forgiveness. One finds a remarkable emphasis on the reconciling and forgiving character of Jesus who is the supreme revelation of God's merciful love. As we read passages from Luke, perhaps we can recognize why it has been called the "Gospel of Mercy" and the "Gospel of Great Pardon."

## SCRIPTURE READINGS

Luke 7:36-50

✓ 15 minute chapter.

✓ 19:1-10

23:35-34, 39-43

## REFLECTION

Jesus inaugurates his ministry on a note of reconciliation in his address (Luke 4:16-30). The year of favor proclaimed by Jesus is based on Isaiah 61:1-2 and includes notions of eschatological jubilee, the end of time realization of the justice of God, as well as the jubilee precepts of Leviticus 25:9-17, in which, according to Jewish law, debts were cancelled, slaves and prisoners were released, people returned to their own land, and the poor were permitted to harvest the crops that grew naturally in the fields and orchards. What is striking in Jesus' quoting from Isaiah is the omission of the "day of vengeance" expressed in Isaiah 61:2. Jews contemporary with Jesus expected a year of favor and political victory for themselves and a year of defeat and retribution for the Gentiles. They were expecting vengeance for outsiders. However, by omitting this key section of the passage, Jesus suggests that the jubilee he announces would benefit both Jews and Gentiles. The new age Jesus prophetically proclaims begins on a note of reconciliation with the enemy -- namely, the Gentiles.

This theme of reconciliation and forgiveness is further illustrated in Jesus' dealings with those regarded as sinners. For example, consider the position of the tax collector in Jesus' day. Whether Jewish or pagan, tax collectors and their families were ostracized and hated by the Jews. They were not allowed to be witnesses in court or to donate to the charity fund. Any house they entered was declared unclean and no Jew would dine in the home of a tax collector because of the infringement of purity and dietary laws. Given this context, imagine the impact on the community when Jesus not only fraternized with tax collectors and other "sinners," but also had the temerity to dine with them at Levi's house (see Luke 5:27-32)! Eating with these sinners in the home of a tax collector was enormously offensive; it was akin to socializing with virtual traitors. As if this were not enough, Jesus actually included Levi among his twelve apostles.

Jesus further challenged people by graphically illustrating an attitude of forgiveness in some of his parables. In chapter 15 Luke combines three such parables into a unit of teaching about forgiveness. The words "rejoice," "lost," and "found," are refrains in each of these stories and indicate that God actively searches for the sinner who repents. This seeking out of the sinner was not always appreciated by the pharisees who complained that Jesus gave special favor to people regarded as undeserving, namely sinners and tax collectors. This same motif is repeated again in chapter 15 when the elder son complains to his father that his younger brother was receiving preferential treatment. Thus, Jesus reminds us again, "I have not come to call the virtuous but sinners to repentance." (5:32)

A powerful summary of Jesus' ministry of forgiveness can be seen in words he spoke during his crucifixion. Jesus died forgiving those who caused his death and promising eternal life to the outcasts who died with him. In Jesus' death on the cross, we have the culmination of his ministry with tax collectors and other outcasts of society, and the climax of a ministry of forgiveness and reconciliation.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the image of God presented in the readings compare with your image of God?
2. What group or groups would be comparable to tax collectors in our society? How is Jesus asking us to respond to them?
3. The *lex talionis* or law demanding an eye for an eye, etc. (Exodus 21:23-25) is superseded by Jesus' example of forgiveness for sinners and love of enemies. How could you apply this new and radical approach to a situation or situations in the news today?
4. Compare society's views of capital punishment and the arms race with both the *lex talionis* and Jesus' example of forgiveness.
5. How does a notion of a reconciling and forgiving God affect your relationships with other people? Cite some examples from your own life.

## OUTREACH

Work on community outreach project.

How is your reading of Luke's gospel affecting your response to the project? (If your project is a short term one that is finished before session XI, go to Outreach section of Session XII.)

## CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: As we seek your forgiveness, Lord, for our failings and shortcomings, help us to extend this same forgiveness to those who disappoint or hurt us. Give us insight to see the good which may be hidden from our eyes just as you saw the good in Zacchaeus and forgave him his wrongdoing. Help us to call others to be more than they are.

(Pray the following litany together.)

Leader: To those who have hurt our feelings . . .

All: . . . we extend our forgiveness.

Leader: To those who have forgotten the poor and the hungry . . .

All: . . . we extend our forgiveness.

Leader: To those who place obstacles in the search for peace . . .

All: . . . we extend our forgiveness.

(Leader invites the group to add its own petitions to the litany.)

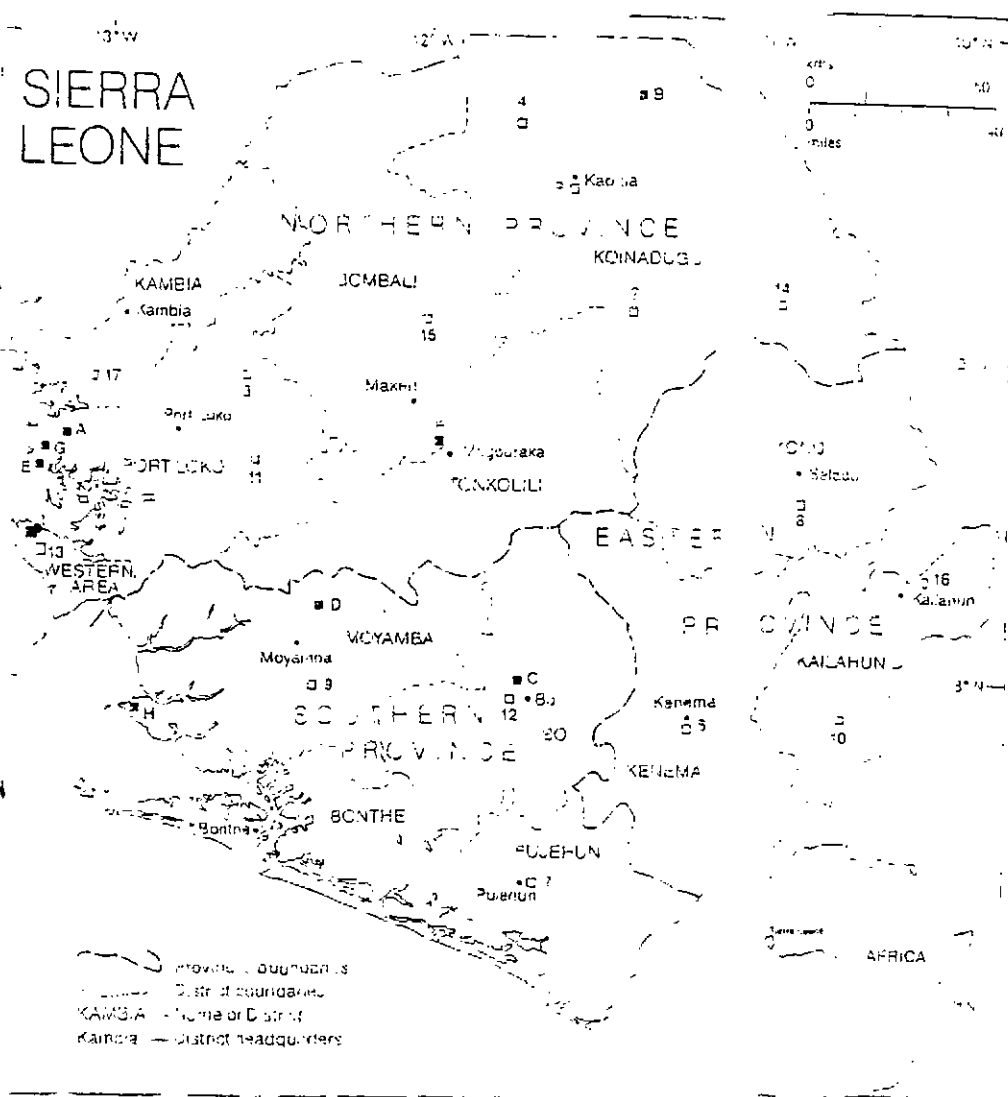
(End the prayer session by extending a sign of peace to one another and saying as you do so, "Be at peace; you are forgiven.")

## ASSIGNMENT

Read the Introduction and all the scripture passages listed for Session IX prior to the next meeting.



## Appendix II: The Map of Sierra Leone



### Places of PEA collections

City, town or village symbol

- 1 Freetown (Kro)
- 2 Bangoma (Mende)
- 3 Magborogon (Temne)
- 4 Balogba (Lumpa)
- 5 Kambia (Kro, Limba)
- 6 Kenema (Mende)
- 7 Alkalala (Koranko)
- 8 Jahama Sewafa, Koya (Koranko)
- 9 Nyandahun (Mende)
- 10 Jojolima (Mende)
- 11 Lunsar (Temne)
- 12 Townum (Mende)
- 13 Gloucester (Loko, F. Temne)
- 14 Korubonia, Bumbukoro (Koranko)
- 15 Kama, Mancho (Mandingo)
- 16 Lalehun, Mandesewa (Koranko)
- 17 Mambo, Rukai (Susu)

### Places of other collections

City, town or village symbol

- 4 Lomassama (Temne)
- 9 Fataa (Lumpa)
- 10 Bo (Mende)
- 11 Tombe (Mende)
- 12 Rowala (Temne)
- 13 Masongon (Temne)
- 14 Kulu Bui (Mende)
- 15 Shenge (Sherbro)