

Exclusion & Embrace:

A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation.

Miroslav Volf. (Abingdon, 1996)

Intro: The Cross, the Self and the Other:

Cultural Cleansing: Conflict of cultures all around. As a Croat I was not allowed divided loyalties. Are there rights across the board, or only as distinct from others?

Universalist: common values, Communitarian: champion our local community,

Postmodern: radical autonomy of individuals – free selves (this fosters evasion of moral responsibility).

Volf prefers (21) ‘what kind of selves we need to be in order to live in harmony’.

THE CROSS: Solidarity with victims so that atonement for perpetrators follows? ~

We are baptised into this dynamic. But in world, self-donation doesn’t always ‘work’.

Modernity: through social control & rational thought believes we can right the world.

The will to embrace has to proceed any truth known about the Other (i.e. being open to learning). The Grace to make a place for the Other..

1. Distance & Belonging:

Missionary puts own culture above Christ. Abraham takes his family to leave his culture before belief. But Paul does not take family because his faith is no longer locked into one people/genealogy. In other words:

Oneness of God implies universality: transcendent of any given culture.

Yet God’s revelation is located. A problem! Paul’s answer: no *privileged* locus. Does this make God too abstract (transcendent)? Not when the universal God reveals self in particular *suffering* on cross ~ this is what unites us ~ for his body ‘refused to remain a self-enclosed singularity, but has opened itself up so that others can freely partake of it... Far from being the assertion of the one against the many, the cross is the self-giving of the one for the many’ (47) ‘because there is one bread, we who *are many are one*’. A differentiated body thus still affirms its unity, no longer inheriting the Land but the World.

This enables Christian to distance a little from own culture so as to receive the other.

Enriched by others (Catholic). The distance also enables us to critique our own culture (Evangelical).

2. Exclusion

Ethnic Cleansing wants a world without the Other. Modernity was born and raised in exclusion whilst professing otherwise (Americas, African Slavery, Holocaust)

Exclusion is barbarity *within*. So they crucified because he called their good, evil.

We exclude by i) binary judgment [sane/mad, normal/abnormal] then ii) coercive assignment [in/out!] so institutions designed to offer normality assist exclusion.

The outcome of this (says Foucault:) we can have chaos without boundaries or oppression with them. A way through?

Identity is distinction *from* others plus internalisation of relationship *to* others. So differentiation is not same as exclusion. Boundaries help differentiation and can allow us to relate to the other. Impenetrable barriers however prevent encounter.

If our self is 'in Christ' then opposition to exclusion is the practice of embrace.

In Jesus' day a Righteous person must separate self from tainted other, but Jesus embraces outcast to show sinfulness of person or systems that excluded them. So:

- i) Jesus renames what was considered unclean other. 'has made clean'.
- ii) He makes those labelled unclean, clean. He renames and remakes them.

False 'purity' wants the world (other) cleansed rather than own self. We can do this by elimination, or by assimilation [become like us]. Or call them inferior and so control them or segregate (apartheid) Or we abandon them by indifference [refuse to acknowledge] To help these processes we manufacture histories or injuries.

And he rejects laws of purity for producing sinners.

We exclude because we want things to stay same; or because we hate how we are; or because we want what others have [contested resources]

In evil world, everyone is innocent in their own eyes. Violence ensnares the psyche of the victim to defensive reaction and robs it of its innocence. "If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves." (I John 1:8) Even the bystanders want to see one protagonist as pure and the other corruption. No 'pure' space. Third parties cannot judge 'purity'.

So others should be embraced even when perceived as wrongdoers – cf the cross.

Power of Exclusion:

Perpetrators want us to think we live in world of no choice of determination.

Principalities & Powers point to system of evil which lures and ensnares: 'TINA'.

(Romans 7:14-20 we can't do good we want to do) So individual sets boundaries of safety for self and lets rest of universe do what it likes in other domains. But this can slide into violence (even to oneself).

Cain and Abel: 'Not my brother's keeper' denies act and responsibility – and thus act of exclusion excludes himself from relationship. Cain is then protected by God so that the cycle of exclusion is broken.

3. Embrace.

Four acts: Repentance; Forgiveness; Making space; Healing the memory.

“Liberation” strange meanings: free to do as you wish? Free if I remain jobless?

Or: power to live life with dignity and be artisan of their own destiny? Liberators don't take off their uniforms! So 'freedom' does not seem sufficient goal. Supremacy of love over freedom where freedom is process towards attaining Kingdom of love.

So we fight oppression but resist attempts at *final* reconciliation or we'll oppress. (yet Christians live with metaphors of the final goal - so)

Kingdom of God: Jesus proclaims this 'end' but also unconditional love & repentance on part of perpetrators and victims (because they can mimic the perpetrators)
Scandalous and revolutionary!

Forgiveness: confessions include self-defence and revenge. But perpetrator deserves unforgiveness. Nothing rectifies original offence once done. But forgiveness 'enthrones' justice by emphasising its violation but forgoes its claim. Psalms offer to God the sin of the perpetrator and our own pent-up (hidden) vengeance (owning our sinfulness) Then, only God can forgive (Mark 2:7)

Making space for other: Forgiveness from the cross adds to the burden of Christ. Forgiveness still leaves a gulf even after healing wounds between the sinned & sinner. The passionate open arms of Jesus invite enemy to come in – forgives & makes space *He gives self and receives other – the Life of the Trinity*. Eucharist celebrates this action and requests us follow, as One! Giving and receiving even those 'outside'.

Forgetting: that assumes matters of justice and truth have been taken care of.

Memory of sin must be kept alive until transformation, then let it die. Either heaven or the memory of horror. So remember now but forget at coming of Kingdom. For a

remembered wound is an experienced wound. When time for forgetting comes, love is complete. No theodicy can succeed.

The drama of Embrace: 1. Opening arms, 2. waiting, 3 closing arms, 4 Opening again.
1. is sign of discontent with self-enclosed identity. 2. the waiting is no grasping after the other. 3. A mutual holding. 4. Remain different.

Contract is to insure delivery. Covenant a theological category of unconditional bond. Through Cross God renews the covenant humanity has broken: 1. By making space because God cannot be alone, but requires adjustment of the self to accommodate other. 2 Entails self-giving: because the covenant was always between two halves, and blood shed. 3 the New Covenant is eternal because it is the nature of God. If one party breaks a covenant it is still breaking *within* the covenant.

Father's Open Arms: Son asks to leave thus breaking his familial identity as Son. He puts others outside himself – 'un-sons' himself. No longer worthy to be called S.

Father was always looking out to Son (never un-soned him) Confession needed for healing, Father then says: 'this son of mine'. Other brother: 'this son of yours'. Even Father acted as a father should not! Father: all I have is yours, so Prod is not getting money, but is a son. Relationship prior to Rules, requires adjusted identities.

4. Gender Identity [*A test-case for otherness.*]

Eve fashioned (like Feuerbach's God) out of human ideas and ideals. God models our humanity not gender specifics. Sex is biological, Gender is social identity, the latter constantly renegotiated. Persons are relationed (not simply relations), and all carry others within themselves ~ "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father".

So we must affirm self-giving without the loss of self and without inequality.

Moltmann suggests: Constitutionally Father is first, Relationally Son is first, the others One among many. So each makes space internally for and glorifies the others.

So subordination of genders is culturally conditioned (no longer male and female).

Each gender is lacking and full, each needing the other for its own creation, the identity of each needing the other.

PART TWO

5. Oppression and Justice

Syllogism of despair: Conceptions of Justice depend on particular cultures and traditions. Peace depends on Justice between cultures. Therefore: Violence between cultures will not stop!

Christians are trapped in specific culture and disagree on nature of justice (capitalism and liberation) No court of appeal here. Enlightenment looked to Reason Rawl adopts 'veil of ignorance': what would be just if I were outside this realm of black/white, male/female, rich/poor? Others say every law oppresses someone who does not fit – tries to be universal. So keep your eyes open to every little difference. Liberals say, respect all except those who do not respect all.

Overlapping commitments: Most of us overlap or multiply cultures. Christian 'tradition' is not 'coherent': in world and not of it, NT redactors, Hbw and Greek cultures). We have therefore only common commitments. But. Hybrid traditions are more open to others than systems. We therefore listen to all 'justices' in hope of finding agreement. So, Liberation Theol introduced us to socialist justice which then reinterpreted Scripture. Likewise Jesus with Syro-Phoenician woman. This requires will to embrace.

Justitia is blind-folded, God is not. God's Grace is unjust.

But neutrality gives tacit support to evil and shields evil-doers. Likewise, Bible expects us to come down on side of poor, not 'open mind to all'. So it is the powerful who must practise this 'double vision' of justices. Because the justice which equalises and abstracts is no justice at all! Let love (which sustains relationship) define justice.

Babel & Pentecost: God intervenes because of violence of imperialism – suppression of difference. Pentecost hears each in own language – the harmony of cultural diversity. They also share possessions. In dispute the minority language (Greeks) are appointed to distribute the bread for Hbw and Greek groups!

6. Deception and Truth

Jews and Christians ‘remember’ – proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. To blow cover off deception, conscientization. But memory of a wrong may prolong hatred. Question of what we do with our memories. All memory is subjective story and is used to an end in struggle for power. So in order to know truly we must want to use power rightly.

Double Vision To see world from here and there. Only God sees from everywhere. So we move into other worlds for a while and take them into ours. The service to this truth is a harsh service. We can do this in order to dominate or if Love is our motive, to seek truth. But if we are open to Embrace we may make Peace and out irrational conflict. The Truth we arrive at through agreement is Faithful and sustaining of community – lies destroy it. So the prophets see God as a warrior for truth.

Jesus before Pilate: Truth against Power.

Trials suppose to find truth but accusers give no reasons, just demands. ‘What is truth? because it runs counter to hold on power. ‘I came to testify to the truth,’ he tells Pilate. To testify/witness to truth is to strive to take self out of it. A man stripped and put on the cross is witness to truth – so it is glorification.

The one big truth (my singular take on it) does not liberate, but Truth does. We can only know in part, as in a mirror, since we are not God.

7. Violence and Peace

Truth and Justice were fruits of Roman sword, thought Pilate.

We will follow Jesus only at a safe distance because we believe in him but not in his ideas. In real ‘outer’ world we need the ‘King of Kings, not a crucified Messiah!’

Enlightenment hoped reason would work humanity out of barbarity (Kant)

But the civilizing process seems only to relieve us of *irregular* violence, and through its creation of technology and masterful administration allowed for the holocaust.

Religious Wars

Religion is ideology which provides ‘meaning’ and guides normalised action.

Majority of world is religious so when at war, inevitably their gods are too.

But if their religions were reconciled, would they stop fighting?

Deleuze argues that New Jerusalem of Revelation is totalitarianism – absolute rule with no court of appeal. White rider treads the winepress of blood. The apocalyptic destruction of world is prepared for by the sacrifice of self, which puts us ready to sacrifice others' selves. All set off by the terror of final judgement.

1. Already said: cross breaks the cycle of violence without adding to it, through embrace of the perpetrators, so absorbing violence. It is not self-abnegation of Deleuze and Nietzsche but a radical self-assertion.
2. Jesus was not usual scapegoat, but a threat with his threatening innocence.
3. The cross was part of Jesus' struggle for truth and justice. The non-violence was part of that struggle, not just self-sacrifice. This Kingdom gives meaning to the non-violence.
4. Cross is Divine struggle to embrace unjust and violent. It tells the truth about all that, and them/us. God uses the sacrificial mechanism to save world from having to see sacrifice of others as only way to bring justice and truth. If we follow in this way then we are enabled to use reason to assist. But without the sacrifice, reason will lead to new violence.

Reason and truth are always situated in our own biased culture and so our own choices will not issue in the Kingdom. But there are some beings so enmeshed in themselves they are unable to respond to God's embrace – God's free grace. This lust for power makes God angry ~ hence the pictures of the wrath of the Lamb, etc., A nice God is a liberal myth. God's patient grace has a price for God and the Innocent who continue to suffer. But remember that at heart of the Revelation picture of wrath is the Lamb that was slain – the cross.

God *can* use violence where we cannot for only God judges justly, and brings to a final end the violence of humankind. God does bring down the mighty from their thrones and we who espouse human justice do well to accept that God's justice is just where ours never fully is.

Therefore: we must eschew revenge and so break cycle of violence. Costly acts of non-retaliation are seeds of Pentecostal peace. Bonhoeffer warns that tyrants may need to be removed, so: "what forms of violence could be tolerated to overcome a social 'peace' that coercively maintained itself through the condoned violence of injustice?" But if we don the military uniform don't look to religion to legitimise that: we must always worship the crucified.