Reconciliation in a State of Emergency: *The Middle Voice of 2 Corinthians*

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The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight. Then we shall clearly realize that it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency...
– Walter Benjamin, Theses on the Philosophy of History, 1940

In order to struggle against retribution, forgiveness finds a powerful ally in time.... In this, time not only extinguishes the traces of all misdeeds but also – by virtue of its duration, beyond all remembering or forgetting – helps, in ways that are wholly mysterious, to complete the process of forgiving, though never of reconciliation.
– Walter Benjamin, The Meaning of Time in the Moral Universe, 1921

All human language is only a reflection of the word in name. The name is no closer to the word than knowledge is to creation. The infinity of all human language always remains limited and analytic in nature, in comparison to the absolutely unlimited and creative infinity of the divine word.
– Walter Benjamin, On Language as Such and on the Language of Man, 1916

In a state of emergency, we stand between the political need to create time and a divine time of creation. Words and deeds hang in the balance. As it declares a state of emergency, legalizing an exception to the law for which it cannot be held accountable, the state strives to assume the mantle of divine authority, a self-justifying form of power. The emergency takes shape in a threat that silences its opposition by constricting past and future into an endless danger. The hypocrisy of this violence is a warrant for revolution that restores the movement of history. However justified, this (re)action provides an "excuse" for the state's violence. If it replaces the law's promise of security with an equally abstract vision of happiness, revolution may also duplicate the very rule (of law) that it claims to challenge. Forgiveness breaks this struggle of retribution that pits oppressor against oppressed. It does not, however, render their opposition productive. The peace of forgiveness is silent. In what Benjamin calls a real state of emergency, an exception to the exception that marks the beginning of politics, there is a faith that both energizes history-making and renders it contingent. As reconciliation, this faith is a recollection of how the mysterious creation of time imbues speech with the creative power to make time. It is a present moment in which our relation to the Word inspires the words with which to forge relationships.

In 1985, the South African 'state of emergency' was both rule and reality. Political speech was curtailed. Suspected enemies of the state were detained indefinitely, tortured by securocrats, and sometimes dumped from airplanes into the ocean. Individuals were "banned." Midnight raids gave troops the chance to fire at will. Massacres became funerals that became massacres that became funerals. In the midst of this "total onslaught," among many other expressions of struggle, appeared *The Kairos Document*. Written by a group of theologians, the tract was "a theological commentary on the political crisis in South Africa." Addressed to state leaders, clergy, civic organizations, and citizens, the document opened by announcing a *kairos*, a "favourable time in which God issues a challenge to decisive action" (1). The state of emergency contained opportunity. According to the theologians, it was time for a prophetic theology to unveil the tyranny of apartheid and move the struggle beyond the mainstream Church's "superficial and counter-productive" calls for "cheap reconciliation". The structural injustice of apartheid could not be overcome through a theology of personal guilt and private confession: "No reconciliation is possible in South African without justice, without the total dismantling of apartheid" (10). In a state of emergency, the moment for speech had passed. It was time for action.[1] Against the Word, the call for reconciliation was just so many words.

As they each invoke reconciliation, what is between the philosopher-political theorist who turns language towards faith and the theologian who uses language to turn toward politics? Is reconciliation the theological remainder of politics, the leap that comes when realism confronts total conflict? Or is recon-

ciliation the political remainder of theology, a form of action that endows hope with content? Might it be both? If so, how do we discern the dynamics of reconciliation and assess its consequences? If not, what is the precise difference between a religious and political interpretation of reconciliation? As they are concerned with the relationship between the words and Word of reconciliation, these questions are rhetorical. To the extent that they ask whether reconciliation constitutes or impedes human interaction, they open a rhetorical field of study: inquiry into whether there is a voice, a middle voice that simultaneously performs and explains the faith of reconciliation which appears to transform times of violence into moments for history-making.

In this essay, I will bring these rhetorical questions to a rhetorical reading of Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians. Explicitly, it should be said that this undertaking will not feature a cataloging of tropes and figures, a recovery of Paul's state of mind or intention, an evaluation of his persuasive prowess, or an argument that his letter trades truth for illusion or sincerity for duplicity. 2 Corinthians funds a great deal of the contemporary debate over the nature and value of reconciliation. The letter defies singular interpretation. Its actual discussion of reconciliation is maddeningly vague and ambiguously related to the larger letter in which it is contained. That is to say that the letter contains features that obscure its own readability. A key portion of Paul's epistle is addressed to a temporal event – a beginning – that has, does, or will disrupt the normal flow of time. The time of reconciliation is a time within and without a time. It is a moment when the indicators of meaning and the grounds of judgment (*phronesis*) are in radical flux. Moreover, this characterization is presented in a letter, an indirect form of communication that consciously separates the moment of expression from the moment of understanding.[2] At certain points, Paul seems to claim that this mode of address creates an occasion in which to resolve his debilitating dispute with the people of Corinth. The performed time of the letter appears to open a time of reconciliation. When read together, these temporal ambiguities suggest that there is a relationship between Paul's arguments about reconciliation and what his letter of reconciliation is doing with arguments.

With this horizon in view, the present essay contends that Paul's letter contains a rhetorical argument that defines the occasion, dynamics, and outcome of reconciliation in communicative terms. Moreover, Paul's definition of reconciliation is contained within a letter that enacts the very kind of communication that it advocates. In this middle voice, performing the concept that it endeavors to explain, the letter holds that reconciliation entails communication about the need for communication.[3] Reconciliation is a discourse that theorizes the power of discourse from within its practice. In these terms, the rhetorical *topoi* of 2 Corinthians denote an important bridge between theological and political interpretations of reconciliation. Perhaps they offer a way of

investigating precisely how legacies of violence are converted into oppositions that contain the potential for mutual understanding.

Before proceeding, I want to address several issues that have a bearing on the scope and motivation of the essay. Initially, this essay offers what might best be called a "distracted" reading of Paul's letter. It is motivated (prejudiced, in Gadamer's terms) explicitly by a concern for *how* the transformational qualities of reconciliation are carried by and enacted in certain modes of rhetorical activity. Thus, the work here is neither a proper hermeneutics nor a rigorous doctrinal commentary on the development of reconciliation in the New Testament. In this matter, I can only hope that the essay will assist inquiry into the language of reconciliation as it appears in other important texts, e.g. Romans. Secondly, I come to this work as a rhetorical theorist, not a theologian or scholar of religion. The fields proceed in different idioms. Frequently, however, they strike a similar key. As Kenneth Burke put the matter, words about God are like words about words (1970). Without much desire to follow Burke's subsequent claim that religions are "exceptionally thoroughgoing modes of persuasion," I prefer to keep the internal tension of the metaphor intact. Increasingly, the study of rhetoric leads me to question the relationship (play) between speech, faith, and action.[4] More precisely, I am interested to understand the specific ways in which speech invents shared meaning in the face of conflict and whether this leap (of faith) sponsors and/or inhibits collective (inter)action. In reconciliation, there is thus much intrigue. Here, we seem to have a word that moves *between* words and the Word, a God-word of words that can turn into a word about God-words. As it looks for the potential for dialogue in the midst of violence, reconciliation entails speech-action that flaunts the law of non-contradiction in the name of creating a time for history-making. I find this communicative faith to be endlessly fascinating if not more than a bit risky.

Defining Performances: Reconciliation in 2 Corinthians

What *is* reconciliation? What does it do? When and how does it do it? Extended studies of the term's etymology yield few concrete answers to these questions. In Greek, the words *katallosso* and *katallage* connote the action of peacemaking and the conversion of enmity into friendship (Liddell and Scott, 1940; Mosala, 1987: 23). In his analysis, Ralph Martin notes that the term is relational (1981: 36). This is an important clue. The undertaking or result of transformation, reconciliation entails a change in the relationship that exists *between* beings, people or goods. The precise form and content of this middle raise questions about the situation, dynamics, and outcome of reconciliation.[5] Some commentators stress the contextual nature of reconciliation. As it removes the causes of alienation and conflict, reconciliation entails an "objective change of situation" (Martin, 1986: 147; Shriver, 1995). However, there are

varying accounts of what kinds of hostilities can be reconciled.[6] There is substantial debate, too, over the nature of the transformation enacted by reconciliation and whether it is a transcendental act or an immanent process (Schreiter, 1992). Vincent Taylor, for instance, held that reconciliation is "accomplished by God" and that the human contribution to this act is limited to the "consent and readiness to be reconciled" (Taylor, 1969: 84).[7] Inspired partly by Hegel's claim that reconciliation was a "middle course of beauty in the midst of extremes," Jay Bernstein (1996) and Benjamin Sax (1983) have each argued that reconciliation is a human language game, a mode of communication in which humans find the grounds for dialogue as they recognize that what stands between them is a shared difference.[8] The potential of human community appears when the character of love overcomes the subjugation of law through a language of confession and forgiveness. While these attempts to pinpoint the "mechanism" of reconciliation may not be exclusive, they do represent different interpretations of the object and outcome of reconciliation. Whether from conflict, oppression, or law, reconciliation seems to promise some kind of liberation. It is, however, an open question as to whether this sea change entails the restoration of a broken covenant, the opening of a (present) moment for action, or the promise of a future peace (Volf, 2000).

These ambiguities background a problem of definition – the question of how the Second Epistle to the Corinthians explains the situation, dynamics, and outcome of reconciliation. More specifically, they underscore the importance of understanding more about *how* the transformative power of reconciliation appears *within* the words and speech that Paul uses to define reconciliation. Warranted by the risk of endless violence, a situation that both forecloses and demands choice, Paul's account suggests that reconciliation begins when the terms of conflict are used to fashion a time in which human beings can enter into relationships with old enemies. A potential for identification, reconciliation relies on the faith of rhetorical invention to motivate the work of rhetorical interaction.

Times within the Times: The Occasion of Reconciliation

Reconciliation is not for all times or all conflicts. Recently, American President Bill Clinton maintained that his dalliances in the backrooms of the Oval Office required reconciliation more than punishment. While impeachment was avoided, Clinton's plea for reconciliation fell on deaf ears. The scene did not fit the act. The example is trivial. The issues that it raises are not. Does every conflict or transgression call for reconciliation? If not, what are the criteria for deciding when it is necessary and appropriate? If saying that we need to engage in reconciliation is not enough to justify its practice, what is the proper situation or occasion for reconciliation?

Significant attention has been paid to the situation in which Paul wrote the Second Epistle to the Corinthians.[9] Much of this analysis cleaves between the general and particular problems that confronted Paul. On one side, the Apostle's work to overcome humanity's "refusal of God" was frequently directed against the laws of the old order (Chau, 1995). Martin's interpretation is that Paul's message was opposed to the emphasis on "worldly success and lordly power" that characterized the laws given by Moses (1986: 137). While discussed more in Romans than 2 Corinthians, many commentators argue that Paul held that this law privatized faith, fractured communities, entrenched racial hatred, perpetuated false appearances and engendered conflict. It was, in short, both an entrenchment and a source of sin (Harvey, 1996). On the other side, Paul faced obstacles of person and persona. "Opposed and insulted" by the people of Corinth, Paul's standing as an Apostle was suspect. He had been accused of weakness, duplicity and fraud, especially as it came to light that he had suffered what appeared to be a near-death experience during the course of his travels. In some sense, unable to communicate with the congregation at Corinth, the status of the messenger was compromising the message (Harvey, 1996: 65). Relating these problems, Paul argues in 2 Corinthians, that humans have been presented with an occasion for reconciliation. He claims that this moment appears in the midst of a potentially endless conflict. It is a time that troubles both the Word of God and the words that bind human communities. Language is suspect. Its power of appearance is equally a source of deception. Thus, in a moment that is and is not what it seems, the occasion of reconciliation is a time within a time, a present in which humans are called to "de-activate" both the identity of law and the law of identity.[10]

In the first four chapters of 2 Corinthians, Paul describes a time of trouble that is imbued with a sense of hope.[11] From the start, the occasion of reconciliation contains both opposition and opportunity. The situation is first painted with broad brushstrokes. Human life brings "afflictions." Pain and conflict challenge our endurance. To the degree that humans carry the sacrifice of Christ within them (1:5), these maladies spur grief but not melancholy. Suffering brings comfort (1:4). Our relationship with the Divine carries with it a power to overcome the imposed or external maladies of life. From this condition, Paul turns to his own circumstances. In his travels, he has been burdened "beyond ability or power" and has "despaired even of life" (1:8). The conflict seems existential, a near death in which Paul has confronted the limits of his own agency. Happily, this challenge has been overcome by the "raising" work of God (1:9-10). Like the larger human condition, subjugation and danger are relieved through the comforting relations of faith.

Paul's reflections on the conflicts and anxieties of the human heart delineate a situation that has both a subjective and an objective component. There is sin, suffering, and strife. However, these oppositions between self, others, and

God are bound within the ambiguous nature and power of language. This connection becomes apparent when Paul begins to describe his tumultuous relationship with the people at Corinth. There is both controversy over his message and the status of Paul's "testimony of conscience" (2:12). A source of grief, this mutual offence has several levels. Is the Apostle an Apostle? Paul's suffering and weakness have led to dispute over his authority and standing to speak. Questions have been raised about the qualities and habits of the character that sustains speech. Paul's *ethos* is in doubt. Can the apostle's message be trusted? Is it the *undebatable* truth? At one interesting if not ambiguous point, the language of debate makes an explicit appearance in the letter. The message of God entails affirmation, not the interplay or clash between "yea and nay" (1:18-19). Concerned that his message to the Corinthians has devolved to the latter, he turns to the very methods of refutation which grieve him. The apostle claims that he is not "hawking the word of God." Far from using words to play tricks with life, Paul claims that his message is authentic and sincere: "We speak in Christ in the sight of God" (2:17).

The debating points are less important than the fact that Paul's position marks an interesting intersection of the human and divine word. The nature of this relationship is played out on the field of law, a source of Paul's troubles and a structure that has been claimed to stand between humanity and God. A synecdoche of the discussion in the Epistle to the Romans, Paul announces in 2 Corinthians that "the letter kills but the spirit makes alive" (3:6). The claim has provoked substantial and important commentary. In part, it seems to mean that the law's promise of salvation leads to human subjugation and defers (endlessly) man's relationship with God. A cause of pride (*hubris*), Martin's interpretation is that Paul viewed the law as a source of discord and an embodiment of the temptation to wrest the power of creation from its divine source (1981, 62). In important recent work, Giorgio Agamben has extended Hegel's claim that the external force of law marks a moment when the task of becoming is supplanted by the juridical fate of being.[12] Following Paul's description of how it was handed from behind a veil, Agamben explores whether law covets a power of mediation that can be neither seen nor questioned. Able to structure the form of history and impute the identity of its subjects, the word of law, he argues, can cut against the words of identification that energize human interaction.[13] Paul seems to underscore this point when he claims that without the contingency of faith, the work of law beckons condemnation and death. Further, he claims that the problem has much to do with the status and relation of Divine and human words: "But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness, nor adulterating the Word of God, but by the revelation of the truth commending ourselves to every conscience of men before God" (4:2). Recalling Paul's perhaps ironic questions about his message to the Corinthians – "do we need commendatory letters to you, or commendatory (ones) from you?" (3:1) – the suspect au-

thority of the word is resolved when it becomes a reflection of the Word.[14]

Presented in a set of rhetorical arguments, Paul's attempt to recover both the Word of God and the standing of his own words has important implications for the nature of the situation at hand. The Corinthians have apparently questioned who Paul *is*. Wary of Paul's character, they have undermined his identity and his qualifications to speak. Literally and metaphorically, the dispute has deterred Paul's presence (13:10). It marks a moment when the Apostle can move *toward* but not *with* his potential audience and it constitutes a crisis in which his words (of God) are no longer heard (1:12; 2:1). Received or not, the substance of Paul's message is partly addressed to the gap between words of law and the Word of God. The former has attempted to usurp the latter. The law has become self-justifying, a power of creation whose works disavow the contingency embodied in faith. Thus, there is a sense in which Paul's situation is brought on by a law of identity and the identity of law. Attacks on Paul's character render him speechless, caught in a cycle of hostility in which it is impossible for him to either appear or "prove" his virtue. Related, the appearance of law's words from behind its veil has established identitarian conditions (works) of virtue that subjugate and divide those that the law claims to serve.

Cast in these terms, Paul's description of his situation is marked by a play between several different senses of *logos* and an argument about the power of speech to create appearances. As is well known, *logos* connotes a variety of ideas: measure, relation, ratio, reason (ground), principle, speech, speech-reason, argument, proposition, deliberation, prophecy, Divine utterance or wisdom and command. As Paul moves between appeals to the human and Divine word, it is difficult to ascertain which of these connotations might have been pertinent to him or his audience. Today, however, Paul's (persuasive) attempt to demonstrate that he had not fallen prey to the tricks of persuasion, combined with his claims about the false appearances generated by law, recalls Aristotle's claim that rhetoric is an art of appearance.[15] Indeed, Paul's situation – a subjective and objective moment that appears in, confounds, and may well call for, speech – rhetorically creates an appearance that warrants the rejection of those laws of appearance that are being used as the reasons for condemning both his character and his message. Is this a paradox? If the justifications for law and the grounds on which to assess the meaning of language are not only suspect but also a cause of violence, what basis for speech remains?

Paul seems to respond to this problem with the claim that the measure of the *knowledge* of the glory (Word?) of God is contained in earthen vessels (4:6-7). What is the connection? For one, this assessment bears directly on the problem of identity that pervades Paul's characterization of his situation. In his historical analysis of messianic Judaism, Gershom Scholem traces an account of creation in which God revealed his powers by forming vessels designed to serve as a "manifestation of His being" (1971). A symbol of autonomy and depend-

ence, these containers endow humanity with both potential and limitation. In Kenneth Burke's terms, what a thing *is* is determined by that which it *is not*. Human appearance is a *container*, the substance of which we can never fully *know*. Human identity is contingent on identification. The grounds of action and justification depend on a faith that relates but does not mediate extrinsic creation and intrinsic creativity (Burke 1969a).

From this "paradox of substance," Paul discerns a potential (*dunamis*) from within the oppositions that compose his situation: "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted but not forsaken, cast down but not destroyed" (4:8-9). Caught in a middle, between subjection and subjectivity, Paul delineates a potential for choice when he remarks, "I believed therefore, I spoke" (4:13). This recovery of *logos* is explained in several ways. On one level, the external standards that have been used to judge humanity (and in this case, Paul's character) are turned inward, toward a faith that moves between humans and God. An "eternal" realm that is not seen replaces the "temporal" realm of appearances (4:18). The *presence* of affliction alters a basic feature of a situation, time. Space follows immediately as Paul describes the divine "home" that clothes humanity and allows it to walk "by faith and not by sight" (5:1-8). Hannah Arendt argued that, among other things, the household (*oikia*) was a space of privacy in which citizens readied themselves for their entrance into the *polis*, a rhetorical domain of appearance and civic friendship (1958). Given the letter's concern to overcome law, Paul's discussion may work towards a similar end. In any case, his position renders the *oikia* relational. It is a space (of words) in which humans can enter into a relationship with God.

Faced with conflict and mutual opposition, Paul's position suggests that as humans relinquish aspects of their identity, as they concede the contingency of character and law, they recover a form of speech that allows them to create interaction with others. In this regard, Paul argues that he persuades only as he knows the fear of the Lord (5:11). He is not an authority that brings condemnation or blame. His speech offers a choice: "For we do not again commend ourselves to you, but are giving you occasion of glorying on our behalf." This moment fuses the temporal, spatial, and rhetorical dimensions of Paul's argument. As an occasion, it contains a starting point, a moment of beginning, and the materials of argument. It is an opportunity for "glorying" against those who "speak in appearance and not in heart." Such speech, Paul notes, is rational within the limits of the time and space provided (5:12-13). While perhaps nonsensical when measured by the terms of law, it is a mode of address that does not forget that the creation of relationships is a contingent and rather mysterious process.[16]

Making the Weaker Appear the Better: The Sacrifice and Gift of Reconciliation

Paul has named a situation. It is a time in which humans are estranged from God, subject to a violent law, and unable to forge understanding through the language of their own making. This occasion is a moment of choice. It is a time within a time, a *kairos* in which discord and division contain the potential for dialogue and fellowship. The question of how this potential is actualized brings Paul to the idea of reconciliation. The turn has important rhetorical elements. It is an account of the condition under which humans can return to the Word. In a time provided, reconciliation occurs as the living memory of a sacrifice invents a moment in which the causes of a past conflict are overwritten by a working faith in the gift of speech. This explanation is also a performance. As it gives standing to speech and delineates a human practice of communication, Paul's discussion of reconciliation addresses both the formal and substantive dimensions of his dispute with the Corinthians. More precisely, the Apostle appears to argue that the faith of reconciliation is a call for humans to recollect the contingency of their own character (*ethos*) in a manner that allows them to set aside identitarian conflict in the name of creating identification with others.

The stage for Paul's altogether brief account of reconciliation (5:18-20) is set by several important verses. The Apostle begins by recollecting the constraint implied by Christ's sacrifice: "He died for all that the living ones may live no more to themselves but to the (One) having died for them and having been raised" (5:15). This underscores Paul's earlier concern for the possibility and status of human identity. Humanity's relationship with itself and with Christ has been complicated. Once possible, perhaps through the mechanisms of the old laws, humans can no longer know Christ "according to flesh" (5:16). The Messiah is no longer present. We can, however, be *in* Christ. This presence within an absence renders us new. The claim is causal. We are new creations/creatures as we come to exist in what has already passed from earth and which we cannot know. This beginning is and is not additive. On the one hand, as old things pass away, all things become what they have not been (5:17). On the other, the abiding memory of a past (sacrifice) opens a present and recovers the potential of history. Put in slightly different terms, it is a moment in which history dies through a death that, when remembered, has the effect of bringing us into a present time that is both new and strange.

Paul's account of reconciliation appears in (and depends on) this time that overcomes the past without promising a future. In a time of conflict, reconciliation is a Divine gift. God has reconciled humanity to God through Jesus Christ, freely resolving that humanity would not be charged with its trespasses (5:19). Thus, reconciliation is not mutual. It is an action in which God passes the time of God's estrangement from humanity. How? Christ's sacrifice marks

an *exception* from the (declared) costs of sin, an exception from the law's exception. There is longstanding controversy over whether this removal into presence is best understood as Divine imputation, amnesty, transference or identification.[17] Formally, it is an attribution that structures time in a manner that renders human beings *as* (they are) *not*.[18] The exception means that individuals are no longer the subjects of sin or bound by the laws through which it is perpetuated. Whether understood as fate or teleology, history's power to determine the standing of human beings is overcome by the gift of reconciliation. In the time provided, humans stand opposed to the past from which they have come. This does not mean that reconciliation overcomes conflict by simply wiping the slate clean through an event that has already happened. Its freedom of peace Janus-faced, reconciliation appears only in the recollection of an event that made life possible: Christ's sacrifice brings life but endows it with a fundamental dependence. In isolation, human identity is incomplete and subject to that which it cannot control. The difference, however, what distinguishes this beginning from the legacy of law, is that our memory of the past recalls a gift that demands not reciprocity but identification. As we do not know what has been and which has now faded from view (flesh), the meaning and movement of memory (between past and present) enacts a calling, a work of faith in which our very standing depends on a willingness to trade identity for relationships of identification and representation. As Hegel put the matter, the faith of reconciliation overcomes fate as the Beautiful Soul renounces its hard-heart *and* resists the temptation to turn a deaf ear on the historical calling of the Word/word that it cannot own but which nonetheless endows it with substance.

Between the times, reconciliation is a present that overcomes legacies of self-negation and gives potential back to history. Rather than salvation - the absence of negativity - it is the gift of a past sacrifice that creates a relationship (standing) and a call to memorialize this sacrifice in a relationship of identification: the Word-Act of reconciliation "puts the word of reconciliation in us." (5:19).[19] In Paul's letter, circling and perhaps playing with the ambiguities of *logos*, the terms of this ministry are less declared than performed. Called as an ambassador of Christ, Paul hails the Corinthians to "be reconciled to God" (5:20). They have an opportunity to "become (the) righteousness of God in Him," In these terms, the choice presented by God's reconciling act is whether the people of Corinth want to enter into a relationship with, or gain standing before God (5:21). Thus, in a simple sense, the words of reconciliation afford Paul the vocabulary needed to invite his audience to enter into the Word of reconciliation. Moreover, this indicates that reconciliation is not simply a - divine act. In certain *situations*, reconciliation is a way for humans to discern the grounds for peace from within the terms of conflict.

Paul explains this possibility through an enactment. Paul claims that he is

a minister of reconciliation, caught in the midst of emergencies, difficulty, imprisonment, riots, labours, watchings, and fastings (6:4-5). In these times of trouble and suffering, things are not as they appear. Perhaps referring to himself, Paul observes that those who proclaim the Word are "deceivers, and (yet) true; as unknown, and (yet) well-known, as dying and (yet), look, we live; as flogged, and (yet) not put to death; as grieved, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet enriching many; as having nothing, yet possessing all things" (6:8-10). Bolstered by the powerful love of God, there is potential in the midst of conflict, a chance to recover human relationships from within lawlessness and darkness (6:13-14). From this time, which appears to suspend the law of non-contradiction, Paul asks the Corinthians for space, imploring them "to make room for us" (7:2). While his "boldness" is great, the Apostle claims that he has not sought to corrupt, overreach or condemn. Recalling the temporal dynamic of sacrifice that is built into reconciliation, he declares that his wish is "for (us) to die together and to live together" (7:3). From this call for the creation of relationships, a turn from a logic of identity to one of identification, Paul turns – literally and tropologically – to the nature and dynamics of language.

Words have effects. In the midst of inner conflict and outer fighting, Titus' words about the longing and mourning of the Corinthians have brought comfort to Paul (7:6). Moreover, they suggest that his letters have had some influence, a power that has "worked earnestness" – a mixture of zeal, urgency, esteem, and goodwill – into his reluctant, if not hostile congregation (7:11). Some kinds of speech do work. How? Paul reflects that "I do not speak by command but through the earnestness of others and testing the sincerity of your love." (8:8). Speech works *through* faith. Later, when Paul refers to his own speech as "unskilled," he uses a term (idiwths) that denotes something private, outside the state (11:6). Apart from the law, faith is the work of speech.

This brings the argument full circle. Paul has forsworn the words of law and traded his own words for those of God. In the name of reconciliation, he has been called to speech that abides in a past sacrifice in order to pass and open a time in which the potential for relationships appears in the midst of conflict. Against laws of identity and the identity of law, the memory of Christ's sacrifice is a conduit of identification. It is an exception to the rule (of law) that both returns humanity to the Word and restores its words. As it theorizes and performs the power of human language, Paul's letter renders this exception the rule. As God did not attribute to us, he claims that our speech should not attribute to others. Instead of presuming to know others, we must question our own standing and relinquish our own character in order to enter to relationship that we cannot fully control. Whether we call this word-work an attitude of faith or *ethos* makes little difference. In a time of endless conflict and the collapse of shared meaning and a risk of real and symbolic death, the recollection and representation of our own contingency is a vulnerability, a productive

form of opposition that opens space for dialogue. As composed, Paul's letter is not an example of how rhetoric makes the weaker case appear the better. It is the rhetorical invention of an appearance in which the weaker case *is* the better.

Creating or Emerging from Emergencies?

The Second Epistle to the Corinthians contains a definitional argument that speaks to the occasion, dynamics, and outcome of reconciliation. In it, Paul argues that reconciliation is not for all times. It appears in moments when violence thwarts our capacity to speak and enter into relationships. Of our own making, these conflicts are the cost of creativity. In the name of securing substance, the development of identity depends on the self's attempt to author the existence of the Other. In the name of presence and legacy, this power converts history into a battlefield and imagines that victory is progress. In some cases, however, the security afforded by this time leads us into a time which is not our own, a moment when we stand beside ourselves, locked in a conflict that we cannot overcome, silent in the face of death.

In such situations, Paul claims that reconciliation is a gift of speech that contains the potential for humans to (re)make fellowship. The gift is borne of a sacrifice that overcomes histories of violence by returning possibility to the past. As we recall our contingency and concede our debts to others, we find a common condition, a space that can support interaction. This opening is not salvation. Rather, it is a turn from negation to negativity, a potential in which the hostility of identity gives way to mutual oppositions that afford individuals the grounds and motives for dialogue. Paul's account of reconciliation contains this productive negativity precisely to the degree that his definition of reconciliation is itself contingent on a process of rhetorical invention that defies strict definition. Thus, the general idea that reconciliation *is* rhetorical has meaning only as it develops within particular rhetorical interactions. This double movement explains why Paul's letter must perform the idea that it defends. In a state of emergency, reconciliation is an exception that precedes, makes, and follows law.

In the middle voice of 2 Corinthians, the difference between the theology and politics of reconciliation begins to fade at the same moment that it appears as a legitimate problem. Is reconciliation the political remainder of theology or the theological remainder of politics? In the present moment, at a time when the idea of reconciliation is being used to underwrite democratic transitions in deeply divided societies, it may be possible to address this question through a consideration of how Paul's rhetorical account of reconciliation funds both the legitimacy and critique of so-called political reconciliation. While this idea must be worked out in detail, it is clear that the rhetorical *topoi* of 2 Corinthians

are relevant to the problem of how a country like South Africa moved from imminent civil war to the negotiated politics of reconciliation.[20] For instance, Paul's claim that reconciliation begins at the limits of speech may support inquiry into the precise situation that led both the South African government and the African National Congress to advocate reconciliation over an endless state of emergency, violence, and ungovernability.[21] Similarly, the middle voice of 2 Corinthians underscores the need to investigate the different ways in which South African citizens and institutions have defined reconciliation and how this communication has both performed and problematized its value. It also highlights the ongoing controversy over whether reconciliation has afforded South Africans the chance to author the rule of law, an opportunity to move from the identity politics of apartheid theology to civic discourse that aims to create identification between old enemies. In any case, the point here is simply that the rhetorical dynamics of Pauline reconciliation may illumine some of the precise ways in which violence is transformed into the grounds of political negotiation and dialogue.

Does reconciliation give *voice* to the faith that turns a state of emergency towards its reality, or is it a *call* to action that renders the emergency superfluous? Among other things, what stands between Walter Benjamin and the *Kairos Theologians* is an enduring concern for how to begin, how to enter into a beginning in which human relationships engender the faith and power to (re)author those laws that have lost their connection to experience. Reconciliation is a gift of the words that open the time and space of this creative moment. However, it is vital to understand that this beginning puts us in the middle of something that we may not be able to finish. This may be Paul's point. In language, invention can bring experience to light, forge meaning, and sponsor collective action. In reconciliation, the success of this work is seen to turn on the question of whether we are willing to hang in the balance with our words, moving between times of creation, remembering that we are making history in a moment when the veil between the Divine and political worlds is at its thinnest.

Notes

1 This point was rendered explicit in a set of published commentaries on the meaning and value of *The Kairos Document*. See Villa-Vicencio (1986).

2 In the context of love and the formation of human relationships, Luce Irigaray (1996) has offered an important account of this communicative indirection.

3 Hayden White (1992) and Martin Jay (1993) have each developed important accounts of the middle voice.

4 Lester Ruiz (1988) has presented an important argument about the connections between these goods.

[5] If not already apparent, this essay plays with the problem of how speech fashions "middles" in which individuals undertake to form relationships. In other work (Doxtader, 2000), I have developed this idea of the middle in some detail. One might also consult Hannah Arendt's view of speech and action (1958).

[6] Martin argues that reconciliation develops from either an "original hostility" or the "predicament" that appears when humanity encounters both the infinite universe and the limitations of law. The latter account resembles Hegel's view that reconciliation is borne of an ontological frustration. Mosala has argued that this alienation is both personal and material, a situation in which human relationships are confounded by the unjust appropriation of property. Taylor's examination of Pauline theology finds that reconciliation is a response to "racial hatred (78)."

[7] This issue is linked closely to debates over whether justification occurs by faith or by works and the idea that reconciliation is a gift, an undeserved love or a "divine power in weakness" (Martin, 1986: lix; Taylor, 1969; Smit, 1996: 105; Duffy, 1993).

[8] (Hegel, 1961: 288). Relevant here, Axel Honneth (1997) has developed an important argument about the nature of recognition and its role in converting struggle into discourse.

[9] There are a number of rhetorical studies of Paul's theology, many of which focus on the problems of situation and audience that faced Paul. See, for instance, Richardson (1994), Elliot (1990), Young and Ford (1987), Mitchell (1991), Sumney (1990), and Pogoloff (1992).

[10] I borrow this term from a lecture given by Giorgio Agamben at the University of California, Berkeley in October 1999.

[11] In this essay, I have relied primarily on Jay Green's *Interlinear Greek-English New Testament* (1996). In most cases, quotations reflect his literal translation of the original Greek. To explain and sometimes expand the meanings of key terms, I have turned to Liddell and Scott's *Greek-English Lexicon* (1940). In the matter of gender, I have refrained from rendering God as either male or female. At several points, this has resulted in somewhat awkward prose. Where the text itself attributes a gender to God, I have made no alteration.

[12] While beyond the scope of this essay, this position raises interesting questions about the discursive-rhetorical parallels between biblical, positive, and constitutional law. Berman's work(1993)offers some interesting discussions of this issue.

[13] Agamben finds specific evidence of this problem in Galatians 3:12-26. For additional consideration of the relationship between identity and identification see Butler (1993) and Burke (1969b).

[14] This idea of reflection is rendered explicit at 3:18, where Paul holds that the unveiling of law functions as a mirror that transforms humanity's relationship with God. It would be interesting to read this metaphor through Lacan's claim that analysis may allow individuals to "assume their history."

[15] In this matter, Martha Nussbaum's (1986) consideration of "rhetorical appearance" merits careful scrutiny.

[16] Set in these terms, I disagree somewhat with Harvey's (1996) characterization that Paul is attempting to privatize faith.

[17] Martin's commentary (1986) contains a detailed review of this debate. The problem is provocative at several levels. Did God "charge" human sin to Christ or did God resolve not to charge humanity with its trespass. The text at 5:19 indicates that both may have occurred. In turn, this presents the question of whether this

event was a positive action or a decision not to act. As a forensic term, "charge" can connote both a kind of action and a form of speech, the filing of a writ or words of accusation. However, one way to not lay charges while still invoking the law, is through amnesty. The other would be to turn a blind-eye to the offence, disrupting the action-reaction of law. Also, the issue raises the question of how it is possible to transfer or attribute qualities of one being to another and whether this (potentially rhetorical) attribution entails violence.

[18] This is an idea that Giorgio Agamben has developed at length in his reading of Romans. My application may or may not reflect his own position on the matter of how Paul uses words to pass time.

[19] At 5:18, Paul writes, "And all things (are) of God, the (One) having reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and having given us the ministry of reconciliation." Thus, it is unclear whether the former act implies or culminates in the latter or if the actions are somehow distinct. The passage at 5:19 seems clearer in this respect but the matter is still debatable.

[20] Writing on the role of religion in the struggle against apartheid, Charles Villa-Vicencio argued that the Church needed to find a way to "proclaim the presence of God in a secular or religionless way" (1992: 25). In some ways, the present essay is addressed to the question of how this might be done.

[21] Starting with exchanges (letters) between Nelson Mandela and F.W. De Klerk, it is interesting to observe how the theme of reconciliation emerged over the course of the negotiations. Implicit in the "talks about talks" and later evident in principles of "sufficient consensus" that guided heated debate, appeals to reconciliation marked attempts to create trust in the face of historical animosity. For detailed accounts of these developments, see the respective work by Gerwel (2000) and De Lange (2000). For instructive accounts surrounding the variable and controversial nature of South African reconciliation see Krog (1998) and Soyinka (1999). In other work (2001), I have traced the rhetorical dimensions of South African reconciliation, particularly as it appeared before the formation of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

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