

Biblical Perspectives on Reconciliation and Their Contribution to Peacebuilding in Rwanda

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Abstract: Reconciliation and peacebuilding remain important concerns in Rwanda, particularly in addressing memories of violence, rebuilding trust, and strengthening social cohesion. This study, entitled “Biblical Perspectives on Reconciliation and Their Contribution to Peacebuilding in Rwanda,” examines how biblical teachings on forgiveness, justice, repentance, truth, reconciliation, and peace can contribute to sustainable peacebuilding. The study asks: How can biblical perspectives on reconciliation contribute to peacebuilding in Rwanda? It hypothesizes that applying biblical principles of forgiveness, justice, repentance, dialogue, and restoration can strengthen relationships and promote sustainable peace. The main objective is to examine biblical perspectives on reconciliation and assess their relevance to peacebuilding in Rwanda. The study uses a qualitative approach, employing biblical and theological analysis, documentary review, questionnaires, and interviews. The respondents were 70 students from the Faculty of Theology at the Catholic University of Rwanda. Findings indicate that 85% consider forgiveness essential for sustainable reconciliation, 78% believe biblical teachings can significantly contribute to peacebuilding, 72% emphasize combining forgiveness with justice and accountability, and 81% identify the Church as an important actor in promoting reconciliation and social cohesion. The study concludes that biblical reconciliation provides valuable theological and ethical resources for peacebuilding in Rwanda, particularly when forgiveness is accompanied by truth, justice, accountability, dialogue, and social transformation.

Keywords: Biblical Reconciliation; Forgiveness; Peacebuilding; Justice and Truth; Rwanda.

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Introduction

Reconciliation is a central biblical and theological response to broken relationships, conflict, injustice, and social division. The Christian understanding of reconciliation is rooted in God's initiative to restore humanity through Jesus Christ and in the calling of believers to become agents of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18–20). Biblical reconciliation therefore goes beyond the absence of conflict; it involves forgiveness, repentance, truth, justice, healing, and the restoration of relationships. Volf (1996) argues that reconciliation requires overcoming exclusion and embracing the other, while Lederach (1997) emphasizes that sustainable reconciliation brings together truth, justice, mercy, and peace. These principles make biblical reconciliation particularly relevant to societies emerging from violent conflict.

The rationale for this study arises from the continuing need to strengthen reconciliation and sustainable peace in Rwanda following the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. The genocide resulted in massive loss of life, destroyed relationships, generated traumatic memories, and weakened trust among individuals and communities. Although Rwanda has undertaken significant efforts toward justice, reconciliation, unity, and social cohesion, challenges concerning forgiveness, painful memories, accountability, trust, and intergenerational transmission of experiences remain important. The Church also has a significant responsibility in this process because of its extensive presence within Rwandan communities. However, the Church's historical involvement in Rwandan society has been complex, including both failures during the genocide and subsequent contributions to reconciliation. Carney (2015) notes the importance of Catholic reconciliation initiatives involving pastoral ministry, justice and peace programmes, prison ministry, and spiritual formation. This context creates a need to examine more systematically how biblical teachings can inform contemporary peacebuilding.

The rationale of the problem statement is therefore based on the gap between the theological potential of biblical reconciliation and the practical challenges of achieving sustainable peace. While forgiveness, justice, repentance, truth, and reconciliation are strongly emphasized in Scripture, their concrete contribution to Rwanda's peacebuilding process requires further contextual examination. This study consequently investigates how biblical perspectives on reconciliation can contribute to rebuilding relationships, strengthening social cohesion, and promoting peaceful coexistence in Rwanda. Using biblical and theological analysis, documentary review, questionnaires, and interviews with 70 students from the Faculty of Theology at the Catholic University of Rwanda, the study seeks to demonstrate how Christian reconciliation

can move beyond theological reflection toward practical peacebuilding. The study is justified by the need to develop approaches that integrate faith, truth, justice, forgiveness, accountability, and social transformation in Rwanda's continuing pursuit of sustainable peace.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach to examine biblical perspectives on reconciliation and their contribution to peacebuilding in Rwanda. The qualitative approach was appropriate because the study sought to understand theological meanings, perceptions, interpretations, and experiences related to forgiveness, justice, truth, repentance, reconciliation, and peacebuilding. The study combined biblical-theological analysis, documentary review, questionnaires, and interviews. Selected biblical texts, particularly 2 Corinthians 5:18–20, Romans 5:10–11, Matthew 6:12–15, Matthew 18:21–35, and Genesis 45:1–15, were examined to identify major biblical principles concerning reconciliation. Scholarly books, journal articles, and relevant academic studies on biblical reconciliation, conflict transformation, and peacebuilding were also reviewed. Creswell and Poth (2018) explain that qualitative research is appropriate for exploring meanings and perspectives within their social and contextual settings, while Merriam and Tisdell (2016) emphasize its usefulness in examining complex social and human experiences.

The study involved 70 students from the Faculty of Theology at the Catholic University of Rwanda. The respondents were selected because their theological formation provided relevant perspectives on biblical teachings and their application to contemporary social issues. Data were collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire focused on major themes such as forgiveness, biblical teachings on reconciliation, justice and accountability, the role of the Church, social cohesion, and sustainable peacebuilding. The interviews provided opportunities for respondents to explain their views more deeply and to reflect on the relevance of biblical reconciliation to the Rwandan context. According to Patton (2015), qualitative inquiry benefits from selecting participants who possess relevant knowledge and can provide meaningful information concerning the research topic.

The collected data were analyzed thematically. Responses were organized according to the principal themes emerging from the research objectives, including forgiveness, justice, truth, repentance, reconciliation, Church involvement, community healing, and sustainable peacebuilding. The findings from the questionnaires were summarized descriptively to identify general patterns in respondents' perceptions, while interview responses were interpreted to

provide deeper contextual understanding. Ethical principles were observed throughout the study, including voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and responsible handling of information. Particular attention was given to the sensitivity of Rwanda's history and the experiences associated with conflict, memory, reconciliation, and healing.

1. The Biblical Understanding of Reconciliation

Biblical reconciliation is fundamentally the restoration of broken relationships and the re-establishment of communion where separation, hostility, or alienation has occurred. In Christian theology, reconciliation is not merely the settlement of disagreement but a transformative process rooted in God's initiative to restore humanity to Himself and to one another. The biblical concept is closely related to peace (*shalom*), forgiveness, repentance, justice, and restoration. It therefore involves both a vertical dimension—reconciliation between God and humanity—and a horizontal dimension—reconciliation among human beings and communities. Scholars such as Volf (1996), Lederach (1997), Wright (2006), and Moltmann (1993) emphasize that Christian reconciliation involves the restoration of relationships and the creation of a community characterized by peace, justice, and mutual recognition. From this perspective, reconciliation is not simply forgetting past conflicts; rather, it requires confronting brokenness and creating conditions for renewed relationships. This understanding is particularly relevant to Rwanda, where reconciliation requires both personal transformation and the rebuilding of relationships within communities.

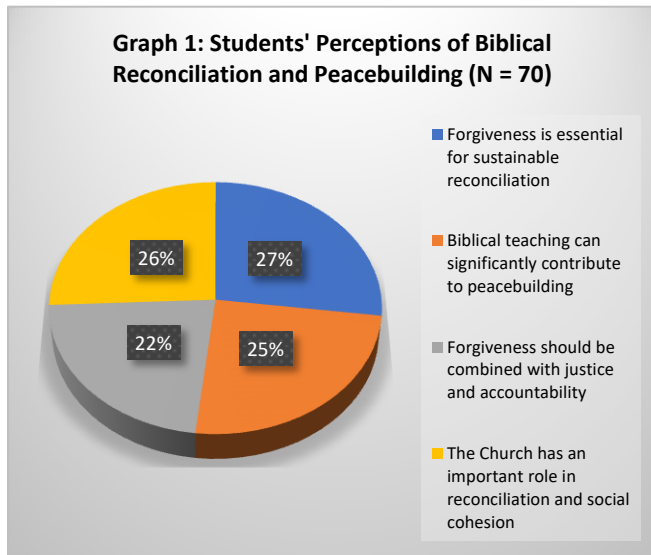
The theological foundation of reconciliation begins with the conviction that God is the primary agent of reconciliation. Humanity's relationship with God is affected by sin, which produces alienation and disrupts communion with the Creator. Nevertheless, the biblical narrative presents God as actively seeking to restore this broken relationship. In the Old Testament, covenant, repentance, forgiveness, and restoration demonstrate God's desire to renew communion with His people. In the New Testament, this divine initiative reaches its fullness in Jesus Christ, through whom God reconciles humanity to Himself. Barth (1958) stresses the centrality of God's grace in restoring the relationship between God and humanity, while Murray (1955) understands reconciliation as God's work of removing the hostility created by sin. Similarly, Dunn (1998) highlights the significance of reconciliation within Paul's theology, while Wright (2013) emphasizes the comprehensive character of God's restorative mission in Christ. Thus, biblical reconciliation originates not primarily from human efforts but from God's gracious action, which calls human beings to participate in the restoration of relationships.

A central biblical foundation is found in 2 Corinthians 5:18–20, where Paul declares that God has reconciled believers to Himself through Christ and has entrusted them with the “ministry of reconciliation.” The passage establishes an important theological movement: God reconciles, Christ mediates reconciliation, and believers become agents of reconciliation. Christians are therefore not merely recipients of reconciliation but are called to communicate and embody it in their relationships and communities. Paul presents reconciliation as a vocation and responsibility, particularly through the expression that believers are “ambassadors for Christ.” Scholars including Hays (1996), Barclay (2015), Fee (1987), and Wright (2013) interpret this Pauline teaching as demonstrating that reconciliation has both theological and ethical consequences. A reconciled relationship with God should produce reconciled relationships among human beings. Consequently, the Christian community is called to become an instrument of healing, forgiveness, dialogue, and peacebuilding. This biblical principle provides an important foundation for considering the contribution of Christian theology to reconciliation processes in Rwanda.

The second major biblical text is Romans 5:10–11, where Paul states that while humanity was God's enemy, reconciliation was accomplished through the death of His Son and that believers now “rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.” The passage emphasizes the depth of God's initiative: reconciliation is offered even to those who are alienated from God. Scholars such as Moo (1996), Dunn (1988), Cranfield (1975), and Wright (2002) explain that Paul's argument connects reconciliation with justification, divine love, salvation, and restored communion. Reconciliation therefore cannot be reduced to a political or social agreement; it has a profound theological foundation in God's grace and Christ's sacrificial action. At the same time, receiving God's reconciliation creates an ethical obligation to extend forgiveness and peace to others. This principle is particularly important for peacebuilding because it challenges individuals to move beyond hatred, revenge, and permanent division toward restored relationships.

The responses of the 70 students from the Faculty of Theology at the Catholic University of Rwanda provide an empirical perspective on these biblical foundations. The reported findings show strong support for the relevance of reconciliation to peacebuilding. Approximately 85% (60 respondents) regarded forgiveness as essential for sustainable reconciliation, 78.6% (55 respondents) considered biblical teaching capable of contributing significantly to peacebuilding, 71.4% (50 respondents) emphasized the need to combine forgiveness with justice and accountability, and 81.4% (57 respondents) identified the Church as an important actor in promoting reconciliation

and social cohesion. These findings are consistent with the theological understanding that reconciliation requires more than the absence of conflict. Lederach (1997), Volf (1996), Moltmann (1993), and Wright (2006) similarly argue that genuine reconciliation involves transformation of relationships, restoration of dignity, and the construction of communities characterized by peace and justice.



Overall, the biblical understanding of reconciliation presents reconciliation as a divine gift, a theological reality, and a Christian vocation. The movement from God's reconciliation with humanity through Christ to the believer's responsibility to reconcile with others provides a strong theological framework for peacebuilding. The findings among the 70 theology students further suggest that these biblical principles are perceived as relevant to Rwanda's continuing efforts toward social cohesion. Nevertheless, biblical reconciliation should not be interpreted as forgiveness without truth, justice, or accountability. Rather, as Lederach (1997), Volf (1996), Wright (2013), and Barclay (2015) indicate, authentic reconciliation involves restoring relationships while recognizing wrongdoing, human dignity, justice, and the possibility of renewed community.

2. Forgiveness as a Foundation for Reconciliation

Forgiveness occupies a central place in the biblical understanding of reconciliation because it addresses the broken relationships produced by sin, conflict, resentment, and injustice. In Christian theology, forgiveness is not simply the decision to forget an offense; rather, it is a process through which individuals release vengeance, acknowledge wrongdoing, and create possibilities for restored relationships. Jesus places forgiveness at the heart of Christian discipleship by connecting human forgiveness with God's forgiveness. In the Lord's Prayer, believers pray, "forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matt. 6:12), while Matthew 6:14–15 emphasizes that those

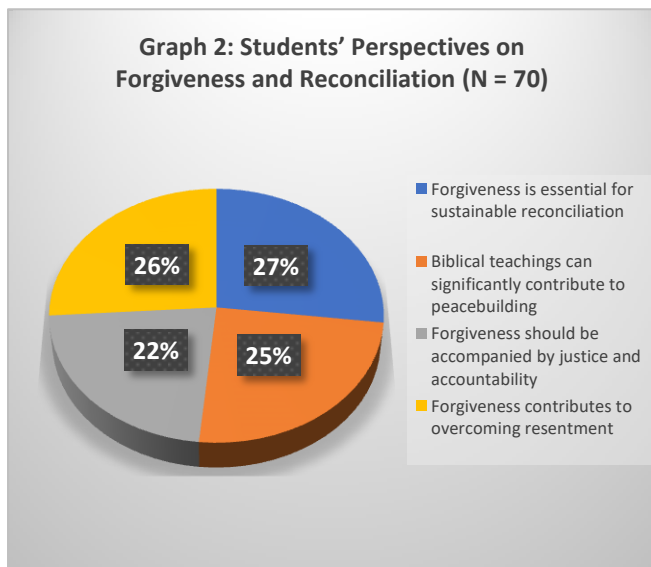
who receive God's forgiveness are called to forgive others. Volf (1996), Lederach (1997), Worthington (2006), and Enright (2012) argue that forgiveness can contribute to reconciliation by breaking cycles of resentment and retaliation and opening space for renewed relationships. In the Rwandan context, this theological understanding is particularly significant because sustainable peace requires mechanisms through which individuals and communities can address painful memories while rebuilding trust and social cohesion.

Jesus' teaching in Matthew 18:21–35 provides another important foundation for understanding forgiveness. When Peter asks Jesus how many times he should forgive someone who sins against him, Jesus responds by emphasizing forgiveness without limiting it to a specific number. The parable of the unforgiving servant then illustrates the inconsistency of receiving mercy from God while refusing to extend mercy to others. The theological message is that forgiveness is not optional for Christian discipleship but an expression of God's mercy received by believers. Brueggemann (2001), Wright (2004), France (2007), and Davies and Allison (2004) observe that Jesus' teaching challenges revenge and cultivates a community in which mercy becomes a basis for restored relationships. Forgiveness does not necessarily eliminate the consequences of wrongdoing, but it can prevent resentment from determining the future. In this sense, forgiveness becomes a moral and spiritual resource for transforming relationships affected by conflict.

Forgiving others also involves overcoming resentment, which is essential for genuine reconciliation. Resentment can preserve the emotional consequences of past conflict and prevent individuals from developing relationships with those perceived as enemies. Biblical forgiveness challenges this cycle by inviting people to respond to wrongdoing without allowing hatred and revenge to dominate their lives. However, forgiveness should not be confused with denying suffering or pretending that injustice did not occur. Worthington (2006), Enright (2012), Volf (1996), and Lederach (1997) emphasize that authentic forgiveness can coexist with acknowledgement of harm, remembrance, accountability, and the pursuit of justice. Thus, forgiveness can be understood as a movement from destructive resentment toward a future in which renewed relationships become possible. For Rwanda, this distinction is important because reconciliation requires both recognition of painful experiences and the willingness to overcome hatred and revenge.

The responses of the 70 students from the Faculty of Theology at the Catholic University of Rwanda provide an empirical perspective on the role of forgiveness in reconciliation. The findings indicate strong support for

forgiveness as an essential component of peacebuilding. Approximately 85.7% (60 respondents) considered forgiveness essential for sustainable reconciliation, while 78.6% (55 respondents) believed that biblical teachings can significantly contribute to peacebuilding. Furthermore, 71.4% (50 respondents) emphasized that forgiveness should be accompanied by justice and accountability. These findings suggest that the respondents do not understand forgiveness as an isolated spiritual act but as part of a broader process involving justice, responsibility, and social healing. This interpretation corresponds with the arguments of Lederach (1997), Volf (1996), Worthington (2006), and Enright (2012), who maintain that forgiveness can contribute to interpersonal and social transformation when it is connected with truth, responsibility, and restoration.



The relationship between forgiveness, justice, and healing is therefore fundamental to biblical reconciliation. Christian forgiveness does not require abandoning justice or ignoring the consequences of wrongdoing. Rather, it seeks to transform the manner in which justice is pursued, replacing revenge with accountability, restoration, and the possibility of renewed relationships. Jesus' teaching demonstrates that forgiveness emerges from God's mercy and should become a characteristic of Christian communities. Miroslav Volf (1996), John Paul Lederach (1997), Everett Worthington (2006), and Robert Enright (2012) all emphasize, in different ways, that forgiveness can contribute to healing when individuals confront the reality of harm while refusing to remain imprisoned by resentment. In Rwanda, therefore, biblical forgiveness can support peacebuilding by encouraging victims and communities to pursue healing, responsible accountability, mutual understanding, and reconciliation.

3. Justice, Truth, and Reconciliation in the Bible

The biblical understanding of reconciliation cannot be separated from justice and truth, because genuine peace

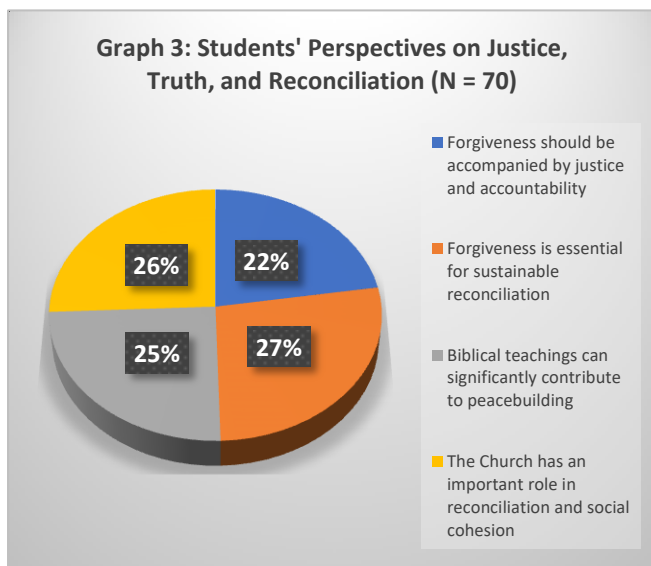
requires the restoration of relationships while confronting wrongdoing and its consequences. In Scripture, justice (*mishpat*) and peace (*shalom*) are closely interconnected: peace is not simply the absence of violence but a condition in which relationships are restored and people experience dignity, fairness, and well-being. The prophets repeatedly connect justice with peace, calling God's people to defend the vulnerable, reject oppression, and practice righteousness. Psalm 85:10 beautifully associates these realities by presenting righteousness and peace as meeting together. Similarly, Isaiah 32:17 teaches that the fruit of righteousness is peace. Brueggemann (2001), Wolterstorff (2008), Volf (1996), and Lederach (1997) argue that sustainable reconciliation requires confronting injustice rather than simply encouraging people to forget past conflicts. In the Rwandan context, this biblical relationship between justice and peace suggests that reconciliation must address the causes and consequences of broken relationships while promoting social responsibility and renewed trust.

Truth is equally fundamental to biblical reconciliation. The Bible does not present reconciliation as an attempt to conceal wrongdoing or suppress painful memories. Instead, reconciliation requires the recognition of wrongdoing, confession, repentance, and accountability. Numbers 5:5–7 presents confession and restitution as elements of restoring relationships after wrongdoing, while Luke 19:1–10, through Zacchaeus' encounter with Jesus, illustrates how repentance can produce concrete acts of restitution. Zacchaeus does not merely express regret; he commits himself to restoring what he has taken from others. Brueggemann (2002), West (1995), Volf (1996), and Worthington (2006) emphasize that authentic reconciliation involves truth-telling, moral responsibility, and transformation. Confession acknowledges the reality of harm, repentance demonstrates a change of heart and conduct, restitution seeks to repair damage, and accountability ensures that reconciliation does not become an excuse for avoiding responsibility. These dimensions are particularly relevant to societies emerging from mass violence and collective trauma.

The biblical story of Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 45:1–15) provides an important example of reconciliation following betrayal, suffering, and family division. Joseph had been sold into slavery by his brothers, yet years later, when they came to Egypt seeking food, he chose reconciliation rather than revenge. His statement, "God sent me before you to preserve life" (Gen. 45:5), demonstrates his interpretation of suffering within God's providential purpose. Nevertheless, Joseph's reconciliation should not be interpreted as denial of the wrong committed against him. The narrative first reveals the brothers' recognition of their wrongdoing and their changed relationship before the full restoration of family fellowship. Alter (1996), Brueggemann

(2001), Wenham (1994), and Hamilton (1995) understand the Joseph narrative as demonstrating how recognition of wrongdoing, transformation, forgiveness, and restoration can overcome longstanding hostility. The story therefore provides a biblical model in which reconciliation transforms relationships without erasing the reality of past injustice.

The empirical findings from the 70 students of the Faculty of Theology at the Catholic University of Rwanda reinforce the importance of combining justice and reconciliation. The results indicate that 71.4% (50 respondents) believe forgiveness should be accompanied by justice and accountability, while 85.7% (60 respondents) regard forgiveness as essential for sustainable reconciliation. Furthermore, 78.6% (55 respondents) believe that biblical teachings can significantly contribute to peacebuilding, and 81.4% (57 respondents) identify the Church as an important actor in promoting reconciliation and social cohesion. These findings suggest that respondents understand reconciliation as a multidimensional process rather than merely an act of forgiveness. This perspective corresponds with the arguments of Lederach (1997), Volf (1996), Worthington (2006), and Zehr (2015), who emphasize that sustainable reconciliation requires truth, responsibility, restoration, and transformed relationships.



The biblical relationship between justice, truth, and reconciliation therefore provides an important framework for peacebuilding in Rwanda. Biblical reconciliation does not demand that victims ignore injustice or that offenders escape accountability. Rather, it encourages a process in which truth is acknowledged, wrongdoing is confronted, repentance is demonstrated, justice is pursued, and relationships are progressively restored. The example of Joseph demonstrates that forgiveness can transform relationships when it is accompanied by recognition of wrongdoing and a commitment to renewed fellowship. Lederach (1997), Volf (1996), Brueggemann (2001), and

Wright (2013) consequently emphasize that reconciliation should be understood as a transformative process capable of addressing both personal and structural dimensions of conflict. Applied responsibly in Rwanda, these biblical principles can contribute to healing, social cohesion, and sustainable peace.

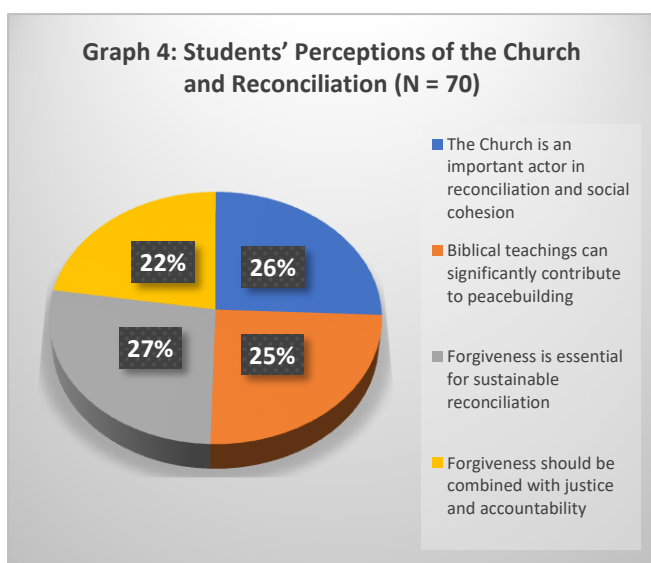
4. The Role of the Church and Christian Communities in Reconciliation

The Church occupies a significant position in the biblical understanding of reconciliation because it is called to participate in God's mission of restoring broken relationships. 2 Corinthians 5:18–20 provides a central theological foundation for this vocation: God reconciles humanity to Himself through Christ and entrusts believers with the “ministry of reconciliation.” The Church is therefore not merely a community that benefits from reconciliation but also an agent and ambassador of reconciliation. Its mission includes proclaiming forgiveness, encouraging repentance, promoting justice, and creating spaces where divided people can encounter one another. In this perspective, reconciliation is both an ecclesial responsibility and a Christian vocation. Lederach (1997), Volf (1996), Wright (2013), and Brueggemann (2001) emphasize that Christian communities can contribute to peace when their theological convictions are translated into practices that restore relationships and challenge structures that perpetuate division. In Rwanda, the Church can therefore contribute to peacebuilding by combining its spiritual mission with practical initiatives that promote healing, social cohesion, forgiveness, and responsible citizenship.

Christian leadership is particularly important in healing divided communities. Church leaders, including priests, pastors, catechists, theologians, and lay leaders, can serve as mediators, educators, and facilitators of reconciliation. Their responsibility extends beyond preaching about peace to creating conditions in which people can acknowledge painful experiences, listen to one another, seek forgiveness, and rebuild relationships. Effective Christian leadership should avoid partisan approaches and instead promote truth, justice, dignity, and respect for every person. Lederach (1997), Galtung (1996), Volf (1996), and Wright (2006) maintain that sustainable peace requires leaders capable of transforming relationships and addressing the underlying causes of conflict. Christian leaders can therefore organize reconciliation seminars, facilitate dialogue between community members, encourage responsible remembrance, and accompany families and individuals affected by conflict. Such leadership becomes particularly effective when it is characterized by humility, impartiality, compassion, and commitment to truth and justice.

Pastoral care provides another important instrument through which Christian communities can contribute to reconciliation. Through prayer, preaching, counselling, catechesis, small Christian communities, and pastoral visitation, the Church can accompany people experiencing grief, resentment, fear, guilt, or difficulties in forgiving others. Prayer can create a spiritual space in which individuals entrust their pain to God and seek the strength necessary for forgiveness. At the same time, pastoral care should not encourage victims simply to forget their suffering; rather, it should help them process painful memories while moving toward healing and renewed relationships. Pargament (1997), Worthington (2006), Enright (2012), and Volf (1996) argue that religious resources can contribute to forgiveness and psychological and relational transformation when they are accompanied by responsible guidance. In Rwanda, pastoral ministry can therefore become a bridge between spiritual healing and community reconciliation.

The responses of the 70 students from the Faculty of Theology at the Catholic University of Rwanda demonstrate strong support for the contribution of Christian communities to reconciliation. According to the findings, 81.4% (57 respondents) identified the Church as an important actor in promoting reconciliation and social cohesion. Furthermore, 78.6% (55 respondents) believed that biblical teachings can significantly contribute to peacebuilding, while 85.7% (60 respondents) considered forgiveness essential for sustainable reconciliation. These findings suggest that theology students recognize the Church not only as a religious institution but also as a significant social actor capable of supporting peacebuilding. This perception corresponds with the work of Lederach (1997), Volf (1996), Wright (2013), and Gopin (2002), who emphasize the capacity of religious communities to mobilize moral resources, facilitate dialogue, and strengthen relationships in divided societies.



Community-based reconciliation initiatives can further strengthen the Church's contribution to peacebuilding. Small Christian communities, parish groups, youth movements, Bible-sharing groups, family associations, and ecumenical initiatives can provide spaces where people from different backgrounds encounter one another and develop relationships of trust. Through dialogue and prayer, Christian communities can encourage people to move beyond stereotypes, resentment, and isolation toward mutual understanding. Such initiatives are particularly valuable because reconciliation is most sustainable when it becomes part of everyday community life rather than remaining limited to formal events. Lederach (1997), Galtung (1996), Gopin (2002), and Zehr (2015) stress the importance of local participation, relationship-building, restorative practices, and sustained dialogue in peacebuilding.

The Church's contribution to reconciliation in Rwanda can therefore be understood through four interconnected dimensions: spiritual formation, pastoral accompaniment, Christian leadership, and community engagement. Through the ministry of reconciliation described in 2 Corinthians 5:18–20, Christian communities are called to transform forgiveness into concrete practices of peace, justice, dialogue, and restoration. The empirical findings among the 70 theology students reinforce the perceived importance of this mission. Lederach (1997), Volf (1996), Wright (2013), and Zehr (2015) demonstrate that reconciliation becomes sustainable when communities actively participate in transforming relationships. Consequently, the Church can make a meaningful contribution to peacebuilding in Rwanda by accompanying wounded persons, promoting truth and accountability, facilitating dialogue, strengthening prayer and Christian formation, and creating community structures in which reconciliation becomes a continuing way of life.

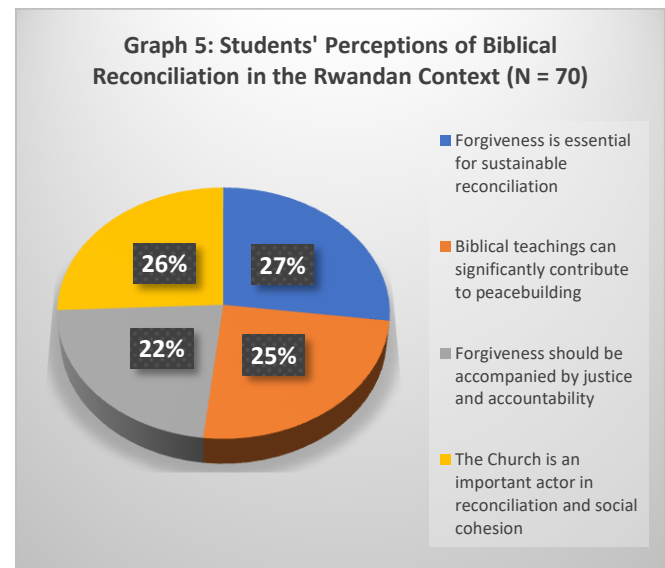
5. Biblical Reconciliation and the Rwandan Context

Rwanda's contemporary pursuit of reconciliation is deeply connected to its historical experiences of conflict, social division, and the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. The genocide resulted in the loss of more than 800,000 lives and left profound wounds among survivors, perpetrators, families, and communities. It also created challenges related to trauma, displacement, broken relationships, mistrust, and competing memories of the past. Reconciliation in this context cannot therefore be understood simply as restoring social harmony; it requires a long-term process of addressing painful memories, acknowledging wrongdoing, rebuilding relationships, and restoring human dignity. Prunier (1995), Des Forges (1999), Mamdani (2001), and Straus (2006) demonstrate that Rwanda's history of political violence and social division created complex conditions for post-genocide reconstruction. From a biblical perspective, reconciliation offers a framework that recognizes the

seriousness of wrongdoing while affirming the possibility of forgiveness, restoration, and renewed community. Biblical reconciliation therefore provides not a mechanism for erasing history but a theological and ethical framework through which individuals and communities can confront the past and construct a more peaceful future.

The biblical principles of truth, repentance, forgiveness, justice, and restoration have particular relevance to post-genocide healing in Rwanda. The biblical message does not suggest that reconciliation should be achieved by ignoring suffering or suppressing memories. Rather, genuine reconciliation requires recognition of wrongdoing and a willingness to seek restoration. Jesus' teaching on forgiveness (Matt. 6:12–15; 18:21–35) challenges individuals to overcome cycles of hatred and revenge, while 2 Corinthians 5:18–20 presents reconciliation as a Christian vocation. Similarly, the story of Joseph and his brothers (Gen. 45:1–15) illustrates how a relationship damaged by betrayal can eventually move toward forgiveness and restoration. Volf (1996), Lederach (1997), Worthington (2006), and Zehr (2015) emphasize that reconciliation becomes sustainable when forgiveness is connected with truth, responsibility, healing, and transformed relationships. In Rwanda, these principles can support pastoral programmes, community dialogue, Christian education, prayer, and initiatives that encourage individuals to move from resentment toward responsible forgiveness and renewed social relationships.

The findings of this study among 70 students from the Faculty of Theology at the Catholic University of Rwanda demonstrate the perceived relevance of biblical reconciliation to the Rwandan context. 85.7% (60 respondents) considered forgiveness essential for sustainable reconciliation, while 78.6% (55 respondents) believed that biblical teachings can significantly contribute to peacebuilding. Furthermore, 71.4% (50 respondents) emphasized that forgiveness should be accompanied by justice and accountability, and 81.4% (57 respondents) identified the Church as an important actor in promoting reconciliation and social cohesion. These results indicate that the respondents recognize reconciliation as a multidimensional process in which spiritual transformation must be accompanied by social and ethical responsibility. Their perceptions correspond with the arguments of Lederach (1997), Volf (1996), Gopin (2002), and Staub (2006), who emphasize the importance of forgiveness, justice, community participation, and relational transformation in societies recovering from mass violence.



Nevertheless, the application of biblical reconciliation in Rwanda faces significant challenges concerning forgiveness, memory, justice, and rebuilding trust. Forgiveness cannot be imposed on survivors, nor should it be understood as requiring victims to forget what happened to them. For many survivors, painful memories remain part of their identity and experience, making reconciliation a gradual process. At the same time, perpetrators who seek reconciliation must demonstrate genuine repentance and accept appropriate forms of accountability. Minow (1998), Staub (2006), Volf (1996), and Lederach (1997) argue that sustainable reconciliation requires balancing forgiveness with truth, justice, remembrance, and restoration. In this regard, biblical forgiveness should not eliminate accountability; instead, it should transform the purpose of accountability from revenge toward healing, responsibility, and restoration. The challenge is therefore to create spaces where victims can speak about their experiences, offenders can acknowledge wrongdoing, and communities can gradually rebuild trust.

Memory constitutes another important dimension of reconciliation. Remembering past violence can help prevent its repetition, but memory can also reinforce resentment and division if it is manipulated or used to perpetuate hostility. Biblical reconciliation calls communities to remember suffering truthfully while refusing to allow the past to determine the possibility of a peaceful future. Brueggemann (2001), Ricoeur (2004), Volf (1996), and Lederach (1997) emphasize the importance of constructive memory in processes of healing and reconciliation. For Rwanda, this means developing forms of remembrance that honor victims, recognize suffering, promote truth, and educate younger generations about the consequences of violence. Christian communities can contribute through preaching, prayer, pastoral counselling, commemorative activities, Bible study, and dialogue. Such practices can help transform

memory from a source of permanent division into a resource for moral responsibility and peace.

Finally, rebuilding trust is essential for sustainable reconciliation. Trust cannot be restored immediately after profound violence; it develops through repeated experiences of honesty, responsible behavior, dialogue, and mutual recognition. The biblical vision of reconciliation provides an important foundation because it calls believers to become ambassadors of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18–20) and to pursue peace with others (Rom. 12:18). Lederach (1997), Volf (1996), Gopin (2002), and Zehr (2015) stress that reconciliation becomes sustainable when communities participate actively in transforming relationships. In Rwanda, biblical reconciliation can therefore contribute to peacebuilding when forgiveness is accompanied by truth, justice, repentance, accountability, healing, and sustained community engagement. The findings of the 70 theology students reinforce the relevance of this approach and suggest that Christian communities have an important role in supporting Rwanda's continuing journey toward social cohesion and sustainable peace.

6. The Contribution of Biblical Reconciliation to Sustainable Peacebuilding in Rwanda

Biblical reconciliation can make an important contribution to sustainable peacebuilding in Rwanda by promoting social cohesion, peaceful coexistence, forgiveness, justice, and restoration of relationships. The biblical vision of reconciliation extends beyond the settlement of interpersonal disagreements; it seeks to transform relationships and communities affected by division and violence. In 2 Corinthians 5:18–20, reconciliation is presented as both a divine gift and a Christian mission, while Romans 12:18 calls believers to pursue peace with everyone as far as possible. Such teachings encourage Christians to reject hatred, revenge, discrimination, and exclusion and to develop relationships characterized by dignity and mutual respect. Lederach (1997), Volf (1996), Galtung (1996), and Wright (2013) argue that sustainable peace requires transformation of relationships and social structures rather than merely the absence of direct violence. In the Rwandan context, biblical reconciliation can therefore strengthen social cohesion by encouraging communities to recognize their shared humanity, promote forgiveness, and work together for the common good.

A major contribution of reconciliation is the rebuilding of relationships and strengthening of community trust. Trust is particularly important in societies that have experienced mass violence because conflict can leave individuals suspicious of neighbors, relatives, and members of other social groups. Biblical reconciliation encourages people to move beyond resentment and seek restored relationships through truth, repentance, forgiveness, accountability, and

dialogue. The story of Joseph and his brothers (Gen. 45:1–15) illustrates how relationships damaged by betrayal can be restored through recognition of wrongdoing, forgiveness, and renewed fellowship. Lederach (1997), Volf (1996), Worthington (2006), and Zehr (2015) emphasize that reconciliation is a relational process requiring sustained interaction and transformation. Consequently, Christian communities can contribute to rebuilding trust through small Christian communities, family programmes, reconciliation groups, pastoral counselling, and community dialogue. Such initiatives allow people to encounter one another, share experiences, address misunderstandings, and gradually rebuild confidence.

The findings from the 70 students of the Faculty of Theology at the Catholic University of Rwanda demonstrate strong support for the contribution of biblical reconciliation to peacebuilding. The findings show that 85.7% (60 respondents) consider forgiveness essential for sustainable reconciliation, while 78.6% (55 respondents) believe that biblical teachings can significantly contribute to peacebuilding. Moreover, 81.4% (57 respondents) identify the Church as an important actor in promoting reconciliation and social cohesion, and 71.4% (50 respondents) emphasize the importance of combining forgiveness with justice and accountability. These findings indicate that respondents view reconciliation as a comprehensive process that includes spiritual, social, and ethical dimensions. Their perspectives correspond with the work of Lederach (1997), Volf (1996), Gopin (2002), and Worthington (2006), who highlight the capacity of religious and community-based initiatives to support forgiveness, dialogue, social cohesion, and sustainable peace.

Christian education, youth formation, and intergenerational dialogue are also essential for transforming reconciliation into a sustainable culture of peace. Christian education can teach biblical principles of forgiveness, human dignity, justice, compassion, nonviolence, and respect for others. Young people are particularly important because they will inherit responsibility for Rwanda's future. Through catechesis, Bible study, youth movements, schools, universities, parish activities, and service programmes, young Christians can develop attitudes that reject prejudice and promote peaceful coexistence. Intergenerational dialogue can further create opportunities for older generations to share experiences while enabling young people to understand the consequences of violence and the importance of preventing its recurrence. Lederach (1997), Galtung (1996), Gopin (2002), and Staub (2006) emphasize the importance of education, intergenerational engagement, and transformation of attitudes for preventing renewed cycles of violence. Christian formation can therefore help transform reconciliation from a response to past conflict into a permanent culture of peace.

Biblical reconciliation ultimately seeks to move society from reconciliation to long-term peace and social transformation. Peacebuilding is sustainable when reconciliation becomes embedded in everyday relationships, institutions, education, family life, and community structures. Biblical teachings encourage Christians to become “ambassadors for Christ” (2 Cor. 5:20), meaning that reconciliation should be translated into concrete actions that promote justice, solidarity, service, and peaceful coexistence. Wright (2013), Volf (1996), Lederach (1997), and Zehr (2015) argue that genuine reconciliation involves transforming relationships and creating social conditions in which peace can flourish. For Rwanda, this transformation requires continued attention to truth, justice, accountability, forgiveness, memory, and social inclusion. Christian communities can contribute by maintaining dialogue platforms, accompanying survivors and perpetrators, supporting vulnerable families, promoting youth formation, and encouraging citizens to work together for the common good.

In conclusion, biblical reconciliation provides significant theological and practical resources for sustainable peacebuilding in Rwanda. Its contribution can be seen in promoting social cohesion, rebuilding trust, strengthening peaceful relationships, educating younger generations, and encouraging long-term social transformation. The empirical findings among the 70 theology students reinforce the perceived relevance of these principles. However, sustainable peace requires more than verbal forgiveness; it demands truth, justice, accountability, repentance, dialogue, and concrete restoration. As Lederach (1997), Volf (1996), Gopin (2002), and Wright (2013) demonstrate, reconciliation becomes transformative when it moves from individual attitudes to community practices and social structures. Biblical reconciliation can therefore serve as a continuing foundation for Rwanda's pursuit of a peaceful, cohesive, and socially transformed society.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has demonstrated that biblical reconciliation provides an important theological and ethical foundation for peacebuilding in Rwanda. Biblical teachings on forgiveness, truth, repentance, justice, restoration, and peaceful coexistence offer principles capable of addressing broken relationships and strengthening social cohesion. The study has shown that reconciliation is not simply the absence of conflict or the forgetting of painful experiences; rather, it is a transformative process involving acknowledgement of wrongdoing, forgiveness, accountability, healing, and the rebuilding of trust. The responses of the 70 students from the Faculty of Theology at the Catholic University of Rwanda reinforce this perspective: 85.7% considered forgiveness essential for sustainable reconciliation, 78.6%

recognized the contribution of biblical teachings to peacebuilding, 71.4% emphasized the importance of combining forgiveness with justice and accountability, and 81.4% identified the Church as an important actor in reconciliation and social cohesion. The study therefore concludes that biblical reconciliation can contribute meaningfully to Rwanda's long-term peacebuilding when translated into concrete pastoral, educational, and community practices.

The study recommends that Christian churches in Rwanda strengthen programmes of reconciliation through preaching, pastoral counselling, prayer, dialogue, and community-based initiatives. The Church should integrate forgiveness with truth, justice, repentance, and accountability, avoiding approaches that encourage victims simply to forget painful experiences. Christian theological institutions should strengthen education on biblical reconciliation, peacebuilding, restorative justice, and conflict transformation. Particular attention should be given to youth formation and intergenerational dialogue so that younger generations can learn from the past and develop a culture of peace. Churches should also collaborate with families, educational institutions, civil society, and community leaders to create spaces for dialogue and trust-building. Finally, further empirical research should examine the experiences of survivors, perpetrators, young people, and different Christian communities to develop more contextually appropriate models of biblical reconciliation and sustainable peacebuilding in Rwanda.

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