A Vision of Embrace

Theological Perspectives on Cultural Identity and Conflict

Miroslav Volf

A perfect hell on earth

"There are no devils left in hell," the missionary said. "They are all in Rwanda." Rwanda — people hunted down on the streets like animals and killed where they are caught; blood flowing down the aisles of churches made into the preferred places of massacre by a perverse inversion of symbolism; butchered bodies floating down the river — on their way to Ethiopia, via the short-cut of the Nayaborongo River, where the hated Tutsi "intruders" came from. "The fighting was hand to hand," writes a reporter, "intimate and unspeakable, a kind of bloodlust that left those who managed to escape it hollow-eyed and mute."[1] In only three months a million were dead and more than twice as many driven out of their homes. The protagonists of the genocide were for the most part Christians!

In a sense, it would be less disturbing had the Rwandan genocide just erupted out of the atavistic depths of its protagonists' souls. But it did not. It was carefully orchestrated; a well-planned attempt at a "final solution".[2] If one asks what caused it, one gets the same answer as in the case of so many other ethnic wars. Alex de Waal writes:

> The elements of the story can be sought in desperate land pressure in Rwanda, in rural poverty intensified by the collapse of international coffee prices and in the determination of a privileged coterie to retain their commanding positions in the government and the army in the face of political and economic "readjustment" of the state. These have been fuel for the fire. But what ignited the genocide is an extremist racial ideology, an ideology that would be laughable were it not so demonically powerful.[3]

Mix economic deprivation and lust for power, add to it racist ideology and let it simmer for a while, and you will get Rwanda of 1994 — a perfect hell on earth.

"There are no devils left in hell; they are all in Rwanda." The words seem to paint just the right image to express the unfathomable. Yet if we leave the immediacy of the Rwandan brutalities and consider the larger world, we sense that the image is skewed on two important counts. First, not *all* devils are in Rwanda. If the missionary's words

● Miroslav Volf is associate professor of systematic theology at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California, and professor of systematic theology at the Evangelical Theological Faculty of Osijek, Croatia.

were not a cry of desperation, one might even be able to detect in them a tinge of clandestine racism: a little country in black Africa has sucked up all the black devils. But what about Bosnia? What about Nagorno-Karabagh? What about the fifty or so other spots around the globe — Western countries included — where violence has erupted between people who share the same terrain but differ in ethnicity, race, language or religion? No devils there? Without intending to diminish the horror of Rwanda's genocide, we must say that the devils of vicious ethnic strife are by no means all *there*. They are dispersed around the globe, sowing death and desolation, even if less vehemently than the devils of Rwanda.

The second way in which the missionary's comment on Rwanda is skewed is even more disturbing than the first. The global presence of devils notwithstanding, hell has by no means become an empty place. In the dark kingdom of evil potencies, fresh troops are being trained for new assignments. The signs of the coming woes are evident in disturbing developments of global proportions. Rapid population growth, diminishing resources, unemployment, migration to shanty-towns and lack of education are steadily increasing pressure along the many social fault-lines of our globe. Though we cannot predict exactly when and where the social quakes will occur and what their magnitude will be, we can be sure that the earth will shake.[4]

As the image of "fault-lines" suggests, clashes will take place along the boundary lines of social groups. Today, after the breakdown of a bipolar world, social tectonic plates are defined less by ideology than by culture. Samuel Huntington argues that on a global scale the fault-lines between major civilizations — the broadest level of cultural identity people have — "will be the battle lines of the future".[5] Similarly, within civilizations, the coming wars will be fought between discrete cultural and ethnic groups. The conditions seem ripe for more Rwandas and Bosnias in the future. The kingdom of darkness has not exhausted its resources. There are plenty more devils in hell ready to make more hells on earth.

The Christian church should know something about handling the kingdom of darkness. After all, its master came into this world "to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8) — ethnic strife no less than any other work of the devil. The church, moreover, owes its very being to the fact that Christ has brought near those who were "far off" by making "both groups into one" and "has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility" between them (Eph. 2:13f.). Often, however, we seem helpless in the face of sinister powers that stir ethnic hatreds and animate destructive urges. Sometimes we find ourselves accomplices of the evil that we have either been too blind to perceive or too impotent to resist. Occasionally we are even among the worst perpetrators.

Rwandas and Bosnias of today and tomorrow challenge the churches first of all to reflect on their own *identity* as a people of God among the struggling peoples of the world. How should we relate to the cultural communities we inhabit? How should we relate to the multiple cultural communities of our neighbours or our enemies? Second, the resurgence of ethnic strife challenges churches to rethink their *mission* as agents of peace. What vision of the relations between culture do we have to offer to communities at war? What paths to suggest?

The two challenges are reflected in the basic outline of my paper. First I will reflect on the relation between church and culture. Second I will propose a theological perspective on the relations between cultures.

Distance and belonging

In the introduction to *Culture and Imperialism* Edward W. Said writes that in the process of working on the book he has discovered a profoundly disturbing truth, namely "how very few of the British or French artists whom I admire took issue with the notion of 'subject' or 'inferior' races so prevalent among officials who practised those ideas as a matter of course in ruling India or Algeria..." Estimable and admirable works of art and learning were manifestly and unconcealedly implicated in the imperial process.[6] Writers, who should have been a conscience of the culture, were but a sophisticated echo of its base prejudices.

Christians should be slow to point the accusing finger, however.[7] We have had our share of complicity in the imperial process. Even more disquieting than this complicity itself is the pattern of behaviour in which it is embedded. Our cosiness with the surrounding culture has made us so blind to many of its evils that, instead of calling them into question, we offer our own versions of them — in God's name and with a good Christian conscience. Consider the following stinging indictment of H. Richard Niebuhr on the issue of race:

> The colour line has been drawn so incisively by the church itself that its proclamation of the gospel of the brotherhood of Jew and Greek, of bond and free, of white and black has sometimes the sad sound of irony, and sometimes falls upon the ear as unconscious hypocrisy — but sometimes there is in it the bitter cry of repentance.[8]

Or think of the great schism in the church finalized in 1054 and today gaping as wide as ever. It simply reinforced religiously the boundary line between Greek and Latin culture, between East and West. Churches, which should have been "the salt" of the culture, have too often been as insipid as everything around them.

"If salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it?", asked Jesus rhetorically (Mark 9:50). A feeling of doom hangs over the question. Since you cannot season it, tasteless salt "is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot" (Matt. 5:13). Yet the very warning about being thrown out calls for "the bitter cry of repentance", invites a turnabout. What we should turn away from seems clear. It is the captivity to our own culture, coupled so often with blind self-righteousness. But what should we turn *to*? How should we live as a church today faced with new tribalism that is fracturing our societies, separating peoples and ethnic groups and promoting bloody conflict? The answer lies, I propose, in cultivating the proper relation between distance from the culture and belonging to the culture. The biblical metaphor "strangers", if properly understood, might help us to achieve that balance.

By the second century "strangers" became a central metaphor for the relation between churches and culture. Despite occurring relatively rarely in the Bible, this term sums up well the central themes from the Old Testament and fundamental perspectives from the New Testament about how the people of God should live in the world. Abram was called to go from his country, his kindred and his father's house (Gen. 12:1); his grandchildren and the children of his grandchildren became "aliens in the land of Egypt" (Lev. 19:34); the nation which descended from him and Sarah lived as exiles in Babylon. And even when they were secure in their own land, Yahweh their God demanded that they be different from surrounding nations.

But the root of Christian self-understanding as sojourners lies not so much in the stories of Abraham and Sarah and Israel as in the destiny of Jesus Christ, his mission

197

and his rejection which ultimately brought him to the cross. "He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him" (John 1:11). He was a stranger to the world because the world into which he came was estranged from God. And so it is with his followers. Christians are "born of the Spirit" (John 3:8) and so do not belong to the "world", but like Jesus Christ to God (cf. John 15:19). It is therefore not a matter of indifference for Christians whether or not to be "strangers" in their own culture: to the extent that one's own culture has been estranged from God, distance from it is essential to Christian identity.

What is the result of this Christian distance, however? Some "third race", as the early Christian apologist Aristides suggested when he divided humanity into Gentiles, Jews, and now Christians? But then, as Justo L. González points out, we would be faced with "the paradoxical notion that, in the midst of a world divided by racism, God has created still another race".[9] No, Christians are not some cosmopolitan third race, equally distant from their own culture and every other. The proper distance from a culture *does not take Christians out of that culture.* How else could the seer in Revelation see "before the throne and before the Lamb" a great multitude "from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages" (Rev. 7:9; 5:9)? Christians are not insiders who take flight to a new "Christian culture" and become outsiders to their own culture; rather, when they have responded to the call of the gospel they have stepped, as it were, with one foot outside their own culture while the other remains firmly planted in it. Though they are not from the "world", in an important sense they are "from the culture" which has shaped them. They belong as those who are distant. Their difference is *internal* to the culture.[10]

Both distance and belonging are essential. Belonging without distance destroys: I affirm my exclusive identity as Croatian and want either to shape everyone in my own image or eliminate them from my world. Distance without belonging isolates: I deny my identity as Croatian and draw back from my own culture. But more often than not, I become trapped in the snares of counter-dependence. I deny my Croatian identity only to affirm even more forcefully my identity as a member of this or that anti-Croatian sect. And so an isolationist "distance without belonging" slips into a destructive "belonging without distance". Distance from a culture must never degenerate into a flight from that culture. Rather, to be a sojourner must be a way of living *in* a culture and *for* a culture. In biblical terminology, the reign of God is not *of* this world, but it is *in* this world and *for* this world (cf. John 18:36).

But are there also positive reasons for Christians to take a distance from their own culture? To put it another way, in the name of what should Christians distance themselves from their own culture? The answer, I submit, is: In the name of *the new creation of God.* There is a reality that is more important than the culture to which we belong. It is the new world that God is creating, a world in which people from every nation and tribe, with their cultural goods, will gather around the throne of the Triune God, a world in which every tear will be wiped away and "pain will be no more" (Rev. 21:4). Christians take a distance from their own culture because they give the ultimate allegiance to God and God's future.

The distance born of allegiance to God and God's future does two important services. First, it *creates space in us to receive the "other".* Consider what happens when a person becomes a Christian. Paul writes: "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17). The Spirit breaks through the self-enclosed worlds we

inhabit and calls us to come to God; the Spirit re-creates us and sets us on the road towards becoming what 1 would call a "catholic personality", a personal microcosm of the eschatological new creation. A catholic personality is a personality enriched by otherness, a personality which is what it is only because multiple others have been reflected in it in a particular way. The distance from my own culture that results from being born by the Spirit creates a fissure in me through which others can come in. The Spirit unlatches the doors of my heart saying: "You are not only you; others belong to you too."

A catholic personality requires a *catholic community*. As the gospel has been preached to many nations, the church has taken root in many cultures, changing them as well as being profoundly shaped by them. Yet the many churches in diverse cultures are one, just as the triune God is one. No church in a given culture may isolate itself from other churches in other cultures declaring itself sufficient to itself and to its own culture. Every church must be open to all other churches. We often think of a local church as a part of the universal church. We would do well to invert the claim. Every local church is a catholic community because, in a profound sense, all other churches are a part of that church. All of them shape its identity. As all churches together form a worldwide ecumenical community, so each church in a given culture is a catholic community. Each church must say, "I am not only I; all other churches, rooted in diverse cultures, belong to me too." Each needs all in order properly to be itself.

The second function of the distance forged by the Spirit of new creation is no less important: it *entails a judgment both against a monochrome character of one's own culture and against evil in every culture*. A catholic personality, 1 said, is a personality enriched by the multiple others. But should a catholic personality integrate all otherness? Can one feel at home with everything in every culture? With murder, rape and destruction? With nationalistic idolatry and "ethnic cleansing"? A catholic personality capable of integrating but not of discriminating would be grotesque. For there are incommensurable perspectives that stubbornly refuse to be dissolved in a peaceful synthesis. [11] The practice of exclusion cannot be given up. There can be no new creation without judgment, without the expulsion of the devil and the beast and the false prophet (Rev. 20:10), without the swallowing up of the night by the light and of death by life (Rev. 21:4; 22:5). [12] An authentic distance from culture frees us to participate in the struggle between truth and falsehood, between justice and arbitrariness, between life and death. [13] A truly catholic personality must be an *evangelical* personality — a personality transformed by the Spirit of the new creation and engaged in the transformation of the world.

In the battle against evil, especially against evil in one's own culture, evangelical personality needs *ecumenical community*, because it needs a place outside itself on which to stand. In the struggle against the Nazi regime, the Barmen Declaration called the churches to reject all "other lords" — the racist state and its ideology — and to give allegiance to Jesus Christ alone, "who is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and death". [14] That call is as important today as it was sixty years ago. Yet it is too abstract. It underestimates our ability to twist the "one Word of God" to serve our own communal ideologies and national strategies. In order to keep our allegiance to Jesus Christ pure, we need to nurture commitment to the multi-cultural community of Christian churches. We need to listen

to voices of Christians from other cultures so as to make sure that the voice of our culture has not drowned out the voice of Jesus Christ, "the one Word of God". Barmen's commitment to the lordship of Christ must be supplemented with the commitment to the multi-cultural church of Christ. The two are not the same, but they are inseparable.

Let me suggest an addition that could be made to the Barmen Declaration (following its format):

> "You were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9). "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).
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> All the churches of Jesus Christ, scattered in diverse cultures, have been redeemed for God by the blood of the Lamb to form one multi-cultural community of faith. The "blood" that binds them as brothers and sisters is more precious than the "blood", the language, the customs, the political allegiances or economic interests that may separate them.
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> We reject the false doctrine, as though a church should place allegiance to the culture it inhabits and the nation to which it belongs above the commitment to brothers and sisters from other cultures and nations, servants of the one Jesus Christ, their common Lord, and members of God's new community.

In situations of ethnic conflict churches often find themselves accomplices in war rather than agents of peace. We find it difficult to distance ourselves from our own culture and so we echo its reigning opinions and mimic its practices. As we keep the vision of God's future alive, we need to reach out across the firing lines and join hands with our brothers and sisters on the other side. We need to let them pull us out of the enclosure of our own culture and its own peculiar set of prejudices so that we can read afresh the "one Word of God". In this way we might become once again salt to a world ridden by strife.

But what does it mean to be salt to the cultures at war?

Exclusion and embrace

To see the issue of ethnic conflict in right perspective we need adequate categories. In recent decades, under the influence of liberation theologies, the categories of "oppression" and "liberation" have governed theological reflection on social issues. They were designed to handle experiences of economic exploitation and political domination, and they did that job reasonably well.

These categories — especially the category of "liberation" — are inadequate in dealing with culture conflicts. The trouble is that in a sense they fit conflict-situations too well: *both* Hutus and Tutsis, *both* Croats and Serbs see themselves as oppressed and engaged in a struggle for liberation. The categories of "oppression" and "liberation" provide each with moral weapons that make their battles so much deadlier. Moreover, in many situations of ethnic conflict we do not have a clear perpetrator and a clear victim; both parties have oppressed and both have suffered oppression, though often in varying degrees and at different junctures in their common history. Even when the perpetrator can clearly be named — as in the case of Nazi Germany or apartheid South Africa — we need much more than simply to liberate the oppressed by defeating the oppressor. Since the former oppressors and the oppressed must continue living

together as neighbours, we must work towards reconciliation. "Liberation" gives us only limited help in this arduous task.[15]

To help resolve conflicts between peoples we need a different set of categories. These must both *name the evil committed by one or both parties* and *facilitate reconciliation between them*. The categories of "exclusion" and "embrace", the central categories of what I have called "a theology of embrace",[16] do precisely that. A theology of embrace is not meant to replace theologies of liberation, but to insert them into a larger theological framework which will preserve their strengths and curtail their weaknesses.[17] It is from the perspective of a theology of embrace that I approach here the problem of ethnic strife.

When ethnic groups lock horns, they become obsessed with *purity*. Blood must be pure: German blood alone should run through the German veins, free from all non-Aryan contamination. Territory should be pure: Serbian soil must belong to Serbs, cleansed of all non-Serbian intruders. We want our world to ourselves, and so we create a monochrome world without "others"; we want to be identical with ourselves, so we exclude "others". As Nicholas Wolterstorff observes, when the ideology of ethnic purity kicks in, the "others" who happen to reside among us are left with "only two choices: either to emigrate, under varying degrees of duress, or to accept the status of second-class citizens, with varying degrees of deprivation of rights and repression".[18]

Before excluding others from one's social world, however, one must drive them out, as it were, from one's symbolic world. Commenting on the conquistadors' genocide against the Native Americans, Tzvetan Todorov writes:

> The desire for wealth and the impulse to master — certainly these two forms of aspiration to power motivate the Spaniards' conduct; but this conduct is also conditioned by their notion of the Indians as inferior beings, halfway between men and beasts. Without this essential premise, the destruction could not have taken place.[19]

With somewhat more nuance, this pattern of debasement is being repeated today in many parts of the world: the "others" are first dehumanized or demonized and then discriminated against, marginalized, driven out or destroyed. Even in Western capitalist societies, where explicit and public exclusion is forbidden by formal rules, implicit and private exclusion still takes place, often in the form of unconscious but no less effectual aversion.[20]

There are many reasons why "others" are excluded, driven out of our world. To start with the most innocent, we strive to get rid of that which blurs accepted boundaries, disturbs our social identity and disarranges our symbolic cultural maps.[21] Often, however, dehumanization and consequent destruction of "others" are a projection of our own individual or collective hatred of ourselves. "Others" become scapegoats, concocted from our own shadows as repositories of our sins so we can relish the illusion of our sinless superiority.[22]

Both accounts of exclusion are important because they help us understand why Jews could be killed just because they were Jews or blacks lynched just because they were blacks. Yet neither will suffice. We do not exclude others simply because we like the way things are or hate the way we are, but also because we desire what others have. Ronald Takaki points out, for instance, that the barbarization and demonization of the indigenous population in North America "occurred within the economic context of competition over land".[23]

In the Bible both symbolic and practical exclusions are called *sin*. Isaiah announces judgment against those who dispossess and drive out others so that they alone can be the masters of the land:

> Ah, you who join house to house,
>   who add field to field,
> until there is room for no one but you,
>   and you are left to live alone
>   in the midst of the land.
> The Lord of hosts has sworn in my hearing:
>   Surely many houses shall be desolate,
> large and beautiful houses, without inhabitants (5:8-9).

Those who have driven others out will themselves be driven out of the clean world they have created for themselves.

In the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus condemns a less active but no less pernicious form of exclusion. A band of robbers stripped a man, "beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead" (Luke 10:30). These brutal acts of assault and robbery are exclusion by *expropriation*. Jesus does not even bother to condemn them; their evil speaks for itself. He is interested in exposing a less obvious evil which happens after the robbers have done their work. The robbed and wounded man was lying on the wayside, and the busy dignitaries, when they saw him, "passed by on the other side" (vv.31,32). These heartless acts of seeing but refusing to be bothered, of treating others as a "surplus people" who are of no use and therefore of no consequence, are exclusion by *abandonment*.

The birth of the Gentile mission as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles is a case of the naming of symbolic exclusion as sin and overcoming it. The apostles were unwilling to have the gospel cross the boundaries of an ethnic group and become the good news for all tribes and nations. Before they could venture on a Gentile mission, their inherited notions of purity and uncleanness had to be dismantled. "What God has made clean," the voice said to Peter in a vision, "you must not call profane" (Acts 10:15). Falsely to call things profane and to purge them out, to exclude others through prejudice or violence is sin, and it must be unmasked and exposed, for all human beings are all equally worthy of respect because they are created in the image of God.

But we may not allow the critique of exclusion to deteriorate into a polemic against all boundaries that order social space, which is a tendency in circles influenced by post-modern thought. As Manfred Franke points out in critique of the post-modernist Michel Foucault,

> it is impossible (and unappealing even for pure fantasy) to fight against all order and advocate a pure, abstract non-order. For, much like the mythical *tohuwabohu*, a non-order would be a "creature" with no attributes, a place where one could distinguish nothing and where neither happiness nor pleasure, neither freedom nor justice, could be identified.[24]

Boundaries must remain, because without boundaries you have non-order, and non-order is not the end of oppression but the end of life. What must be abolished are the false boundaries which pervert an order that sustains and nourishes human life, shaping it into a system of exclusions that degrades and destroys it. The warped system of exclusions — what people "call profane" — must be dismantled in the name of an order of things which God, the creator and sustainer of life, "has made clean". In

contrast to the "system of exclusion", which rests on prejudice and oppression, I will call this divine order that sustains life in its rich diversity "an order of embrace".

But what is an "embrace"? Let me try to answer this question by looking first at the ambivalence of group identities. Around the globe today we are experiencing a resurgence of what has been called a "new tribalism" — a reaffirmation of group identities. On the one hand, this is a salutary process. There is a growing realization that the Enlightenment ideal of abstract humanity is truncated; we encounter people not simply as "humans", stripped of their culture, their colour of skin or gender, but as Hutu or Tutsi, as Buddhist or Hindu, as red or yellow, as men or women. Group identities offer us homes in which to belong, spaces where we can be among our own and therefore be ourselves. They provide us also with bases of power from which we can pursue our goals or engage in the struggle against oppression.

At the same time, the resurgence of group identities is deeply troubling, for the homes which group identities provide can be stifling, suppressing the difference and creativity of their non-conformist members. Bases of power can become fortresses into which we retreat, surrounding ourselves by impenetrable walls dividing "us" from "them". In situations of conflict, they serve as encampments from which to undertake raids into enemy territory. Group identities are profoundly ambivalent: they are havens of belonging as well as repositories of aggression, suffocating enclosures as well as bases of liberating power.

Notice the location at which the blessing of group identities slips into a curse. It is the desire for purity, for homogeneity, for a monochrome world without the other: non-conformist members must be repressed, outsiders must be kept at bay, even destroyed. What compounds the trouble is that pure communal identities are so many pure illusions, the dark dreams of people unwilling or unable to face the colourful social realities. As Edward Said points out, "all culture is hybrid... and encumbered, or entangled with what used to be regarded as extraneous elements".[25] There are always strangers within our gates, and we ourselves never belong completely to a given group but only in part. We live in overlapping social territories, belong to overlapping traditions. Our communities are like our houses in which we feel at home, and yet keep rearranging, taking old things out and bringing new things in, often objects acquired on visits to near and distant places, objects which symbolize that we can never be the same after we have ventured outside our home, that the things we encounter "outside" become a part of the "inside".

This brings me to the metaphor of "embrace". In an embrace I open my arms to create space in myself for the other. Open arms are a sign that I do not want to be by myself only, an invitation for the other to come in and feel at home with me. In an embrace I also close my arms around the other. Closed arms are a sign that I want the other to become a part of me while I at the same time maintain my own identity. By becoming part of me, the other enriches me. In a mutual embrace, none remains the same because each enriches the other, yet both remain true to their genuine selves.

Embrace, I believe, is what takes place between the three persons of the Trinity, which is a divine model of human community.[26] The Johannine Jesus says: "The Father is in me and I am in the Father" (John 10:38). The one divine person is not that person only, but includes the other divine persons in itself; it is what it is only through the indwelling of the other. The Son is the Son because the Father and the Spirit indwell him; without this interiority of the Father and the Spirit, there would be no

Son. Every divine person *is* the other persons, but he is the other persons in his own particular way.

Embrace, I propose, is what should happen between different ethnic or cultural groups. Instead of seeking to isolate ourselves from other groups by insisting on our pure identity, we should open ourselves to one another to be enriched by our differences. Of course, we will have to maintain group boundaries. If we did not, the bright colours of cultural multiformity would wash out into a drab gray of cultural sameness. We must cultivate our languages, sustain our traditions, nurture our cultures. All this requires boundary maintenance. At the same time, boundaries must be porous. Guests should be welcomed in, and we should pay visits to our near and distant neighbours so that through cross-fertilization our respective cultures can thrive, correcting and enriching each other.

Though crucial, cultural exchange is not yet embrace. As Peter Berger notes:

> It is one of the more facetious illusions of liberal ideology that people will like each other better by getting to know each other. The opposite is the case, as a glance at the homicide data will show: Most murders are committed by close friends and relatives.[27]

Berger goes on to say that "the adage that good fences make good neighbours has certain sociological validity". Yet even if knowledge of others and porous borders between people do not suffice, the solution to our communal feuds certainly does not lie in better fences and deeper ignorance. Rather, in addition to knowledge of the other we need the *will* to welcome the other into our world.

There is yet another sense in which embrace must go beyond mere cultural cross-fertilization. I have argued earlier that a major driving force behind the practice of exclusion is the desire for economic advantage. Embrace must therefore involve not only cultural exchange but above all economic solidarity. Boundaries between peoples must be porous so that those who are rich and in the centre of power can share their belongings with those who are poor and on the margins. Commenting on the need for international solidarity, Jürgen Moltmann asks, "Is this pure idealism?" He answers rightly, "No, I believe this is a naked realism necessary for the survival of human-ity."[28]

We all know that sometimes the others are not simply pleasant guests with whom we can share our cultural and material goods. Occasionally they strike us as strange, unknown, like some "dark angels that muddle the transparency" of our world.[29] At times the others are evil and powerful enemies, thirsty for our blood. Any notion of embrace which would presume symmetry of power and sympathy of the powerful for the powerless is not only naive but dangerous. For then the oppressive exclusion would thrive as we soothe our consciences by advocating a false embrace. A genuine embrace requires resistance against injustice and falsehood. And yet, even when we resist others because injustice and falsehood are intolerable, we may not resist them in a way that excludes them. At the heart of our struggle for justice to be done and truth to be made manifest must be *a desire for embrace*. For the followers of the crucified Messiah are called to love their enemies.

How do we embrace the strange and the evil? A seed of embrace needs to be planted in our hearts by the Spirit of Embrace. We must be gripped by a vision of a new world, of that City of Embrace whose "architect and builder is God" (Heb. 11:10), in which all peoples would retain their identity and yet be enriched in

communion with other peoples, in which all will speak their own languages and yet be understood and in which all will have their needs met because bridges will be built across their borders, venues of mutual giving and receiving.

NOTES

[1] Nancy Gibbs, "Why? The Killing Fields of Rwanda", *Time*, 16 May 1994, p.58.

[2] See Robert Block, "The Tragedy of Rwanda", *The New York Review of Books*, 20 October 1994, pp.3-8.

[3] Alex de Waal, "The Genocidal State: Hutu Extremism and the Origins of the 'Final Solution' in Rwanda", *Times Literary Supplement*, 1 July 1994, p.1.

[4] See Paul Kennedy, *Preparing for the Twenty-First Century*, New York, Vintage, 1994.

[5] Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?", *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 72, no. 3, 1993, p.22.

[6] Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, New York, Knopf, 1993, p.xiv.

[7] Some fascinating results of empirical research on the ambivalent role of the churches in ethnic conflicts are found in Ralph R. Premdas, "The Church and Ethnic Conflicts in the Third World", *The Ecumenist*, May/June 1994, pp.53-56.

[8] H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*, New York, Henry W. Holt, 1929, p.263.

[9] Justo L. González, *Out of Every Tribe and Nation: Christian Theology at the Ethnic Roundtable*, Nashville, Abingdon, 1992, p.110.

[10] Cf. M. Volf, "Soft Difference: Theological Reflections on the Relation Between Church and Culture in 1 Peter", forthcoming in *Ex Auditu*, 1995.

[11] See Richard J. Mouw, "Christian Philosophy and Cultural Diversity", *Christian Scholar's Review*, 17, 1987, pp.114ff.

[12] See M. Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work*, New York, Oxford UP, 1991, pp.120f.

[13] Cf. Jürgen Moltmann, *Der Weg Jesu Christi: Christologie in messianischen Dimensionen*, Munich, Kaiser, 1989, p.226; and "Dient die 'pluralistische Theologie' dem Dialog der Welt-religionen?", *Evangelische Theologie*, 49, 1989, pp.528-36.

[14] *The Book of Confessions*, Philadelphia, Office of the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the USA, 1967, 8-10ff.

[15] For Gustavo Gutiérrez "freedom"/"liberation" is not the fundamental theological category; rather, the "gratuitousness of God's love" or "the all-embracing love of God" is "the first and last word in biblical revelation"; *A Theology of Liberation*, Maryknoll, NY, Orbis, rev. ed., 1988, p.xxxix.

[16] M. Volf, "Exclusion and Embrace: Theological Reflections in the Wake of 'Ethnic Cleansing'", *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, vol. 29, no. 2, 1993, p.232.

[17] An adequate "theology of embrace" will have to address at its centre the issues of justice and oppression, truth and deception, peace and violence. See my forthcoming book *Exclusion and Embrace*, to be published by Abingdon.

[18] Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1983, p.114.

[19] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, New York, Harper, 1984, p.146.

[20] See Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Princeton, Princeton UP, 1990, pp.130ff.

[21] See Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, London, Routlege, 1966; Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay in Abjection*, New York, Columbia UP, 1982, p.4.

[22] See Vamik Volkan, *The Need to Have Enemies and Allies: From Clinical Practice to International Relationships*, Northvale, CA, Jacob Aronson, 1994.

[23] Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*, Boston, Little, Brown, 1993, p.39.

[24] Manfred Franke, *Was ist Neostrukturalismus?*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1984, p.237.

[25] Said, *op. cit.*, p.317.

[26] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, New York, Harper-Collins, 1991, pp.191ff.

[27] Peter L. Berger, *A Far Glory: The Quest for Faith in an Age of Credulity*, New York, Free Press, 1992, p.38.

[28] Jürgen Moltmann, "Theologie und die Zukunft der modernen Welt", typescript 1994, p.20.

[29] Julia Kristeva, *Fremde sind wir uns selbst*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1990, p.11.