CHASING THE FORGIVENESS IDEAL: CASE STUDIES IN RESTORATIVE JUSTICE, POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA, AND THE PASTORAL CARE OF VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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*et vitam venturi saeculi*
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The world in which pardon is all-powerful becomes inhuman.
—Emmanuel Lévinas
TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION........................................................................................................................................... iii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ................................................................................................................................. iv

I. INTRODUCTION: MAPPING THE FORGIVENESS TERRITORY ......................................................... 1
   Jesus’ Teachings on Forgiveness ............................................................................................................. 6
   Interpretations of Forgiveness .................................................................................................................. 15
   - Forgiveness as strengthening community ......................................................................................... 16
   - Forgiveness as controlling negative emotions .................................................................................... 21
   - Therapeutic forgiveness ....................................................................................................................... 25
   Forgiveness and repentance ..................................................................................................................... 30
   - Repentance and obligatory forgiveness ............................................................................................... 33
   - Forgiveness that inspires repentance ................................................................................................. 36
   Forgiveness and Restorative Justice ....................................................................................................... 38
   Forgiveness and post-apartheid South Africa ......................................................................................... 40
   Forgiveness and the pastoral care of victims of domestic violence ....................................................... 43
   Reimagining forgiveness ......................................................................................................................... 45

II. FROM REPENTANCE AND REPAIR TO EXISTENTIAL MUSCLE-FLEXING:
    FORGIVENESS IN THE “SEVENTY TIMES SEVEN” INSTRUCTIONS AND
    VICTIM-OFFENDER MEDIATION .........................................................................................................48
   Jesus’ forgiveness instructions in Matthew and Luke ............................................................................. 53
   - Unlimited forgiveness ......................................................................................................................... 53
   - Reproving and repentance .................................................................................................................. 56
   - Unconditional forgiveness .................................................................................................................. 59
   Restorative Justice and the forgiveness imperative ................................................................................. 61
   Biblical foundations of Restorative Justice ............................................................................................ 65
   - Defining forgiveness ........................................................................................................................... 70
   - Veneration of forgiveness ................................................................................................................... 73
   - Forgiveness and the VOM process ....................................................................................................... 79
   - Forgiveness and the rhetoric of VOM .................................................................................................. 85
   - Analyzing VOM rules and expectations ............................................................................................. 89
   - Victim intentions and VOM outcomes ............................................................................................... 94
   Conclusion ............................................................................................................................................. 97

III. FROM COMMUNITY COHESION TO A HEGEMONY OF HARMONY:
    FORGIVENESS IN THE LORD’S PRAYER AND POST-APARTHEID
    SOUTH AFRICA .................................................................................................................................. 101
   Forgiveness in the Lord’s Prayer ............................................................................................................. 111
   - The prayer as preserving community order ....................................................................................... 113
   - Sin as debt ........................................................................................................................................ 116
Forgiveness has a history. As far back as the biblical record, authors have depicted forgiveness as a way to repair relationships and heal communities. In Christian accounts forgiveness serves as an antidote to revenge, a mechanism for staying in right relationship to God, and a way to hold communities together. In the modern age, it becomes the psychological power of the individual to supersede negative emotions in the aftermath of violence. Celebrated by therapists and talk-show hosts, forgiveness emerges as both a sparkling moral ideal and the amazing accomplishment of magnanimous victims. So miraculous, onlookers whisper. So Christ-like!

The particular story of forgiveness told in these pages claims less expansive beginnings. As a young woman, I was nearly killed by an intruder who broke into my home early one Sunday morning. The attacker was never caught. When I woke from a coma, the difficult work of recovering from my injuries spread out before me. In the hospital, I listened to well-meaning visitors issue a series of religious platitudes: This is all part of God’s plan. The Lord works in mysterious ways. God saved you for a reason.

I collected these words in lieu of responding to them. I just listened and blinked my eyes, which for weeks remained bright red with hemorrhage.

You will never be fully healed until you forgive the man who did this.

I added this one to my mental list. I lingered on the words: until you forgive.
The God invoked in those bedside platitudes seemed overwhelming and abusive. Part of God’s plan? Saved for a reason? Saved at all, and by the same God who watched it all unfold until that last moment of saving?

And by implication, this was also a God who would watch to see if I forgave my attacker and then judge me by my act of charity toward the stranger who nearly beat me to death. If I believed in God as I lay in that hospital bed for all those weeks, it was not this God.

You will never be fully healed until you forgive the man who did this.

I knew with everything in me that this was wrong.

This dissertation seeks to examine and provide alternatives to Christian forgiveness imperatives that are presented to victims of wrong doing in general and violence in particular. Advocates of forgiveness often promote it as a religious and moral obligation and cite the New Testament as support. Three texts appear frequently in arguments for forgiveness: Jesus’ “seventy times seven” instructions (Mt. 18:21-22; Lk. 17:3-4), in which Jesus instructs his disciples to forgive boundlessly (“seventy times seven times” in Matthew [18:21], and “seven times seven times” in Luke [17:4]); the Lord’s Prayer (Mt. 6:9-13; Lk. 11:1-4), in which God’s forgiveness is intertwined with human willingness to forgive, and Jesus’ cry from the cross, “Father, forgive them” (Lk. 23:34a). Close readings of these texts, however, open to interpretations other than the simplistic, “you must forgive.”

Advocates of forgiveness conflate certain biblical understandings, such as that forgiveness is an absolute requirement, with contemporary, psychological notions of the
term, like forgiveness as unconditional and unilateral. This sometimes reflects over-
interpretation of the biblical material; while Jesus’ instructions often appear absolute,
closer readings suggest that his account of forgiveness contains ambiguities and
conditions. Forgiveness in the teachings of Jesus appears to be closely tied to
reconciliation (i.e., restoring relationships), is used as a means of strengthening the
nascent Christian community, and requires repentance from the offender. In
contemporary contexts, though, a different vision of forgiveness emerges, one that is
focused primarily on the individual victim and defined as an emotional or psychological
change that is unilateral (involving only the person forgiving) and unconditional
(requiring nothing from the offender, esp. repentance). The danger arises when this idea
of forgiveness is read back into the biblical instructions, and unilateral, unconditional
forgiveness is presented to victims as a moral imperative. As David Konstan observes,
“Forgiveness, in the modern acceptation of the word, did not exist in classical antiquity or
in the early Judeo-Christian tradition…The modern conception, which involves a moral
transformation in the offender and a corresponding change of heart in the forgiver, is of
relatively recent vintage as a moral idea.”¹

When such conflation occurs, victims are sometimes pressured to forgive by pastors,
psychologists, legal representatives, family members, or friends. Such pressure can be
both physically and psychologically harmful.² In her work on trauma and recovery, Judith

¹ David Konstan, Before Forgiveness: The Origins of a Moral Idea (New York:
² On the negative effects of pressuring victims to forgive, see Kerrie James, “The
Interactional Process of Forgiveness and Responsibility: A Critical Assessment of the
Family Therapy Literature,” in Carmel Flaskas, Imelda McCarthy, and Jim Sheehan
(eds.), Hope and Despair in Narrative and Family Therapy: Adversity, Forgiveness, and
Reconciliation (New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 127-38 (135-36); Sharon Lamb,
Lewis Herman describes the “cruel torture” of forgiveness that appears to be out of reach to most victims. In some cases, victims succumb to pressure, forgive unrepentant offenders (who are potentially still dangerous), and make themselves vulnerable to future injury.

I explore the problem of pressuring victims to forgive across three contexts. First, I examine the growing restorative justice movement that views responding to crime as a question of restoring relationships among the victim, the offender, and the community rather than—or sometimes in addition to—punishing offenders. In the process, forgiveness becomes a catchword for “healing” and victims are pressed, both explicitly and tacitly, to forgive offenders and repair the broken relationship, even when the offender was a stranger and no relationship preceded the crime. Restorative justice


advocates frequently combine biblical instructions and contemporary psychological
tonings in promoting a unilateral, unconditional version of forgiveness. Furthermore, they
present forgiveness as the good half of a dichotomy in which being consumed by
negative emotions such as anger, resentment, indignation, and rage is the only alternative.

Second, I consider forgiveness in the context of the South African Truth and
Reconciliation Commission; I focus specifically on the writings and speeches of
Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Here again, victims of apartheid and anti-apartheid violence
are presented with a unilateral, unconditional task of forgiveness that claims its warrant
from New Testament teachings. Because of the public nature of the Human Rights
Violations Committee hearings, the celebrity of Desmond Tutu, and the religious ideas he
imported into the process, the rhetoric of forgiveness was publicly known. Victims were
under enormous pressure to forgive and reconcile with former combatants for the sake of
the “New South Africa.” The TRC Commission and Bishop Tutu presented anger and
resentment as forgiveness’s “demonic other,” and gave victims no choice but to forgive
if they wanted to claim a place in the new, reconciled state.

Finally, I look at language of forgiveness in the pastoral care of victims of domestic
violence. Again, some pastoral care practitioners predicate their contemporary notions of
unilateral and unconditional forgiveness on biblical texts; the result is a religious
imperative to forgive even when the offender is unrepentant or still a threat to the victim.
As in the first two cases, a dichotomy emerges in the pastoral care literature that positions
forgiveness against corrosive negative emotions. Victims must forgive regardless of the

5 Thomas Brudholm, *Resentment’s Virtue: Jean Améry and the Refusal to Forgive*
disposition of the offender in order to save themselves from being consumed by anger and to remain right with God.

Alongside each of the three case studies, I consider a particular Gospel text that provides both the basis for the discussion in context as well as a lens for reconsidering forgiveness in that setting. I examine forgiveness in the restorative justice movement alongside Jesus’ seventy-times-seven instructions (Mt. 18:21-22; Lk. 17:3-4) in order to demonstrate that the biblical material contains a call for offender repentance (Lk. 17:4 and Mt. 18:15-17) that would serve victims well in this alternative justice process. The Lord’s Prayer (Mt. 6:9-13; Lk. 11:2-4) provides a way of thinking about forgiveness in post-apartheid South Africa, also by way of illuminating the role of repentance as seen in the plea for forgiveness, “forgive us our trespasses/sins/debts.” Finally, I consider Jesus’ cry from the cross, “Father, forgive them” (Lk. 23:34a), in the context of pastoral care for victims of domestic violence. Here I demonstrate how calls to imitate Christ through patient suffering or unconditional forgiveness misinterpret the biblical text. On the cross, Jesus prays for the forgiveness of his attackers and does not forgive them himself. This recognition provides an alternative path for faithful imitation.

**Jesus’ teachings on forgiveness**

Understandings of forgiveness have shifted from the biblical account to the present-day emphasis on unconditional forgiveness requiring only the victim’s participation. First I show how forgiveness in the teachings of Jesus is active, relational, and conditional. Next I present the work of several key thinkers from the fields of philosophy, theology, and psychology who draw on the biblical material but demonstrate the shift towards more emotional, individual understandings of the concept.
A full summary of research and analysis of the three primary texts in this study appears in the chapters to follow. Here I present the major themes and implications of these texts as well as other mentions of forgiveness in the Gospel texts. Throughout this dissertation, I use the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.

The forgiveness material in the Gospels can be divided into four categories:

1. Direct instructions to forgive, including Mt. 6:9-13 and Lk. 11:2-4 (the Lord’s Prayer); Mt. 6:14-15, Mk. 11:25, Lk. 6:37-38, and Jn. 20:22-23 (forgive others in order to be forgiven by God); Mt. 18:21-22 (forgive seventy-seven times); Lk. 17:3-4 (if there is repentance you must forgive; forgive seven times); and Mt. 18:23-35 (the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant).

2. Pronouncements of forgiveness, including Mt. 9:2-8, Mk 2:2-12, and Lk. 5:17-26 (the healing of the paralyzed man); and Lk. 7:36-50 (a woman’s sins are forgiven).

3.Warnings about the unforgivable sin (Mk. 3:29; Mt. 12:32; Lk. 12:10).

4. The prayer for forgiveness from the cross (Lk. 23:34a).

These citations represent the totality of Jesus’ discussions of forgiveness in the Gospels.6

For the purposes of this project, I focus most closely on Jesus’ instructions about interpersonal forgiveness as opposed to his words on divine forgiveness. In this category, there are three results of forgiveness: restoration of relationship (Mt. 18:21-22 and Lk. 17:3-4), reciprocal responsibility to God (Mt. 6:14-15, Mk. 11:25, Lk. 6:37-38, and Jn. 20:22-23), and cancellation of a debt (Mt. 6:9-13 and Lk. 11:2-4; Mt. 18:23-35). The

6 While some interpreters also include as examples of forgiveness Lk. 6.27-28 and Mt. 5.44-45 (love your enemies); Lk. 15.11-32 (the prodigal son); and Jn. 8.1-11 (the woman caught in adultery), these text do not mention forgiveness by name and I do not include them in my account.
discussions of debt cancellation may be understood metaphorically as referring to the release from the moral debt incurred by sinning against one’s neighbor, and thus they may be folded into the categories of restoration of relationship and reciprocal responsibility to God.

The purpose of this taxonomy is to distill Jesus’ teachings on forgiveness to their core and then to draw a contrast with contemporary understandings of forgiveness that claim Gospel antecedents. For example, nowhere in these texts does Jesus suggest that forgiveness should be unconditional. On the contrary, in the seventy-times-seven instructions in Matthew and Luke, Jesus details measures for offender repentance before the victim is obligated to forgive:

Mt. 18:15-17, 21-22

“If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax-collector.”

… Then Peter came and said to him, “Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.”

Lk. 17:3-4

Be on your guard! If another disciple sins, you must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive. And if the same person sins against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says, “I repent,” you must forgive.
With regard to the text in Matthew, I interpret discussion of community discipline that precedes the seventy-times-seven instructions as a call for repentance or at the very least, acknowledgment of wrongdoing:

“If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax-collector.” (Mt. 18:15-17)

In the absence of being receptive to rebuke, the offending member is cast out of the community, although not without the possibility of re-inclusion; gentiles and tax collectors are frequent subjects of evangelism. The point here is that the offender has a responsibility to respond to first the individual’s and then the community’s concern. I interpret this as a call for repentance. Only when that condition has met are Jesus’ listeners required to forgive boundlessly.

The Lord’s Prayer offers both a model for repentance and an imperative to forgive:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Mt. 6:12} & \quad \text{Lk. 11:4} \\
\text{And forgive us our debts,} & \quad \text{And forgive us our sins,} \\
\text{as we also have forgiven our debtors.} & \quad \text{for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.}
\end{align*}
\]

In its expression of hope for reciprocal forgiveness, the prayerful voice first requests forgiveness. I interpret this initial plea as an expression of acknowledging sin, repentance, and of the need for forgiveness. The prayer, so understood, contains not only a statement about the relationship between divine and human forgiveness (we forgive

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7 For examples, see Jn. 4:5-26 (Samaritan woman), Lk. 19:1-10 (staying at Zaccheus’s house), Mt. 10:3 and Lk. 5:27 (calling of Matthew), Mt. 8:5-13 (healing of the centurion’s servant), Mk. 2:13-17 (dinner with the tax collectors).
others so God will forgive us), but also an acknowledgment of wrongdoing (we acknowledge that we have sinned and we repent). The fact that the prayer is recited regularly speaks to the importance of forgiveness in strengthening the nascent community. 

Immediately following Matthew’s seventy-times-seven instructions comes the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant:

For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, “Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.” And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow-slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, “Pay what you owe.” Then his fellow-slave fell down and pleaded with him, “Have patience with me, and I will pay you.” But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow-slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, “You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow-slave, as I had mercy on you?” And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he should pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart. (Mt. 18:23-35)

In this illustration, one’s status as forgiven obligates one to approach others with a forgiving disposition. While it is clear that the parable’s language of debt stands as a metaphor for sin, as it does in the Lord’s Prayer, the story does not consider the moral implications that might accompany a spiteful or violent offense. David Konstan writes, “Remitting a debt does not imply any wrongdoing on the part of the debtor: it is simply

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8 The Didache instructs, “Pray this three times each day” (8:3); on the thrice-daily gatherings of the early community, see Aaron Milavec, The Didache: Text, Translation, Analysis, and Commentary (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), p. 65.
an act of generosity on the part of the lender, equivalent to a gift. The liberated debtor makes no apologies, feels no remorse, and undergoes no change of heart in respect to the benefactor, for there has been no offense at all, whether voluntary or involuntary.”

Without a consideration of wrongdoing, the parable is of limited use for understanding interpersonal forgiveness. Moreover, in the parable the consequence for not “paying it forward” is having one’s own forgiveness rescinded and replaced with torture and imprisonment. This parable means to say something about interpersonal forgiveness beyond the literal context of monetary debt, but the message is not clear.

In his work on debt metaphors for sin and forgiveness in the Bible, Gary Anderson offers an interpretation of this parable: “We are in danger of becoming debt-slaves when we sin. Should the act go uncorrected, then one will have to ‘pay’ for the ‘cost’ of the misdeed through the ‘currency’ of physical punishment. Fortunately God is merciful and will remit the debt we owe if we humbly beseech him.” Here Anderson lets humble beseeching stand in the place of repentance, but the analogy doesn’t follow. As Konstan observes, there is no need for a person in debt to repent or show remorse. In any case, begging for mercy is quite a different thing from offering an apology.

In this parable, the metaphor of sin as debt creates a transactional relationship both between human and divine and among fellow human beings. Debts may be accrued and forgiven, or they may be offset by credits such as gained in almsgiving. Anderson explains, “How we talk about sin influences what we will do about it.”

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9 Konstan, Before Forgiveness, p. 118.
sin as debt allows for sin to be erased in the way debts can be erased, either by loan forgiveness or debtor repayment. In the parable, one’s potential for debt forgiveness is linked to one’s willingness to forgive others their debts. The same holds true for the petition in Matthew’s version of the Lord’s Prayer: first comes the plea for forgiveness (“forgive us our debts,” 6:12), followed by the condition for that forgiveness (“as we also have forgiven our debtors,” 6:12).

As with sin, how we talk about forgiveness also influences what we will do about it. Envisioning forgiveness as release from debt demonstrates that the effects of forgiveness may be visible and concrete, i.e., forgiving a debt involves adjusting accounts so that the burden of the debt no longer weighs on the debtor. The sin-as-debt metaphor shows that forgiveness was something to be done, not something only to be thought or felt. While it is difficult to draw a one-to-one relationship between the forgiveness depicted in this parable and interpersonal forgiveness for things like betrayal, assault, or oppression, the metaphor is instructive about the impact of human forgiveness on divine forgiveness. According to Anderson, the parable illustrates that people are at risk for accruing debt when they sin, and the way out is through physical punishment. The hope is that God will be merciful and forgive the figurative debt just as human beings forgive the “debts” of one another.13 There is no model for the debtor to follow other than to beseech God, and to forgive others from the outset.

However, not all sin can be conceived as debt, or be as easily resolved by the victim’s release of that debt. A victim’s pain, physical injury, and fear of future harm may not be wiped away in one forgiving motion, or even if they are, they might reappear. The

13 Anderson, Sin, pp. 32-33.
complexity and lability of such injuries makes conceiving of interpersonal sin as debt an insufficient analogy in the realm of human wrongdoing. Crimes of physical violence, for example, often leave wounds that are not easily wiped away. Talking about forgiveness as the cancellation of a debt, then, has limits when it comes to more serious interpersonal offenses.

Finally, Jesus’ stern words about the unforgivable sin (Mk. 3:29//Mt. 12:32//Lk. 12:10) provide the clearest evidence that forgiveness is neither an absolute good nor an unquestioned moral obligation. In these cases, Jesus explains that there is one sin that will not be forgiven (the agent is not named but is assumed to be God): blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. These cases coupled with the image of the unforgiving king in the above parable raises the question of whether forgiveness can be named a moral or religious obligation when even God does not behave accordingly. In all three Synoptic Gospels, unforgiveness is a distinct possibility.

However, unforgiveness as a fact of life also presents a serious threat to human beings, whose salvation, according to the Gospel account, is utterly dependent on divine forgiveness. Even though the exact nature of God’s forgiveness is not made explicit in the text, there is no doubt that humans need it and they must forgive each other in order to receive it. Matthew adds this coda to the Lord’s Prayer: “For if you forgive others their

trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (6:14-15), and Luke writes, “Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you” (6:37).¹⁶ For most Christian interpreters, forgiveness forms a triangular relationship among the victim, the offender, and God. Where the message of the parable is that being forgiven (by God or by others) should inspire further forgiveness, these verses suggest that human forgiveness inspires divine forgiveness. In Luke and Acts, “forgiveness of sins” becomes a synonym for salvation.¹⁷ The imperative to forgive is not just a moral issue; it is a soteriological necessity.

The Greek word most commonly translated as “forgive” in these texts is ἀφίημι, a verb whose semantic range includes “let go,” “send away,” “cancel,” “remit,” “pardon,” “leave,” “give up,” “divorce,” and “abandon,” in addition to “forgive (debts)” and “forgive (sins).”¹⁸ These meanings suggest that interpersonal forgiveness in the time of the composition of the Gospels had an active, or outward, character and was not only a

¹⁶ This verse marks the only time in the Gospels in which the verb ἀπολύω is translated in the NRSV as “forgive.” Elsewhere in the Gospels, ἀπολύω is taken to mean “send away” (Mt. 14:15, 22, 23, 15:23, 32, 39; Mk. 6:36, 45, 8:3, 9; Lk. 8:38, 9:12), “depart” (Lk. 2:29), “divorce” (Mt. 1:19, 5:31, 5:32, 19:3, 7, 8, 9; Mk. 10:2, 4, 11, 12; Lk. 16:18), or “release” (Mt. 27:15, 17, 21, 26; Mk. 15:6, 9, 11, 15; Lk. 13:12, 14:4, 22:68, 23:16, 17, 18, 20, 22, 25; Jn. 18:39, 19:10, 19:12).


matter of changing one’s mind or feelings (an inward action). This verb appears a total of 146 times in the New Testament, but it is translated in the NRSV as “forgive” only thirty-eight of those times. Elsewhere it appears primarily as a transitive verb with a direct object: They left their nets (οἱ δὲ ἐφέντες τὰ δίκτυα; Mt. 4:20); Leaving the crowd behind (καὶ ἀφέντες τὸν ὄχλον; Mk. 4:36); Let the children come to me (ἐφέτε τὰ παιδία ἔρχεσθαι πρός με; Lk. 18:16); Let it alone for one more year (ἀφες αὐτήν καὶ τοῦτο τὸ ἔτος; Lk. 13:8). In the Pauline literature, ἀφίημι also has the connotation of “divorce” (the husband should not divorce his wife [ἀνδρα γυναίκα μὴ ἀφιέναι], 1 Cor. 7:11-13). In most cases, the verb depicts a concrete action taken, usually toward another person. Given this semantic range for ἀφίημι, first-century hearers would have understood forgiveness to have an active character. In other words, it is something one does (words spoken, action taken, physical things altered) rather than something one feels.

**Interpretations of forgiveness**

The biblical forgiveness material has been interpreted in a variety of ways. In contemporary literature, these instructions and forgiveness in general get developed in three main ways: forgiveness as strengthening the community, forgiveness as controlling negative emotions, and forgiveness as a therapeutic strategy that benefits the individual forgiver’s health. In what follows I present some of the primary voices representing these three interpretations.

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19 See the individual chapters for histories of interpretation of the texts in question.
Forgiveness as strengthening community

According to Jesus’ teachings, offender repentance and relationship play important roles in forgiveness. In the Gospel texts, forgiveness is bilateral: the process involves action from the offender toward the victim with a tangible outcome such as restored relationship or a strengthened community. When repentance is not forthcoming, forgiveness fails. For example, just prior to Jesus’ instruction in Matthew to forgive boundlessly (18:21-22), community members who are not receptive to correction are cast out of the community. Luke’s presentation of the boundless-forgiveness instruction contains the qualifier, “if there is repentance” (17:3-4). And when Jesus is on the cross, he offers a prayer for forgiveness rather than forgiving his executioners directly; one reason for this may be that they do not repent of their actions. Furthermore, God’s forgiveness may be granted or removed for specific reasons (Mk. 3:29//Mt. 12:32//Lk. 12:10 [unforgivable sin]; Mt. 18:23-35 [unforgiving servant]; Mt. 6:14-15 [if you forgive, God will forgive you; if you don’t forgive, God will not forgive you]). Forgiveness in the teachings of Jesus lacks explicit definition, but it is undoubtedly a relational or bilateral process that happens under certain conditions with tangible outcomes.

A number of modern biblical interpreters retain this emphasis on community cohesion and repair of relationship. Here I discuss two examples, one secular and one religious: Hannah Arendt, who discusses the political implications of forgiveness, and L. Gregory Jones, who argues that forgiveness is crucial in the maintenance of the body of Christ. Both Arendt and Jones call for forgiveness as a necessity in repairing community relationships. This is a key theme for Jesus, and it undergirds the forgiveness emphases of both Desmond Tutu and advocates of restorative justice.
Hannah Arendt, theorizing forgiveness by way of New Testament sources, famously asserts, “The discoverer of the role of forgiveness in the realm of human affairs was Jesus of Nazareth.” Key for Arendt is Jesus’ message that human forgiveness is not only possible but necessary for divine forgiveness and—more important—the survival of human community. She writes, “Trespassing is an everyday occurrence which is in the very nature of action’s constant establishment of new relationships within a web of relations, and it needs forgiving, dismissing, in order to make it possible for life to go on.” “Forgiving” and “dismissing” are closely related here; Arendt envisions forgiveness as “the possible redemption from the predicament of irreversibility—of being unable to undo what one has done.” Reversed by forgiveness, the wrongdoing is effectively erased.

For Arendt, forgiveness is an act of will that involves the forswearing of both resentment and revenge in response to wrongdoing. But this forgiveness is not just an absence of negative action, of withholding anger or resentment. Forgiveness is a social act that reflects a commitment to renewed trust and preservation of community. Arendt calls this idea amor mundi, and L. Gregory Jones uses the phrase “the body of Christ” referring to the same kind of community concern. Arendt’s understanding of the value of

21 Arendt, Human Condition, p. 240. In her analysis, Arendt cites the healing of the paralytic in Luke (5:21-24), the Lord’s Prayer and its addendum in Matthew (6:9-15), and Luke’s instruction to forgive seven times seven times if there is repentance (Lk. 17:3-4; emphasis mine).
22 Arendt, Human Condition, p. 237.
forgiveness emphasizes the collective over the individual and emphasizes the ability of forgiveness to prevent destruction and repair communal relations. She pulls the basic theme of forgiveness as redemption and renewal from the New Testament and cites Jesus as its author, but her model of political (or social) forgiveness lacks the divine reciprocity that characterizes discussions of forgiveness in the Gospels. Arendt thus transforms the divine imperative into a primarily communal one.

Pointing out that “crime and willed evil are rare,” Arendt interprets Jesus’ forgiveness instructions as applying mainly to mundane, everyday missteps, with forgiveness as a way to balance and correct wrongdoing in a community. She writes, “Only through this constant mutual release from what they do can men remain free agents, only by constant willingness to change their minds and start again can they be trusted with so great a power as that to begin something new.” Arendt’s account of forgiveness does not include more serious crimes, or “radical evil.” For such criminals, she offers another biblical prescription: “Where the deed itself dispossesses us of all power [to forgive or punish], we can indeed only repeat with Jesus: ‘It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea’” (quoting Mt. 18:6). Where the biblical text refers to a specific crime punishable by drowning, that is, putting a stumbling block in front of anyone who believes in Jesus, Arendt recontextualizes this to apply to crimes of impossible enormity.

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24 Arendt, *Human Condition*, p. 240. She cites the reciprocal formulas offered in Mt. 6:14-15, 18:35, and Mk. 11:25; along with the “seven times seven times” teaching in Luke (17:3-4).
In her report on the trial of Nazi criminal Adolf Eichmann, Arendt faces a man whose crimes during the Holocaust constitute such “radical evil.” She explains why his crimes put him beyond the reach of the “mundane” forgiveness she describes earlier:

Just as you supported and carried out a policy of not wanting to share the earth with the Jewish people and the people of a number of other nations—as though you and your superiors had any right to determine who should and should not inhabit the world—we find that no one, that is, no member of the human race, can be expected to want to share the earth with you. This is the reason, and the only reason, you must hang.28

In this case, not forgiving Eichmann (i.e., sentencing him to death), repairs the community. She writes, “The reparation effected in criminal cases is of an altogether different nature; it is the body politic itself that stands in need of being ‘repaired,’ and it is the general public order that has been thrown out of gear and must be restored, as it were.”29 Thus, not forgiving the most egregious crimes serves the same purpose as the mundane or trivial forgiveness Arendt describes: it repairs the community (or the body politic, or *amor mundi*).

L. Gregory Jones argues for an “embodied”—or, lived out in practice—understanding of forgiveness based on the teachings of Jesus.30 He writes, “Humans are called to become holy by embodying [God’s] forgiveness through specific habits and practices that seek to remember the past truthfully, to repair the brokenness, to heal divisions, and to reconcile and renew relationships.”31 Jones defines forgiveness as “not so much a word

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30 Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness*, pp. xii, *passim*. He cites Lk. 7:36-50 (sinful woman forgiven), Mt. 18 (community discipline, seventy-times-seven, the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant), Mt. 5:44 (love your enemies), and Jn. 20:23 (“forgiving and retaining”).
31 Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness*, p. xii.
spoken, an action performed, or a feeling felt as it is an embodied way of life in an ever-deepening friendship with the Triune God and with others.”\textsuperscript{32} In Jones’s account, forgiveness and reconciliation (figured as the repair of a broken relationship) are deeply intertwined. One does not occur without the other, and reconciliation is a necessary reflection of the forgiveness embodied by Jesus.\textsuperscript{33} The “craft of forgiveness” (or, forgiveness as an “embodied way of life”) means that forgiveness and reconciliation are inseparable. For Jones, forgiveness is meaningless without the repair of the relationship that was broken by the offense.

Jones goes to great lengths to define forgiveness not as a simple concept, but a way of life. In this way he follows Arendt by locating the significance of forgiveness in the social sphere. This relational nature of forgiveness leads Jones to criticize contemporary psychological approaches (see below) that allow for internal, unilateral expressions of forgiveness and do not take the next step of communal action. However, Jones so thoroughly rejects the idea of forgiveness as a thought or action (he prefers to talk about “the craft of forgiveness” as a general way of life) that in the end he does not ever offer a clear definition of the term. Instead, there is nothing to separate Jones’s “craft of forgiveness” from, say, a “craft of compassion” or “craft of charity.” Furthermore, Jones’s conflation of forgiveness and reconciliation negates the possibility of forgiveness in cases where reconciliation is impossible, undesirable, or both. Even so, his insistence on the communal and relational nature of forgiveness is helpful for the consideration of the difficult kinds of forgiveness presented in the case studies to follow.

\textsuperscript{32} Jones, \textit{Embodying Forgiveness}, p. xii.
\textsuperscript{33} Jones does acknowledge that sometimes “hope against hope” for reconciliation is as close as some might get to actual communion, but that hope is a key element of forgiveness (\textit{Embodying Forgiveness}, p. 232).
Both Arendt and Jones preserve the active character of forgiveness and cite its importance for preserving communities and repairing relationships. Both draw on New Testament sources to demonstrate that forgiveness must be a way of life, whether secular or religious, and that it involves more than simply a change of mind or heart. They thereby offer more complex accounts than do advocates who embrace unilateral, unconditional forgiveness as the biblical imperative.

*Forgiveness as controlling negative emotions*

Nowhere does Jesus suggest that forgiveness involves only the control of a victim’s anger or resentment toward the offender. However, this understanding of forgiveness is not uncommon among both religious and secular interpreters. Anglican Bishop Joseph Butler (1692-1752) advances a theory of forgiveness that, although grounded in the Gospels, defines forgiveness primarily as the act of controlling negative emotions. A number of later thinkers adopt this approach.

In his 1726 sermon “Upon Forgiveness of Injuries,” Butler defines forgiveness as the forswearing of active resentment.\(^\text{34}\) This marks the beginning of a trend in a number of disciplines toward apophatic definitions of forgiveness: defining forgiveness by what it is not. According to Butler, forgiveness prevents excessive resentment from damaging the body of Christ on earth\(^\text{35}\) (L. Gregory Jones follows this line of thinking) and protects human salvation in the hereafter. Butler regards resentment itself as a “natural” emotion\(^\text{36}\) and to be expected. However, “when this resentment entirely destroys our natural

\(^{34}\) Butler, Joseph, “Upon Forgiveness,” p. 96.

\(^{35}\) Butler, “Upon Forgiveness,” p. 98.

\(^{36}\) Butler, “Upon Forgiveness,” p. 96.
benevolence towards [our neighbor], it is excessive, and becomes malice or revenge,” he explains. “The command to prevent its having this effect, i.e. to forgive injuries, is the same as to love our enemies.”

Forgiveness, then, is defined as an antidote to excessive negative reactions that threaten love of neighbor. Rather than reacting positively to an offense, forgiveness primarily reacts against the possibility of anger or resentment.

Like Butler, Miroslav Volf locates the essence of forgiveness in the willingness to forego a negative reaction to an offense. “Forgiveness cuts the tie of equivalence between the offense and the way we treat the offender,” he writes. “I forgo all retribution. In forgiving, I absorb the injury—the way I may absorb, say, the financial impact of a bad business transaction.” Volf draws a direct equivalence between financial loss and other injury. But as discussed above, such a transactional understanding of forgiveness leaves out the possibility for (or necessity of) repentance on the part of the offender. Any robust view of biblical forgiveness must address the role of repentance.

Psychologist Robert D. Enright also depends on the absence of negative emotions to capture the essence of forgiveness. He writes,

> The forgiveness process, properly understood and used, can free those bound by anger and resentment. It does not require accepting injustice or remaining in an abusive situation. It opens the door to reconciliation, but it does not require trusting someone who has proven untrustworthy. Even if the offender remains unrepentant, you can forgive and restore a sense of peace and well-being to your life.

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37 Butler, “Upon Forgiveness,” p. 99; emphasis mine. To forgive is to “prevent” resentment from having ill effect.


Like many other psychologists,⁴⁰ Enright pits forgiveness against a seemingly necessary negative opposite, in this case, being “bound by anger and resentment.” Enright defines forgiveness as “a willingness to abandon one’s right to resentment, negative judgment, and indifferent behavior toward one who unjustly injured us, while fostering the undeserved qualities of compassion, generosity, and even love toward him or her.”⁴¹ He sees the father in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk. 15:11-32) as a prime example of forgiveness-as-withholding-resentment when he welcomes his errant son home.⁴² Forgiveness, again, is mainly a question of controlling or eradicating negative emotions.

Here, Enright joins philosopher Joanna North in defining forgiveness this way: “If we are to forgive, our resentment is to be overcome not by denying ourselves the right to that resentment, but by endeavoring to view the wrongdoer with compassion, benevolence and love while recognizing that he has willfully abandoned his right to them.”⁴³ North often collaborates with Enright in developing materials advancing this emotional understanding of forgiveness. She writes, “Forgiveness, through such active mental and emotional endeavor, is therefore possible even in the absence of repentance and

⁴² Enright, Forgiveness is a Choice, pp. 24-25.
retribution. It is essentially an internal change of heart…the successful result of an active endeavor to replace bad thoughts with good, bitterness and anger with compassion and affection.” North also cites the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk. 15:11-32) as an example of forgiveness that takes the form of (the father) withholding a negative reaction (to the son). North also positions forgiveness as the good half of a dichotomy that presents anger, resentment, and other negative emotions as its necessary opposites. Forgiveness thus defined becomes primarily the state of not being angry, bitter, or resentful. Clearing away these negative emotions makes way for compassion, affection and good thoughts. Rather than something active and constructive, forgiveness emerges an exercise in thought control.

Charles L. Griswold expands on the apophatic definition of forgiveness to include refraining from negative actions as well as feelings. Griswold points out that Bulter defines forgiveness only as forswearing revenge (an action), not resentment (a feeling). Then Griswold sets forth his own definition that fills the gap he sees in Butler:

“Forgiveness does however mean overcoming negative feelings that embody and perpetuate the key features of resentment, feelings that very often accompany resentment—such as contempt and scorn—insofar as they are modulations of the moral hatred in question.” Thus, Griswold defines forgiveness as an emotional state. He briefly considers the semantic range of ἀφίέμι in the biblical texts and opts to merge the term with the classical Greek term συγγνώμη, which Griswold sees as a more cognitive

47 Griswold, Forgiveness, p. 41; emphasis in original.
task, in arriving at his own definition. He finds that when συγγνώμη is used to mean “forgiveness,” the term carries more cognitive and emotional associations than does ἀφίεμι (whose semantic range includes, in addition to “forgive,” simple action verbs such as “leave” or “dismiss”). 48 “Forswearing the emotion is indeed the ultimate goal,” he writes. However, defining forgiveness only as the absence of negative emotions disregards the constructive potential of forgiveness offered in the biblical account as well as its bilateral character. While Butler and others draw—to varying degrees—from the teachings of Jesus to inform their definitions, their tendency to locate the action of forgiveness only in the mind or heart of the victim neglects the corporate and tangible nature of forgiveness presented in the Gospels.

*Therapeutic forgiveness*

This emphasis on forgiveness as a matter of forswearing resentment leads to a third trend in forgiveness research: defining forgiveness as needing only the participation of the victim. This understanding suggests that victims can and should overcome injury or wrongdoing by adjusting their thoughts and emotions in a positive way with regard to the offender, regardless of the offender’s disposition or presence. Advocates of this brand of forgiveness often claim biblical warrant, but there is no indication in the teachings of Jesus that forgiveness requires only an emotional or mental exercise. Even so, psychologists, pastoral counselors, legal representatives, and others may pressure victims to forgive even when the offender is unknown, unrepentant, or still a threat. Victims may

48 Griswold, *Forgiveness*, p. 3; see n. 3 for his discussion of ἀφίεμι. The term συγγνώμη appears once in the New Testament: “This I say by way of concession (συγγνώμην), not of command” (1 Cor. 7:6).
49 Griswold, *Forgiveness*, p. 42; emphasis mine.
then be judged according to their willingness or ability to demonstrate forgiving thoughts
toward the offender.

This unilateral, unconditional, emotional view of forgiveness appears most often in
the work of psychologists and pastoral counselors. The “therapeutic” understanding of
forgiveness assumes not only that victims may transform their experience by changing
how they think and feel about it, but also that such forgiveness is necessary for healing.
The pressure on victims to forgive can be enormous.

Psychologists began to embrace forgiveness as a therapeutic strategy in the 1980s,
and many credit Lewis B. Smedes and his 1984 book Forgive and Forget: Healing the
Hurts We Don’t Deserve as foundational for starting the “forgiveness movement.”
Smedes first defines forgiveness as “God’s invention [and gift to humanity] for coming to
terms with a world which, despite their best intentions, people are unfair to each other
and hurt each other deeply.” However, he downplays the importance of forgiveness in

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50 Psychologists and pastoral caregivers use this term both to recommend psychological
approaches to forgiveness and to criticize them; see for example, Terry D. Hargrave,
“Families and Forgiveness: A Theoretical and Therapeutic Framework,” The Family
Journal 2.4 (1994), pp. 339-48, and Cynthia Ransley and Terri Spy, Forgiveness and the
Healing Process: A Central Therapeutic Concern (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 31-50
(forgiveness as an effective therapeutic strategy); Chris Brauns, Unpacking
Forgiveness: Biblical Answers for Complex Questions and Deep Wounds (Wheaton, IL:
Crossway Books, 2008), p. 65 (therapeutic forgiveness as distinct from “biblical
forgiveness”), and Jones, Embodying Forgiveness, pp. 35-91 (therapeutic forgiveness as
“the Church’s psychological captivity in Western culture”). I use the term to describe
how forgiveness (often unconditional and unilateral) is promoted in therapeutic contexts
(such as counseling) as an emotionally and psychologically curative approach to
wrongdoing.
51 Smedes, Forgive and Forget.
52 Smedes, Forgive and Forget, pp. xi-xii.
relationship or community repair. Forgiveness, he argues, is primarily something we do “for our own sakes.”\textsuperscript{53}

In this slim volume, Smedes unleashes a cacophony of metaphors\textsuperscript{54} that portray forgiveness in a positive, almost magical light, and that suggest that forgiveness can be accomplished by any individual simply as an act of will:

The only way to heal the pain that will not heal itself is to forgive the person who hurt you. Forgiving stops the reruns of pain. Forgiving heals your memory as you change your memory’s vision. When you release the wrongdoer from the wrong, you cut a malignant tumor out of your inner life. You set a prisoner free, but you discover that the real prisoner was yourself.\textsuperscript{55}

While Smedes often cites the New Testament as a source—he references the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Mt. 18:23-35), the woman caught in adultery (Jn 8:1-11), and the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk. 15:11-32), among others\textsuperscript{56}—his theories of forgiveness have very little grounding in the biblical text. The parable of the prodigal and the story of the woman caught in adultery nowhere use the term forgiveness. Nowhere does Jesus suggest that forgiveness stops pain or repairs memory. Nowhere is non-forgiveness given as a tumor or disease, or forgiveness as psychic healing. And certainly, nowhere does Jesus advocate forgiveness as a form of self-care or self-improvement. These are modern ideas. Forgiveness as a way of making oneself feel better is more a product of the contemporary self-help movement than it is a biblical precept. Smedes

\textsuperscript{53} Smedes, \textit{Forgive and Forget}, p. 30; emphasis in original.
\textsuperscript{54} Absent among these is the metaphor of debt forgiveness.
\textsuperscript{55} Smedes, \textit{Forgive and Forget}, p. 133.
\textsuperscript{56} Smedes references the following texts in \textit{Forgive and Forget}: the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (p. 150), the story of the woman caught in adultery (p. 48), the cry of dereliction (p. 87), Judas’ betrayal (p. 16), Peter’s denial (pp. 16, 108), the healing of the paralyzed man (p. 94), the Parable of the Prodigal Son (p. 68), and the cry from the cross, “Father, forgive them” (p. 11).
conflicts these emotional understandings of forgiveness with biblical examples and presents them as religious imperatives.

Such psychological formulations of forgiveness conflated with biblical imperatives can result in pressure on victims to change their thinking about an offense without necessarily holding offenders accountable. Here the problem is that these emotional formulations of forgiveness are written back into the biblical account. For example, Smedes cites the cry of dereliction (Mt. 27:46, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”) as an instance where human beings who suffer and feel abandoned by God can choose even to forgive God. In response to the seventy-times-seven instructions, Smedes emphasizes the endlessness of the numbers, but offers an emotional purpose. He writes, “Jesus was talking [in the seventy-times-seventy instructions] about healing our memories of a wound that someone’s wrong etched in our cemented past. Once we have stopped the abuse, we can forgive however many times that it might take us to finish our healing.” Here, the beneficiary of the forgiveness is the individual who forgives, not the community. The only person involved in forgiving is the victim, and the hoped-for outcome is the healing of memories. This obscures the fact that the forgiveness Jesus called for required the participation of the offender and the community, not just the victim. The role of offender repentance is lost in Smedes’s analysis.

On this point L. Gregory Jones critiques Smedes’s work. According to Jones, any definition of forgiveness that does not regard community as central is detached from the biblical tradition: “On Smedes’s account…therapeutic forgiveness is divorced from Christian practices and doctrine; an individual’s psychic health replaces the goal of

57 Smedes, *Forgive and Forget*, pp. 87-88.
substantive Christian community lived in faithfulness to the Triune God.”⁵⁹ Although Smedes imagines that “when we forgive we ride the crest of love’s cosmic wave; we walk in stride with God,”⁶⁰ Jones places this cosmic wave squarely outside the biblical tradition.

In spite of its religious underpinnings, Smedes’s account has broad appeal among secular psychologists and pastoral caregivers alike. Everett L. Worthington cites Smedes for his understanding of forgiveness as benefitting a person’s mental health.⁶¹ Psychologists mostly abandon Smedes’s emphasis on biblical themes and images; thus forgiveness becomes a kind of psychological intervention that addresses only the emotional state of an individual.

Most psychological definitions of forgiveness share the following ideas with Smedes: forgiveness is good for the forgiver, forgiveness is the best response to wrongdoing (and the only other response is negative and harmful), and forgiveness may be unilateral or unconditional in nature (that is, not involving the wrongdoer in any way). As a result, forgiveness is often touted for its supposed health benefits, and victims of crime or other offense are often pressed by counselors to forgive in order to free themselves from suffering (both mental and physical) relating to the offense.⁶²

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⁵⁹ Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness*, p. 52.
As these psychological understandings permeate discussions of forgiveness in theology, law, philosophy, and pastoral care, professionals in these areas conflate them with their own understandings of the select biblical passages. The result is a moral and religious imperative on victims to forgive as a matter of controlling their thoughts and feelings.

**Forgiveness and repentance**

Jesus’ links his forgiveness instructions to the concept of repentance. Here I consider how the repentance requirement informs the process of forgiveness throughout the Gospel. In the New Testament, the primary term translated as “repentance” is μετάνοια (the verbal form, “to repent,” is μετανοέω). This term appears throughout the synoptic Gospels (but is absent in the Gospel of John). The relationship between repentance and forgiveness calls into question interpretations of Jesus’ teachings that portray forgiveness as unilateral or unconditional.

The basic meaning of μετάνοια is a “change of mind” and is closely linked with “turning” to faith in the gospel message. In Luke, when the “scribes and Pharisees” question Jesus about his association with “tax collectors and sinners” (5:30), he responds, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to

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call not the righteous but sinners to repentance” (5:31-32). Here, repentance involves a change of mind (i.e., toward faith in the gospel) and a turn away from sinful behavior. Later in the Gospel, Jesus announces the great value of a repentant sinner’s turn to righteousness: “There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who need no repentance” (15:7). In his resurrection appearance, Jesus commissions the disciples to deliver this message: “repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in [my] name to all nations” (Lk. 24:47). Here, repentance precedes forgiveness of sins.

The Gospel of Luke contains the only explicit mention in the Gospels of repentance in the context of interpersonal sin. Jesus warns his disciples, “Be on your guard! If your brother sins, you must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive. And if the same person sins against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive” (17:3-4). The familial language indicates that forgiveness is a community matter. It is a multi-part exercise: First the sinner must be rebuked, and if he repents, the victim is obligated to forgive him. If the person sins again, and repents again, forgiveness must follow “seven times” or ad infinitum. Jesus expects that the one sinned against will be able to judge whether there has been sincere repentance. The “brother” language indicates that this instruction is meant for relationships within a specific community.

In Luke’s Gospel, the action of repentance is not restricted to an intellectual or emotional change. Early in the narrative, John the Baptist instructs, “Bear fruits worthy of repentance” (3:8). Thus, the inward change must be outwardly enacted. According to John the Baptist, those fruits include sharing clothing and food with the poor, not
overcharging for taxes, and not extorting money (3:10-14). Such actions may or may not indicate regret or a sorrowful disposition toward the past, but they do demonstrate a change in action in the future.

Repentance in the Gospels is a prerequisite for forgiveness from both God and other human beings. Other than the actions described to sinners and tax collectors above, however, the Gospels offer no instruction on how to gauge the sincerity of any expression of repentance; this is left to the victim’s judgment. For the purposes of this dissertation, I include apology (“I’m sorry,” “Forgive me,” “Pardon me”) as an acknowledgment of wrongdoing and gesture of repentance, as in the petition for forgiveness in the Lord’s Prayer: “Forgive us our debts/sins” (Mt. 6:12//Lk. 11:4). The spoken word has currency as repentance in the Lucan instruction: “[If the same brother] turns back to you seven times and says, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive” (17:4). Repentance in the Gospels has visible manifestations, whether in the form of changed behavior (tax collectors and sinners improving their practices) or spoken apology (“Forgive me,” “I repent”). In Matthew’s community discipline instructions (18:15-20), repentance takes the form of being receptive to the rebuke of another member of the community or the community at large; since uncooperative members are cast out of the community (at least temporarily), the ensuing forgiveness instructions apply to those who listen and change their behavior. In Luke, the right response to such rebuke is repentance (17:3). In each of these cases, the

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64 This elaboration on the meaning of repentance occurs only in Luke; there is no corresponding instruction in Matthew or Mark (Guy D. Nave, *The Role and Function of Repentance in Luke-Acts* [Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002], p. 132).

65 On the varieties of spoken apology as requests for forgiveness, see Radzik, *Making Amends*, p. 56; on “forgive me” as an example of apology, see Nick Smith, *I Was Wrong: The Meanings of Apologies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. vi, 263 n. 17.
victim (or the representative community, as in Matthew) must determine whether the repentance is sincere.

*Repentance and obligatory forgiveness*

To this point, I have argued that according to the Gospels’ forgiveness instructions, a victim is not obligated to forgive when repentance is absent. The Gospel material portrays forgiveness as a bilateral exercise (i.e., involving effort from both victim and offender), and that victims should not be pressured to forgive unrepentant, absent, or unknown offenders. I point this out in order to counter contemporary calls for unconditional and unilateral forgiveness that claim biblical precedent. However, this emphasis on repentance raises the question: What happens when the offender is repentant? Is a victim obligated to forgive when there is sincere repentance on the part of the offender?

According to the Gospel instructions, it appears that the answer is yes. Both Matthew and Luke indicate that boundless forgiveness is the appropriate response to a repentant offender: the seventy-times-seven instructions in Mt. 18:12-22 follow the section on community discipline and offender rebuke; in Lk. 17:3-4, Jesus emphasizes unlimited forgiveness “if there is repentance.” The Lord’s Prayer (Mt. 6:14//Lk. 11:4) and the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Mt. 18:23-35) make plain that divine forgiveness is contingent on human willingness to forgive.

Even with such straightforward instructions, though, there is room for individual discernment. The biblical requirement for outward manifestation of inward repentance introduces an element of time and judgment to repentance. For example, a victim cannot rely on words of apology alone. The offender’s behavior must change over time to show
that the repentance (both words and actions) is sincere; assessing this change becomes a matter of the victim’s judgment.

In the Gospel of John, the risen Jesus commissions the disciples, standing in for the entire community, to do exactly this: use their own judgment in deciding whom and what sins to forgive. John describes, “He breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained’” (Jn 20:22-23). James W. Barker argues that John reformulates the Matthean instruction on binding and loosing (18:18) as a correction to offset the harsh consequences for non-forgiveness given in Matthew’s Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (those who do not forgive will be handed over for torture by God; 18:34-35). Barker observes, “John emphasizes the disciples’ authority to withhold forgiveness, concerning which Matthew had cautioned.”

Jesus grants this authority to forgive or retain sins to each disciple present, and to every member of the community by extension. While some argue that this applies only to the disciples functioning as a community, I hold that Jesus means to grant this authority—along with the guiding wisdom of the Holy Spirit—to all members of the community for all time. The fact that he makes this announcement to an incomplete community is significant. 

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66 James W. Barker, “John’s Use of Matthew” (Ph.D. diss; Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN: 2011), pp. 83-103; John shifts the language from “loosing” (λύω) to “forgiving” (διψέμ), thus matching the διψέμ language in Mt. 18:21-22 (seventy-times-seven) and 18:23-35 (Parable of the Unforgiving Servant).
67 Barker, “John’s Use of Matthew,” pp. 103.
group of disciples (at least Thomas is missing; those in attendance are not named) indicates that he means his words to apply to a broader audience. Craig S. Keener writes, “Although the promise is given directly to those present at the time, it will no more exclude later generations of Christians (such as John’s audience) than it would Thomas once he believes.”70 Just as Matthew’s Great Commission (28:19-20) is taken to apply to all Christians at all times, so this “commission” also extends to all Christians.

This means that even in cases where the offender repents, the victim may opt not to forgive. Perhaps a crime is too enormous, the injuries too severe, or the ongoing fear is too great to warrant forgiveness. As each of the Synoptic Gospels attests, there is at least one sin that is beyond the province of God’s forgiveness (see Jesus’ warning about the sin that “will not be forgiven;” Mk. 3:29//Mt. 12:32//Lk. 12:10).

The instruction in Jn 20:22-23 does not contradict the forgiveness instructions in Matthew and Luke; instead, it provides a complement as it commissions the disciples (who represent the entire community) to judge carefully when deciding whether to forgive. The implication in these verses is that the Holy Spirit (which Jesus breathes onto

70 Keener, Gospel of John, p. 1206.
the disciples just prior to the instruction) will guide such decisions. And regardless of whether a victim forgives or retains the sins of another, God will follow suit.\textsuperscript{71}

With this intertextual reading, the forgiveness instructions in Matthew and Luke are tempered by Jesus’ authorizing the disciples (and the community) to make their own decisions about forgiveness. From Matthew and Luke, it is clear that forgiveness plays an important role in community cohesion and individual salvation (i.e., forgiveness by God), but John’s Jesus adds that forgiveness is neither a given nor an absolute obligation. Rather, victims must discern whether forgiveness is appropriate with the knowledge that God will act accordingly.

\textit{Forgiveness that inspires repentance}

There is a strain in Christian theology that views repentance as a response to—rather than a prerequisite for—divine forgiveness. Miroslav Volf likens forgiveness to a gift that must be received. He writes, “Forgivers’ forgiving is not conditioned by repentance. The offenders’ being forgiven, however, is conditioned by repentance. Without repentance the forgivers will keep forgiving but the offenders will remain unforgiven, in that they are untouched by that forgiveness.”\textsuperscript{72} With regard to divine forgiveness, first there is forgiveness, then the response of repentance, then the grabbing hold of forgiven-ness. It is only by responding with repentance that one may truly accept the gift of forgiveness,

\textsuperscript{71} This assumes the divine passive in Jn 20:23 (“they are forgiven them...they are retained”); see Barker, “John’s Use of Matthew,” p. 90. See n. 15 for further examples of the divine-passive construction.
\textsuperscript{72} Volf, \textit{Free of Charge}, p. 183.
but it is the initial forgiveness that inspires the repentant response. Similarly, Augustine’s concept of prevenient grace has God’s grace (and forgiveness) as occurring prior to any human action (including repentance). In this view, Jesus’ prayer from the cross, “Father, forgive them” (Lk. 23:34a) becomes an example of grace (forgiveness) that precedes and then prompts human action (repentance).

This line of thinking has made its way into psychological circles as a way to promote unconditional and unilateral forgiveness. In the realm of interpersonal forgiveness, “Genuine forgiveness can lead the sinner to understand their wrongdoing and repent,” write Cynthia Ransley and Terri Spy. In this view, forgiveness becomes a mode by which the victim could positively influence the wrongdoer. “If the expression of forgiveness is viewed as sincere,” write Julie Juola Exline and Roy F. Baumeister, “the perpetrator could note the victim’s admirable behavior and feel inspired (or perhaps shamed) toward repentance.” In the context of this dissertation, such an understanding of the relationship between forgiveness and repentance becomes simply a way to heap a double burden on victims. Not only must they forgive unconditionally, but they must do so for the good of the perpetrator (i.e., to inspire his repentance).

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Forgiveness and restorative justice

In what follows, I present chapter summaries and show how the case studies work together toward a more measured account of forgiveness for victims of violence and other wrongdoing. In the first case study, I provide a brief history of interpretation of Jesus’ seventy-times-seven instructions (Mt. 18:21-22 and Lk. 17:3-4). I demonstrate how the Church Fathers and the Reformers focus on the role of repentance in these instructions and how contemporary interpretations abandon the emphasis on repentance that is clear in both Matthew and Luke’s versions. As a result of these more recent interpretations, victims who participate in restorative justice encounters are often presented with biblical imperatives for unlimited forgiveness that is also unilateral and unconditional (i.e., not requiring offender repentance), when the biblical material presents quite a different picture.

Restorative justice advocates idealize and heavily promote forgiveness while often claiming biblical mandate. I call for a reexamination of the seventy-times-seven material and a reinstitution of a bilateral process of forgiveness that can and must include offender repentance. I am critical of the restorative justice movement’s lavish praise of unconditional forgiveness both because it misappropriates the biblical teaching and because it threatens to revictimize the victim.

Claiming biblical foundations, restorative justice advocates emphasize forgiveness and reconciliation as the primary response to crime. A major facet of this movement is the practice of Victim-Offender Mediation (VOM), where, together with a mediator victims face offenders to talk about the effects of the crime. While pressure to forgive is
taboo in this process, restorative justice advocates heavily promote forgiveness in other contexts and the tacit pressure to forgive is strong.

Since many restorative justice advocates cite biblical foundations for their work, this case study examines how they import biblical forgiveness instructions into a quasi-legal process and bring them to bear on victims in the context of mediation. The seventy-times-seven instructions in Matthew and Luke are especially prevalent in restorative justice literature. I show that only the “unlimited” character of forgiveness is preserved and celebrated, while the emphasis on offender repentance is usually downplayed and sometimes lost. I show how the trend in biblical studies also leans toward emphasizing the command for unlimited forgiveness.

In the context of restorative justice, VOM practices both enact and contradict the biblical instructions. While the process is presented as a dialogue—with roles for both the offender (to apologize) and the victim (to forgive)—such expectations render the encounter artificial and scripted. Further, there is much more discussion and praise of

“forgiving” victims in the movement’s literature than there is about repentant offenders. Victims are expected to forgive regardless of the offender’s disposition, and this expectation is based largely on the supposed therapeutic benefits of forgiveness. Such forgiveness is presented as biblical, and so victims face not just a moral imperative, but also a theological one.

The goal of this case-study analysis is not to discount or reject the role of forgiveness in the aftermath of crime. Rather, I argue that a more thorough application of the bilateral model of forgiveness presented in the Gospels provides a more balanced and emotionally safer approach to VOM than the current idealized version of forgiveness. Victims are not required to forgive offenders who are not repentant, and that repentance must be judged to be sincere and reflected in concrete actions such as restitution where possible (also a key concept in restorative justice). In the absence of such repentance, victims may withhold forgiveness and reconciliation. This is exactly the process described in the seventy-times-seven material. When applied to restorative justice encounters, it stands to create a richer experience for victims.

Forgiveness and post-apartheid South Africa

In the context of post-apartheid South Africa, forgiveness language dominates the national discourse of reconciliation. During the Human Rights Violations Committee hearings, victims were sometimes implored to forgive even by the TRC chairperson himself, Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Forgiveness was touted both for its healing potential (mainly psychological; mainly for individuals) and its religious importance. Tutu’s memoir of the period, No Future Without Forgiveness, reflects this imperative. Tutu
repeatedly asserts that the future of the “new South Africa” is dependent on the unconditional forgiveness of the victims of apartheid and anti-apartheid violence.

Alongside this rhetoric of forgiveness, I consider the Lord’s Prayer (Mt. 6:9-13; Lk. 11:2-4). While Tutu does not frequently cite the prayer in his writings, he does mention its forgiveness imperative; its presence is implied with its daily recitation at the openings of the TRC hearings. First I review the history of interpretation of these verses and note how the prayer functions as a tool for ensuring community cohesion. In the Gospel context, the Lord’s Prayer unites voices toward common hopes and commitments: enough food, mutual forgiveness, protection from evil, and the emergence of the kingdom of God on earth. The prayer is a community prayer.

The Lord’s Prayer is consistent with other accounts of forgiveness in the Gospels in that it emphasizes the bilateral character of forgiveness. The prayer contains both a plea and a promise: forgive us as we forgive. The plea contains an admission of guilt, a sense of repentance (i.e., asking for forgiveness), and a hope for divine pardon. The promise looks to enact that forgiveness in order to preserve and strengthen the early Christian

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80 Some interpret it as an eschatological prayer, with “daily bread” referring to the “heavenly manna of the latter days” and “Forgive us our debts” pointing to the coming time of judgment (Dale C. Allison, “Matthew,” in John Barton and John Muddiman (eds.), The Oxford Bible Commentary [New York: Oxford University Press, 2001], pp. 844-86 [856]; see also W.D. Davies and D.C. Allison, Matthew 1-7 [International Critical Commentary; London and New York: T & T Clark International, 1988], p. 594)). I interpret the prayer as having to do with everyday concerns, including acts of interpersonal forgiveness.
community. The plea for forgiveness, which I interpret as an expression of repentance, is inseparable from the promise to forgive. The community repeats each of these pleas and promises when they pray together.

This interpretation of the Lord’s Prayer is instructive in the context of the TRC and post-apartheid South Africa in that the promotion of forgiveness by Tutu and others often dismisses the need for repentance. Indeed, while victims in the HRVC hearings were often pressed to forgive, offenders appearing before the Amnesty Committee were not urged to apologize or otherwise show remorse. While the TRC has roles for both victims and offenders—the Human Rights Violations Committee and the Amnesty Committee hearings, respectively—the two are kept separate and there is no opportunity for dialogue. The rhetoric of victim forgiveness is not matched by a similar call for offender repentance or remorse, although coming before the Amnesty Committee with no guarantee of a positive outcome is a step in that direction.

Together with his promotion of forgiveness, Tutu also frequently warned of the ill effects of negative emotions such as anger or resentment. Victims, then, were presented with an imperative to forgive based not on offender repentance but rather on promises of psychological or emotional healing. While he advocated forgiveness based on Christian imperatives, Tutu conflated that forgiveness with an idealized model of unconditional, unilateral forgiveness that would give birth to a new, reconciled South Africa.

In this chapter I also demonstrate that Tutu’s repudiation of the negative emotions discounts the role played by anger and resentment in the years of protest leading up to the end of apartheid. Moving forward to a consideration of Tutu’s thought during and after the TRC, I show that forgiveness alone is insufficient as a national ethic. In many ways,
forgiveness and the reconciliation it often precedes may serve as powerful catalysts for conflict transformation. But forgiveness alone did not end apartheid; protest and anger and righteous indignation paved the way to the TRC. The biblical account does not preclude anger even as it calls for bilateral forgiveness. The TRC and Tutu would better serve victims with a reexamination of a process that calls for unconditional forgiveness. I propose the Lord’s Prayer as a countervailing example of community cohesion that involves both repentance and forgiveness. Tutu’s boosterism of unconditional, unilateral forgiveness may provide emotional catharsis in the short term, but pressuring victims toward this kind of forgiveness creates a weak version of reconciliation that is based on the emotional sacrifice of victims rather than mutual effort and respect.

Forgiveness and the pastoral care of victims of domestic violence

According to the National Institutes of Justice and the Centers for Disease Control, approximately 1.5 million women are victims of domestic abuse in the United States every year.81 Since victims often seek help from Christian clergy or other pastoral caregivers, theological responses play a role in how victims understand their situations and whether they find safety from their abusers.

In many cases, pastors and pastoral counselors raise the issue of forgiveness with victims of domestic violence. Often victims, having noted the Gospel emphasis on forgiveness, struggle with whether and how to forgive their abusers. While certainly not all pastoral professionals advise women to remain in abusive marriages, many advocate

forgiveness, either towards reconciling the marriage relationship or for the individual health of the victim. In this chapter, I examine how women are sometimes encouraged to follow the example of Christ on the cross (“Father, forgive them,” Lk. 23:34a) and to forgive without condition. I argue that this verse in fact reflects a refusal to forgive in such a circumstance, and thus it provides a positive model for victims of domestic violence to withhold forgiveness from unrepentant and potentially dangerous abusers. Considering that many women forgive and return to abusive partners only to be abused again, victims may be served by a reading of this text that encourages an intermediary step, such as prayer that makes way for careful discernment as called for in Jn 20:23 before forgiving.

I review the history of interpretation of Jesus’ cry from the cross in order to show how the verse has been used in both ancient and contemporary contexts to promote unconditional forgiveness in the midst of suffering, as well as after the fact. In light of Jesus’ other teachings on forgiveness in the Gospel of Luke (e.g., 17:3-4), some scholars assert that he withholds forgiveness in the absence of repentance.\footnote{See for example, S. John Roth, “Jesus the Pray-er” \textit{Currents in Theology and Mission} 33.6 (2006), pp. 488-500 (497).} His prayer for forgiveness is entirely consistent with his earlier call for enemy love (Lk. 6:27-28), but it is not a direct act of forgiveness. In Luke Jesus teaches a forgiveness that is conditioned on repentance, and his prayer on the cross illustrates this.

Next, I show how pastoral caregivers often apply explicit or tacit pressure on victims to forgive their abusers in ways that are similar to techniques used by forgiveness advocates in the other two case studies. Many pastors and counselors embrace the psychological model or unilateral and unconditional forgiveness and present this to
victims as a biblical imperative. This forgiveness is given as the duty of the victim, as well as the only way to heal from abuse. I demonstrate how some pastoral caregivers downplay the role of repentance and conflate biblical and psychological understandings.

When Jesus prays from the cross, he turns the matter of forgiveness over to God. As he suffers violence and death, he demonstrates to victims that forgiveness in the midst of violence is not an obligation. This prayer in place of forgiveness gives victims who are concerned with following the biblical text another way to respond in the midst or aftermath of abuse. With this interpretation, victims maintain their moral agency and may faithfully imitate Christ without forgiving their abusers.

Reimagining forgiveness

In each of these three cases, well-meaning theologians, clergy, and counselors transform the biblical call for forgiveness as a bilateral process that has practical outcomes (restored relationship, reconciliation, community cohesion) into a pop-psychological notion that requires only emotional work on the part of the victim and little participation from the offender or the affected community. As such, the entire burden of repair rests on the victim. This dissertation presents new interpretations of biblical texts toward reimagining forgiveness as bilateral and contingent.

Preserving the bilateral nature of forgiveness in accordance with the Scriptures offers victims a biblically based alternative to forgiving offenders. This allows victims to protect themselves in the wake of violence by refusing to forgive and reconcile with their abusers while remaining faithful to their religious convictions. The seventy-times-seven instructions, the Lord’s Prayer, and Jesus’ cry from the cross each contains a prescription for repentance as a necessary part of forgiveness.
It is not the purpose of this project to debunk or devalue forgiveness. On the contrary, I recognize that a process of repentance and forgiveness may be a powerful part of conflict transformation or relationship repair. Indeed, such repair is what is called for in the Gospel texts. However, I suggest that not every act of forgiveness is morally valuable or even appropriate. Following Margaret Urban Walker, I argue that the value of forgiveness is governed by its intentions and outcomes. She writes,

An account of forgiveness needs to capture that part of forgiving that looks ahead hopefully to an uncertain future and not only to the part that looks to settle something in the past. There are conditions [i.e., whether the offender repents, whether that repentance is sincere, and whether that relationship is genuinely safe for the victim going forward] that make that hopefulness more or less risky, and understanding forgiveness as something of moral value involves understanding what conditions those are.\(^{83}\)

Thus, forgiveness must not be idealized; every act of forgiveness is only as good as what it accomplishes. For example, if forgiving an unrepentant abuser opens the door for further abuse, such forgiveness is not morally good. Such a discerning account holds forgiveness accountable to the biblical view and provides a safeguard for acts of forgiveness that put the victim or others in danger by becoming again vulnerable, either physically or emotionally, to the offender.

Walker also argues that there are circumstances in which relationship repair may not be possible. She writes, “Where the reparative role of forgiveness is blocked or impossible due to some changeable feature of the situation, it may be true that to forgive under those conditions [lack of repentance, amends, or acknowledgment of harm] would be wrong.”\(^{84}\) For Walker, there are no negative moral implications for the victim who is


unable or unwilling to forgive. She continues, “Holding wrongs ‘unforgivable’ is a way to mark the enormity of injury and the malignancy of wrongdoing as exceeding anything that could be made to fit back into a reliable framework of moral relations.”

Walker focuses on the end result of forgiveness as well as the act of forgiveness before naming it as a virtue. According to Walker, forgiveness may not be possible. According to the biblical instructions, forgiveness may not be possible. But that failure does not indicate a moral failure on the part of the individual victim. This dissertation is predicated on this careful and conditional understanding of the possibilities and limits of forgiveness.

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85 Walker, Moral Repair, pp. 190.
CHAPTER II

FROM REPENTANCE AND REPAIR TO EXISTENTIAL MUSCLE-FLEXING:
FORGIVENESS IN THE “SEVENTY TIMES SEVEN” INSTRUCTIONS AND
VICTIM-OFFENDER MEDIATION

When Clair and Anna May Weaver were brutally murdered by their fourteen-year-old son Keith in 1991, the response from Landisville Mennonite Church was immediate. In addition to caring for surviving family members, Pastor Sam Thomas created support groups for the community and began providing legal and social assistance for Keith. In the early days after the murders, Thomas encouraged the congregation to “understand what it means to forgive,” and to “think about their intent to forgive.”

A few months later, church members had established the “70x7 Fund” to help with the legal, therapeutic, educational, and personal needs of Keith Weaver. Through the fund, the congregation acknowledged their “biblical responsibility to have compassion for both victims and offenders and their desire to forgive and continue forgiving, even ‘seventy times seven,’ as Jesus called his disciples to do in Matthew 18.”

In reporting on these events, Andrea Schrock Wenger calls the fund, “A modern response to an ancient command.” She presents the story of the Church’s actions as an example of restorative justice in action. Indeed, Howard Zehr, widely regarded as the

86 Andrea Schrock Wenger, “How Does a Congregation Deal with a Triple Murder?” Gospel Herald, February 9, 1993, pp. 6-8 (6). The now-defunct Gospel Herald was a news organ of the Mennonite Church from 1908 to 1998. I received a scanned copy of this article courtesy of Colleen MacFarland of the Mennonite Church USA Archives on April 17, 2012.
founder of the restorative justice movement, cites the community’s response as a shining example of right response to crime. He writes, “[T]he only justice [is one] that treats each actor as a full participant…that encourages communication and empathy, that addresses the needs of victims as well as offenders.”

Zehr cites the “70x7 fund” as a model of restorative justice practice. Its name, he observes, recognizes that “forgiveness [is] a decision that would need to be made over and over, ‘seventy times seven.’”

The church’s response to the murder in their midst—as well as Zehr’s analysis—goes to the heart of the restorative justice movement in which advocates offer an alternative to the so-called “retributive” criminal justice system and criticize its emphasis on punishment. Privileging such values as forgiveness and reconciliation, they emphasize the humanity and agency of the victim, the offender, and the community. In their view, the essence of crime is a broken relationship and the goal of restorative justice is to repair that breach. Even when there was no relationship prior to the offense, many restorative justice advocates contend that the crime creates a relationship, and that relationship is worth restoring. As Mark Umbreit observes, “Restoration of the emotional and material

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89 Zehr, “Restoring Justice,” p. 159.
92 Zehr, Changing Lenses, p. 51.
losses resulting from crime is far more important than imposing ever-increasing levels of costly punishment on the offender.”

In this chapter, I examine the intersection of Scripture and law in the restorative justice movement and specifically in the practice of Victim-Offender Mediation (VOM). Since many restorative justice advocates cite biblical foundations for their work, I address how they interpret the community instructions about forgiveness in Mt.18:21-22 and Lk.17:3-4 and apply them in this context. Advocates often use these texts to promote unlimited and unconditional forgiveness. However, a closer look at the biblical texts demonstrates definite boundaries within the forgiveness instructions, boundaries that are often transgressed in VOM practices.

First, I review the history of interpretation of the so-called “seventy-times-seven” instructions on forgiveness. I show how these verses teach a forgiveness that is boundless but conditional, and I situate them in their context of a set of instructions intended to strengthen the nascent Christian community. In examining the process of forgiveness described in Matthew and Luke, I find that the call for repentance given explicitly in Lk. 17:4 and implied in Matthew’s discourse on community discipline (18:15-20) is highly valued among early church fathers and reformers, but is often lost in the celebration of “radical forgiveness” that is the hallmark of restorative justice and mediation practices.

94 See “Introduction,” n. 73.
95 Brian Zahnd, Unconditional? The Call of Jesus to Radical Forgiveness (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2010), p. 82: “Restorative justice is…the kind of justice Jesus wants to bring to a broken world. This is the kind of justice that can happen when we choose to end the cycle of revenge. This is the kind of justice that can happen when we
I also show how current interpretations enlarge the definition of forgiveness, downplay the role of repentance, and conflate the biblical instructions with contemporary psychological notions of forgiveness.

Next, I show how VOM practices are both consistent with and also antithetical to the biblical forgiveness instructions. Jesus’ instructions—especially in Matthew—serve as directions for resolving conflicts within the community, a process that ideally ends in forgiveness. VOM follows this course to a point, especially by carefully delineating requirements for both victim and offender. However, by identifying a “forgiving” victim in conversation with a “repentant” offender as the basic structure, the very process contains pressure on each participant to behave in a particular way or risk termination of the mediation session. Further, advocates tend to draw the basis of their advocacy of forgiveness from contemporary visions of unlimited and unconditional forgiveness, both religious and psychological. While VOM mediators take care never to pressure victims to forgive, I show that implicit pressure and a preference for forgiveness exists.

Some VOM mediators discourage expressions of anger during mediation, and many cases are rejected for VOM if the victim is judged to be “too angry.” As a result, victims must sublimate negative emotions in order to fit within the VOM picture of what successful mediation looks like (Jennifer Gerarda Brown, “The Use of Mediation to Resolve Criminal Cases: A Procedural Critique,” Emory Law Journal 43 [1994], pp. 1247-1309 [1276]).
In the murder case described above, the pastor warns, “It is not helpful at all to push forgiveness or to give pat answers.”97 But as the congregation acted out a specifically “restorative” vision of community justice, one of the first tasks of the ministry team was to help parishioners and the victim’s family “understand what it means to forgive, and to …think about their intent to forgive.”98 At no point in this extended article about the murders and their aftermath does the author recount the words or behavior of the offender after his arrest. The article does not report whether he was apologetic or remorseful. For this community, supporting or forgiving Keith Weaver does not depend on his response.

Jesus’ forgiveness instructions in Matthew and Luke

Two similar sets of teachings about forgiveness appear in Matthew and Luke:

**Mt. 18.21-22**

Then Peter came and said to him, “Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.”

**Lk. 17.3-4**

Be on your guard! If your brother sins, you must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive. And if the same person sins against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says, “I repent,” you must forgive.

In both passages, the verb ἀφίημι (“forgive”) echoes the Lord’s Prayer as well as the pronouncements of forgiveness in the healing of the paralyzed man (Mt. 9:2-8, Mk 2:2-12, Lk. 5:17-26) and the sinful woman (Lk. 7:36-50). In Matthew’s version, Jesus gives a simple instruction: if a member of the church sins against you, then you must forgive seventy-seven times, that is, without limit. The Lucan formula is more complex. Instead of presenting forgiveness as an automatic response to wrongdoing, Jesus describes a bilateral process in which the offender must first show repentance before the victim is required to forgive.

Unlimited forgiveness

Scholars most commonly interpret Matthew’s use of “seventy-seven” to mean that forgiveness should be boundless.\(^9\) The number may also be an allusion to Gen. 4:24,

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\(^9\) In Matthew, the command is to forgive seventy-seven times (ἐβδομηκοντάκις ἐπτά, which is often mistranslated as “seventy times seven times”). In Luke’s version (17:3-4), the command is to forgive “seven times” (ἕπτάκις) if preceded by seven expressions of
where Lamech boasts that he will avenge himself seventy-sevenfold. Jesus’ audience
would have noticed this parallel and so regarded the instruction concerning unlimited
forgiveness as the correction of Lamech’s unrestricted revenge. Understood as such,
forgiveness serves to quiet, or offset, the desire for revenge. However, unlimited
forgiveness may be as problematic as unlimited revenge in that it may excuse even
ongoing offenses; a more effective antidote to unlimited revenge could be more careful
consideration and moderation of the forgiving or angry response.

Others interpret the number seventy-seven as representing not the quantity but rather
the ongoing character of forgiveness. Christoph Klein sees the command as less about
quantity and more a way of life, “an understanding of reconciliation as a process, that
needs to be repeatedly [and] constantly maintained, regularly nurtured and brought about,
therefore pointing to the demand for a ‘culture of reconciliation.’” In this
configuration, forgiveness as a way of life may not include a forgiving response to every
instance of wrongdoing but rather a general disposition toward forgiving where possible.

In both Matthew and Luke, Peter questions whether one should forgive “seven
times,” which would have been a very large or even infinite number. This makes Jesus’
multiplied responses seem even more excessive. Matthew’s instruction for boundless

“I repent” (μετανοήσῃ). For the sake of expediency, I refer to these texts as the “seventy
times seven” instructions or teachings.

100 Douglas R.A. Hare, Matthew (Interpretation; Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1993), p. 216.
101 Christoph Klein, Wenn Rache der Vergebung weicht: Theologische Grundlagen einer
Kultur der Versöhnung (Forschungen zur systematischen und ökumenische Theologie, 93; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), p. 19; translation mine. Original text:
“Eines Verständnisses von der Versöhnung also Prozess, der immer wieder, ständig,
regelmässig gepflegt und bewirkt, werden muss; sie ist somit Hinweis auf die Forderung
einer ‘Kultur der Versöhnung.’”

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forgiveness appears near the end of Jesus’ discourse on community rule. In the preceding verses, Jesus advises his followers to rebuke other church members when they commit sins and to cast those who are not receptive to this rebuke out of the community (18:15-17). He tells Peter that he is obligated to forgive his “brother” (18:21) seventy-seven times. Similarly, in Luke Jesus instructs forgiveness of “your brother” (17:3) seven times a day as long as that disciple repents.\footnote{103} The familial language indicates that these instructions were intended to promote reconciliation within a specific community. Luke’s addition of “a day” (τὴν ἡμέραν) to the instruction emphasizes the everyday character of this process.

Forgiveness and reconciliation are closely linked in these passages. Matthew and Luke both devote substantial effort to dealing with conflict and reconciliation within the community. Relationships in the church are worth restoring.\footnote{104} The exhortations in Matthew and Luke are limited to how church members should behave toward one another. The community cannot survive without active effort to maintain and nourish relationships.\footnote{105} Forgiveness in these contexts is synonymous with reconciliation; in Jesus’ teachings, forgiveness always involves the restoration of right relationship and

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\footnote{103} The NRSV renders ὁ δεξιός ἀδελφός as “another member of the church” (18:21) and “another disciple” (17:3).


\footnote{105} Allison, “Matthew,” p. 867; see also Davies and Allison, Matthew, p. 308.
reintegration into the community, whether that is a human community or the
eschatological community of the saved. The current notion that forgiveness can begin and
end with the individual victim, or achieve an emotional or psychological change, does not
appear in Jesus’ teachings.¹⁰⁶

Reproving and repentance

While the teaching of unlimited forgiveness in Matthew seems antithetical to the
immediately preceding instructions on strict discipline for unrepentant sinners (those not
receptive to reproof should “be to you as a Gentile and a tax-collector” 18:17), in fact
they are complementary. Forgiveness should be unlimited, but not unconditional.
Leviticus instructs, “You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall
reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself” (19:17; emphasis mine).
Correcting one’s neighbor is, according to the Bible, not only a kind response; it is also
an obligation. Further, as Davies and Allison observe, “The [early Christian] community
would cease to be if it did not insist on [right behavior]. Thus the spirit of forgiveness
cannot mean blindness and indifference to sin within the church.”¹⁰⁷

Matthew supplies only a general instruction on forgiveness, but Luke offers details on
the mechanics of the process. Luke gives a pair of parallel examples: “If your brother
sins, you must rebuke him, and if there is repentance, you must forgive. And if the same
person sins against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says, ‘I
repent,’ you must forgive” (Lk. 17:3-4). Luke thereby presents a progression: sin →
rebuke → repent → forgive. The second example is more specific: sin seven times a day

¹⁰⁶ Konstan, Before Forgiveness, p. 165-66.
¹⁰⁷ Davies and Allison, Matthew, p. 308.
→ turn back seven times a day → say, “I repent” → forgive. In Luke’s description, the process of forgiveness is an exchange between victim and offender with requirements on both sides. It follows that if any of the steps fails, the entire process fails. Luke makes clear that repentance is necessary for forgiveness.

In both the Gospels of Luke and Matthew, forgiveness material appears within a collection of community instructions. Where Matthew separates the process of reproof (Mt. 18:15) from the command to forgive (18:22), Luke joins the two to demonstrate that forgiveness must be preceded by repentance (17:3-4). Repeated sins must be accompanied by repeated expressions of repentance before there can be repeated forgiveness (signified by the number seven).

The early church followed Luke’s insistence on repentance. Concerning Matthew’s verse about the one who is unwilling to be reproved being “as a Gentile and a tax collector” (18:17), John Chrysostom sees Matthew as imposing a limit the command for forgiveness. He rephrases Peter’s question by adding a phrase: “How often then ought I to bear with him, being told his faults, and repenting? Is it enough for seven times?” The addition of “being told his faults” and “repenting” to Matthew’s text indicates the importance of both behaviors in the granting of forgiveness. For Chrysostom, repentance is such an integral part of the forgiveness instruction that he alters Peter’s question in order to include the repentance behavior described in Luke.

Martin Luther makes a similar move. He writes, “As oft as thy brother asks forgiveness, thou shalt forgive him.” Again, repentance demonstrated by “asking

108 St. John Chrysostom, Homily 61 on Matthew.
109 St. John Chrysostom, Homily 61 on Matthew.
110 Martin Luther, in E. Mueller (ed.), Luther’s Explanatory Notes on the Gospels (trans.
forgiveness” is included in the formula. Luther considers the Matthean and Lucan versions of these texts to be interchangeable; his comment on Lk. 17:1-4 cross-references Matthew 18.¹¹¹ Even in the midst of a sermon on Christ’s voluminous grace and forgiveness, Luther incorporates a call to repentance: “Because Christ…set up and erected such a kingdom, as wherein is only grace, which must at no times cease….So that if thou repent all things will be wholly forgiven thee.”¹¹²

Luther invokes Lk. 24:47 (“Repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations”) to demonstrate further the inexorable relationship between repentance and faith, which together open the way to forgiveness. According to Luther, repentance and faith cannot be understood separately. “These two are the first elements of Christian life,” he writes. “Repentance or contrition and grief, and faith through which we receive the forgiveness of sins and are righteous before God. Both should grow and increase in us.”¹¹³ Even as the reformer sought to correct what he saw as the Catholic emphasis on human works as necessary for salvation, he held onto the call for repentance as a requirement for forgiveness.

John Calvin also focuses on the importance of repentance. He writes, “As repentance is a wonderful work of the Spirit, and is the creation of the new man, if we despise it, we

¹¹¹ Luther, Luther’s Explanatory Notes, p. 241.
offer an insult to God himself.”¹¹⁴ He considers the Matthean and Lucan instructions together: Mt. 18:21-35 (the seventy-times-seven instruction and the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant) and Luke 17:4 (the seventy-times-seven instruction with the inclusion of repentance). His arrangement of the Gospel instructions presents a text that moves from the last line of the parable—“So likewise shall my heavenly Father do to you if you forgive not every one his brother from your hearts their offenses”—straight to Luke’s instruction—“If the same person sins against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive.”¹¹⁵ By joining the two scriptures in this way, he emphasizes the role of repentance in forgiveness. Thus, even for the Reformers, repentance is an essential part of the process of forgiveness.

Unconditional forgiveness

Matthew and Luke present forgiveness instructions that demand concrete expressions (in Matthew, receptiveness to rebuke; for Luke, repentance), and early interpreters emphasize the bilateral process of repentance and forgiveness. However, contemporary voices from biblical studies, pastoral care, and psychology embrace a vision of forgiveness that has neither limit nor condition. Such forgiveness is then contained entirely in the emotional state of the victim, while the offender remains unrepentant or even unknown. In these scenarios, forgiveness is separated from reconciliation; it becomes a change of mind and heart, one that a victim is often pressured to perform.

¹¹⁵ Calvin, Calvin’s Bible Commentaries, p. 325.
Underlying this idea are Jesus’ instructions for unlimited forgiveness, which are understood as unconditional.\textsuperscript{116}

Theologian and psychologist Lewis B. Smedes writes, “Forgiving is a gift, not a duty. It is meant to heal, not obligate. So the only good answer to Peter’s question is: Use the gift as often as it takes to set you free from a miserable past you cannot shake.”\textsuperscript{117} David W. Augsburger cites both the Matthean and Lucan passages in his work on pastoral care, but like Smedes, he says nothing about repentance. “Jesus sets no limits, draws no line in the sand, defines no point when forgiving love can capitulate to evil and offer reactive violence. It is in this refusal of limits, this boundless and stubborn refusal to draw lines to define the intolerable, that we reflect the fullness of God’s love.”\textsuperscript{118} Both authors praise the unconditional and unlimited character of Jesus’ teachings, but neither retains the original verse’s emphasis on offender repentance.

Today, the phrase “seventy times seven” has become Christian shorthand for unconditional and unlimited forgiveness, especially forgiveness in situations of betrayal or violence. In \textit{Seventy Times Seven: The Power of Forgiveness}, Johann Christoph Arnold relates a series of stories in which “real people” demonstrate forgiveness in

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{116} David Konstan offers an account of this shift in \textit{Before Forgiveness}, pp. 122-23. For examples of “seventy-times-seven” interpreted as a call for unconditional forgiveness, see Johann Christoph Arnold, \textit{Seventy Times Seven: The Power of Forgiveness} (Farmington, PA: Plough Publishing House, 1997); Doris Donnelly, \textit{Seventy Times Seven: Forgiveness and Peacemaking} (Erie, PA: Pax Christi USA, 1993); David Augsburger, \textit{Seventy Times Seven: The Freedom of Forgiveness} (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1970); Thomas W. Buckley, \textit{Seventy Times Seven: Sin, Judgment, and Forgiveness in Matthew} (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991); among many other textbooks, memoirs, and novels bearing this title and celebrating “the power of forgiveness.”
\end{thebibliography}
difficult circumstances: a woman forgives her husband for molesting their daughter; a woman forgives and advocates for the man who kidnapped and murdered her daughter; parents forgive the drunk driver who killed their son.119 These, Arnold writes, are “people who have the right to tell you that forgiveness is the only way to find healing.”120 Arnold attests to the healing power of both forgiveness and repentance, but at no point does he posit the latter as a condition of the former.121 In his view, human forgiveness is a reflection of Jesus’ forgiveness, which knows no bounds.122 Repentance can open the door to forgiveness, but forgiveness can and should take hold even in its absence. A church community’s goal, he argues, “should never be punishment, but restoration.”123 However, avoiding punishment need not negate the role of repentance, whether in a church community or criminal process. Withholding forgiveness in the absence of repentance is not necessarily synonymous with “punishment,” and according to the instructions in Matthew and Luke, it is exactly what is called for.

**Restorative justice and the forgiveness imperative**

Forgiveness seventy-times-seven times is attractive as a community ethic in its simplicity and clarity. Teodor Costin notes the potential for such forgiveness to manifest in everyday life. He writes, the forgiveness teachings in Matthew, “which are powerfully radical and at the same time stand a realistic chance of being implemented, are rooted in a

119 Arnold, *Seventy Times Seven*.
120 Arnold, *Seventy Times Seven*, back cover.
121 Arnold, *Seventy Times Seven*, p. 150.
123 Arnold, *Seventy Times Seven*, p. 150.
deep experience of an impartial God.” However, the biblical text does not portray God as “impartial.” In Matthew especially, God is portrayed as a harsh judge prone to violent reactions as seen in the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant when the servant is “handed over to be tortured” (18:35). Neither the Matthean nor the Lucan instructions on boundless forgiveness recommend impartiality; on the contrary, they provide guidelines for reproof and repentance, along with forgiveness that depends on both. The idea that these forgiveness instructions might reach into contemporary contexts with a “realistic chance” of being implemented is the kernel of the restorative justice movement. Drawing on a biblical vision of restoration of right relationship through repentance, forgiveness, and mutual respect, advocates propose alternatives to criminal justice that include restitution along with mediation (and ideally, reconciliation) between victim and offender.

Restorative justice advocates identify the movement against traditional criminal justice, or what they term a “retributive” system. Claiming a biblical foundation, restorative justice shifts the focus away from the state and abstract legal concepts such as crime as a violation against the State to focus on the effects of crime on relationships.


125 While restorative justice advocates position themselves against the “retributive” American criminal justice system, this is in fact a misnomer. Retribution (or, deserved punishment) is only one justification for punishment in a system that also aims for deterrence, incapacitation, or rehabilitation. See Matthew Lippman, *Contemporary Criminal Law: Concepts, Cases, and Controversies* (2nd ed.; Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2010), pp. 54-57.

and the community. The restorative vision names three primary stakeholders: the victim, the offender, and the community in which the crime occurred and insists that all three have an active role in seeking justice in the aftermath of crime. Justice is defined in terms of restoration of right relationship among individuals and communities rather than punishment of an offender. The victim takes the central role in this process, and the offender is encouraged to provide restitution to both the victim and the affected community, such as repayment of a loss or repair of damaged property. The personal needs of the victim and the offender rather than the state are at the forefront, and every attempt is made to resolve the conflict without adjudication or incarceration.

Central to this vision of justice is a process called Victim-Offender Mediation (VOM), in which the victim and the perpetrator sit together with a trained mediator in order to resolve questions and engage in dialogue about the offense and its effects. VOM reflects restorative justice’s desire to incorporate civil dispute resolution techniques such as mediation and restitution into the process of addressing criminal wrongs.

More than 1,000 VOM programs, both private- and state-funded, currently operate in North America and Europe. Advocates cite high rates of emotional satisfaction for

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both victims and offenders. Currently VOM is used primarily in juvenile cases, first-time offenses, and low-level property crimes, but advocates are pressing for its employment in cases of assault, rape, and even homicide (with surviving family members). VOM provides a controlled setting in which victims can question offenders and offenders may explain or apologize for their actions. In some cases, offenders are offered reduced sentences in exchange for participating in mediation; in others, VOM stands in for the criminal justice process altogether, which means no conviction and no state-imposed sentence when the mediation yields positive results and both parties are satisfied with the outcome.


Biblical foundations of restorative justice

Most early victim-offender mediation\textsuperscript{134} programs were community-based non-profit organizations, and many were located in and funded by religious groups, often Mennonite churches. The Mennonite Central Committee Office on Crime and Justice continues to provide training, resources, and funding support to VOM programs worldwide.\textsuperscript{135} In a 2000 national survey, Mark S. Umbreit and Jean Greenwood identify the characteristics of VOM programs in the United States:\textsuperscript{136} twenty-two percent surveyed were based in churches, and thirty-nine percent of mediations took place in Christian or Jewish places of worship: churches, synagogues, or temples.\textsuperscript{137}

Howard Zehr incorporates biblical material into his writings and sees the church as essential to the movement. “[VOM] desperately needs the church if it is to survive in a form that matters,” he writes. “Motivated by a biblical vision of justice as restoration…the church can provide the kind of independent value base and independent institutional base which is necessary to carry the vision.”\textsuperscript{138} Zehr’s “vision of biblical justice” is predicated on a broad definition of shalom that incorporates equal distribution of resources, peaceful social relationships, and a condition of honesty or “moral

\textsuperscript{134} The first organized victim-offender mediation programs (first called victim-offender reconciliation programs, or VORP) took place in the 1970s in Elkhart, Indiana and Kitchener, Ontario (http://www.vorp.org/history.shtml).
\textsuperscript{136} Umbreit and Greenwood, \textit{National Survey}.
\textsuperscript{138} Zehr, \textit{Changing Lenses}, p. 174.
integrity.” All of this is “how God intends things to be.” Zehr interprets forgiveness as the highest goal for the social aspect of shalom as restoration of right relationship. Zehr cites multiple Old Testament texts as both positive and negative examples of shalom-as-justice (Lev. 24:19-20, “an eye for an eye;” Lev. 19:18-19, “do not seek revenge” but “love your neighbor;” Lev. 24:16, “anyone who blasphemes must be put to death”), but primarily he offers general statements not supported by biblical citations. Zehr cites only one New Testament text in support of his vision of biblical justice: “Therefore since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God” (Rom. 5:9). Here Zehr cites the RSV, but the Greek text of the final clause is quite different: σωθησόμεθα δι’ οὗτοι ἀπὸ τῆς ὀργῆς, or “we are saved through him from the anger.” The emphasis is on the absence of anger, not peace, and the agent of that anger is not explicit. Thus Zehr reads shalom-as-peace into the biblical material to support his own definition of justice rather than starting with the Bible and building from there.

Zehr draws heavily on his Mennonite tradition by appealing to biblical principles that emphasize reconciliation and repair as primary goals. As a result of crime, he writes, “Victims and the community have been harmed and are in need of restoration.” Victims should be at the center of the justice-making process and offenders should “make

\[\text{\textsuperscript{139}} \text{Zehr, Changing Lenses, pp. 126-57.} \]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{140}} \text{Zehr, Changing Lenses, p. 132.} \]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{141}} \text{On non-violence in the Mennonite tradition, see Sally Engle Merry, “Mennonite Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation,” in Cynthia Sampson and John Paul Lederach (eds.), From the Ground Up: Mennonite Contributions to International Peacebuilding (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 203-217. The other texts in this volume are also instructive on non-violence in the history of the Mennonite tradition.} \]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{142}} \text{Howard Zehr, The Little Book of Restorative Justice (The Little Books of Justice and Peacemaking; Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2002), p. 64.} \]
things right.” The community should be the site of this justice process, and the goal is an idealized image of repaired relationships and wounds addressed by dialogue and restitution rather than trial and incarceration.

In some ways, restorative justice—and especially VOM—appears to bring the principles of the seventy-times-seven instructions into contemporary contexts in a productive way. The vision of conflict resolution presented by Jesus involves a dialogue that includes both forgiveness and repentance. The offender is held accountable by the community (in Matthew) or the victim (in Luke), and repentance opens the door for forgiveness, which is here synonymous with restored relationship. For restorative justice advocates, that restored relation is the essence of justice.

Howard Zehr cites the New Testament as a starting point. “We are called to forgive our enemies, those who harm us, because God has forgiven us,” he writes. “We cannot be free as long as we are dominated by enmity.” Zehr cites Mt. 18:21-22 as a reversal of the “law of Lamech”: “It is no accident, perhaps, that [Jesus] extends [this reversal] to seventy times seven, a number almost beyond imagination. From unlimited retaliation to unlimited love—we have come full circle.” He does not mention the Lucan version with its requirement for offender repentance.

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145 Zehr, *Changing Lenses*, p. 45. Here, Zehr misquotes the biblical text; while Jesus does instruct his followers to “love your enemies,” (Lk. 6:27) nowhere does Jesus suggest that they should forgive their enemies.
146 Zehr, *Changing Lenses*, p. 150.
The lack of emphasis on repentance in restorative justice literature is especially curious considering its prominence in the teachings of Jesus. In Luke, Jesus states, “There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who need no repentance” (Lk. 15:7). Repentance is sometimes celebrated in restorative justice, but repentance has nothing to match the cachet of victim forgiveness. When advocates quote scripture, they are most likely to cite the seventy-times-seven teachings, Jesus’ cry from the cross, or the Lord’s Prayer—all of which are easily extrapolated to support the kind of emotional and unilateral forgiveness that restorative justice advocates praise. Jesus’ teachings about repentance carry as much weight in the Gospels as those on forgiveness.

When an offender agrees to a mediation session, this hints at repentance, but it may or may not be articulated during the mediation session. And since offenders often have incentives to participate in mediation (such as reduced or dropped charges, reduced sentences, or increased privileges), victims may not simply assume that a cooperative offender is a repentant one.

149 This is true especially in juvenile cases, when participation in mediation can mean dropped charges (or felony charges reduced to misdemeanors) and avoiding a criminal record. See Marian Liebmann, Restorative Justice: How It Works (London and Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2007), p. 325; Wright, “Victim-Offender Mediation as a Step,” p. 534; Declan Roche, Accountability in Restorative Justice (Clarendon Studies in Criminology; Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 86.
Christopher Marshall presents a distorted view of biblical teachings in his presentation of biblically grounded restorative justice. He notes that the Lucan version of the seventy-times-seven command calls for repentance, but even so, he still manages a vision of unconditional forgiveness. “For a broken relationship to be restored, forgiveness by the victim alone is not enough; there must also be repentance by the offender,” he writes. “But even if repentance is not forthcoming, even if the relationship cannot be restored, the disciple is still obligated to nurture forgiveness.” As if on cue, Marshall then cites Jesus’ cry from the cross as a prooftext.

As restorative justice advocates map the biblical call for forgiveness onto their theories of how criminal justice should work, three themes emerge. First, biblical forgiveness is equated with unilateral, unconditional forgiveness. Second, the requirement for repentance is lost. And third, forgiveness gets defined as a psychological and emotional feat accomplished by the victim, regardless of whether the offender is present or shows remorse. In the ideal paradigm, a remorseful offender sits across the table from a receptive victim and the mediation culminates in a catharsis of apology and forgiveness. But absent this, an endlessly and unconditionally forgiving victim suits the restorative purpose.

However, the conviction that a victim will be “healed” (or, made to feel better physically or emotionally) by forgiving and restoring a relationship with her attacker represents a major flaw in restorative justice thinking. As they conjure ideals of successful, forgiving VOM encounters, restorative justice advocates paint their bright picture against the dark backdrop of retributivism (a theory of justice that advocates the

150 Marshall, *Beyond Retribution*, p. 73.
punishment of criminals). A false dichotomy emerges as restorative justice defines itself over and against so-called retributive justice. In the process, victims are limited to two options: they engage in VOM and follow its rules of engagement, or they reject the restorative path in favor of retribution. The idealized “forgiving victim” takes on a pernicious other, the ultimate VOM undesirable: the “angry victim.”

Defining forgiveness

For restorative justice advocates, the primary point of departure from the biblical teachings is the definition of forgiveness. Where the seventy-times-seven instructions offer roles for both victim and offender toward forgiveness-as-reconciliation, restorative justice advocates isolate forgiveness as the most important and potentially most thrilling aspect of restoring right relation. In these pages I do not mean to suggest that restorative justice advocates should map their understandings of forgiveness exactly from the biblical text. Rather, I argue that a second look at the seventy-times-seven instructions could help to temper VOM’s intense focus on the victim’s response and prompt equal concern for the responses of both victim and offender. The bilateral vision of forgiveness presented in both Matthew and Luke stands to lighten the burden on the victim to forgive and open new possibilities of restored relationship in which accountability and restitution play a larger role.

A salient problem in restorative justice literature is the conflation of biblical forgiveness with contemporary psychological definitions of the term. Howard Zehr starts out with the Bible but arrives at an unconditional forgiveness that the victim is obligated to undertake for her own good. “Forgiveness is letting go of the power the offense and the offender have over a person,” he explains. “Without this experience of forgiveness,
without this closure, the wound festers, the violation takes over our consciousness, our lives.”\textsuperscript{151}

Following Zehr, Marshall writes, “Forgiveness is a process whereby those who have been wounded let go of the power of the offense and the offender over them, and more toward freedom and wholeness.”\textsuperscript{152} Such understandings of forgiveness dismiss the role of repentance and emphasize the psychological task of the victim. “The offense” takes on a life of its own as an unfriendly ghost that torments the victim, and forgiveness is the only way she will overcome its power.

Restorative justice is better served by preserving the bilateral character of forgiveness presented in the biblical text that sees forgiveness and reconciliation as separately defined but closely linked. In her work on VOM,\textsuperscript{153} Stephanie van de Loo highlights the difference between forgiveness (\textit{Vergebung}) and reconciliation (\textit{Versöhnung}). “Forgiveness means a change of attitude on the side of the hurt person regardless of the dispositions or behavior of the person who caused the hurt, such as insight, remorse, or repentance,” she writes. “Reconciliation is a reciprocal process that requires both the injured person and the offender to assume responsibility for [dealing with the past] and also requires both to have the desire to improve relations going forward.”\textsuperscript{154}

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\item \textsuperscript{151} Zehr, \textit{Changing Lenses}, p. 47.
\item \textsuperscript{152} Marshall, \textit{Beyond Retribution}, p. 73.
\item \textsuperscript{153} In Germany this practice is known as \textit{Täter-Opfer-Ausgleich}, which translates to Offender-Victim Compensation.
\item \textsuperscript{154} Stephanie van de Loo, \textit{Versöhnungsarbeit: Kriterien - theologischer Rahmen – Praxisperspektiven} (Theologie und Frieden; Stuttgart: W. Kolhammer, 2009), p. 16; my translation. Original text: “Vergebung meint eine Einstellungveränderung auf der Seite der - im wörtlichen oder metaphorischen Sinn - verletzten, vergebenden Person die unabhängig geschieht von Dispositionen oder Verhaltensweisen der verletzt habenden Person wie beispielsweise Einsicht, Reue oder Umkehr; Versöhnung als wechselseitiger Prozess setzt hingegen bei verletzter und verletzt habender Person gleichermassen
\end{itemize}
focuses on the “work of reconciliation” (*Versöhnungsarbeit*), a process that may include forgiveness and repentance but is not synonymous with these. For her, VOM at its best will be a reflection of God’s reconciliation, or restored relationship, with humankind through Jesus.  

For the purposes of this chapter, I follow van de Loo in distinguishing between forgiveness and reconciliation. While these two ideas overlap nearly completely in the biblical text—that is, forgiveness does not exist apart from its tangible effect of the restoration of right relation—today they represent two very different ideas. Forgiveness is defined as giving up resentment, anger, or negative actions against the offender and may include—but not always—the offender’s expressions of remorse or repentance. Reconciliation refers to the restoration of right relationship between victim and offender. Reconciliation may include forgiveness, but it does not have to. For example, co-workers or family members, for example, may “agree to disagree,” thus restoring relationships but not necessarily forgiving past behavior. 

Verantwortungsübernahme für das Gewesene und den Willen zur Beziehungsverbesserung voraus.”

155 Van de Loo, *Versöhnungsarbeit*, p. 136 and *passim*. On the atonement of Christ as reconciliation with humanity, see Rom. 5:10, 2 Cor. 5:18, Eph. 2:16, Col. 1:20.

**Veneration of forgiveness**

In restorative justice circles, forgiveness has become an idol. James Ptacek observes this veneration of forgiveness and its role in countering victims’ anger. “In Restorative Justice training conferences and events that I have attended in the United States, there have been tables filled with books about forgiveness on display… Forgiveness, then, seems to be a powerful emotional process that Restorative Justice harnesses.”

Ptacek notes that restorative justice advocates claim an objective stance toward forgiveness even as they celebrate books and films on the topic. While restorative justice advocates generally agree that victims should never be pressured to forgive, they remain enamored with forgiveness at the level of mediator training. Often mediators are instructed to follow scripts that are “carefully designed to ensure that a process of emotional transformation [leading in the direction of forgiveness] takes place in a conference.”

In such cases, while the participants are encouraged to “express disapproval about an offender’s actions,” this is matched by an emphasis on “the offender’s intrinsic worth as an individual, ‘separating the deed from the doer.’”

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159 Roche, *Accountability*, p. 120.
Declan Roche observes a tendency of restorative justice authors to elevate forgiveness to a supernatural level.\(^{160}\) Other scholars revere the “magical”\(^{161}\) or “miraculous”\(^{162}\) powers of apology and forgiveness, and Conrad G. Brunk writes, “Offenders, victims, families, mediators, judges, and lawyers who participate all speak of the ‘magic,’ or ‘deeply spiritual’ aspects of the events that take place” when offenders show repentance and victims are able to forgive.\(^{163}\) These scholars name repentance as a part of the process, but their primary focus is on forgiveness.

Some argue that forgiveness is not only a moral obligation of the victim, but also necessary for restoring the offender as a productive member of society. Margaret Holmgren writes, “If the offender is forgiven by his victim, he may feel as if he has a new lease on life, or a second chance to be a decent, contributive member of society.”\(^{164}\) This carries resonances of the Christian notion that forgiveness may precede repentance so as to inspire it.\(^{165}\) In Holmgren’s lengthy treatise on the virtues of unconditional forgiveness, though, she offers scant anecdotal or statistical evidence of such positive outcomes. Indeed, many victims may not appreciate being loaded with the burden of restoring a violent offender to a positive place in the community.

The offender has no prescribed role in this process of unconditional forgiveness. Instead, Holmgren writes, “I argue that an attitude of unconditional genuine forgiveness


\(^{163}\) Brunk, “Restorative Justice and the Philosophical Theories,” p. 51.

\(^{164}\) Holmgren, *Forgiveness and Retribution*, p. 269.

\(^{165}\) See the discussion of repentance inspired by forgiveness and “prevenient grace” in the Introduction, pp. xx.
is always appropriate and desirable from a moral point of view, regardless of whether the
offender repents and regardless of what he has done or suffered.\textsuperscript{166} A bilateral process of
forgiveness may occur, she writes, but it will be sparked by this initial cultivation of
“unconditional genuine forgiveness,” which is the moral obligation of the victim.\textsuperscript{167} Thus,
the fate of both victim and offender lies in the hands of the victim and depends on the
victim’s willingness to meet the offender face to face, listen to him, and bestow the
powerful gift of forgiveness so that he may rejoin the community. According to
Holmgren, the offender’s only responsibility is to attempt to make restitution for the
crime, and to behave better in the future.\textsuperscript{168} These are major responsibilities, but they are
not given as preconditions for victim forgiveness. Rather, Holmgren expects the victim to
take a leap of faith and extend “unconditional genuine forgiveness” to any offender
regardless of how he or she behaves. As with van de Loo above, such a view posits that
victims must not only deal with their own injuries, but also help reform the offender.

Holmgren dismisses any value of resentment in favor of this unconditional
forgiveness and thus she condemns victims for what may well be a reasonable response
to being violated and at best a measure of self-respect.\textsuperscript{169} In Aristotelian ethics, the
absence of anger and willingness to forgive too easily are signs of “small-souledness” or
obsequiousness.\textsuperscript{170} Nietzsche follows this line of thinking when he argues that
forgiveness is a sign of weakness, while revenge is a sign of self-respect: “Everybody

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\textsuperscript{166} Holmgren, \textit{Forgiveness and Retribution}, p. 10.  \\
\textsuperscript{167} Holmgren, \textit{Forgiveness and Retribution}, p. 65.  \\
\textsuperscript{168} Holmgren, \textit{Forgiveness and Retribution}, p. 269-71.  \\
\textsuperscript{169} Brudholm, \textit{Resentment’s Virtue}, p. 4 and \textit{passim}; Murphy, “Forgiveness and
Resentment,” pp. 14-34, esp. 16-18.  \\
\textsuperscript{170} Gregory Sadler, “Forgiveness, Anger, and Virtue in an Aristotelian Perspective,”
\textit{Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association} 82 (2008), pp. 229-247
(235).
\end{flushleft}
will revenge himself unless he is without honor or full of contempt or full of love for the person who has harmed and insulted him.”

Such revenge is a matter of “self-preservation” and “self-defense.” Gregory Sadler observes, “Not only are such non-forgiving responses merited [in Aristotelian thought], as well as protective of self and others in the community, they may even serve purposes of moral education both for the offender and for others.” Here, it is non-forgiveness rather than forgiveness that stands to reform the offender, much in the same way that many Christians believe that forgiveness may prompt resentment.

Another way restorative justice advocates revere forgiveness is by naming it as a gift—sometimes ineffable and always invaluable—that the victim might offer the offender. Stephanie van de Loo describes forgiveness as a “free gift” from the victim that is not synonymous with but may contribute to reconciliation. “Forgiveness as an interior process can only be a free gift from the victim,” she writes. “In its interpersonal effects, forgiveness comes close to the concept of reconciliation.” Forgiveness here is figured as an internal, emotional process that may have a visible, outward effect in a reconciled relationship between the victim and the offender. This “free gift,” even in the absence of repentance, may heal the breach on its own.

Christopher D. Marshall, however, describes a gift that is transactional and requires “moral effort” on both sides to be accomplished. He writes, “Forgiveness, by definition, is a gift freely given to the guilty party, otherwise it is not forgiveness. But it is not given cheaply, for it occurs in the moral space created by remorse, repentance, confession, and accountability, and demands moral effort on the part of both giver and receiver. But when it occurs, it lifts the shame of offending (and, indeed, the shame of victimhood) from the heads of those affected.”\textsuperscript{175} The gift of forgiveness, then, stands to release both victim and offender from being, well, victim and offender. It is a task that can only be accomplished by the victim, with some “moral effort” on the part of the offender as well. And even though forgiveness requires effort from both sides, it is still seen as a gift from the victim to the offender. This is not to say that all victims are opposed to such “gifts;” indeed, in many cases victims find listening to and forgiving offenders to be a rewarding and valuable part of recovering from the criminal offense. My point is that victims ought not be presented with forgiveness as the only way forward, and certainly not in the absence of offender participation.

The gift of forgiveness might also communicate renewed trust between victim and offender. Lode Walgrave writes, “Forgiving is a gift…because it conveys to [the offender] the victim’s trust that he will refrain from causing further harm and opens hope for constructive relations in the future.”\textsuperscript{176} However Walgrave does not discuss on what the victim might base this trust. Simply showing up for a mediation session does not, as

noted above, signal offender repentance. The “hope for constructive relations in the future” is yet another burden for victims who wish no further contact with the offender. Such visions of the transformative power of forgiveness do not speak to the realities of reconstructing moral relations in the aftermath of crime. Forgiveness is not a magic wand that erases the threat of further victimization by a “forgiven” offender.

Marshall sees a gift-giving dynamic at play in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk. 15:11-32; see discussion of this text in the Introduction). He observes, “As the [story] indicates, it is the positive bestowal of honor on the shamed party, not the reinforcement or clarification of their shame, that makes the critical difference. And the person best equipped to confer such honor on the wrongdoer is the victim of their offense.”177 Again, the onus is on the victim (here, the father) to dole out the gifts of honor and community wellness. Whether the wasteful son has any gifts to offer towards the restoration of honor and right relationship remains unknown. However, at no point does the parable indicate that the father felt wronged by the prodigal son or in any way violated. Indeed, the father facilitated the initial dishonor by acceding to the younger son’s request for his share of the inheritance. The father’s response stands in contrast to the older brother, who fumes as the prodigal is welcomed home (15:28-30). And since the father is not exactly a “victim,” the idea that this is a parable about forgiveness is in question. The father is “filled with compassion” (15:20, ἐσπλαγχνίσθη), but there is no reason to assume that he forgives his son for anything. In Luke, ἐσπλαγχνίσθη (“to be filled with compassion, pity, or sympathy”178) is also Jesus’ response to the widow of Nain before he raises her only son from the dead (7:13). While this action could be considered as a gift, there is

177 Marshall, Compassionate Justice, p. 231.
178 BAGD, σπλαγχνίζομαι, p. 770.
nothing in this instance that suggests that ἔσπλαγχνίσθη has anything to do with forgiveness.

The gift status of forgiveness can be threatened if there is pressure to forgive, so restorative justice advocates direct mediators to avoid mentioning of forgiveness at all costs, especially in the context of VOM. Howard Zehr writes, “Those who cannot find it in themselves to forgive [should not] be encouraged to feel an extra burden of guilt. Real forgiveness cannot simply be willed or forced, but must come in its own time, with God’s help. Forgiveness is a gift. It should not be made into a burden.”179 Given Zehr’s exaltation of the mystery and beauty of forgiveness, forgiveness appears to be a foregone conclusion even for those who resist at first.

Forgiveness and the VOM process

The preference for forgiveness is clear in restorative justice literature—along with warnings not to pressure victims—but the message is often mixed. John Braithwaite includes forgiveness on a “priority list of values” for victim-offender mediation even as he writes, “We actively seek to persuade participants that they ought to listen respectfully, but we do not urge them to forgive. It is cruel and wrong to expect a victim of crime to forgive.”180 However, Braithwaite goes on to declare the power of forgiveness and advocate its celebration in restorative justice circles. “This is not to say that we should not write beautiful books like [Desmond] Tutu’s on the grace that can be found

179 Zehr, Changing Lenses, p. 46; emphasis mine.
through forgiveness,” he writes. “Nor does it preclude us evaluating restorative justice processes according to how much remorse, apology, forgiveness and mercy they elicit.”181 Thus, forgiveness emerges as a definite goal of restorative justice.

VOM proponents take special care not to pressure victims to forgive offenders. In fact, the first mediation programs were called “Victim-Offender Reconciliation Programs” (VORP), but advocates realized that “reconciliation” might sound too much like pressure to forgive and adjusted the title accordingly.182 “The shift in terminology from VORP to VOM signaled a shift in focus, based on experience, from reconciliation to mediation as a defining characteristic of victim offender engagement.”183 I find this change to be a beneficial one. Victims of crime may be hesitant to engage in any process that envisions “reconciliation,” or a restored relationship, as its desired outcome. Shifting the focus to the process (mediation) rather than a desired goal (reconciliation) leaves the possibilities open.

Forgiveness is the most mentioned unmentionable concept in all of restorative justice literature, especially when it comes to VOM. Writing with Marilyn Peterson Armour, Umbreit even refers to it as “the ‘f’ word” in the context of mediation.184 However, in the same work Umbreit and Armour espouse its spiritual healing effects. They write, “Forgiveness, in the sense of letting go of anger and control over the outcome, also

allows the victim to be whole again. This exercise of forgiveness relieves victims of the responsibility for their own anger, the crime, and the offender and replaces it with the trust that something else will prevent further crimes toward themselves and others.”

Umbreit and Armour do not define forgiveness any further than as a release of anger; they primarily discuss how amazing forgiveness is, and how important it is not to suggest it to victims.

Heather Strang, whose work focuses on victim emotions and careful attention to the needs of victims in restorative justice theory, also espouses forgiveness as the goal of the restorative justice encounter. For example, she concludes her article, “Is Restorative Justice Imposing Its Agenda on Victims?” by pronouncing: “It is the work of a restorative justice encounter to engender emotions of remorse and forgiveness to the benefit of all participants. When that is achieved, then the restorative justice agenda has been fulfilled.”

Legal theorist Stephen P. Garvey considers the criminal justice process from the point of view of the offender and envisions punishment as a way to achieve restoration of relationships. For this punishment-as-restoration model to work, the victims must do their part. He writes, “It reflects a moral failure…for victims to withhold forgiveness unreasonably from offenders who have done all they can do to expiate their guilt.

Forgiveness may not be obligatory, but neither is it always supererogatory. Forgiveness is

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something victims ought to give, even if they are not obligated to give it.”

In this sense, victims are subjected to moral “Good Samaritan” laws; they are obligated to help out offenders who have satisfied some idea of atonement by forgiving them. Not forgiving becomes an act of hostile neglect, just as forgiveness is seen above as a gift you are obligated to give.

Here I engage the biblical text to counter Garvey’s argument. It is only in cases where the offender’s repentance is sincere (and this is a matter of the victim’s judgment) that the question of “obligation” arises in the biblical instructions. According to the forgiveness instructions in Luke, forgiveness is required “if there is repentance...[and if the offender] says, ‘I repent’” (17:4). In the context of mediation, such repentance takes the form of a speech act, as in the latter part of Luke’s instruction. Gauging the sincerity of the offender’s apology falls to the victim, just as in John 20:23 when Jesus authorizes the disciples to forgive and retain sins as they see fit. If the victim judges the offender’s repentance to be insincere or lacking, she may refuse to forgive. The “gift” of forgiveness has little meaning when it is offered based on false pretenses.

While victims may not be obligated to forgive when certain conditions are not met, the question remains: Must the victim forgive when the offender has satisfied every requirement? For example, if the offender apologizes and the victim judges the apology to be sincere, and if the offender has made restitution to the victim and the community, is forgiveness absolutely required? Regarding the biblical instructions, it appears that

188 On victim forgiveness (and the tendency to forgive too easily), see Erin O’Hara and Maria Mayo Robbins, “Using Criminal Punishment to Serve Both Victim and Social Needs,” Law and Contemporary Problems 72.2 (Fall 2009), pp. 199-218 (207).
forgiveness in such circumstances is compulsory. And in situations where the offender has met every demand of the victim and the justice system, I would not argue against forgiveness as a moral obligation. If the offender is sincere, if he is no longer a threat to the victim, and if restitution has been made, it may indeed be wrong to withhold forgiveness.

Whether restorative justice advocates discuss or stay quiet about forgiveness, the emphasis (and sometimes the measure of mediation success) is on the victim’s ability—and often the victim’s obligation—to accomplish it. Writing specifically about the offender’s experience of VOM in a manual for mediators, Janet P. Schmidt suggests that mediators should push offenders toward repentance, which is the final step before they are able to ask for forgiveness.\(^{189}\) However, later in the same manual, the authors also suggest building in “delays” in the mediations (such as delaying entering a room or waiting for papers to be signed) in order to make space for “spontaneous acts of contrition and forgiveness.”\(^ {190}\) John Braithwaite presents a similar strategy. He offers forgiveness as the “prime example” of the values restorative justice practices should be designed to realize. “Many of us believe that if we can create spaces that give victims an opportunity to discover how they might bring themselves to forgive, this is the most important thing we can do,” he writes.\(^ {191}\) Here again, forgiveness is an explicit agenda, and while Braithwaite knows better than to mention it in the mediation encounter, he advocates “creating spaces” where forgiveness might emerge. While some authors do


\(^{190}\) Amstutz and Zehr, *Victim Offender Conferencing*, p. 32.

\(^{191}\) Braithwaite, *Responsive Regulation*, p. 15; emphasis mine.
mention repentance and contrition, these are optional and often get overshadowed in the emphasis on forgiveness.

To gain a local perspective on forgiveness and victim-offender mediation practices, in the spring of 2012 I contacted the Nashville Conflict Resolution Center. According to its website, the center mediates misdemeanor crimes in order to “[help] disputing parties communicate their needs and interests, express grievances and develop mutually acceptable solutions.”\(^{192}\) Forgiveness is not a stated goal of this process, but it is a theme that undergirds the center’s literature and workspace.

In the main room of the center, copies of Mark Umbreit’s *Handbook for Victim-Offender Mediation* (with its hopeful words about forgiveness) line the bookshelves. Executive director Tamara Losel screened the “awe-inspiring” film “The Power of Forgiveness” as part of a “movie night” at the center in 2009, and she offers a review on the center’s website. She writes, “As a mediator, I believe that our primary task is to bring more peace to this world. Virtues like love, compassion, forgiveness and mercy—key ingredients in the recipe for peace—must be studied and put into practice in our own lives.”\(^{193}\) Losel also acknowledges that she uses this film—which features Robert Enright, Everett Worthington, Fred Luskin, and other prominent figures in the “forgiveness movement” speaking enthusiastically about forgiveness—as part of all mediator-training courses at the center.\(^{194}\)

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\(^{194}\) Tamara Losel, director, Nashville Conflict Resolution Center, personal e-mail communication, May 14, 2012.
Forgiveness and the rhetoric of VOM

VOM literature is replete with instructions on how *not* to mention forgiveness in the mediation context. Umbreit recommends mediators “listen for the issue of forgiveness either as an expectation of the offender or perhaps as a fear from the victim”195 so they might step out of the way of it. He writes, “If forgiveness is to occur, it must be genuine and not contrived or done because someone thought the mediator expected it.”196 The bottom line for Umbreit is that it is not a good idea to pressure victims into forgiving, primarily because this might prevent “genuine” forgiveness from taking hold.

In the *Handbook of Victim Offender Mediation*, Umbreit issues a strong warning to mediators. He advises, “It is also important that mediators avoid the use of words such as *forgiveness* or *reconciliation*. Such words pressure and prescribe behavior for victims…Forgiveness may be expressed during the mediation session, but if the mediator so much as uses the word *forgiveness*, it may be destructive to the victim.”197 In spite of this instruction, Umbreit goes on to discuss forgiveness throughout the book in continuing to warn against its mention while simultaneously celebrating its amazing healing powers.198 Victims are more likely to forgive, he argues, if the mediator doesn’t mention forgiveness at all.199 Thus, the hush around forgiveness becomes a form of gentle coaxing.

Umbreit even devotes an entire subsection to the topic of forgiveness in a chapter on mediation possibilities in cases of severe violence. He writes, “Although forgiveness may

be an outcome of the dialogue for some, it is not the goal of the program. Even if it is a goal of participants, there are limits as to how far such dialogues can move victim and offender…To forgive the [offender] for what he or she has done requires an almost superhuman effort.” Forgiveness cannot be a goal, then, because it takes superhuman emotional skills. This kind of language suggests that victims who are unwilling to forgive are unable to summon such a “superhuman effort.”

The idealization of forgiveness in this context is especially problematic. Acorn notes the emotional allure of forgiveness in restorative justice processes, especially forgiveness in the wake of an especially violent or heinous crime. “It appeals as an exhilarating form of ethical bungee jumping,” she writes. “Forgiveness of the unthinkably egregious has more drama and is worth the effort because, if successful, it clearly counts as seriously impressive ethical and existential muscle-flexing.” As restorative encounters capitalize on catharsis, forgiveness offers a grand payoff.

In *Facing Violence: The Path of Restorative Justice and Mediation*, Umbreit and colleagues evaluate VOM programs in Texas and Ohio and show their preference for forgiveness in the criteria they use. They evaluate “the philosophical principles that shaped the program, the selection and training of volunteers, the preparation, meeting, and follow-up phases of the work, supervision and accountability, waiting list issues, forgiveness, and self care.” Forgiveness becomes just one more logistical issue on the list along with case selection and waiting list maintenance. That the presence of

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201 Acorn, *Compulsory Compassion*, p. 10.
202 Umbreit, Vos, Coates, and Brown, *Facing Violence*, p. 70; emphasis mine.
forgiveness is simply assumed at such a basic level demonstrates its ubiquity in VOM structures.

Keith Allen Regehr argues that the “hidden presence” of forgiveness in restorative justice dialogues should be more explicit. If Restorative Justice is to fully live up to its potential as a new way of doing justice, this presence [i.e., forgiveness] needs to become public and become a more explicit part of Restorative Justice practice,” he writes. However, later in the same text Regehr employs a familiar subversive strategy. He writes, “Despite its essential role in Restorative Justice, care must be taken not to impose a requirement of forgiveness on victims. Too strong a focus on the possibilities for reconciliation and forgiveness can drive victims away from a willingness to be involved.” For Regehr, forgiveness is and ought to be the primary goal of restorative justice practices, but mediators must behave as though it is not in order to ensure its possibility.

Restorative justice advocates claim that forgiveness is not an explicit goal while simultaneously describing the healing effects “if it happens.” In practice, acknowledging the possible beneficial effects of forgiveness in the context VOM is not necessarily a negative aspect of the process. The problem lies in the double talk. Facilitators are careful not to mention forgiveness in the mediation encounter, but

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204 Regehr, “Judgment and Forgiveness,” p. 39. He locates this “biblical underpinning” in the general Hebrew terms, רפוא (righteousness) and מלחמה (peace), expanding these to include forgiveness, justice, and well-being (p. 41; he closely follows Zehr’s discussion of “biblical justice in Changing Lenses, pp. 151-52 and 184-85, which is also founded on general terms instead of specific scriptures.
elsewhere advocates are writing about it, hoping for it, and carefully documenting and celebrating every time mediations result in forgiving responses. VOM advocates are not unaware of the tendency toward double talk. Mark S. Umbreit and Marilyn Peterson Armour acknowledge this “paradox of forgiveness” in an article by that title. “The more one talks about [forgiveness],” they argue, “the more likely [it] will be heard as behavioral prescriptions, and the less likely victims will participate and have the opportunity to experience elements of forgiveness and reconciliation.”

The forgiveness hush is directed at coaxing victim responses, but there is no equivalent surge of books and articles about how best to tiptoe around issues of repentance or remorse (because it would follow that advocates would need to avoid prescribing responses for offenders as well as victims). Since the forgiveness burden is on the victim, there is not as much urgency about how to approach offenders. The willingness to engage in mediation is often an indicator of remorse, and since the encounter is a conversation, a spoken apology is often forthcoming. Another reason the literature devotes less attention to speaking with offenders is that they may already be incarcerated and as a result, face-to-face preparation with a mediator prior to the encounter may be limited.

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209 Note the outlines for victim and offender pre-mediation preparation given in the Victim-Offender Mediation Association’s “Recommended Ethical Guidelines”; the program for victim preparation is nearly twice as long as the offender’s and includes much greater discussion of feelings (http://www.voma.org/docs/ethics.pdf).
Analyzing VOM rules and expectations

Another way pressure to forgive manifests in VOM comes with the mandatory preparation and extensive rules for mediation encounters. VOM requires particular behaviors for both victim and offender. Victims who are angry, vengeful, and potentially disrespectful are excluded from participation. Likewise, apathetic and non-remorseful offenders are also excluded. By removing undesirable emotions and behaviors from the mediation, the stage is set for victim forgiveness and offender remorse. In some cases, these boundaries might be helpful, but in others they serve to stifle victim expressions of anger and hurt much in the same way VOM activists claim that the criminal justice stifles emotional responses from both victims and offenders.\(^{210}\) I argue that such negative emotions, especially on the part of the victim, have every place in the context of VOM.

Mark S. Umbreit suggests “Guidelines for Victim-Sensitive Mediation and Dialogue with Offenders.”\(^{211}\) He starts by affirming the victim’s choice in time and place of the mediation session as well as the option to bring one or two support persons. Under the heading “Careful Screening of Cases,” he writes, “It is important in the mediation process that offenders take responsibility for their participation in the crime and proceed willingly to mediation.”\(^{212}\) From the outset, then, VOM is only open to offenders who acknowledge guilt and approach the process with contrition. The “Careful, Extensive Preparation of the Offender” emphasizes that offenders must delve into their feelings about the crime(s) and


their own experience as victims in order to foster empathy for the victim. Likewise, “Careful, Extensive Preparation of the Victim” includes helping victims with “preliminary brainstorming about the ways their losses and needs might be addressed.”

VOM demands certain “ground rules,” primarily “allowing each person to speak without interruption and speaking and listening respectfully.” Arguing and emotional outbursts risk termination of the mediation session. Offenders must admit guilt, and victims must listen without interruption to their explanations and/or apologies. The complex superstructure of rules surrounding the process runs counter to one of the most common restorative justice complaints about the traditional system, namely that its procedures take precedence over personal and emotional outcomes for the stakeholders.

These ground rules draw boundaries around what it means to be a victim in the context of restorative justice. George Pavlich identifies two characteristics of victimhood that seem to be non-negotiable. First, he identifies a “contingent ontology”; that is, being a victim is transient, and restorative justice processes imagine “moving beyond” the victim identity. The goal is the “non-victim sense of self,” and restorative justice practices like VOM are designed to assist with this forward motion into a non-victim future. Restorative justice defines itself as empowering and serving the needs of

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216 Zehr, *Changing Lenses*, p. 211.
218 Pavlich, *Governing Paradoxes*, p. 52. For a perspective on restorative justice as helping victims move beyond “wallowing in victimhood,” see David Smock, “The
victims, but at the same time it seeks to shed that label. I contend that the label of victim need not indicate weakness or inferiority, only one’s status of having been subjected to a crime. VOM advocates who focus on discarding the victim identity assign a negative value to the label by suggesting that it should be discarded. For most victims, however, simply abandoning a label does nothing to change the fact that they have been victimized.

Further, Pavlich points to the structure of the pre-mediation process as containing a bias toward this type of victim identity (a victim who wants to escape the victim label) as well as a preference for a forgiving victim. He notes Heather Strang’s emphasis on victim preparation: “Insufficient preparation of victims (and of offenders) regarding their role in the conferences, their expectations about the outcome, and their rights in terms of requesting reparation can have serious negative consequences for victims.” Pavlich questions the need to “prepare” a victim to enter an encounter where she will play the role of victim. He wonders whether victimization alone shouldn’t be enough to recommend a victim for the role. Rather, what is happening is that mediators and other restorative justice advocates are interested in preparing a particular kind of victim.

“Preparing’ is thus an important point at which subjects are socialized into the basic tenets of restorative justice’s victim identity,” Pavlich writes. This includes “encouraging


Pavlich, Governing Paradoxes, p. 60: “There is therefore a tragic incongruity involved in promoting a justice that empowers victims as victims, and which depends essentially on the continue presence of victims.”

Strang, Repair or Revenge, p. 150; emphasis in original.
them to adopt an identity that focuses on losses (material, emotional and relational), needs and resolutions to these."221

Using Umbreit’s guidelines, Pavlich identifies the “restorative victim” as one who keeps her emotions under control, never becomes “abusive or revengeful,” is reasonable about restitution, and is forgiving whenever possible.222 “As such,” he writes, “we have at least a sense of the ‘ideal type’ of victim identity that restorative justice processes are designed to restore and reconcile with a broader community.”223 Victim-offender mediation programs should include all manner of victims: angry and outraged in addition to conciliatory and forgiving. Instead, the current agenda for VOM is to help victims release or overcome anger rather than express it at length in a mediation session. Indeed, mediation sessions risk being terminated if a victim becomes too angry.224

Once angry and disruptive victims are screened out, forgiveness is much more likely. Pavlich concludes that while VOM programs vary in their tone and design, “All embrace equivalents of a secular confessional in which the victim is required—as a condition of participating in the process—to adopt a delimited identity designed to help bring about restoration [in the form of forgiveness or even a restored relationship].”225 Forgiveness—or the hope for forgiveness—is central to this identity, with some form of it nearly a requirement for sitting on the opposite side of this “secular confessional.” In this metaphor, the victim sits in the place of the priest, and she is fully expected to fill her role by forgiving the offender.

221 Pavlich, Governing Paradoxes, pp. 54-55.
222 Pavlich, Governing Paradoxes, p. 57.
223 Pavlich, Governing Paradoxes, p. 57.
225 Pavlich, Governing Paradoxes, p. 56.
Declan Roche observes the power of language in the VOM process. “Participants in restorative meetings are still expected to master a language—not the formal, dispassionate language of the courtroom—but the nuanced and complex language of the emotions,” he writes. “Some will be highly proficient at expressing their feelings, able to communicate convincingly remorse and sorrow, forgiveness and empathy. Some [offenders] will master it so well they can abuse it—using rhetoric to deceive, manipulate, and flatter.”226 Not every VOM participant will be able to master this “nuanced and complex” emotional language in ways that are beneficial. Some victims may use it as a weapon against the offender or vice versa.

On this point, Annalise Acorn warns, “Apology and forgiveness, the primary method of restorative repair, can often be anything but healing. They can be essential weapons for placing an offender in a position to inflict new wounds and reopen old ones.”227 Either victim or offender may use the mediation encounter as an opportunity to unleash harsh words against the other. However, the VOM guidelines, which attempt to regulate the encounter so that it does not deteriorate into a shouting match, often over-correct and reach for an opposite extreme in which anger and resentment have almost no place in the process. Insofar as anger is permitted, it is only in service to the restorative ideals of forgiveness and reconciliation. Acorn writes, “Restorative justice hopes that, by making appropriate space for the controlled expression of mean-spirited desires, we can transform them in healthy desires for right-relation.”228 There is no reason to believe that every victim approaches a VOM encounter with hopes for forgiveness and renewed

226 Roche, Accountability, pp. 113-14.
227 Acorn, Compulsory Compassion, p. 74.
228 Acorn, Compulsory Compassion, p. 52.
relationship. Some may simply want answers about why they were targeted, or even an apology. The offender has something the victim wants—usually, this is information—and VOM gives the victim a way to get it. Righteous indignation and anger about lost property or physical injury are not unreasonable emotions. Requiring a victim to “respect” the offender precludes the expression of such emotions. While VOM sessions should not be occasions for verbal or physical assaults, lifting the prohibition on anger could result in more victim participation in and satisfaction with the process.

Victim intentions and VOM outcomes

The staunchest champions of restorative justice promote mediation and reconciliation in cases of violent crimes by strangers. Here, the ideal of right relation prevails regardless of whether a relationship preexisted between the victim and the offender. The crime has created a relationship, and that relationship is worth restoring.

In restorative justice, healing is a primary goal, and that includes healing of both parties after stranger crimes, including “opportunities for forgiveness, confession, repentance, and reconciliation.” Howard Zehr writes, “Some of this must take place between individuals and their God, their church, and their community. But involved also is the relationship between victim and offender, a relationship which if it did not exist before the offense, does now.” However, restoring relationships after stranger crimes may be a moral impossibility. Margaret Urban Walker writes, “When a crime victim has been unjustly harmed by a stranger, the offense creates a relationship where there was

230 Zehr, Changing Lenses, p. 51.
231 Zehr, Changing Lenses, p. 51.
none before. Forgiveness cannot aim at the restoration of relationship here, unless this means restoring the fact that no relationship exists, just as no relationship existed before the crime.\textsuperscript{232} Here, the value of forgiveness might trump the impossibility of restoring right relationship in the aftermath of a crime by a stranger. By focusing so closely on forgiveness as the ideal outcome, advocates may unwittingly press victims to re-engage with their attackers in service to this ideal.

However, victims may reject VOM and restorative principles for a number of reasons that have nothing to do with retribution. Not all victims are angry. Not all are choosing between fantasies of forgiveness and fantasies of revenge. As Susan Jacoby observes, “Boundless vindictive rage is not the only alternative to unmerited forgiveness.”\textsuperscript{233} Judith Lewis Herman demonstrates in her study of responses to crime that many victims actually seek a third option: incapacitation.\textsuperscript{234} They want neither to embrace nor to punish the offender; they just want the offender to stay away from them. Victims who hold this simple hope of safety may not be interested in restorative practices, but this does not mean that they are seething with revenge and should be viewed negatively. Some victims just want to be left alone. Since the majority of VOM cases are referred by the District Attorney’s office, victims may experience pressure as those in authority suggest they participate. They may reject the suggestion for a variety of reasons, including concern for emotional or physical safety, but they should not be characterized as angry or vengeful just for passing on that opportunity. Annalise Acorn argues that the goals of restorative

\textsuperscript{232} Walker, \textit{Moral Repair}, p. 159.
justice reach beyond what victims and communities (and even offenders) might expect in the aftermath of crime. She writes, “[Restorative justice] requires that we build better, more respectful, more mutual relationships than those that existed prior to the wrong. It reaches toward an idealized state of right-relationship as its model of the just.”

According to Herman’s study of victim responses to crime, some victims wanted or valued apologies; others recognized the potential for further abuse or manipulation if they open themselves to such communication. Some victims are more than happy to let the state step in as the arbiter of justice. Restorative justice is built on the assumption that mediations are in the best interest of victims, offenders, and the community, with forgiveness gleaming as the ideal outcome. But for many victims the refusal to forgive an unrepentant attacker becomes a measure of self-protection and self-respect. Often, suggesting that a victim engage in a dialogue with the offender serves as another victimization in itself. Martha Minow observes, “To expect survivors to forgive is to heap yet another burden on them.”

Margaret Holmgren does not address the issue of the victim’s safety in her discussion of the “paradigm of forgiveness.” She theorizes forgiveness as a moral ideal with retribution as its evil opposite: “Retributive reactive attitudes are rejected…it is ultimately appropriate and desirable from a moral point of view for [crime victims] to adopt an attitude of unconditional genuine forgiveness toward the offender.”

References

235 Acorn, Compulsory Compassion, p. 22.
236 Herman, “Justice from the Victim’s Perspective,” p. 597.
237 On this point, see Murphy, “Forgiveness and Resentment,” p. 16; Brudholm, Resentment’s Virtue, p. 4.
239 Holmgren, Forgiveness and Retribution, p. 261.
not acknowledge that victims may withhold forgiveness (or refusing to engage in mediation) for reasons other than retributive goals.

Instead, as Herman demonstrates, victims may hold the very reasonable fear of being reoffended. Holmgren demands a level of trust that a victim may not be able to or want to manufacture in order to bestow this gift on the offender. She discounts the possibility of more complex victim responses in the title of her book: *Forgiveness and Retribution*, which are, as she describes with her subtitle, the primary Responses to Wrongdoing.\textsuperscript{240} To suggest that victims are morally obligated to forgive and portray non-forgiving victims as vengeful and hate-filled serves only to amplify the offense they already suffer.

### Conclusion

With its promises of healing and moral accomplishment, forgiveness has become the shining star of restorative justice theory and practice. The structure and rules of VOM along with the undercurrent of forgiveness rhetoric create an environment in which susceptible victims are led toward forgiveness, while angry and more emotionally complicated victims are screened out of the process. Advocates proclaim the importance of not mentioning forgiveness or pressuring victims to forgive while the forgiveness agenda is hidden in plain sight. This is seen in books and articles celebrating the miraculous healing effects of forgiveness, in subtle questions posed by mediators, and in the biblical principles that undergird the origins and processes of restorative justice.

In the case of the triple murder in the Mennonite congregation, “developing the intent to forgive” was an immediate concern. Congregants and family members called on the

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\textsuperscript{240} Holmgren, *Forgiveness and Retribution*.
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biblical instruction of forgiveness “seventy times seven” as they worked to support the young man who murdered his family. In this way, they disregarded the complexity of the teaching that also called for reproof (Matthew) and repentance (Luke) in order for forgiveness to take hold. While early interpreters of the seventy-times-seven instructions emphasize the role of repentance in this bilateral process of forgiveness, contemporary readers tend to adopt a unilateral vision that incorporates modern psychological definitions of forgiveness as an emotional task that concerns primarily the victim.

In their focus on community repair, VOM practices are faithful to the New Testament vision. Both the seventy-times-seven instruction and VOM value community cohesion and harmony. The dialogic structure of VOM opens the way for a repentance-forgiveness exchange, but advocates who dream of unilateral, unconditional forgiveness downplay this bilateral opportunity. Instead, they laud forgiveness as the way to restore the relationship and provide beneficial emotional effects for both victim and offender. The assumption is always that the relationship should be restored, or at least attempts should be made toward that goal. However, many victims may enter into mediation with little interest in restoring a relationship, especially in the case of stranger crimes. Other goals might include having questions about the crime answered and gaining a sense of future security. For VOM advocates who claim a biblical warrant, a closer focus on victim-offender dialogue and forgiveness-repentance exchange could stand to lighten the pressure on the victim, hold the offender responsible, and produce a more desirable outcome for the victim, the offender, and the affected community.

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241 Acorn, Compulsory Compassion, p. 86.
Acorn underscores the heady idealism and grandiose fantasies of forgiveness and right-relation inherent in restorative justice literature. “The seductive vision of restorative justice seems, therefore, to lie in a skillful deployment—through theory and story—of cheerful fantasies of happy endings in the victim-offender relation, emotional healing, closure, right-relation, and respectful community,” she writes. “Yet, as with all seductions, the fantasies that lure us in tend to be very different from the realities that unfold. And the grandness of the idealism in these restorative fantasies, in and of itself, ought to give us pause.”

Forgiveness may well be restorative and admirable, but it should be judged by its effects, not simply by its expression. The victim alone cannot repair the broken relationship; rather, such a process must be nurtured by the offender in the form of repentance, apology, reparation, or remorse. This is what is described in the seventy-times-seven instructions, and this is a more constructive vision of how VOM encounters might look. Configuring forgiveness as a unilateral, emotional task of the victim (as many of the above authors do) renders the offender’s contribution desirable (but optional). VOM advocates do not dismiss the role of offender repentance and apology, but at the end of the day what they celebrate most is victim forgiveness. When forgiveness is unilateral and unconditional, the only necessary work is the victim’s.

Any account of forgiveness must not only seek to settle something in the past, but also look toward what future landscape that forgiveness creates. Repair of a torn fabric is valuable only in its strength to withstand or prevent future tears. Such a process must

242 Acorn, *Compulsory Compassion*, p. 16.
involve effort on the part of both victim and offender. Forgiveness may not always succeed. This is true in the seventy-times-seven instructions, and it is true in VOM practices that maintain a reciprocal understanding of reconciliation. Without question, though, the past and the hoped-for future, along with the victim-offender dialogue, determine the possibility and value of forgiveness.
CHAPTER III

FROM COMMUNITY COHESION TO A HEGEMONY OF HARMONY:
FORGIVENESS IN THE LORD’S PRAYER AND POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

On April 16, 1997 in the small coal-mining and cattle-farming town of Vryheid in KwaZulu Natal, Bettina Mdlalose takes her seat before the Human Rights Violations Committee (HRVC) of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). She is there to testify about the night of April 19, 1990, when her son was killed.²⁴⁵

“The police arrived at night at about twelve midnight,” she begins. “They knocked at the door and I asked, ‘Who are you?’ They said they were police. I opened the door….Now they started looking, searching for [my son]….They went outside to get one white police, and they were almost breaking the door open, and they shot instantly right in the bedroom.”

She continues, “They left and I went in the room, found out that they had already shot him. I tried to see if there were any signs of vitality and to no avail. They came back again and said, ‘This one is dead, and leave him just like that.’”

She goes on to describe the struggle to reclaim her son’s body and how the police disrupted the funeral with tear gas. When she finishes, she acknowledges that the perpetrators have not come forward and have not applied for amnesty. Even so, the commissioner asks her, “If they come to you and ask for forgiveness would you be prepared to sit down with them, shake hands with them, and reconcile with them? Would you be prepared to talk to them?”

Mrs. Mdlalose replies, “I don’t think I will allow such an opportunity.”

The hearings of South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission began in 1995 to address human rights violations and other wrongdoings committed during the apartheid regime in which black and “coloured” (Asian or mixed-race) South Africans were forced to live separately from whites and with significantly fewer rights, a system that was often enforced by violent means. The commission was divided into three parts: the Human Rights Violations Committee, which heard testimony of victims; the Reparation and Rehabilitation Committee, which assisted victims in recovery and awarded monetary reparations (mostly symbolic); and the Amnesty Committee, which reviewed applications for amnesty from those who committed crimes under apartheid. The TRC was meant to supplant a criminal process by giving victims a forum to be heard and perpetrators the opportunity to make full confessions in exchange for amnesty. All of this was carried out in service to South Africa’s transition to democratic rule.
The 1995 *Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act*\(^{246}\) established the TRC to deal formally with crimes committed under apartheid by both the government and the anti-apartheid combatants. Led by Desmond Tutu, a high-profile anti-apartheid activist and retired Anglican archbishop, the *Act* presents the mandate of the TRC:

To provide for the investigation and the establishment of as complete a picture as possible of the nature, causes and extent of gross violations of human rights…emanating from the conflicts of the past, and the fate or whereabouts of the victims of such violations; the granting of amnesty to persons who make full disclosure of all the relevant facts relating to acts associated with a political objective committed in the course of the conflicts of the past during the said period; affording victims an opportunity to relate the violations they suffered; the taking of measures aimed at the granting of reparation to, and the rehabilitation and the restoration of the human and civil dignity of, victims of violations of human rights; reporting to the Nation about such violations and victims; the making of recommendations aimed at the prevention of the commission of gross violations of human rights.\(^{247}\)

It was the great hope of the TRC that a thorough airing of the truth would be “a means to reconcile a fractured nation and heal the wounds of its troubled soul.”\(^{248}\)

With regard to reconciliation, Mark R. Amstutz joins a number of people who judge the TRC to be a success: “[It] represents the most successful governmental initiative to


\(^{247}\) *Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act*.

promote peace and harmony through the discovery and acknowledgment of truth.”

However, others criticize the TRC for its over-emphasis on forgiveness in the service of reconciliation and its questionable rhetorical tactics used to urge victims in that direction. This chapter makes its contribution to that discussion through an analysis of the language of forgiveness that permeated the TRC process.


While what follows is a critique of the forgiveness rhetoric of Desmond Tutu and the TRC, it should not be taken as a dismissal of the entire process. Let me be clear: The TRC was a remarkable experiment in alternative justice and moral repair. The victories of this process must not be overlooked: the cycles of racial violence fueled by apartheid have largely ended, democratic elections are standard, and black, white, and coloured people live in the same communities, study in the same schools, and enjoy the same freedoms. I might go so far as to join with others who call the TRC miraculous, both in its intention and its effect. That a truth commission could successfully supplant a criminal system and offer something like justice to victims, perpetrators, and the affected community is a beacon of hope.

But like any institution, the TRC was flawed. Today, it leaves behind unprosecuted former combatants who refused to apply for amnesty, persistent and abject poverty among the formerly oppressed communities, and a “new civil religion” of racial reconciliation that is already under strain. The systemic racism many had hoped the TRC would address is still a reality. I am critical not of the political aspirations or the symbolic importance of the TRC; rather, I am troubled by the language used to pressure victims into forgiving perpetrators in service of the new South Africa. In this respect, the TRC could have done better.


251 Waldmeir, Anatomy of a Miracle, p. 254.

Appeals for forgiveness in the name of national unity and reconciliation are not uncommon in the Human Rights Violations Committee (HRVC) transcripts, and often they come directly from the chairperson of the TRC, Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Many victims acquiesce to the calls for forgiveness, and they are lavishly praised. There are also, however, witnesses like Bettina Mdlalose. She refuses to forgive the men who shot her son; she will not even face them. With one sentence, Mdlalose rejects the TRC’s overarching narrative of forgiveness as healing and national reconciliation.

This narrative is seen primarily in the writings of Desmond Tutu and crystallized in the title of his memoir of the TRC, *No Future Without Forgiveness*. Here Tutu issues the most famous forgiveness imperative associated with the TRC: “Without forgiveness, there is no future.” He contends that victims must forgive in order to ensure the reconciliation of South Africa, because such magnanimity among victims is the only way to quell resentment and end violence.

However, applicants for amnesty are not required to apologize or show remorse, and Tutu has not yet produced a corresponding volume called *No Future Without Repentance*. The forgiveness ideal presented to victims in South Africa is both unconditional and a national imperative. If there is no future without forgiveness, then the entire burden of the future is on the victims.

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In addition, Tutu’s account generally rejects the potential value of negative emotions such as resentment, outrage, and anger. He denounces those emotions in his post-TRC work, (he notes the “corrosive” effects of anger on the common good, for example254), and yet his own anti-apartheid speeches, sermons, and writings demonstrate how the negative emotions can fuel social action. Resentment, outrage, anger, and even the refusal to forgive can demonstrate self-respect and a commitment to justice, i.e., holding offenders accountable for their actions. The fall of the apartheid government and the institution of the TRC could not have come about without the decades of righteous indignation that fueled the anti-apartheid movement.

Reflecting on the end of the apartheid era in South Africa, Tutu posits that forgiveness is essential not only for transforming conflict, but for all human relations from the creation of Adam and Eve to the present.255 “Forgiveness is an absolute necessity for continued human existence,”256 he writes. However, forgiveness is reactive and relies on the presence of wrongdoing, as well as a community that is constantly being defined by that wrongdoing and forgiveness as a mode of repair. To be sure, certain instances of forgiveness may form constructive and even admirable ways to rebuild a community in the aftermath of systemic violence such as apartheid, but forgiveness is not the only way forward, it is conditional (depending on perpetrator repentance) and contextual (defined or limited by circumstance and setting), and is not always a morally appropriate response. I argue that because forgiveness is always contextual, it does not always provide a fitting foundation for a national ethic.

254 Tutu, No Future, p. 31.
In this chapter I use the Lord’s Prayer as a lens to think about how forgiveness might be understood in the context of conflict transformation (the process by which societies in conflict, such as South Africa under apartheid, transform that conflict into peaceful outcomes), particularly the TRC and South Africa’s transition to democratic rule. First, I consider how the Lord’s Prayer operates as a tool for social cohesion in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. I show that the prayer—which is first of all a community prayer—depicts a vision of forgiveness that equally values asking for forgiveness from God and forgiving others. In both Gospels but especially Matthew, the prayer demonstrates the importance of community harmony for being in right relationship with God. Next, I examine debt language in the prayer (“forgive us our debts,” Mt. 6:14; “we forgive everyone indebted to us,” Lk. 11:4) and evaluate its usefulness and limits in contemporary interpretations. The prayer contains a repentant plea for forgiveness (“forgive us”) as well as a commitment to forgiving others (“as we forgive”), thus demonstrating the bilateral character of forgiveness.

In the years leading up to the TRC, Tutu acknowledges the interdependence of repentance and forgiveness in the Lord’s Prayer. In 1990, when the Dutch Reformed Church confessed and apologized for providing theological support for the apartheid government, Tutu responded with an appeal to the reciprocal forgiveness presented in the Lord’s Prayer. He explains, “I cannot, when someone says, ‘Forgive me,’ say, ‘I do not.’ For then I cannot pray the prayer that we prayed, ‘Forgive us, as we forgive.’”257 While Tutu often touts unconditional, unilateral forgiveness of victims, here he emphasizes the importance of an exchange of repentance and forgiveness. He says, “When that

257 Tutu, God Is Not a Christian, p. 31; citing Tutu’s words with the South African Council of Churches in Mogopa in 1983.
confession of wrongdoing is made, those of us who have been wronged must say, ‘We forgive you.’”

Not all amnesty applicants viewed their testimony as confessions or expressions of repentance in this sense, and applicants were not required to apologize or otherwise express remorse for their crimes. Since amnesty was not awarded by the TRC as a gift but rather in exchange for information in the form of truthful testimony, testimony before the Amnesty Committee did not constitute the kind of confession of sin depicted in the Lord’s Prayer. As a result, Tutu’s charge for victims to respond to “that confession of wrongdoing” with forgiveness rings hollow since testimony before the Amnesty Committee was not seen as a “confession of wrongdoing” in the sense Tutu implies.

In the Gospels, both Matthew and Luke provide conditions for interpersonal forgiveness, as seen in the previous chapter. There is no instruction relating to unconditional forgiveness. The Lord’s Prayer prescribes community solidarity by way of a bilateral understanding of forgiveness in which believers must ask for forgiveness as often as they dispense it. In this case, forgiveness is not just an emotion or speech act that makes everything right. Rather, forgiveness here is an element of reconciliation that requires work from all sides in order to establish right relationship in community and with God.

In the context of the TRC, forgiveness was necessary for reconciliation. However the term “reconciliation” was highly contested, with some arguing that it demanded “contrition, confession, forgiveness and restitution,” and others calling simply for

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258 Tutu, God Is Not a Christian, p. 29.
“peaceful coexistence.” The TRC defined “reconciliation” as “both a goal and a process” for both individuals and communities.

For the purposes of this chapter, I define reconciliation as the repair or restoration of a broken relationship, both between human beings and communities at large. In the case of South Africa, reconciliation means the restoration of peaceful community relations in the wake of apartheid. The reconciliation at stake in the TRC is between black and coloured South Africans who were oppressed by the white apartheid government, as well as between perpetrators of apartheid or anti-apartheid (of all races) and their victims.

Building on the analysis of reciprocal forgiveness in the Lord’s Prayer, the second part of this chapter focuses on the rhetoric of forgiveness of the TRC and particularly its chairperson. Tutu draws heavily on the African concept of ubuntu, which he calls “the African Weltanschauung.” The essence of ubuntu, he explains, is the recognition that all human beings are interconnected, and therefore the suffering of any affects the health of the whole. This notion of inherent interdependence undergirds the TRC and the drive toward reconciliation. Tutu enlarges the concept to introduce Christian language of forgiveness to the TRC proceedings, and a future based on reconciliation becomes a future based on forgiveness. As a result, victims were sometimes implicitly pressured by commissioners to forgive. The presence of clerical garments, prayer, and candles contributed to the general religious character of the hearings, which supplied implicit moral pressure to forgive. Throughout the proceedings, Tutu and other commissioners abundantly praised testifiers who agreed to forgive, both in and out of the hearing rooms.

262 Tutu, No Future, p. 31.
263 Tutu, No Future, p. 31.
In addition, Tutu promotes a biblical imperative (based primarily on the Lord’s Prayer [see above], the seventy-times-seven instructions, and Jesus’ cry from the cross, “Father, forgive them”) to forgive that is based on decided non-biblical understandings of forgiveness. He defines forgiveness using therapeutic terms such as “healing” and “catharsis,” urges victims to forgive without apology or even the presence of the perpetrators, and repeatedly states, “To forgive is not just to be altruistic. It is the best form of self-interest.” As a result, the project of reconciliation depends wholly on emotional feats of forgiveness accomplished by the victims. I contend that reconciliation based on one-sided forgiveness stands to be shakier than its bilateral counterpart. In addition, such constant pressure to forgive and celebration of forgiveness marginalize victims who are unable or unwilling to forgive those who tortured them, terrorized them, and murdered their loved ones.

Forgiveness in the Lord’s Prayer

Perhaps the most familiar canonical instruction on forgiveness comes in the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew and Luke:

265 No provisions were made for psychological follow-up with victims who testified before the HRVC or whose perpetrators applied for amnesty, so I cannot speak to the experience of victims whose anger and outrage might have changed in the years since the close of the TRC. On this topic, see Timothy Sizwe Phatathi and Hugo van der Merwe, “The Impact of the TRC’s Amnesty Process on Survivors of Human Rights Violations,” in Chapman and van der Merwe (eds.), Did the TRC Deliver? pp. 116-42 (137). On the lack of follow-up with victims, see also Graybill, Miracle or Model? p. 84; Brandon Hamber, Transforming Societies after Political Violence: Truth, Reconciliation, and Mental Health (Peace Psychology Book Series; London and New York: Springer Science+Business Media, 2009), p. 58.
Mt. 6:9-13  
Lk. 11:2-4

‘Pray then in this way: He said to them, ‘When you pray,
Our Father in heaven, say: Father, hallowed be your name.
hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come.
Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread.
Your will be done, And forgive us our sins,
on earth as it is in heaven. for we ourselves forgive everyone
Give us this day our daily bread. indebted to us.
And forgive us our debts, And do not bring us to the time of
as we also have forgiven our trial.’
debtors.
And do not bring us to the time of trial,
but rescue us from the evil one.’

Here I demonstrate that this prayer contains not only an imperative for human beings to forgive, but also an expression of repentance. While the words of confession (“Forgive us our debts,” Mt. 6:14//”Forgive us our sins,” Lk. 11:4) are directed at God, they constitute a general disposition of repentance for past transgressions.
The extended prayer in Matthew begins with “Our Father” and implies a community of believers praying together.\(^{266}\) In both Matthew and Luke, Jesus teaches his followers to pray in the first-person plural.\(^{267}\) Darrell Bock writes, “As disciples come before the Father, they are to affirm their unity and share a sense of family.”\(^{268}\) The prayer contains hoped-for ideals for the new community: enough food, forgiveness within the group, and protection from temptation and hardship. The communal groundwork of the Lord’s Prayer establishes a framework for the health and strength of the community.

*The prayer as preserving community order*

The use of the first-person plural in both versions of the Lord’s Prayer emphasizes the importance for preserving community unity. In Matthew, the instruction is to pray to “Our Father,” not “My Father.” In both Matthew and Luke, the petitions follow: “Give us” our daily bread, “Forgive us” our debts or sins, and “do not bring us” to the time of trial. The Lord’s Prayer is a corporate prayer. The command to forgive ensures that interpersonal conflicts will not threaten the health of the group. In addition, the prayer serves as a foundational story for the community; when the members pray together, they proclaim who they are in relation to God and each other.\(^{269}\) According to the *Didache*, the

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\(^{267}\) Where Matthew has, “Our father” (Πάτερ ἡμῶν), Luke’s prayer is addressed simply to “Father” (Πάτερ). Following this, both prayers are given in the first-person plural.


\(^{269}\) James D.G. Dunn, “The Tradition,” in *idem* and Scot McKnight, *The Historical Jesus in Recent Research* (Sources for Biblical and Theological Study, 10; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), p. 167-84 (168).
community was to pray these words together three times a day; the promises and pleas of this prayer were deeply ingrained in the character of the community.\footnote{270 } Cyprian also emphasizes the corporate character of the Lord’s Prayer. He writes, “Our prayer is public and common. When we pray, we pray not for one, but for the whole people, because we the whole people are one…one should thus pray for all, even as He Himself bore us all in one.”\footnote{271 } Thomas Aquinas also underscores the prayer’s importance for the community by insisting that the corporate power of the prayer transcends individual wrongs, for the voice of the prayer is the voice of the church as a whole. He writes, “The Lord’s Prayer is pronounced in the common person of the whole Church, and so if anyone say the Lord’s Prayer while unwilling to forgive his neighbor’s trespasses, he lies not.”\footnote{272 } Even one who is not forgiving may say this prayer as a part of the common voice. Aquinas focuses on the all-forgiving nature of God (who abides by the instruction to forgive boundlessly [Mt. 18:22]) rather than on the possibility that unforgiving Christians may be excluded from the new covenant.

The two parts of the forgiveness prayer represent the roles in such a forgiveness dialogue that may lead toward reconciliation: one asks for forgiveness, while the other extends forgiveness. Both actions are necessary for a reconciled community. Warren Carter writes, “The request for forgiveness recognizes that the one praying has violated human dignity and not met divine and human demands. It requests God’s faithful and inclusive love to set aside the debts and renew relationships and community….Asking

\footnote{270 } “Pray this three times each day” (Didache 8:3); see also Milavec, The Didache. \footnote{271 } Cyprian, “On the Lord’s Prayer.” \footnote{272 } Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, second part of the second part, question 83.
God for such mercy means releasing others from their failed obligations also. I do not mean to suggest that sins against God and sins against other human beings are interchangeable, or that asking God’s forgiveness stands in for asking forgiveness of others. Rather, the idea is simply that human repentance (expressed to God) and human forgiveness are dependent on each other.

Petitioning God to set aside one’s debts and promising to pay this generosity forward demonstrate a desire to reconcile relationships marred by sin, on the part of both the penitent and other members of the community. This turning toward a changed relationship is exactly what is suggested by μετάνοια, the Greek word most often translated as repentance in the New Testament. Annemarie S. Kidder also notes the complementary elements in the Lord’s Prayer: it is a prayer of repentance (“forgive us”) as much as forgiveness (“we forgive”). Every member of the community—sinner or sinned-against, debtor or lender—makes a contribution to unity.

While the repentance portion of the prayer is not necessarily directed at a specific victim to address a specific crime, it does contain an apology as an expression of remorse. “Forgive me” (along with “I’m sorry,” or “I repent” [as seen in Lk. 17:4]) is a common phrase in the language of religious confession as well as spoken apology.

Indeed, “Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned,” is the opening of the traditional formula for Roman Catholic confession (an occasion for repentance), and in the Anglican

273 Carter, Matthew and the Margins, pp. 167-68.
275 Radzik, Making Amends, p. 56; Smith, I Was Wrong, pp. vi, 263 n. 17.
276 “In confession we have the opportunity to repent and recover the grace of friendship with God” (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops [USCCB], “The Sacrament of Penance,” http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/sacraments/penance/).
tradition penitents pray, “Have mercy on us and forgive us.”

Both petitions are rooted in the Lord’s Prayer and taken as penitential confessions. Edward Hanna observes, “Without sincere sorrow and purpose of amendment, confession avails nothing, the pronouncement of absolution is of no effect, and the guilt of the sinner is greater than before.”

The person praying makes a general expression of repentance for past wrongs and pledges to forgive others in return.

Matthew’s two-verse addendum to the Lord’s Prayer underscores the connection between right relation in the community and divine forgiveness: “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (6:14-15). It is impossible for God to be in relationship with a community that does not get along internally. That Matthew reiterates the prayer’s forgiveness instruction testifies to its importance.

Sin as debt

Where Matthew has, “And forgive us our debts (̇ϕειλήματα) as we have forgiven our debtors (̇ϕειλέται),” Luke instructs, “And forgive us our sins (̇ἁμαρτίας), for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us (̇ϕείλοντι).” Luke indicates that God may forgive the sins of human beings but then grounds the possibilities of human forgiveness

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in the metaphor of “debts” (or, “those indebted to us”). Matthew offers an exact parallel between divine and human forgiveness (both forgive “debts”).

Luke differentiates the human ability to forgive debts from God’s capacity to forgive sins, but Matthew assigns to both the power to forgive “trespasses” (παράπτωμα) in the two-verse addendum. John Nolland observes, “The switch from ‘debts’ to ‘transgressions’ [or trespasses], which Matthew uses only in vv. 14-15, confirms that [Matthew] intended ‘debts’ in v. 12 to be an image for wrongdoings.” Thus in both Matthew and Luke, the human willingness to forgive debts both literal and figurative is a precondition for divine forgiveness. The prayer presumes that human beings have the ability to forgive both financial debts and personal trespasses.

The nature of forgiveness in the Lord’s Prayer

In the history of interpretation of the Lord’s Prayer there are numerous understandings of the forgiveness it describes. Parallels to the Matthean follow-up to the Lord’s Prayer appear in both Mark and Luke. Mark, who does not include (or perhaps does not know) the Lord’s Prayer, gives this admonition: “Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses (παράπτωμα)” (11:25). Mark’s use of παράπτωμα


280 Nolland, Gospel of Matthew, pp. 293-94.

281 The NRSV gives the following note: “Other ancient authorities add verse 26, ‘But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.”’
for trespasses echoes Matthew’s two-verse coda where the word is used twice.

παράπτωμα appears only once in Mark, suggesting a familiarity with or independent attestation of the parallel texts in Matthew and Luke.  

Matthew’s shift indicates that he means the language of debts to be related to these trespasses. As opposed to the more serious ἁμαρτία (Lk. 11:4), which signifies crimes against both other human beings and God, παράπτωμα are literally “false steps” or transgressions against others.  

Matthew’s follow-up is concerned with linking the resolutions of interpersonal disputes with God’s own forgiveness of those transgressions.

Luke also offers an additional reciprocal formula, although it is detached from the prayer and uses different language. Luke writes, “Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive [ἀπολύετε], and you will be forgiven [ἀπολύσεσθε]; give, and it will be given to you” (6:37). This verse marks the only time in the Gospels in which the NRSV translates the verb ἀπολύω as “forgive.” Elsewhere the NRSV renders this word as “send away,” “depart,” “divorce,” or “release.” Every other discussion of interpersonal or divine forgiveness in the Gospels uses the verb ἁφίημι. Both verbs have the literal sense of “letting go;” both can indicate the forgiveness or release of a debt.  

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283 BAGD, παράπτωμα p. 627.
285 BAGD, ἁφίημι, pp. 95-96; ἁφίημι, p. 125.
indicates that forgiveness was understood in this context to have perceptible outcomes of release and liberation from the effects of wrongdoing as from debt.

In the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Mt. 18:23-35), Jesus describes a servant whose enormous debt is forgiven by a king. When that servant then refuses to forgive the small debt of his fellow slave, the king throws him into prison to be tortured and reinstates his debt. Matthew uses ἀπολύω alongside ἀφίημι in this story to describe the king’s response to the servant’s pleas, “And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released [ἀπέλυσεν] him and forgave [ἀφίκεν] him the debt” (18:27). This proximity suggests that Jesus plays on the similarity of being released from slavery and having a debt released; the semantic ranges of both words are nearly identical. Here, debt forgiveness and release from captivity are related. The parable presents forgiveness as not reciprocal but as progressive: if one is forgiven a debt, one is obligated to forgive his or her debtors, just as the Lord’s Prayer describes.

However, in the Pauline literature, God’s forgiveness was understood to be grounded in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Thus, forgiveness was seen as a consequence of and response to God’s forgiveness (as given in Eph. 4:32, “be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you,” and Col. 3:13, “Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive”). The idea that mutual forgiveness was a strict requirement for receiving God’s forgiveness would have

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286 Hägerland, *Jesus and the Forgiveness of Sins*, p. 63. In these verses, as in most New Testament discussions of forgiveness outside the Gospels, the word translated as “forgive” is χαρίζομαι.
seemed to contradict early Christian writings that locate forgiveness not in the teachings of Jesus, but in the death and resurrection of Christ.

Early Christian interpreters of the Lord’s Prayer emphasized the themes of divine reciprocity and right relationship to God. Tertullian (160-225) shifts the emphasis from forgiveness to repentance: “A petition for pardon is a full confession; because he who begs for pardon fully admits his guilt.” 287 Cyril of Alexandria (376-444) and Gregory of Nyssa (335-95) both posit that human forgiveness provides a model for God’s own behavior. 288 Cyril writes, “[Jesus] first commands them to ask forgiveness of the sins they commit and then to confess that they entirely forgive others. They ask God to imitate the patience that they practice.” 289 Augustine (354-430) interprets the prayer both as a call for almsgiving (“so that God may give to you what you give to [the poor]”) 290 and a remedy, or discipline of penance. The emphasis for these early interpreters is on the practical relationship between forgiving and being forgiven. They most often see the practice of forgiveness as a work that both responds to and secures God’s forgiveness.

Martin Luther identifies a problem with the prayer’s formula of reciprocal forgiveness. He writes, “It looks besides as if the forgiveness of sins was gained and merited by our forgiving. What would then become of our doctrine that forgiveness

287 Tertullian, Chapter VII, The Sixth Clause, from “On Prayer.”
comes alone through Christ and is received by faith?" The idea that salvation comes through the practice of human forgiveness assaults the very core of Luther’s program of salvation by faith alone. Luther interprets the prayer as a call for peace and unity among the Christian community. Its utterance forms a strong bond and prevents factions and discord. Interpersonal forgiveness, according to Luther, then, is not a requirement but rather evidence of divine forgiveness. He explains, “The external forgiveness which I practically show is a sure sign that I have the divine forgiveness of my sins.” In this view, forgiveness on earth is God’s forgiveness made manifest; it binds the community together.

John Calvin reads the prayer with a similar emphasis on God’s unlimited mercy. God’s forgiveness is not conditional on mutual human forgiveness. The prayer for forgiveness, he writes, “the Lord intended, partly to comfort the weakness of our faith.” Thus, the prayer contains an assurance of forgiveness more than a command. Like Luther, Calvin regards human forgiveness as a sign of and not a condition for divine forgiveness. “For [the Lord] has added this as a sign, that we may be as certainly assured of remission of sins being granted us by him, as we are certain and conscious of our granting it to others.” In Calvin’s view, forgiveness becomes less an imperative on Christians than an inevitable outcome of faith. Along with Luther, he plants the seed of unconditional, unilateral forgiveness developed later by Tutu.

Some contemporary scholars assert that the loving nature of God takes precedence over the threat of exclusion as a result of non-forgiveness. Like Luther, they suggest that

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291 Martin Luther, Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount (5:14-15).
292 Luther, Sermon on the Mount.
making God’s love dependent on forgiveness amounts to works righteousness and threatens the central Protestant doctrine of salvation by grace alone. Arthur W. Pink writes, “My capacity to forgive others seems inconsistent and incomplete at best. Will God’s forgiveness be the same for me? The thought is horrifying!” Questioning the idea that the forgiveness petition contains a precondition, he suggests that it is instead an example of Jesus’ use of hyperbole to make his point. Pink writes, “It shocks us. How dare we beg for grace with no intention of extending that same grace to others?” The outrageous idea that God’s forgiveness might be conditional is meant to shock people into practicing forgiveness.

Nicholas Ayo reads the prayer’s forgiveness petition as a description rather than condition. He writes, “‘Forgive us as we forgive’ need not imply human initiative with God’s mercy. It may rather point to a parallel in the kind of forgiveness being asked. Forgive us just as or even as we forgive others.” Understood this way, the prayer offers an illustration, something more like Cyril of Alexandria’s interpretation. The meaning is not, “Forgive us because we forgive,” but “Forgive us in the same way we do when we forgive.” Ayo writes, “We learn of God’s ways by analogy with the human ways we have known. It is hard to imagine how anyone could comprehend God’s forgiveness if they had never been forgiven during their lifetime.” This interpretation transforms forgiveness from an imperative to an ideal or ambition. Forgiveness, when it happens, can be a powerful and loving gesture. We may hope that God will behave in this way

295 Pink, Beatitudes, p. 151.
296 Ayo, Lord’s Prayer, p. 80.
297 Ayo, Lord’s Prayer, p. 80.
toward us in light of our sins. These scholars remove the moral imperative from the prayer, and thus the character of repentance is lost. Since God’s forgiveness is a foregone conclusion, the petition is more a rote exercise than an earnest pleading.

Like the early Church Fathers, Desmond Tutu calls on the reciprocal formula in the Lord’s Prayer to illustrate the necessity of human forgiveness in the service of God’s collaborative kingdom. He writes, “Extraordinarily, God, the omnipotent One depends on us, puny, fragile, vulnerable as we may be, to accomplish God’s purposes for good, for justice, for forgiveness and healing and wholeness.”

He quotes Augustine on this interdependence: “God without us will not as we without God cannot.” However, John Dominic Crossan points out that this is “magnificently misquoted” by Tutu; the actual words of Augustine are, “God made you without you, but he doesn’t justify you without you.”

In misquoting Augustine’s maxim, Tutu makes God’s action entirely dependent on human participation: “God without you will not.” His misquotation loses the sense of omnipotence and autonomy Augustine ascribes to God: “God made you without you”; for Augustine, God waits for right human action to justify (or make right before God). Both sides of this sentence imply God’s ultimate power. Tutu’s version implies a mutual dependence that is absent in Augustine’s original words. Tutu implies that God may refuse to forgive unless human beings forgive, but he also wants to say that human beings have a limited capacity to forgive without God. Human beings and God, then, are equal

298 Tutu, No Future, p. 158.
299 Tutu, No Future, p. 158.
partners in forgiveness; each depends on the other to make it happen. The sense of human pleading with God for forgiveness, which I see as an act of repentance, gets lost in this teamwork formulation.

Forgiveness in post-apartheid South Africa

In 1985, a group of unnamed, black South African theologians came together to write the Kairos Document, a statement on the country’s political crisis and practices of apartheid, and especially the state and church theologies undergirding those practices. While Desmond Tutu did not sign the document, he is thought to be its architect and he publicly supported its ideas. The document proposes a contextual theology, called “prophetic theology,” that demands justice as a necessary condition for reconciliation. The Kairos theologians write,

No reconciliation is possible in South Africa without justice. What this means in practice is that no reconciliation, no forgiveness and no negotiations are possible without repentance. The Biblical teaching on reconciliation and forgiveness makes it quite clear that nobody can be forgiven and reconciled with God unless he or she repents of their sins. Nor are we expected to forgive the unrepentant sinner. When he or she repents we must be willing to forgive seventy times seven times but before that, we are expected to preach repentance to those who sin against us or against anyone. Reconciliation, forgiveness and negotiations will

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become our Christian duty in South Africa only when the apartheid regime shows signs of genuine repentance.\textsuperscript{302}

Like Bonhoeffer, the Kairos theologians will not stand for cheap grace. There can be no forgiveness without its outward manifestation of reconciliation (the restoration of right relationship), and no reconciliation without justice. For them, “true and lasting justice” involves a change in social structures that is accomplished by those who are oppressed (i.e., it comes from the bottom, not the top).\textsuperscript{303} Forgiveness, they argue, is contextual. It becomes a “Christian duty” only when repentance and justice also reign. The body politic, like the body of Christ, must be nourished by both forgiveness and repentance.

This necessary relationship is manifested in the Lord’s Prayer where the petition for forgiveness and the commitment to forgive are intertwined, although they form a triangular relationship rather than a reciprocal one: the general repentance is aimed at God, the promised forgiveness is extended to fellow human beings, and the hoped-for forgiveness flows from God. This does not preclude interpersonal repentance. Rather it implies that asking for forgiveness (from God or from one’s neighbor) should be a regular discipline. However, the TRC abandons the Kairos emphasis on repentance in favor of a notion of forgiveness as unconditional and a source of individual healing.


\textsuperscript{303} Kairos Theologians, \textit{Kairos Document}, p. 12.
The end of apartheid and the TRC

Apartheid (literally, “apart-ness”) was a system of legislated racial segregation and white political domination in South Africa from 1948 to 1993. Under apartheid, everything from park benches and bathrooms to land, education, and political status was racially determined. Black Africans—who made up eighty percent of the population—along with “coloured” (Asian or mixed-race people) were forced to live separately from whites and afforded limited freedom of movement; some were banished to quasi-autonomous “homelands” or bantustans. While racial segregation began in colonial times under Dutch and British rule, apartheid as an official policy was introduced when the National Party took power in 1948.

In 1962, the United Nations established the UN Special Committee against Apartheid. By 1968, the UN was urging member countries to suspend all trade and cultural relations with South Africa. As anti-apartheid resistance grew in South Africa, it was met with rising repression and violence from the apartheid government. In 1990, South Africa president F.W. de Klerk began negotiations with the African National Congress (ANC) to end apartheid. In 1994, Nelson Mandela—who had been jailed for twenty-seven years as

a result of his opposition leadership—became South Africa’s first democratically elected president.\textsuperscript{306}

\textit{The religious character of the TRC}

Within the hearing rooms and especially in public perception, forgiveness played a prominent role in the TRC. In its final report, the commission is transparent about the introduction of Christian language and imagery into the official process. Central to this boosting of forgiveness was Desmond Tutu. He promotes a vision of forgiveness that is unconditional and that he equates with being human, and he lavishes enormous praise on victims who forgive their perpetrators.

At the time of the TRC, Desmond Tutu was serving as the first black Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town. His presence in the hearings was visually striking. He dressed in full bishop’s vestments: a long, purple cassock with a clerical collar and large crucifix. He opened sessions with prayer and lit candles on tables covered with white cloths.\textsuperscript{307} As an active participant especially in the HRVC hearings, Tutu not only convened the proceedings but also questioned witnesses. Even after some commissioners voiced concerns that the hearings were “far too ‘religious’” Tutu persisted. As the story goes, he

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\textsuperscript{306} Waldmeir, \textit{Anatomy of a Miracle}, p. xiv; Beck, \textit{History of South Africa}, p. xxv.
\end{flushright}
tried to open a session in Johannesburg without praying and found that he could not. “We cannot start without having prayed,” he announced. “Close your eyes!”

At the hearings, Tutu prayed not only to a “God of justice” but specifically “in the name of Jesus.” He told “the victims of apartheid crimes that we must forgive because God forgives us and because we ask God’s forgiveness every day when we pray the Lord’s Prayer.” Allan Aubrey Boesak and Curtiss Paul DeYoung write, “By doing that, the TRC not only Christianized the process, it has set the standards for reconciliation for the victims of apartheid crimes, most of them black Christians who take their faith very seriously indeed.” Muslim victim Farid Esack reflects on the Christian character of the commission. “On the day of my testimony,” he says, “I spoke critically to an all-Christian panel, headed by an archbishop sitting under a huge crucifix in a church hall.” The use of Christian imagery and language in the hearings created additional moral dilemmas for victims—such as difficulty with forgiveness and whether one is obligated to forgive unrepentant perpetrators—that went largely unaddressed throughout the hearings.

Tutu also heavily promoted the idea of ubuntu alongside the Christian language of forgiveness. He writes, “Ubuntu…is to say, ‘My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours.’” Ubuntu calls for justice that restores broken relationships rather than punishes or retaliates, because relationships are primary. “Human community is vital

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311 Quote in P.G.J. Meiring, “Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: the role of the faith communities,” Verbum et Ecclesia 26.1 (2005), pp. 146-173 (168). However, Esack is mistaken about the “all-Christian panel;” there was actually one Hindu member of the commission, Yasmin Sooka.
312 Shore, Religion and Conflict Resolution, p. 143.
313 Tutu, No Future, p. 31.
for the individual’s acquisition of personhood,” writes Michael Battle in his explication of *ubuntu* in Tutu’s theology.\(^{314}\) Human beings are only persons insofar as they are social beings.

The language of *ubuntu* appears in the *Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act* as a founding principle of the TRC: “There is a need for understanding but not for vengeance, a need for reparation but not for retaliation, a need for *ubuntu* but not for victimization.”\(^ {315}\) There is a parallel relationship among *ubuntu*, understanding, and reparation. Tutu also equates *ubuntu* with forgiveness,\(^ {316}\) but the official language of the TRC does not; rather, the call for *ubuntu* is defined over and against “victimization,” and thus implies that forgiveness and the common good must include an end to violence.\(^ {317}\) By merging forgiveness and *ubuntu*, Tutu invokes not only a Christian duty to forgive, but also an imperative that goes to the very heart of victims’ African identity.

Tutu also calculates that *ubuntu* is equal to forgiveness, and thus to being human. He writes, “We say that a human being is a human being because he belongs to a community, and harmony is the essence of that community. So *ubuntu* actually demands that you forgive, because resentment and anger and desire for revenge undermine harmony. In our understanding, when someone doesn’t forgive, we say that person does not have *ubuntu*. That is to say, he is not really human.”\(^ {318}\)

\(^{315}\) *Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act*.
\(^{316}\) Tutu, *No Future*, pp. 31, 54.
\(^{317}\) *Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act*.
Lyn Graybill is critical of such a vehement commitment to forgiveness in service of community harmony. She writes, “An inherent danger arises when a social order is enshrined around collective solidarity rather than civil liberties. Victims are expected to forgive and accept into the fold the perpetrator in the interests of traditional African values, and may feel guilty if they cannot.” Thus, a victim who stands up for herself in anger or outrage excludes herself not only from the reconciled community but also from what makes her African and what makes her human.

Tutu’s language of forgiveness was not always welcome to HRVC witnesses. One victim testifies, “The Government is telling us, saying that we must forgive the perpetrators. It is very difficult to forgive someone who was an enemy…We cannot forgive them because they are still our enemy.” Tutu responds, exasperated: “After ten years we want to see results. We do not want to see that we have wasted our time. We also noted the requests you mentioned [that the perpetrators be brought forward and the police held accountable]. Some of them are very difficult, because we are trying to reconcile and to forgive each other in this country.” With these words, Tutu sets the entire project of national reconciliation and forgiveness against the earnest entreaties of this witness. Ostensibly, the work of the TRC will be wasted if this witness refuses to forgive and keeps requesting to see the perpetrators held accountable.

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319 Graybill, Miracle or Model? p. 34.
321 Testimony of Zimasile Joseph Bota.
In praise of forgiving victims

Far more common than confrontations with unforgiving witnesses in the TRC hearings are compliments to victims who extended forgiveness, even to unrepentant or unknown perpetrators. Beth Savage, for example, was severely wounded by a grenade attack during a wine-tasting party at her golf club in King William’s Town in 1992. While Savage and all of the guests at the event were white, it is not clear whether the club registered any official support of apartheid policies. The guerilla wing of the Pan-African Congress (APLA, or Azanian People’s Liberation Army) claimed responsibility, and the perpetrators received amnesty in 1998.322 During her earlier HRVC testimony, Savage spoke charitably of her attacker. She testifies, “What I would really, really like [is] to meet that man that threw that grenade in a attitude of forgiveness and hope that he could forgive me too for whatever reason.”323 To this, Desmond Tutu responds:

Thank you, I just want to say, we are, I think a fantastic country. We have some quite extraordinary people…I think it just augers so wonderfully well for our country. We thank you for the spirit that you are showing and pray that those who hear you, who see you will say, “Hey, we do have an incredible country with quite extraordinary people of all races.” And it is important for us to know that in the struggle, awful things happened on both sides, and that we in this Commission should seek to be revealing all the truth about our country.324

324 Testimony of Beth Savage.
In his memoir, Tutu recounts this incident and offers further praise. He writes, “That ought to leave people quite speechless with the wonder of it all and make you want to be still in the presence of something so sublime, filled to overflowing with a sense of deep thankfulness that nearly all the victims, black and white, possessed this marvelous magnanimity.” Beth Savage, with her humility and expression of unconditional of forgiveness, is the kind of victim the TRC prizes.

Johan Smit, a white man whose eight-year-old son was killed in a bomb blast near Durban in 1985, earns similar accolades after testifying that he could empathize with the perpetrators. Tutu says, “The people of this country are incredible and the testimony that you have just given is something which people really admire. Our hats off to you and we would really like to express our appreciation and thanks to God that he created people like yourself, and that the reason why we still have this hope that reconciliation will triumph in the end is because there are people like yourself.” In his memoir, he cites Smit as another extraordinary example of South African forgiveness.

Nor does Tutu limit his praise to South Africans. He also lauds the parents of slain Fulbright Scholar Amy Beihl (they started a foundation for youth in the township where she was killed), the widows of the Craddock Four (they want to forgive even though they don’t know whom to forgive), and in a puzzling non sequitur, he gives several

325 Tutu, *No Future*, pp. 147.
327 Testimony of Johan Smit.
328 Tutu, *No Future*, pp. 35-36, 152.
pages to the forgiving mother of a kidnapped girl in Montana and an Irishman who forgave his daughter’s killers.331

When Gregory Edmund Beck testified that Nelson Mandela inspired him to forgive the (unknown) men who shot and wounded him, Tutu congratulated him: “Ultimately if we are going to have the change then it is clear that forgiveness, reconciliation, are quite central to that process, and justice is an element of it as well. But forgiveness ultimately is to say you give people the chance to change. You open a door for someone to move from a dark past to a new and enlightened present and future.”332 Not only is forgiveness essential for national reconciliation, it is also the key to a productive future for the offender. Tutu continues, “All of us need to change, all of us are wounded people, all of us are traumatized people, all of us are people who need to forgive and who also need to be forgiven.”333 Victims should forgive not because perpetrators repent or ask for forgiveness, but because all people need to be forgiven by God and each other.

There is very little room for responses other than forgiveness in the rhetoric of the TRC and the new South Africa. In some cases, commissioners appeared to restate witness remarks to conform to the underlying narrative of forgiveness. Audrey R. Chapman writes, “Whether intentionally or not, commissioners frequently seemed to misinterpret comments of deponents. Not infrequently a deponent told the commissioners that he would not forgive anyone, with the commissioner ignoring or misconstruing the statement in his summary remarks.”334 For example, Margaret Madlana—whose twelve-

331 Tutu, No Future, pp. 155-58.
333 Testimony of Gregory Edmund Beck.
334 Chapman, “Perspectives,” p. 79.
year-old son was murdered by police—testified, “I don’t see the opportunity of me forgiving anyone” (here a note in the transcript indicates, “witness upset”). The commissioner responded, “It doesn’t have to be this human rights hearing, they can come to the amnesty so that they as perpetrators should come before the people and tell the truth so that people like you can be able to forgive and reconcile.” Rather than allowing her anger to stand, he reinstates forgiveness as the ultimate goal and defers it toward a future amnesty hearing.

In addition to being a prized goal of the TRC, forgiveness emerges in Tutu’s writings as a fundamental part of being human. In one interview he waxes nostalgic about the forgiving response of one of the TRC witnesses. He marvels, “How fantastic to see this young girl, still human despite all efforts to dehumanize her.” Accordingly, not to forgive is to be less than human. Even after being a victim of severe violence, she hangs onto her humanity; forgiveness is the clear sign of this.

Tutu’s praise for forgiveness is expansive. After the gallery erupts in forgiving applause of the contrite perpetrators of the Bisho Massacre, when police killed twenty-eight black activists during a protest march in 1992, Tutu reflects, “It was as if someone had waved a special magic wand which transformed anger and tension into this display of communal forgiveness and acceptance of erstwhile perpetrators.” According to Tutu, even God is impressed with all this forgiveness. He writes, “God has looked and seen all these wonderful people who have shone in the dark night of evil and torture and abuses

336 Testimony of Margaret Madlana.
337 Tutu, interview by Cantacuzino; very similar language appears in Tutu, No Future, p. 31.
338 Tutu, No Future, p. 151.
and suffering, shone as they have demonstrated their nobility of spirit, their magnanimity as they have been ready to forgive.”

Years after the close of the commission, Tutu describes its work as a veritable theophany. He says,

"The whole spirit of our process at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was marked by an incredible generosity. When we had listened to the testimony of people who had suffered grievously and it all had worked itself out to the point where they were ready to forgive and embrace the perpetrators, I would frequently say, “I think we ought to keep quiet now. We are in the presence of something holy. We ought metaphorically to take off our shoes because we are standing on holy ground.”"

Thomas Brudholm notes that this religious orientation offers little alternative for victims besides signing on to the religious-redemptive narrative. He writes, “I would suggest that this kind of religious praise and celebration of forgiveness offer an all too sanguine perspective. There is apparently no such thing as inappropriate forgiving and there is a fancy for the telling of uplifting stories and redemption.”

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339 Tutu, No Future, p. 158; see also Brudholm, “Advocacy of Forgiveness,” pp. 142-43.
TRC, which is also “breathtaking,”\textsuperscript{342} “extraordinary,”\textsuperscript{343} and under the sway of the “special magic wand,”\textsuperscript{344} non-forgiveness strikes a sour note indeed.

Tutu’s immense praise of forgiving victims coupled with the language of forgiveness for the sake of national unity and also for the sake of “healing” necessarily created a pressure among those waiting to testify.\textsuperscript{345} The hearings were broadcast daily on television and radio with weekly recaps distilling the highlights.\textsuperscript{346} One young victim remarked in a newspaper interview, “What really makes me angry about the TRC and Tutu is that they are putting pressure on me to forgive. …The oppression was bad, but what is much worse, what makes me even angrier, is that they are trying to dictate my forgiveness.”\textsuperscript{347} Like Bettina Mdlalose in this chapter’s opening story, other victims and survivors reject the idea of forgiveness on its face.

Tutu addresses the issue of non-forgiveness only once in his memoir, and even then it becomes a catalyst for another panegyric on forgiving victims. He writes, “Of course there were those who said they would not forgive. That demonstrated for me an important point that forgiveness could not be taken for granted; it was neither cheap nor easy. As it happens, these were the exceptions. Far more frequently what we encountered was deeply moving and humbling.”\textsuperscript{348} Unforgiveness, then, only serves to highlight how challenging and remarkable an achievement forgiveness really is.

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\item\textsuperscript{342} Tutu, \textit{No Future}, p. 147.
\item\textsuperscript{343} Tutu, \textit{No Future}, pp. 86, 118, 154.
\item\textsuperscript{344} Tutu, \textit{No Future}, p. 151.
\item\textsuperscript{346} Minow, \textit{Between Vengeance and Forgiveness}, p. 60, 72.
\item\textsuperscript{347} “Kalu,” quoted in Wilhelm Verwoerd, “Forgive the Torturer, Not the Torture,” \textit{Sunday Independent} (Cape Town, December 6, 1998).
\item\textsuperscript{348} Tutu, \textit{No Future}, p. 271.
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The specific forgiveness of the TRC

Perpetrators who appeared before the Amnesty Committee were offered amnesty in exchange for a full disclosure of events; they were not required to apologize or show remorse. The hearings of the Amnesty Committee and the Human Rights Violations Committee were held separately and victims had few opportunities to face their perpetrators. As a result, the forgiveness promoted by the TRC was most often unilateral and unconditional. With offenders not required to apologize to victims or even face them to hear their testimony, forgiveness was solely the work of victims.

This separation of victims from offender posed no problem for Tutu. In fact, throughout his writings during and after the TRC, he offers unconditional forgiveness the most praise. For example, the daughter of one the Craddock Four, whose killers were not identified, famously affirmed, “We do want to forgive but we don’t know whom to forgive.” Tutu highlights this incident in his memoir and even lifts this quotation into the title of the chapter celebrating examples of forgiveness.

Tutu frequently presses victims to forgive without knowing who was responsible for the crimes against them, much less receiving words of repentance. He considers this kind of forgiveness to be “Christ-like.” He writes, “Jesus did not wait until those who were nailing him to the cross had asked for forgiveness. He was ready, as they drove in the

349 There were more specific requirements for amnesty: the crime had to have been committed between March 1, 1960 and December 6, 1993, it had to have been politically motivated, and the act had to have been proportional to its motives. When amnesty was granted, it took immediate effect, and the applicant was exempt from criminal and civil liability (Verdoolaege, Reconciliation Discourse, p. 15).
350 Tutu, No Future, pp. 149.
351 Tutu, No Future, pp. 121-60.
nails, to pray to his Father to forgive them.”

He argues that victims must not wait for confession or repentance before they offer forgiveness. Consequently, the forgiveness of an unknown and unrepentant perpetrator becomes the height of moral virtue, comparable to that of the crucified Christ.

Such imitation sets an almost impossibly high and not exactly equivalent standard for victims of systematic abuses who are asked to move forward and live peacefully alongside those who had abused them. Thomas Brudholm and Arne Grøn write, “The question is whether victims of gross injustices should be held to the example of the crucified Christ. After all, there are a number of salient moral and ontological differences between the situation of Christ and that of the human survivor of genocidal violence.”

Issuing a prayer of forgiveness at the moment of death does not have the same implications as forgiving one’s rapist or torturer who may then go on to occupy the same neighborhood and enjoy the same freedoms as the victim.

Tutu also extols the therapeutic benefits of unconditional forgiveness. He writes, “Forgiving means abandoning your right to pay back the perpetrator in his own coin, but it is a loss that liberates the victim. In the commission we heard people speak of a sense of relief after forgiving.” This may be so, but it is a mistake to map a small selection of victim responses onto all victims of apartheid. Not all of them subscribed to Tutu’s Christian version of forgiveness, were receptive to the TRC’s rhetoric of forgiveness, or felt liberated upon “forgiving” unrepentant perpetrators. In fact, many victims of

354 Tutu, No Future, p. 272.
apartheid violence were Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Baha’i, and Buddhist, to name a select few. These groups were marginalized by the apartheid regime based on religion and race, or religion-as-race.

Since perpetrators were required neither to apologize nor to show remorse, if the new South Africa’s reconciliation was to be founded on forgiveness, it had to be unconditional. The fact that perpetrators were not compelled to demonstrate repentance was the primary reason the Roman Catholic Church in South Africa as well as many Protestant denominations found the TRC an unacceptable solution for conflict transformation.\textsuperscript{355} For example, Alex Boraine—deputy chair of the TRC and an ordained Methodist minister—argues that forgiveness is only one ingredient in a larger process of reconciliation that must include “confession, repentance, restitution, and forgiveness.”\textsuperscript{356} Around the beginning of the TRC, Tutu’s emphasis shifts from repentance-based forgiveness to the unconditional forgiveness he sees demonstrated by Jesus on the cross.

Both Tutu and the TRC adopt wholesale a therapeutic, psychological understanding of forgiveness. Not only is forgiveness a political necessity for the future of South Africa, but it is also essential for recovery from trauma and mental health in general. In his appraisal of the TRC, Jeffrie Murphy observes “arguments grounded in trendy notions of mental health where such gems of psychobabble as ‘closure’ and ‘a time for healing’ are the order of the day.”\textsuperscript{357} As such, forgiveness becomes its own mode of psychotherapy

\textsuperscript{357} Murphy, \textit{Punishment}, p. 147. See also Amstutz, \textit{Healing of Nations}, p. 209; Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, \textit{A Human Being Died That Night: A South African Story of}
towards a kind of healing only it could accomplish. The idea of forgiveness, which in this case is conflated with national reconciliation and sound mental health, takes on a life of its own in the TRC and surrounding literature.

The emotional, therapeutic character of the hearings is well known. Lyn Graybill remarks, “As long as there had been crying, commissioners said that healing had occurred.” Such valuing of emotion and catharsis led to some critics dubbing the TRC the “Kleenex commission.” Tutu’s own metaphors reflect this emphasis on emotion. In explaining how South Africa’s process of forgiveness and reconciliation should proceed, Tutu provides the analogy of a husband-and-wife quarrel. “Tutu anticipates and desires an amazing euphoric catharsis,” Annalise Acorn observes. “[He] speaks of the process of dealing with the atrocities of apartheid as akin to husband and wife making up after a fight. The route is apology and forgiveness. The destination is loving embrace.” In this vision, the future of South Africa is rendered as star-crossed lovers sprinting toward each other on a beach at sunset after a long estrangement, all injuries and harsh words forgotten regardless of who inflicted the wounds.

Forgiveness (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2003), p. 97; Acorn, Compulsory Compassion, p. 71. On forgiveness related to healing and closure, see Tutu, No Future, pp. 179 and 270 (healing) and pp. 143, 188, 212 (closure); Tutu, God Has a Dream, p. 53 (“the process of requesting and receiving forgiveness is healing and transformative for all involved”).

Graybill, Miracle or Model? p. 83; also noted in Wilson, Politics of Truth and Reconciliation, p. 120.

Verdoolaege, Reconciliation Discourse, p. 83; see also Tutu, No Future, p. 163.


Acorn, Compulsory Compassion, pp. 72, 115.

Desmond Tutu, “Foreword by Chairperson,” p. 18.
A case study in negative emotions: Desmond Tutu prior to the TRC

Tutu finds that victims who do not forgive are “consumed by bitterness and hatred”\textsuperscript{363} and “consumed by…a lust for revenge.”\textsuperscript{364} He continues, “Not to forgive leads to bitterness and hatred, which, just like self-hatred and self-contempt, gnaw away at the vitals of one’s being.”\textsuperscript{365} Such presentations leave victims no choice; either they forgive or they will find themselves gnawed at and consumed by these negative passions.

While Tutu devotes many pages to denouncing resentment, anger, and outrage, a close examination of his work leading up to the TRC demonstrates that such negative emotions were actually a driving force. The forceful rhetoric of forgiveness does not appear in Tutu’s writings until early 1990s, when the end of apartheid was imminent and the TRC under negotiation. A consideration of the totality of Tutu’s work, especially his social justice work in the fight against apartheid, yields a case study in favor of negative emotions in the service of social change and self-respect, as well as against unconditional forgiveness as the path to harmony.

Tutu’s corpus of writings, speeches, and sermons spans five decades. He is continuously engaged with the biblical text, but his exegesis shifts around the time of the institution of the TRC. Until that time, Tutu’s theology centered on a God of justice and liberation. He cites the Exodus story as paradigmatic for black South Africans, and Jesus as a savior who is “setting God’s children free.”\textsuperscript{366} He emphasizes God’s preferential

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\textsuperscript{363} Tutu, \textit{No Future}, p. 120.
\textsuperscript{364} Tutu, “Foreword by Chairperson,” vol. 1, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{365} Tutu, \textit{God Has a Dream}, p. 54.
option for the oppressed and downtrodden when he writes, “God can’t help it. He always takes sides. He is not a neutral God.”\textsuperscript{367} He argues that God is a liberator “who leads His people out of every kind of bondage, spiritual, political, social and economic, and nothing will thwart Him from achieving the goal of the liberation of all His people and the whole of His creation.”\textsuperscript{368} Tutu notes that the chief concern of God and Christ’s work on earth is reconciliation, but he does not mention the role of human forgiveness in this divine project.\textsuperscript{369}

Nowhere in his earlier work does Tutu mention forgiveness as a mode of conflict transformation. The Jesus who instructs his followers to “be ready to [forgive] not just once, not just seven times, but seventy times seven, without limit”\textsuperscript{370} is replaced by the prophet Jesus who preaches “release to the captives” (Lk. 4:18-19). Tutu says, “Jesus seems to sum up His ministry with the words from Isaiah. We see that this liberation is meant to be total and comprehensive.”\textsuperscript{371} Tutu does not marshal the motif of the forgiving Jesus until the fall of apartheid when Jesus becomes a model for victim forgiveness.

Composed in 1985, the Kairos Document, to which Tutu was an unnamed contributor, also does not call for unconditional forgiveness. Instead, it promotes justice and reconciliation \textit{with repentance}: “No reconciliation, no forgiveness and no negotiations are possible without repentance.”\textsuperscript{372} The tone of this document is indignant. Forgiveness is only mentioned in one paragraph, and there it is coupled with the charge

\textsuperscript{369} Tutu, “Divine Intention,” p. 166.
\textsuperscript{370} Tutu, \textit{No Future}, p. 273.
\textsuperscript{372} Kairos Theologians, \textit{Kairos Document}.
for repentance. “As disciples of Jesus we should rather promote truth and justice and life at all costs, even at the cost of creating conflict, disunity and dissension along the way,” the authors affirm. The Kairos Document calls for change, not forgiveness, and if the road to change includes “conflict, disunity, and dissension,” so be it.

A few years after the publication of the Kairos Document, South Africa moves from apartheid to the transitional period of the TRC and Tutu’s role shifts from apartheid fighter to reconciliation leader. While this change in context calls for different tactics, his wholesale denunciation of anger and veneration of unconditional forgiveness disregard the constructive value of anger and overstate the political usefulness of forgiveness.

Anger and righteous indignation fueled the non-violent protest movement against South Africa’s apartheid government. Exemplifying this, Tutu’s sermons and speeches during that time called for action, not forgiveness. While Tutu sometimes looks to a future when the perpetrators of apartheid might be forgiven (he writes, “The victims of injustice and oppression must be ever ready to forgive. That is a gospel imperative”373), the time for forgiveness has not yet arrived. In a taped message to the TransAfrica Forum in the U.S. in 1984, Tutu is exasperated. He says, “We have been deeply hurt. Blacks are really expendable in the view of the mighty U.S.…You can’t really trust Whites. When it comes to the crunch…Whites will stick by their fellow whites.”374 But in the end, Tutu is not discouraged. He concludes, “Freedom is coming. We will be free whatever anybody does or does not do about it.”375 In a magazine article around the same time, he makes an

373 Tutu, God Is Not a Christian, p. 28 (excerpt from a 1990 speech at a conference of South African churches).
374 Desmond Tutu, “Black South African Perspectives and the Reagan Administration,” in idem, Hope and Suffering, pp. 103-17 (116); capitalization in original.
ominous prediction. He writes, “I [said] last year that within five to ten years we will have a Black Prime Minister. Will this happen reasonably peacefully or after much violence or bloodshed? This is the context in which the PFP [the Progressive Federal Party, which advocated a federal system in place of apartheid] and White opponents of apartheid have to decide.”

Tutu was “vociferous” in his role as a leader in the United Democratic Front (UDF), a prominent anti-apartheid organization. He led marches and protests, and he called for change. He says, “There is nothing the government can do to me that will stop me from what I believe is what God wants me to do. I cannot help it when I see injustice. I cannot keep quiet.” He did not stop. He raised his voice, he pointed his finger, and he shook his fist. He was very often and very publicly angry. And yet this anger did not corrode his sense of *summum bonum*; it fueled it. He embraced non-violent struggle, but he also embraced *struggle*.

When he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1984, Desmond Tutu gave an impassioned speech about the conditions in South Africa under apartheid. He observes, “There has been little revulsion or outrage at this wanton destruction of human life in the

West,” and he questions why. Clearly he is revolted and outraged. He says, “Enough is enough. God created us for fellowship….If we want peace, so we have been told, let us work for justice. Let us beat our swords into ploughshares.” Tutu does not mention forgiveness once in this speech.

Another instance of righteous anger occurred when United States President Ronald Reagan decided not to impose sanctions on South Africa in 1986. Tutu snapped, “Your president is the pits as far as blacks are concerned. I think the West, for my part, can go to hell.” There is no public indication that Tutu ever reversed himself and “forgave” the West, although considering his speaking engagements and visiting professorships in the United States and Europe, we may assume that on some level, he has reconciled with the West.

On a visit to Yad Vashem in 1989, Tutu boldly proposes that Jews—not just Holocaust survivors, but all Jews, and especially Israelis—direct their forgiving energies toward Palestinians. He suggested that forgiveness could be a positive byproduct of the extermination of European Jewry. After drawing a direct analogy between treatment of Palestinians in the occupied territories and South Africa under apartheid, he says, “Our Lord would say that in the end the positive thing that can come is the spirit of forgiving, not forgetting.” He continues with a prayer that packs a passive-aggressive punch: “God,

this happened to us. We pray for those who made it happen, help us to forgive them and help us so that we in our turn will not make others suffer.”

Later in a newspaper article on the topic, he suggests that Israelis are perpetrating another Holocaust on displaced Palestinians. He asks, “Have our Jewish sisters and brothers forgotten their humiliation? Have they forgotten the collective punishment, the home demolitions, in their own history so soon?” Here he distorts the pay-it-forward model seen in the Parable of the Unforgiving servant (and to an extent, in the Lord’s Prayer). In his questions, it is suffering—not forgiveness—that should prompt future benevolence. Holocaust survivor Ruth Kluger remarks on this idea that past suffering should warrant future good will with regard to the Palestinian conflict. She writes, “Auschwitz was no instructional institution…You learned nothing there, and least of all humanity and tolerance.” But Tutu reduces the Nazi horror to “humiliation,” and doesn’t recall that the Holocaust was much more than “collective punishment [and] home demolitions.” In fact, the concentration camps, medical experiments, and forced labor were hardly “punishment,” if punishment implies past wrongdoing. Tutu contends that the Holocaust should inspire reconciliation between Arabs and Israelis. He calls for “peace based on justice,” which he defines as withdrawal from the occupied territories and the establishment of a Palestinian state, because this is “God’s dream.” He does not


mention forgiveness in his prescription for a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. By writing under the title “Apartheid in the Holy Land,” it is clear which side Desmond Tutu holds responsible. The answer here is not forgiveness.

The crusader Jesus of Tutu’s earlier writings stands in stark contrast to the Jesus who appears in his work during and after the TRC. In a 1990 sermon, he writes, “If there is to be reconciliation, we who are the ambassadors of Christ, we to whom the gospel of reconciliation has been entrusted, surely we must be Christ’s instruments of peace. We must ourselves be reconciled. The victims of injustice and oppression must be ever ready to forgive. That is a gospel imperative. [Wrongdoers must apologize,] and the wronged must forgive.”

In this case, Tutu merges the prophetic Jesus with the forgiving one by preserving the call for repentance as a requirement for forgiveness. However, in this same text he also calls on the crucified Christ as a model for perfect love and unconditional forgiveness. He writes, “We expect Christians to be people filled with love. We expect Christians to be people who forgive as Jesus forgave even those who were nailing him to the Cross.”

Desmond Tutu is passionate in his depiction of Jesus as the model of unconditional forgiveness. When asked if he thought Jesus would forgive the Nazis if Jesus were a Holocaust survivor, he invokes the prayer from the cross (“Father, forgive them”) and ties it to the reciprocal forgiveness depicted in the Lord’s Prayer. “From the paradigm that Jesus provided…it wasn’t as if he was talking about something that might happen,” he explains. “He was actually experiencing one of the most excruciating ways of being killed, and yet he had the capacity to live out a prayer that he taught Christians, that we

can expect to be forgiven only insofar as we are ready to forgive.” Here Tutu connects the Lord’s Prayer with the prayer from the cross but leaves out the seventy-times-seven instructions in Matthew and Luke, both of which call for repentance as a prerequisite for forgiveness.

In the mid-nineties, Tutu submitted an essay in response to Holocaust-survivor Simon Wiesenthal’s hypothetical query: Would you have forgiven the dying Nazi soldier who asked for my forgiveness? In his answer, Tutu invokes the amazing acts of forgiveness he encountered in the TRC. He writes, “There are others who say they are not ready to forgive, demonstrating that forgiveness is not facile or cheap. It is a costly business that makes those who are willing to forgive even more extraordinary.” However, he very carefully dodges the question and instead points to the awe-inspiring post-prison forgiveness of Nelson Mandela, along with Jesus’ prayer from the cross (Lk. 23:34a). He closes his essay on a familiar note that doesn’t answer the question of whether he would forgive the soldier: “[Forgiveness] is practical politics. Without forgiveness there is no future.” Of course, post-apartheid South Africa and post-Holocaust Europe are entirely different landscapes. In South Africa, the TRC facilitated testimony from victims and offenders with strict amnesty requirements. While there was no official mechanism for victims to face their offenders, the TRC allowed victims to tell their stories and offenders to be held accountable. By the time Tutu writes his reply, most victims and offenders of the Holocaust are dead.

387 Tutu, God Is Not a Christian, p. 27.
388 Desmond Tutu, contribution to the symposium in Wiesenthal, Sunflower, pp. 266-68 (267).
389 Tutu, in Wiesenthal, Sunflower, p. 268.
In 1995, Tutu visited Rwanda with a church delegation a year after nearly one million people were killed in the genocide there. Speaking to a group of government officials and diplomats, he charges them with the task of justice as reconciliation. He says, “There can be no future without forgiveness. There will be no future unless there is peace. There can be no peace unless there is reconciliation. But there can be no reconciliation before there is forgiveness. And there can be no forgiveness unless people repent.” Just a year or two later, Tutu would be presiding over the TRC and urging victims to forgive unknown and unrepentant perpetrators. When his memoir appears in 1999, his promotion of unconditional forgiveness has expanded even further. With no requirement for perpetrators to apologize or show remorse in the amnesty hearings, forgiveness most often begins and end with the victims.

_A case study in negative emotions: Desmond Tutu after the TRC_

By the time _No Future Without Forgiveness_ is published in 1999, the image of a Jesus who forgives his murderers even as they are nailing him to the cross has become Tutu’s central model for forgiveness. Tutu explains that Jesus forgave his executioners “and he even provided an excuse for what they were doing.” He continues by clarifying the implications of this interpretation for victims and survivors at the TRC. “If the victim could forgive only when the culprit confessed,” he reasons, “then the victim would be locked into the culprit’s whim, locked into victimhood, whatever her own attitude or intention.” Thus, he links unconditional forgiveness both to being a good Christian and being released from “victimhood.” No longer is Jesus’ primary role as a model for

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391 Tutu, _No Future_, p. 272.
fighting injustice. Now the crucified Christ stands as a co-victim and the epitome of the right response to suffering in his unconditional forgiveness.

In a 2000 interview with the BBC, Desmond Tutu remarks, “Resentment and anger are bad for your blood pressure and your digestion.” Such comments about the deleterious effects of anger appear throughout his work. He writes, “Social harmony is for us the *summum bonum*—the greatest good. Anything that subverts, that undermines this sought-after good, is to be avoided like the plague. Anger, resentment, lust for revenge, even success through aggressive competitiveness, are corrosive of this good.” Anger interferes with forgiveness and *ubuntu*, he argues, and without *ubuntu*, one cannot be truly human.

But Tutu’s expressions of righteous indignation did not end with apartheid. When the Dalai Lama was denied an entry visa to South Africa to attend Tutu’s eightieth birthday celebration in 2011, Tutu publicly exploded: “Our government is worse than the apartheid government because at least you would expect it with the apartheid government because at least you would expect it with the apartheid government. Let the ANC know they have a large majority. Well, Mubarak had a large majority, Gaddafi had a large majority. I am warning you: watch out. Watch out!” To this tirade, the official ANC response included a request for Tutu to “calm down.” He continued with a serious threat: “You, President Zuma and your government, do not represent me. I am warning you, as I warned the [pro-apartheid] nationalists, one day we will pray for the defeat of the ANC government.”

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In August 2012, Tutu pulled out of a summit because of the presence of former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, whom Tutu charged with invading Iraq based on false intelligence about weapons of mass destruction. His office stated, “Morality and leadership are indivisible. In this context, it would be inappropriate for the Archbishop to share a platform with Mr. Blair.”\(^396\) It is clear that expressions of anger are essential elements of Tutu’s sense of moral protest. In light of all his calls for forgiveness, however, it is surprising that he would be so public in his displays of this “corrosive” quality.

Tutu’s condemnation of anger, resentment, outrage, and other negative emotions overlooks an important point. It is the expression of these emotions by protesters that got South Africa to the point where a TRC could become possible. In the immediate context of conflict transformation, forgiveness is perhaps a value worth promoting, along with repentance and reconciliation. However, acts of forgiveness did not fuel the apartheid resistance. Anger and outrage have their place, and Tutu’s life is a clear example of this.

At one point, the post-TRC Tutu even explicitly endorses the constructive value of anger. In a rare moment of openness to negative emotions, he says, “[These] are all part of being human. You should never hate yourself for hating others who do terrible things: the depth of your love is shown by the extent of your anger.”\(^397\) However, this is a rare moment indeed; Tutu’s main line both during and after the TRC is that anger is corrosive of social harmony, and those who do not forgive will be consumed by anger and resentment. He writes, “In our African worldview, the greatest good is communal


\(^{397}\) Tutu, interview by Cantacuzino.
harmony. Anything that subverts or undermines this greatest good is ipso facto wrong, evil. Anger and a desire for revenge are subversive of this good thing.”

In the above examples, Desmond Tutu’s anger and righteous indignation were most often directed outside the community to promoters of apartheid and countries that supported the apartheid state. Regarding relations inside the community—that is, those who would comprise the new South Africa—Tutu is vehement in his warnings about the “corrosive” effects of anger. Such a distinction is visible in the seventy-times-seven instructions in Matthew and Luke. These texts frame the call for forgiveness by “brother” language: “If my brother (ὁ ἀδελφός) sins against me” (Mt. 18:21); “If your brother (ὁ ἀδελφός) sins” (Lk. 17:3). This familial language indicates that the instructions apply to intra-community conflict resolution. However, Tutu eschews anger and promotes forgiveness between both groups: the victims of apartheid and the perpetrators of those crimes. During and after the TRC, his language expands to cover all participants in the new South Africa: all victims should forgive so the new community may cohere and flourish. Anger—regardless of whom it is directed toward—is verboten. According to Tutu, sublimating anger is the answer for resolving conflict both inside and outside the various stakeholder communities in the TRC and the new South Africa

_In praise of negative emotions_

As demonstrated by Tutu’s anger and outrage at the apartheid government, negative emotions—including resentment and the refusal to forgive—might actually serve a

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399 Tutu, _No Future_, pp. 31, 35; Tutu, _God Has a Dream_, p. 54 (here corrosive anger is equated with non-forgiveness).
constructive purpose. Graeme Simpson writes, “The discourse of ‘forgiveness’ embroidered much of the Commission’s work, [but] it is equally arguable that true reconciliation in South Africa will more likely be achieved by integrating the anger, sorrow, unresolved trauma and other complex feelings of victims, rather than by suppressing them.”

Jeffrie G. Murphy similarly observes, “Just as indignation or guilt over the mistreatment of others stands as emotional testimony that we care about them and their rights, so does resentment stand as emotional testimony that we care about ourselves and our rights.” Thus, resentment—sometimes manifested in a refusal to forgive—can be a signal of self-respect and self-worth.

This valuation of the negative emotions provides a counter to Tutu’s forgiveness rhetoric. Thomas Brudholm writes, “Preservation of outrage or resentment and the refusal to forgive and reconcile can be the reflex expression of a moral protest and ambition that might be as permissible as the posture of forgiveness.” He also questions the TRC’s commitment to restoring relationships and asks whether all relationships between victims and offenders were even worth restoring. He writes, “The person who does not forgive those who wronged his or her next of kin is not likely to shrivel in existential desolation. Not all relationships are worthy of restoration, and maintaining networks of humane relationship is hardly possible on the basis of an attitude that makes a hegemony of harmony.”

With regard to scriptural precedent for Tutu’s condemnation of anger, there is no indication in the Gospels that anger, outrage, and indignation are destructive or

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400 Simpson, “‘Tell No Lies,’” pp. 239-40.
401 Murphy, Punishment, p. 11.
402 Brudholm, Resentment’s Virtue, p. 4.
403 Brudholm, Resentment’s Virtue, pp. 48-49.
inappropriate emotions. Jesus famously “cleanses” the Temple by overturning tables and lambasting merchants and moneychangers (Mk. 11:13-19; Mt. 21:12-17; Lk. 19:45-48; Jn. 2:13-22), and he also withers a fig tree (Mk. 11:20-24; Mt. 21:18-22). He calls Pharisees “a brood of vipers” (Mt. 23:33) and rails at the scribes and Pharisees, “Woe to you, hypocrites!” (Mt. 23:13-15). Jesus “becomes angry” (ἀγανακτέω) when the disciples tried to keep the children from him and he rebukes them severely (Mk. 10:13-15).

In these accounts and others, Jesus’ anger is a response to injustice or infidelity. Even in the case of the fig tree, which symbolizes the destruction of Jerusalem, Jesus’ anger was often a motivating force for change. In addition to freely expressing his anger, Jesus never actively forgives another person for any wrongdoing against him personally. He does not forgive the scribes and Pharisees for their hypocrisy, he does not forgive the merchants and moneychangers in the Temple, and he does not forgive the disciples for their doubt (although he does reconcile with them). Jesus does not employ forgiveness as a mode of social change or conflict transformation. Further, in his anger Jesus is not “consumed by bitterness and hatred,” as Tutu describes. Most often, his anger plays a constructive role.

After submitting the TRC’s final report in 1998, Tutu notes Jesus’ propensity for anger. “Our Lord was very forgiving,” he says, “but he faced up to those he thought were self-righteous, who were behaving in a ghastly fashion, and called them a ‘generation of

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404 BAGD, ἀγανακτέω, p. 4.
405 Many interpret Jesus’ prayer from the cross (“Father, forgive them,” Lk. 23:34a) as an act of forgiveness. I hold that this is an example of praying for one’s persecutors (Lk. 6:28) and not a first-person act of forgiveness. See the following chapter for a full discussion of this verse.
406 Tutu, No Future, p. 120.
vipers.” He continues, “Forgiveness doesn’t mean turning yourself into a doormat for people to wipe their boots on….There is necessarily a measure of confrontation. People sometimes think that you shouldn’t be abrasive. But sometimes you have to be to make people acknowledge that they have done something wrong.” Here Tutu shifts the definition of forgiveness to include confrontation and reproof. And yet this is not the vision of forgiveness he advocates in his other writings and speeches in which anger and outrage are equated with non-forgiveness, which is non-ubuntu and therefore also inhuman.

Forgiveness is an insufficient national ethic

Angry voices and continued protests ushered in a time when a truth commission working toward national reconciliation was possible in South Africa. Perhaps the transformation could not have occurred without the violent protests of anti-apartheid resistance. In any case, it is clear that acts of forgiveness did not lead the way. Unconditional forgiveness of unknown perpetrators did not transform and overturn the apartheid government.

In the context of any oppressive regime, forgiveness does not necessarily work as a driving force for change, as Tutu’s early writings show. Forgiveness in such contexts

408 Tutu, God Is Not a Christian, p. 38.
409 Tutu, No Future, p. 31.
410 For example, Nelson Mandela led the armed resistance of the ANC’s military wing. “Violence would begin whether we initiated it or not,” he said (quoted in Anthony Sampson, Mandela: The Authorized Biography [New York: Random House, 1999], p. 145). Other armed resistance groups took action against apartheid, such as the Pan African Congress’s armed wing, APLA (Azanian People’s Liberation Army), which took aim at white civilians in the St. James Church massacre in Cape Town in 1993 as well as other attacks.
may even allow or embolden oppressors to continue their persecution. Instead, morally valuable responses may include negative emotions such as anger and indignation that call for justice and change.

Forgiveness as a sustaining political ethic misses the mark; there can be either constant harmony, or constant forgiveness. There cannot be both. Forgiveness is reactive; it needs disruptions in the harmony to take hold. There is no forgiveness without victims, and there are no victims without wrongdoing. Further, it may not be a good idea to mix personal forgiveness with political aims. Rajeev Bhargava writes, “One cannot forgive for the future good of the society, if personal costs are excessive. The good of the community cannot provide reasons for unconditional forgiveness.”411 However, as seen in his responses to victim testimonies, Tutu presents victim forgiveness as essential for a reconciled South Africa.

Ernesto Verdeja argues against such harnessing of victims’ emotional responses. He writes, “The state cannot, of course, decree forgiveness. But though forgiving should be a free and unencumbered act, its de facto institutionalization in some truth commissions (such as South Africa’s) or in official apologies gives victims little free space for opposing it and demanding instead some sort of accountability.”412 Thus, depicting reconciliation as dependent on victim forgiveness is coercive. Verdeja concludes,

“Forgiveness may be morally praiseworthy, but it should not serve as the lodestar of reconciliation.”

A vision of the future that uses forgiveness as the basis for reconciliation and an end to all conflict can also preclude legitimate political debate by framing relations only in terms of good feelings and harmony. In such a utopia, negative emotions like resentment, anger, and outrage have no place. But defining relationships in terms of the forgiving abuse creates a community of constant pardon. Such an emphasis on forgiveness then paves the way for miscreants who know that no matter what they do, the onus will be on the victims to forgive them.

Tutu’s view of forgiveness has not changed since the close of the TRC. Indeed, most of his writings in the last fifteen years capitalize on this veneration of forgiveness, with several books repeating verbatim his effusive praise for unconditional forgiveness. It is clear that he intends this message to be universal and timeless. Indeed, Tutu exhorts, “Forgiveness is practical politics,” not only during but also after the close of the TRC and

413 Verdeja, Unchopping a Tree, p. 16.
414 Verdeja, Unchopping a Tree, p. 17. Harmony is defined as peaceful relations characterized by forgiveness and reconciliation among former enemies and community members (p. 3).
into the future of the re-legitimized state. As far as Tutu is concerned, this applies not only to South Africa, but to every human community.

In her proposal for a moral theory of political reconciliation, Colleen Murphy considers whether the TRC should serve as a model for other transitional contexts. The TRC’s emphasis on forgiveness-as-reconciliation is problematic for a number of reasons, especially the attempt to map the model of interpersonal forgiveness onto political contexts. “In transitional contexts, the conception of a prior, normal, acceptable political relationship that has been ruptured by wrongdoing does not pertain,” writes Murphy. In personal relationships, the wrongdoing might be an aberration, but in political contexts it has been and might continue to be the rule. She continues, “Urging forgiveness and the overcoming of resentment in contexts where wrongdoing is systematic and ongoing seems at best naïve and at worst a form of complicity in the maintenance of oppression and injustice.” Thus, in some cases forgiveness fuels the discontent rather than helps to resolve it. That is not to say that forgiveness is inappropriate for any political context, only that it risks suggesting a simple, emotional solution to complex, multi-layered political problems.

The TRC’s vision of forgiveness and reconciliation depends on an idealized vision of harmony with Edenic overtones. Tutu writes in his foreword to the TRC Report, “We are

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417 See Tutu, “Foreword by Chairperson,” p. 22; No Future, pp. 31, 35, 196. Tutu expands his philosophy to apply to all of humanity: “To work for reconciliation is to want to realize God’s dream for humanity—when we will know that we are indeed members of one family, bound together in a delicate network of interdependence…True forgiveness deals with the past, all of the past, to make the future possible” (p. 274).

418 Murphy, Moral Theory, pp. 10-11.

419 Murphy, Moral Theory, p. 11.
sisters and brothers in one family—God’s family, the human family. Let us move into the glorious future of a new kind of society where people count, not because of biological irrelevancies or other extraneous attributes, but because they are persons of infinite worth created in the image of God.”\(^{420}\) This vision suggests a hope for the future as it recalls the past harmony of an original human family. Claire Moon writes, “Reconciliation is a story told in a single word. It tells a tale of prior harmony, a rupture (wrong perpetrated) and a subsequent reunion, predicated here on the confessional and forgiveness. Reconciliation relates these implied events in a causal and linear fashion—harmony, rupture, reunion—and prefigures narrative closure as reconciliation, the end point of the story.”\(^{421}\)

This vision of reconciliation requires both victims and offenders to cast their testimonies in terms of hope for the future as a return to an Edenic ideal rather than moving forward and confronting the complicated present moment. Moon observes,

> [The TRC’s] workings were most powerfully manifest through its retrospective structuration of the individual testimonies where victims were largely compelled to speak in terms of reconciliation rather than revenge and seek restorative justice which sought to endow them with a recognition of their suffering. Similarly, perpetrators had to relate a particular account of violations that worked within the overall teleology of the reconciliation narrative.\(^{422}\)

Forgiveness as the emotional and spiritual substance of reconciliation emerges as a way back to this perfect South Africa that was created in God’s image and lost to the poison

\(^{420}\) Tutu, “Foreword by Chairperson,” p. 22.
\(^{421}\) Moon, *Narrating Political Reconciliation*, p. 119.
\(^{422}\) Moon, *Narrating Political Reconciliation*, p. 136.
of apartheid.\textsuperscript{423} The narrative of the TRC adheres to this rewritten history and image of the future as restoration fueled by victim forgiveness.

Murphy contends that there is no justification for a state (or a state body like the TRC) to encourage victims to forgive in the name of reconciliation. She writes, “Citizens reasonably disagree about the justifiability of forgiving both in general and especially in transitional contexts. State policies designed to encourage victims to forgive fail to acknowledge such disagreement.”\textsuperscript{424} Ultimately, the question becomes whether a state can be in the business of mandating reactive emotions, such as promoting forgiveness as well as discouraging anger and resentment, which may have reasonable bases and play constructive roles in conflict transformation.

During the TRC, the promotion of forgiveness also serves to stabilize the sometimes-controversial grants of amnesty. If victims offer forgiveness to perpetrators, then the amnesty decisions are strengthened. Moon points out that the TRC’s language of forgiveness was meant to make it seem like the amnesty decisions were supported by the victims. She writes, “Forgiveness worked retrospectively to legitimize the amnesty decision but was made to appear as if it had somehow been generated by popular will.”\textsuperscript{425} Thus, the pressure on victims to forgive strengthens the overall narrative of forgiveness (including grants of amnesty) in service of the new South Africa, with all sides in agreement.

What gets lost in these narratives of forgiveness-as-reconciliation is the idea that reconciliation, or the restoration of a broken relationship, can take hold and thrive

\textsuperscript{423} Moon, \textit{Narrating Political Reconciliation}, p. 136.
\textsuperscript{424} Murphy, \textit{Moral Theory}, p. 13.
\textsuperscript{425} Moon, \textit{Narrating Political Reconciliation}, p. 122.
without interpersonal forgiveness. In the *TRC Report*, a section entitled “Reconciliation without Forgiveness” reluctantly acknowledges that “peaceful coexistence” may be the best South Africa can expect. It reports, “The emphasis on peaceful or non-violent coexistence suggests that a weak or limited form of reconciliation [or ‘peaceful coexistence’] may often be the most realistic goal towards which to strive, at least at the beginning of the peacemaking process.”\(^{426}\) However, fewer than two pages of the seven-volume, more than 4,000-page report are given to exploring this topic. Given that the words “weak” and “limited” are used to describe it, “reconciliation without forgiveness” is far from the TRC’s ideal.

Such a limited account of reconciliation might prove to be the most promising way forward. Ernesto Verdeja writes, “Many people calling for forgiveness are simply trying to articulate the need to avoid a return to violence. They are not necessarily apologists for dictators. But it is also clear that expecting a victim to overcome resentment and ‘leave the past behind’ for the sake of solidarity does little to convince survivors that society takes them seriously.”\(^{427}\) He proposes a “weaker” form of forgiveness that is “normatively defensible and practically attainable.”\(^{428}\) This “partial pardon” is distinct from forgiveness in that it allows victims to maintain negative emotions and retributive desires while also committing to peaceful coexistence with the perpetrator. Verdeja writes, “Here, forgiveness is not so much about moral transformation on the part of

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\(^{426}\) *TRC Report*, vol. 5, pp. 400-401. See also Chapman, “Perspectives,” esp. pp. 88-89.  
\(^{427}\) Verdeja, *Unchopping a Tree*, p. 168.  
\(^{428}\) Verdeja, *Unchopping a Tree*, p. 169.
victims, perpetrators, and bystanders, but rather is about forswearing violence and coming to acknowledge the [humanity] of former enemies.  

This version of forgiveness is based on shared humanity and depends heavily on recognition of wrongdoing and victim harm on the part of the perpetrator. Verdeja argues, “[The partial pardon] is more robust than the thin coexistence because even to consider pardoning there must be some acknowledgment of past wrongs and recognition of victims. The pardon is premised on the belief that any stable and just future must focus on creating a common moral, political, and social space for former enemies.” In this proposal, victims contribute to reconciliation not with catharsis and moral transformation, but with the practical steps of accepting apology and forswearing retaliation. Central is the recognition of victim suffering and the expectation that perpetrators will make their own contribution by acknowledging and accepting responsibility for that suffering. The “partial pardon” stands in contrast to both amnesty, which “undermine[s] the rule of law and signal[s] that the interests of victims can be sacrificed for the common good of stability,” and forgiveness, which claims an unreasonable moral superiority and burdens victims with a requirement for reconciliation.

*The Lord’s Prayer as a counterbalance*

Any understanding of interpersonal forgiveness must attend to the bilateral nature of wrongdoing. Forgiveness becomes coercive in the South African context when victims are pressed to forgive unilaterally and unconditionally and in service not to restoring a

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429 Verdeja, *Unchopping a Tree*, p. 169.
430 Verdeja, *Unchopping a Tree*, p. 172.
431 Verdeja, *Unchopping a Tree*, p. 108.
432 Verdeja, *Unchopping a Tree*, p. 168.
specific ruptured relationship, but to an ideal of national reconciliation. The TRC pressured victims to forgive both implicitly through its religious imagery and language, lavish praise for forgiving responses, and linking forgiveness to the hope for reconciliation, and explicitly through direct requests from commissioners. By separating victims and perpetrators into separate committees and official processes, the TRC headed off potentially ugly exchanges. As a result, “The TRC did not provide the official forum through which victim-perpetrator encounters, which might see to be the perfect exemplar of a reconciliation event, could be enacted.”

While the TRC’s final report acknowledges a bilateral process of forgiveness, on the ground things were quite different. Its reliance on unconditional, unilateral forgiveness as the source of reconciliation put the burden on victims to achieve internal, emotional changes and to create the reconciliation the new South Africa needed. A community that is reconciled in this way can only be imbalanced; victims must go forward to live alongside perpetrators they may have reason to fear. To be sure, while violence in South Africa is nowhere similar in terms of quantity or circumstance to what it was before the TRC, the post-reconciliation Eden is not a reality. “The post-apartheid crime figures in South Africa…suggest a society ill at ease with itself,” write Roger Mac Ginty and Andrew Williams. “So is this [“reconciled” South Africa] the ‘lesser of two evils?’”

In summary, this chapter argues that the TRC and specifically Tutu present a corrupted account of biblical forgiveness. By appealing to the Lord’s Prayer and other

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433 Moon, Narrating Political Reconciliation, p. 55.
434 “The religious paradigm is tendered as a solution for our ills. There is a call for representative confession, repentance and forgiveness” (TRC Report, p. 443).
435 Roger Mac Ginty and Andrew Williams, Conflict and Development (Routledge Perspectives on Development; New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 115.
biblical forgiveness texts, Tutu gives victims a mandate for unconditional, unilateral forgiveness. Instead, I argue that the biblical text consistently presents a bilateral process of forgiveness that must include repentance on the part of the perpetrator. The Lord’s Prayer, which Tutu interprets as a command to forgive unconditionally under the threat of the loss of divine forgiveness, in fact demonstrates the importance of this bilateral process and the connection between that process and right relationship with God.

The Lord’s Prayer contains an acknowledgement that wrongdoing and forgiveness are ongoing, just like the need for food and the presence of temptation. The point of saying this prayer is not for sin to disappear and forgiveness to reign supreme. Rather, the point is to participate in the bilateral process of asking for forgiveness and giving forgiveness on a daily basis. The forgiveness petition is an acknowledgment that wrongdoing happens, and there is a mechanism for addressing it. Repentance and forgiveness are ongoing and intertwined, and they may often be connected to a community’s wholeness and relationship to God. In order to be in right relation to God, human beings must be in right relation to each other, and this includes forgiving with repentance. Communities will necessarily have injury and estrangement, along with forgiveness and reconciliation. But forgiveness and repentance work together, and according to the prayer, human beings receive forgiveness from God at least as far as they are willing to ask for it and give it to others. This daily prayer is a reminder: that being human is difficult work requiring daily maintenance, that conflict can be transformed, and that repentance and forgiveness both have a place.

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Where the Lord’s Prayer provides a prescription for community cohesion, Tutu’s vision of unconditional, unilateral forgiveness leads to an uncomfortable integration of victims and offenders with varying commitments to communal harmony. The *Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act* invokes *ubuntu* toward the end of a reconciled community, but *ubuntu* is an ethic of interdependence, not of solitary acts of victim forgiveness.

Such a vision of shared humanity suggests an exchange. Lives can only be bound up in each other by reciprocal design; one has *ubuntu* only as far as others also have *ubuntu*. Unilateral, unconditional forgiveness does not fit this form since it needs only the singular. *Ubuntu* is profoundly plural; it is more adequately represented by the bilateral process of admission and absolution given in the Lord’s Prayer, which is another declaration of how human beings become persons: “Forgive us…as we forgive.” There is repentance (forgive us), and there is the offer of forgiveness (we forgive). Neither happens independently. Thus the Lord’s Prayer stands as a Christian correlate to *ubuntu*. Where Tutu says, “My humanity is inextricably bound up in yours,” he could just as easily say, “My forgiveness is inextricably bound up in yours.” Both victims and perpetrators must inhabit the new South Africa, and the work of reconciliation cannot fall only to the victims. So much emphasis on the astounding feats of unconditional forgiveness—indeed, declaring that there is *No Future Without Forgiveness*—neglects to hold the perpetrators responsible for their fair share of the future.
CHAPTER IV

FROM PASSIONATE PRAYER TO PASTORAL PRESSURE: FORGIVENESS IN
LUKE 23:34A AND THE PASTORAL CARE OF VICTIMS OF
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

From Joy M.K. Bussert, “Letter from a Battered Wife”:

I am in my thirties and so is my husband…. We have four children and live
in a middle-class home with all the comforts we could possibly want. I have
everything, except life without fear. For most of my married life I have been
periodically beaten by my husband. What do I mean by ‘beaten’? I mean that
parts of my body have been hit violently and repeatedly, and that painful bruises,
swelling, bleeding wounds, unconsciousness, and combinations of these things
have resulted.

I have been kicked in the abdomen when I was visibly pregnant. I have
been whipped, kicked and thrown, picked up again and thrown down again. I have
been punched and kicked in the head, chest, face, and abdomen more times than I
can count…. Few people have ever seen my black and blue face or swollen lips
because I have always stayed indoors afterwards, feeling ashamed. I was never
able to drive following one of these beatings, so I could not get myself to a
hospital for care.

Now, the first response to this story, which I myself think of, will be
‘Why didn’t you seek help?’ I did. Early in our marriage I went to a clergyman
who, after a few visits, told me that my husband meant no real harm, that he was just confused and felt insecure. I was encouraged to be more tolerant and understanding. Most important, I was told to forgive him the beatings just as Christ had forgiven from the cross. I did that, too.

Everyone I have gone to for help has somehow wanted to blame me and vindicate my husband….I have learned that the doctors, the police, the clergy, and my friends will excuse my husband for distorting my face, but won’t forgive me for looking bruised and broken. The greatest tragedy is that I am still praying and there is not a human person to listen.437

According to the National Institutes of Justice and the Centers for Disease Control, approximately 1.5 million women are raped and/or physically assaulted by an intimate partner annually in the United States.438 Because many victims are assaulted more than once, approximately 4.8 million intimate partner assaults and rapes are perpetrated against U.S. women annually.439 Since domestic violence ranks among the most underreported of all crimes, the actual number of annual victims is likely much larger.440

438 Tjaden and Thoennes, Intimate Partner Violence, p. iii. “Intimate partner” is defined here as current or former spouses or boyfriends. While domestic violence is also perpetrated by women and in same-sex relationships, the above study shows that women are far more likely than men to be assaulted by a male intimate partner (p. iv).
439 Tjaden and Thoennes, Intimate Partner Violence, p. iii.
440 “Approximately one-fifth of all rapes, one-quarter of all physical assaults, and one-half of all stalkings perpetrated against female respondents by intimates were reported to the police” (Tjaden and Thoennes, Intimate Partner Violence; see also U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, “Criminal Victimization,” 2011, http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=4494).
While domestic violence crosses all demographic categories, this chapter focuses on the pastoral care of women who are victims of physical violence in heterosexual marriages. In one study of 350 victims of domestic abuse, twenty-eight percent sought help from clergy members. The primary responses these women reported hearing were instructions to remember their marital duties, to “forgive and forget,” and to avoid involving the church.\footnote{Nancy Nason-Clark, \textit{The Battered Wife: How Christians Confront Family Violence} (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), p. 15.} In another study of 5,700 Protestant clergy in the United States and Canada, seventy-two percent reported that they would not counsel a woman to leave an abusive husband and ninety-two percent stated that they would never tell a woman to divorce an abusive husband.\footnote{Mary Ann Douglas, “The Battered Woman Syndrome,” in Daniel J. Sonkin (ed.), \textit{Domestic Violence on Trial: Psychological and Legal Dimensions of Family Violence} (New York: Springer, 1987), pp. 39-54 (41), cited in Judith A. Boss, “Throwing Pearls to the Swine: Women, Forgiveness, and the Unrepentant Abuser,” in Laura Duhan Kaplan and Laurence F. Bove (eds.), \textit{Philosophical Perspectives on Power and Domination} (Value Inquiry Book Series, 49; Philosophy of Peace; Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1997), pp. 235-47 (242).}

As seen in the opening story, pastors often raise the topic of forgiveness in the pastoral care of victims of domestic abuse. Clergy and other pastoral caregivers frequently use Scripture to encourage women to forgive and endure patiently. In the above example, the pastor calls on Jesus’ example by advising, “forgive him the beatings just as Christ had forgiven from the cross.”\footnote{Bussert, \textit{Battered Women}, p. 83.} While not all pastoral care providers advise women to stay in abusive marriages, many will discuss with victims the importance of forgiveness, either in the context of reconciling the marital relationship or in promoting the individual health and well-being of the victim. I examine how Christian women are sometimes encouraged to follow the model of Christ on the cross when he prays for the...
forgiveness of his executioners (Lk. 23:34a) and so, as their encouragers prompt, forgive without condition. Nancy Nason-Clark writes, “The famous cry of Jesus from the cross…is often portrayed as the exemplary pattern that abuse victims ought to imitate as they approach their aggressors.”

I suggest that Jesus’ dying words—”Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Lk. 23:34a)—instead reflect an absence of forgiveness and an opening for victims to remain faithful to the biblical model without forgiving their abusers.

In this chapter, first I review the history of interpretation of Luke 23:34a, “Father forgive them; they do not know what they are doing.” I show how this verse has been used in both ancient and contemporary contexts to promote unconditional forgiveness. In light of the other forgiveness texts in Luke’s Gospel—including the healing of the paralyzed man (5:17-26), the sinful woman forgiven (7:36-50), the seven-times-seven instructions (17:3-4), and the instruction for reciprocal forgiveness (6:37-38)—Jesus might be expected to forgive his executioners or at least announce their forgiveness as he does with the paralyzed man and the sinful woman. However, he does not do so. Instead, he prays that God might forgive them. Such prayer is consistent with his teachings on enemy love (“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you” [Lk. 6:27-28]), but it does not constitute a first-person act of forgiveness according to his earlier instructions (see esp. Lk. 17:1-4).

Next, I show how Christian pastoral care practices impose explicit or tacit pressure on victims of domestic abuse to forgive their abusers. Pastoral caregivers put women in

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danger when they counsel that forgiveness is the right response to an abusive spouse and suggest that forgiveness should lead to reconciliation. Further, the emphasis on forgiveness—even in the context of separation and safety planning—implies that it is the victim’s responsibility to respond to the abuse with unilateral or unconditional forgiveness. Such forgiveness is presented as the imitation of Christ, the moral duty of the victim, or the only way to heal from abuse. Here I demonstrate how pastoral

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445 Christian pastoral caregivers sometimes stress forgiveness in light of the New Testament household codes regarding wifely submission and obedience. These include Eph. 5:22-24 (“Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands”); Col. 3:18 (“Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord”); 1 Pet. 3:1-2, 6a (“Wives, in the same way, accept the authority of your husbands, so that, even if some of them do not obey the word, they may be won over without a word by their wives’ conduct, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives…Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham and called him lord”). For careful treatment of these and other problematic texts, see Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, “Emancipative Elements in Ephesians 5:21-33: Why Feminist Scholarship Has (Often) Left Them Unmentioned, and Why They Should be Emphasized,” in Amy-Jill Levine with Marianne Blickenstaff (eds.), A Feminist Companion to the Deutero-Pauline Epistles (London and New York: T & T Clark International, 2003), pp. 29-38; Angela Standhartinger, “The Epistle to the Congregation in Colossae and the Invention of the ‘Household Code,’” in Levine and Blickenstaff (eds.), A Feminist Companion to the Deutero-Pauline Epistles, pp. 88-97; Betsy J. Bauman-Martín, “Feminist Theologies of Suffering and Current Interpretations of 1 Peter 2.18-3.9,” in Amy-Jill Levine with Maria Mayo Robbins (eds.), Feminist Companion to the Catholic Epistles and Hebrews (London and New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), pp. 63-81; Catherine Clark Kroeger, “Toward a Pastoral Understanding of 1 Peter 3.1-6 and Related Texts,” in Levine and Robbins (eds.), Feminist Companion to the Catholic Epistles and Hebrews, pp. 82-88; Alan G. Padgett, As Christ Submits to the Church: A Biblical Understanding of Leadership and Mutual Submission (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011); Teresa J. Hornsby, Sex Texts from the Bible: Selections Annotated and Explained (SkyLight Illumination Series; Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths Publishing, 2007), Dale B. Martin, Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), pp. 112-14 (“The Pro-family Paul”); Peter H. Davids, “A Silent Witness in Marriage: 1 Peter 3:1-7,” in Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis (eds.), Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), pp. 224-240; I. Howard Marshall, “Mutual Love and Submission in Marriage: Colossians 3:18-19 and Ephesians 5:21-33,” in Pierce and
caregivers downplay the role of offender repentance and enlarge the biblical definition of forgiveness to include contemporary psychological understandings such as suggesting that forgiveness is required for the victim’s mental health. In many pastoral care settings, whether a woman is counseled to forgive and stay in her marriage or she is told that forgiveness is the only way for her to heal apart from her abuser, forgiveness plays a role in subjugating women to abuse.

Scripture provides an alternative. When Jesus prays, “Father, forgive them,” he turns the matter of forgiveness over to God. As he endures violence to the point of death, he shows victims that forgiveness in the midst of suffering is not an obligation and maybe not even possible. Jesus’ prayer in place of forgiveness provides an alternative model for responding to abuse, relieves them of the burden of forgiveness, and restores moral agency to victims of abuse.

A note on language

Domestic violence goes by a number of names, including domestic abuse, intimate partner abuse, intimate partner violence, wife battering, family abuse, family violence, intimate abuse, relationship abuse, and spouse abuse. The term favored by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is “intimate partner abuse,” a broad category that includes physical or psychological violence committed in the context of heterosexual or same-sex dating or marriage relationships by current or former partners.\textsuperscript{446} Since my subject is limited to female

\\textsuperscript{446} The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) define intimate partner violence as “physical, sexual, or psychological harm by a current or former partner or
victims of physical violence in the context of marriage, I employ the terms that are used most commonly in the literature and media to refer to this kind of offense: “domestic abuse” and “domestic violence.” Both the BJS and the CDC use these terms interchangeably with “intimate partner violence.”

There is an ongoing debate about the use of the words “victim” and “survivor” in the context of domestic violence. Some authors define a trajectory of healing from abuse that includes moving “from victim to survivor.” In this chapter, I will refer to victims of domestic violence as “victims.” This is not to suggest that they are weak, continue to be spouse. This type of violence can occur among heterosexual or same-sex couples and does not require sexual intimacy” (http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/index.html). The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) specifies, “Intimate partner violence includes victimization committed by spouses or ex-spouses, boyfriends or girlfriends, and ex-boyfriends or ex-girlfriends” (http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=tp&tid=971).


abused, or are somehow lacking in healing. Here, I intend the label “victim” to indicate only that a woman is or has been subjected to domestic abuse.449

Forgiveness in Luke 23:34a

Jesus’ cry from the cross in Luke—“Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing” (23.34a)—is most commonly interpreted as an outpouring of unconditional forgiveness from a suffering man to his executioners.450 This verse marks the only example in the Gospels in which Jesus speaks about forgiveness with regard to someone committing an offense against him directly. Elsewhere in Luke, he either instructs his followers on when and how to forgive or pronounces the sins of others to be


forgiven. The forgiveness petition follows from his earlier instruction to “pray for those who abuse you” (Lk. 6:28), but it raises questions in light of his teachings about unlimited forgiveness (Mt. 18:21-22; Lk. 17:3-4).

_Forgiving the soldiers, the Jews, and all humanity_

The question of the prayer’s object is the subject of much debate. The immediate context suggests that Jesus means to pray for the soldiers who are executing him.\(^{451}\) However, the direct antecedent of “them” in this verse is the “chief priests, the leaders, and the people” (23:13). Later material in Acts such as Stephen’s similar prayer for his Jewish tormentors (7:60) and Peter’s speech—“Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified” (2:36; emphasis mine)—indicate that Luke intends to hold the Jewish leaders responsible as well.\(^{452}\) Other interpretations expand the object of the prayer to include not only the soldiers or the Jewish leaders, but also all humanity for all time.\(^{453}\)

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Whether the object of the prayer is the soldiers, the Jews, or all of humanity, the important point is that Jesus prays for the forgiveness of whoever is responsible for his suffering. He also applies the excuse of ignorance as a reason they should be forgiven. Ignorance as a basis for forgiveness coincides with Aristotle’s “excuse of ignorance,” which absolves the offender of the crime, but only insofar as the offender regrets what he has done. But Luke gives no indication that the soldiers feel bad for having killed Jesus; on the contrary, in the same verse just after Jesus’ prayer for forgiveness Luke reports, “And they cast lots to divide his clothing” (23:34b). The soldiers likely did not have a choice in whether they killed Jesus that day, but they did voluntarily roll dice to divide up his belongings.

The prayer prefigures the motif of ignorance that is evident in Acts. Peter indicts the Jewish audience for the crucifixion of Jesus, but offers the ignorance excuse: “And now, friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers…Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out” (3:17, 19). Later, Paul preaches, “While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands

all people everywhere to repent” (17:30). In these verses, it is clear that ignorance must be followed by repentance. As with Aristotle’s instruction, sins committed in ignorance may be overlooked when there is remorse (or repentance, given here as μετανοεῖν).


The first instance of forgiveness in the Gospel of Luke occurs when Jesus encounters the paralyzed man (5:17-26). Upon restoring the man’s ability to walk, Jesus declares, “Friend (αὐθρωπῖ, lit. “man”; there is no prior relationship between Jesus and this man), your sins are forgiven you” (v. 20). Here, the passive voice (ἀφέωνται) suggests that Jesus is announcing forgiveness performed by God. However, when the scribes and Pharisees question Jesus’ ability to forgive sins, Jesus counters, “The Son of Man has the authority on earth to forgive sins” (v. 24). Later, when the woman identified as a sinner anoints Jesus (7:36-50), he offers identical words of forgiveness first to the onlookers and then to the woman herself: “Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven” (v. 47; ἀφέωνται), and “Your sins are forgiven” (v. 48; ἀφέωνται). These pronouncements also arouse suspicion among those present who “began to say among themselves, ‘Who is this who even forgives sins?’” (v. 49).

Both episodes use the passive voice to deflect the agency for forgiveness from Jesus to God.Both consequently raise but do not explicitly answer the question of Jesus’

own ability to forgive sins vs. the ability of any person – any ‘son of man’ or ‘human being’ – to do so. Jesus heals the paralyzed and declares that the “son of man” has authority to forgive sins. However, this action proves only that Jesus has the ability to heal, something that was true for other miracle-workers at the time.\footnote{457} It is Jesus’ interlocutors who conclude that Jesus is claiming the ability to forgive on his own authority by asking, “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (5:21) and “Who is this who even forgives sins?” (Lk. 7:49). It is clear from these passages that Jesus understands himself as having the authority to speak for God in matters of forgiveness.\footnote{458}

In the Sermon on the Plain (Lk. 6:17-49), forgiveness and love of one’s enemies are prominent themes. Jesus instructs, “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you… Forgive, and you will be forgiven” (6:27-29, 37). These words anticipate Jesus’ prayer from the cross. Indeed, Jesus does offer a prayer for those who torment him (23:34a), but he does not forgive them even though he has both asserted his authority to do so (5:24) and instructed his listeners that it is possible and necessary for humans to forgive (6:37).

The Lord’s Prayer reinforces the point that human beings have the ability and obligation to forgive one another: “When you pray, say . . . forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us” (Lk. 11:2, 4). Jesus instructs the disciples further on forgiveness when he tells them, “If the same person sins against you seven

times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive” (17:3-4; see discussion of these texts in Chapter Two). Jesus teaches his disciples to be forgiving of one another, although where Matthew leaves a similar instruction for unlimited forgiveness in vague terms (18:21-22), Luke makes the condition explicit: the offender must repent.

These examples demonstrate that according to the Lucan program, forgiveness is not the exclusive province of God. They show that Jesus, and indeed everyone, also have the ability to forgive others. In light of this, we might expect Jesus to say, “I forgive you! You don’t know what you’re doing.” Given Luke’s emphasis on repentance, such forgiveness might not be in order. However, having already claimed the authority to speak on God’s behalf (“the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,” Lk. 5:24), he might say as he did before to both the paralyzed man and the tearful woman at his feet even though any repentance on their part wasn’t immediately obvious, “Your sins are forgiven you! You don’t know what you’re doing.” Instead, in the midst of a violent death, Jesus pleads, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing” (23:34a).

Jesus’ language in this prayer is identical to the words he uses to exhort his disciples to forgive one another. Speaking to the disciples about interpersonal forgiveness, Jesus uses the imperative, ἄφες αὐτοῖς ("if there is repentance, you must forgive him’’; 17:3). On the cross, Jesus utters the same words, ἄφες αὐτοῖς ("forgive them’’; 23:34a), an imperative plea for God to forgive. But as he is dying, Jesus does not follow the instruction he issued to his disciples or exercise his own authority to forgive. His words

459 On the textual authenticity of Lk. 23:34a, see the Excursus, pp. 127-29.
from the cross raise the issue of forgiveness, but the prayer suggests that Jesus was unable or unwilling to offer forgiveness to his attackers.

Although Jesus does not directly forgive his executioners, he does pray for them in accordance with his earlier instruction: “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you” (Lk. 6:27-28). The point is not that enemies or persecutors will stop cursing and abusing. What should change is one’s disposition to them. Jesus issues the instructions as an ethical challenge:

If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. (6:32-36)

These words immediately precede the reciprocal forgiveness formula, “Forgive, and you will be forgiven” (6:37). Here it is clear that Jesus considers forgiveness to be a kind action on the order of loving and praying for one’s enemies. He gives no precondition for that forgiveness, just as there is no precondition for enemy love or prayer. This is not to say that women who are victims of abuse should stay in violent situations and love and pray for their abusers. On the contrary, each of these actions may be performed from a safe distance.
The martyrdom of Stephen provides a second example of substituting prayer for direct forgiveness during a violent act: “[Stephen] prayed, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’ Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them (κύριε, μὴ στήσης αὐτοῖς τὴν ἁμαρτίαν ταύτην). When he had said this, he died” (Acts 7:59-60). Stephen prays not to God, but to “Lord Jesus” whom he sees standing at the right hand of God (7:56), and while he does not use language of forgiveness, Stephen indicates that he wishes Jesus will deal mercifully with his attackers (there is no question here that the antecedent of “them” is the Jewish mob who is stoning him to death).

Stephen does not call out, “I forgive you,” although he might have done so given Jesus’ teachings in the Gospel. Instead, he prays in imitation of his Lord, “Do not hold this sin against them” (7:60). However, refraining from holding a sin against someone is not the same thing as forgiving that person. This becomes clear in Jesus’ encounter with the adulterous woman in the Gospel of John. He does not hold her sin against her, but he does not forgive her. He says simply, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again” (οὐδὲ ἔγω σε κατακρίνω· πορέω καὶ μηκέτι ἁμαρτάνεις; 8:11). Stephen’s model is potentially more useful to victims of domestic violence struggling with whether to forgive. As Jesus demonstrates in John, such passing over or not condemning does not require a continued relationship, but it does require a change in behavior. Jesus tells the woman, “Go your way, and from now on do not sin again” (Jn. 8:11).

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See the excursus for a discussion of the text-critical issues with this verse.
Early interpretations of Luke 23:34a

Many ante- and post-Nicene interpreters distinguish between Jesus’ prayer for his executioners and a direct act of forgiveness. Augustine (354-430) understands the prayer in the context of the hypostatic union of human and divine, both praying (and thus setting an example) and also hearing the prayer for the forgiveness. ⁴⁶¹ The example of prayer is also central to Pseudo-Clement (writing ca. 140-160). He explains, “For the Teacher Himself, being nailed to the cross, prayed to the Father that the sin of those who slew Him might be forgiven. They also therefore, being imitators of the Teacher in their sufferings, pray for those who contrive them, as they have been taught.”⁴⁶²

Like Pseudo-Clement, both Irenaeus (130-202) and John Chrysostom (347-407) connect Jesus’ cry to his instructions to love enemies (Lk. 6:27) and pray for persecutors (Lk. 6:28). Chrysostom writes, “As therefore He commanded men to pray so does He Himself pray, instructing you to do so by his own unflagging utterances of prayer. Again He commanded us to do good to those who hate us, and to deal fairly with those who treat us spitefully.”⁴⁶³ Irenaeus echoes this sentiment: “The long-suffering, patience, compassion, and goodness of Christ are exhibited. For the Word of God, who said to us, Love your enemies, and pray for those that hate you, Himself did this very thing upon the

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⁴⁶³ John Chrysostom, Homily on “Father, if it be possible…”, Section 4. See also John Chrysostom, Homily 7 on Ephesians.
In these interpretations, Jesus’ prayer from the cross is consistent with his instructions on enemy love and an ideal for Christian piety.

Later interpreters also focus on Jesus’ act of prayer. Martin Luther preaches that as he prays, Jesus is fulfilling the role of high priest: Jesus “prays for us and all men, who by our sins had furnished the cause for His crucifixion and death. For this reason we should not regard the gallows, or the cross, on which Christ suffered, as anything else than that altar, upon which He offers up His life and at which He discharges the priestly duty of prayer.” For Luther, Jesus’ prayer for forgiveness is actually a prayer for all humanity. In that the crucifixion secures forgiveness for everyone, the prayer serves as a narration for the atonement that is enacted with his suffering and death.

Luther stops short of claiming this verse as a mandate for human forgiveness. Rather, he aligns with earlier interpreters in citing it as an example of right prayer and enemy love. He explains, “Therefore if thou wilt be a Christian, thou shalt then imitate thy Lord, and have compassion on those who cause thee suffering, and even pray for them that God might not punish them.” For Luther, wrongdoing is more an occasion for pity and prayer than it is forgiveness, at least in the context of this verse. Forgiveness is a foregone conclusion for Christians, secured by the death and resurrection of Jesus and embodied in this prayer on the cross. He writes, “Therefore you ought to be so pious as to rather pity

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466 Martin Luther, Sermons on the Passion of Christ, p. 191.
467 Martin Luther, in John Nicholas Lenker (ed.), Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude preached and explained by Martin Luther, The Hero of the Reformation, the Greatest of the Teuton Church Fathers, and the Father of Protestant Church Literature (Minneapolis, MN: Lutherans in All Lands Co., 1904), p. 269.
[the ones who wrong you]…as Christ also himself has done toward us, when he prayed on the cross, ‘Father forgive them.”\(^{468}\)

*The prayer as lacking forgiveness*

Contemporary interpreters note the absence of forgiveness in this verse. John K. Roth cites Jesus’ earlier claim that “the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” (Lk. 5:24), as well as his pronouncements of forgiveness for the paralyzed man (5:24) and sinful woman (7:47) and asks, “Why doesn’t Jesus just forgive the offenders himself?”\(^{469}\) Like earlier interpreters, Roth distinguishes between the prayer and forgiveness, and emphasizes consistency with the earlier teachings on enemy love.\(^{470}\) He is not forgiving them. Roth concludes that the primary reason Jesus does not directly forgive his executioners is that there is no display of repentance.\(^{471}\) It is for this reason that the prayer may well represent a circumlocution for forgiveness.

In accounting for the lack of forgiveness in the prayer, Frederick W. Keene explains that the prayer is a reflection of how one in a weak position cannot forgive the stronger party.\(^{472}\) He argues that had Jesus wanted to show that the weak should forgive the strong, this would have been a perfect opportunity. However, Jesus turns the matter over to the one who is more powerful than either the victim or the abuser. Keene explains,


\(^{469}\) Roth, “Jesus the Pray-er,” p. 496.

\(^{470}\) Roth, “Jesus the Pray-er,” pp. 497-498.

\(^{471}\) Roth, “Jesus the Pray-er,” p. 497.

“Surely the idea of a forgiving Christ would tell us that if he could he would forgive. But he did not, and thus no one should be asked or expected to forgive those who retain the power in a relationship where forgiveness might be applicable.”

However, Jesus’ forgiveness instructions in the Gospel of Luke suggest the contrary; any person may forgive another person regardless of his or her standing in the community. In both the Lord’s Prayer (“forgive us…as we forgive,” 17:4) and the reciprocal formula (“Forgive, and you will be forgiven,” 6:37), Jesus speaks in terms general enough to imply that everyone has the ability to forgive. Even if Jesus’ intended his instructions for unlimited forgiveness for a particular community (suggested by the “brother” language in 17:3-4), there is no suggestion here or elsewhere that such forgiveness is governed by considerations of power. Therefore, Jesus’ withholding of forgiveness from the cross may not be explained simply by out-of-balance power dynamics.

**Jesus as stoic or martyr**

Jesus’ forgiveness prayer fits both the stoic and martyrological traditions of his time. Because the stoic sage is considered to be invulnerable to injury, he would not feel resentment and it would not be appropriate for him to forgive. Moreover, the stoic wise man “acts according to what is due, and so he will not remit the penalty for an intentional wrong.” In keeping with this, Jesus provides the ignorance excuse (“for [γὰρ, also “because”] they do not know what they are doing,” 23:34a) as a causative for God’s

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473 Keene, “Structures of Forgiveness,” p. 130.
475 Konstan, Before Forgiveness, p. 32.
forgiveness. For the stoics, however, the issue of forgiveness is moot because the wise man cannot be harmed.\textsuperscript{476} Thus, there would be no reason to forgive. Nietzsche reveals a similar understanding when he argues that the strong person will not allow wrongdoing to affect him in such a way that forgiveness is necessary. He writes, “To be incapable of taking one’s enemies, one’s accidents, even one’s misdeeds seriously for very long—that is the sign of strong, full natures in whom there is an excess of the power to form, to mold, to recuperate and to forget.”\textsuperscript{477} Jesus may be seen as exemplifying this detachment by neither forgiving nor calling for vengeance for his persecutors.

At the time of Jesus, the martyrrological tradition included the belief that God would emerge on the side of the righteous and judge those who tormented them.\textsuperscript{478} The typical martyr’s cry for vengeance reflects this idea.\textsuperscript{479} This is seen in the murder of Abel, the prototypical martyr, whose spilled blood calls for vengeance. God speaks to Cain: “Listen; your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground! And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand” (Gen. 4:10-11). However, Jesus’ words as he is dying call for mercy rather than vengeance; this prayer becomes a model that Christian martyrs will follow, beginning with Stephen.

Regarding both Jesus’ prayer from the cross and Stephen’s plea as he is being stoned in Acts, Matthews argues, “The forgiveness prayer in itself is a dramatic overturning of the expected cry of the martyr for vengeance. As an expression of self-mastery and the

\textsuperscript{477} Nietzsche, \textit{Genealogy of Morals}, p. 39.
\textsuperscript{478} Matthews, “Clemency as Cruelty,” p. 131.
ability to refrain from retaliating in the face of undeserved violence, it is an assertion of the ethical superiority of Christianity over Judaism." However, the prayers may not represent such a stark reversal as Matthews suggests. Martyrs’ prayers for the forgiveness of their killers may serve to amplify blame on their attackers. According to Irenaeus, the forgiveness prayer only postpones the vengeance God has in store. Knust even suggests that the prayer may have an element of sarcasm; instead of an expression of mercy, Jesus’ words contain a wish for the divine punishment of the executioners (who include both the Roman soldiers and also, as becomes clear in Acts, the Jewish authorities) and a proclamation of the superiority of Christianity over Judaism.

Matthews demonstrates that Jesus’ prayer models a new way of being in the world for his followers. She writes, “The prayer radically challenges both the stoic silence of the suffering righteous one, who is confident in God’s ultimate vengeance, and the martyr whose dying cry to God is that vengeance be done. This unprecedented plea for mercy upon those tormentors is the assertion of a ‘new testament’ for a new social group.” Matthews suggests the prayer reflects the marcionite concern for dividing the Jewish martyrdom tradition from the kinder, gentler Christianity expressed in Jesus’ prayer.

Jim Harrison also sees the prayer as countering popular notions of social relations. “Jesus’ logion…radically undermined the ancient politics of hatred, irrespective of its

480 Matthews, “Clemency as Cruelty,” p. 120.
481 Against Heresies, 3.18.5; quoted in Jennifer Wright Knust, “Jesus’ Conditional Forgiveness,” in Griswold and Konstan (eds.), Ancient Forgiveness, pp. 176-94 (177).
482 Knust, “Jesus’ Conditional Forgiveness,”
483 Matthews, Perfect Martyr, p. 128.
484 Matthews, “Clemency as Cruelty,” p. 120.
religious and cultural context." Harrison also points out that Jesus’ willingness to appeal on behalf of his attackers go against the Greco-Roman ethic of “helping friends and harming enemies” and could have made Jesus appear weak. He writes, “Above all, at the most basic level of ancient civil ethics, Jesus had not helped his friends at all by loving his enemy.” With this prayer, Jesus overturns the prevailing ethic and, according to Harrison, institutes a “radical new ethic and paradigm of behavior.” Harrison interprets the prayer as running counter to a variety of social conventions, thus presenting Jesus on the cross as heralding social reform even as he prays in the moment of his death. Regardless of whether enemies are loved or hated, they are still enemies. Jesus’ prayer presents a new way to approach those enemies—by interceding for forgiveness on their behalf—and is therefore consistent with his earlier teachings. While such analyses shed light on relationships of power in the time of Jesus, they do so by playing to popular ideas of Jesus as a revolutionary leader bent on overturning oppressive social attitudes. Thus,

Jesus’ merciful prayer is cast as heroically undermining the vague “ancient politics of hatred.”

*Jesus suffers and struggles*

Understanding Jesus as a stoic or a martyr portrays him as in complete control of his actions and emotions as he is being crucified. However, there is no reason to believe that Luke intended to present Jesus as a martyr or stoic figure. Interpreting Jesus as a stoic sage incapable of feeling pain is not useful for the pastoral care of victims of domestic violence. Calm forbearance of injury only permits injury to continue, and martyr-esque cries for vengeance likely beget more severe abuse. Instead of reading Jesus in these ways, I suggest using Luke’s account of Jesus’ last words to construct a model of a suffering Christ who struggles with forgiveness as victims may also struggle.

In his passion narrative, Luke depicts Jesus’ emotional conflict: “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me” (Lk. 22:42). The next verses recount, “Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. He prayed in agony more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground” (22:43-44). Even after the angel strengthened him, Jesus was still “in agony” (ἐν ἀγωνίᾳ).

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The sweat that poured off his skin was so copious that it is said to be “like great drops of blood.” While some argue that Luke’s Gospel portrays an “imperturbable Jesus,” these visceral physical descriptions suggest that he was already struggling to accept the fate that awaited him on the cross.

Moreover, death by crucifixion was remarkably painful and protracted, and it is fair to assume that Jesus was at least in physical distress during the hours he hung conscious on the cross in Luke’s account. While Luke omits the cry of dereliction (“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Mk. 15:34//Mt. 27:46), there is still copious evidence that Jesus suffered. For Luke, Jesus’ suffering is an integral part of what gives meaning to his death and resurrection. Throughout the Gospel and Acts, Jesus’ suffering understood to be both necessary and a foregone conclusion (“The Son of Man must undergo great suffering,” 9:22; “first he must endure much suffering,” 17:25; “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer,” 22:15; “Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things?” 24:26; “it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer,” 24:46; “After his suffering he presented himself alive to them,” Acts 1:3; “God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer,” Acts 3:18; “it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and to rise from the dead,” Acts 17:3).

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The most convincing evidence that Jesus experienced pain and struggled on the cross comes in his final words. Luke reports that just after the forgiveness prayer, Jesus tells the thief beside him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise” (23:43). Several hours later, the sky darkened and Jesus spoke his last words. “Crying with a loud voice, [he] said, ‘Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.’ Having said this, he breathed his last” (23:46; emphasis mine). This last request does not reflect a calm and composed Jesus. Instead, he is crying out (φώνησας, φωνή μεγάλη, “calling out in a loud voice”), and while he entrusts his spirit to God, the shouting portrays Jesus as pleading for rescue as much as it indicates acceptance of his fate. Understanding Jesus this way allows for an interpretation of the forgiveness prayer as another example of his struggle on the cross. While he has claimed the authority to forgive sins on earth (Lk. 5:23), Jesus cannot bring himself to pronounce forgiveness for his executioners.

The prayer as a direct act of forgiveness

Other expositors read the prayer as a direct act of forgiveness. A few early interpreters hint at this exegesis, but contemporary interpreters make it explicit. Forgiving one’s abusers—not simply praying for them—is what should be imitated. Miroslav Volf writes, “Under the foot of the cross we learn that in a world of irreversible deeds and partisan judgments redemption from the passive suffering of victimization cannot happen without the active suffering of forgiveness.” Volf sees Jesus’ prayer as

494 Volf, Exclusion and Embrace, p. 125. Volf follows Dietrich Bonhoeffer in envisioning forgiveness as “costly,” and thus a source of “active suffering” (see Bonhoeffer, The Cost
the enactment of the possibility of human reconciliation and communion. Like many contemporary readers, he downplays the prayer’s significance as a prayer per se (as opposed to an act of forgiveness) and presents it as an act of transformative forgiveness.

A great number of scholars and ministers regard the prayer as a model for Christian practice, an example of the kind of unconditional forgiveness Christians should aspire to imitate. Raymond E. Brown notes that Jesus’ forgiveness models the right response to persecution for Christians. And describing a mother whose son had been murdered, Michael Henderson recounts how she looked to the example of Jesus on the cross when choosing to forgive his killers. Henderson even allows the verse to stand misquoted: “At the point of death, Jesus said, ‘I forgive them.’” Henderson reports that the mother said, “I forgive them” rather than “I forgive you.” Holding on to the third-person-plural

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496 Cherry, Healing Agony, p. 125.


498 Henderson, No Enemy to Conquer, p. 100.
pronoun (just as Jesus did) gives her some necessary distance in the midst of trying to forgive the men who killed her son.

Theologians and pastoral caregivers often import contemporary psychological categories such as self-forgiveness, insecurity, depression, and self-esteem into their interpretations of Luke’s verse. “Jesus forgave his own murderers because he understood all to which they were enslaved—the social and religious prejudices of the day, their own insecurities, their ordinary, passive minds, and their self-centered motivations,” writes Augusto Curry. Ron Clark also cites Jesus’ prayer as an example of the therapeutic value of forgiveness. He counsels, “Through forgiveness, victims choose not to be like the abuser who is full of fear, anger, confusion, and low self-esteem. Victims and families can face the future with hope and can choose not to let the abuser determine their happiness and spiritual choices.”

With regard to the crucifixion, though, there is no indication in the biblical text that the soldiers or Jewish leaders suffered from “fear, anger, confusion, and low self-esteem.” Earlier in Luke, Jesus does not elaborate on any mitigating psychological factors (unless repentance might count as “psychological”) that might prequalify an offender for forgiveness. Some interpreters suggest that the psychological benefit of forgiveness belongs to the forgiver. Considering that crucifying Jesus was all in a day’s work for these men, they were unlikely to consider their actions to have been wrong.

499 Augusto Cury, Think and Make It Happen: The Breakthrough Program for Conquering Anxiety, Overcoming Negative Thoughts, and Discovering Your True Potential (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008), p. 149.
Such an emphasis on the therapeutic value of forgiveness is anachronistic, as interpreters import post-Enlightenment psychological categories into the story of the crucifixion, but it also asserts pressure as sacred texts are mobilized to advocate psychological or emotional responses from victims of domestic violence. Jesus does not say, “Father, forgive them because they are insecure and self-centered,” or “Father, forgive them so I will not be locked into victimhood.” In such readings, the prayer of Jesus is transformed into an act of unconditional forgiveness to fit current models of offense as psychologically understandable and forgiveness as the key therapeutic response. This is not to say that psychological categories did not exist at the time of Jesus, nor that the Bible is never a suitable source of direction for Christian readers.

My reading of Luke 23:34a is careful not to over-interpret the prayer for forgiveness as a direct act of forgiveness. Uttered in the midst of terrible violence and excruciating pain, the prayer is a cry, a demand, even, for God the Father to do what Jesus either cannot or is not willing to do in that moment. As Luke emphasizes throughout his Gospel, repentance is a precondition for forgiveness (see esp. 17:3-4, “if there is repentance you must forgive’). The idea of unilateral, unconditional forgiveness for the sake of emotional health would have been foreign to both Jesus’ context and Luke’s readers.
Forgiveness and the pastoral care of victims of domestic violence

Many women who are victims of abuse seek help from the church because they see it as a safe place.\footnote{United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), “When I Call For Help: A Pastoral Response To Domestic Violence Against Women” (2002), \url{http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/marriage/domestic-violence/when-i-call-for-help.cfm}.} As a result, Christian clergy and pastoral caregivers play a crucial role in responding to domestic violence. Religious beliefs very often play a role in abusive relationships. Batterers sometimes cite Scripture to defend their actions (Eph. 5:22, “Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord,” taken as obedience, even to physical abuse), as well as to pressure victims to forgive and reconcile (Mt. 6:9-15 and Lk. 11:2-4, the Lord’s Prayer; Mt. 18:21-22 and Lk. 17:3-4, forgive without bound; Lk. 23:34a, “Father, forgive them”).\footnote{On abusers using Scripture (esp. Eph. 5:22) to defend their actions, see John J. Pilch, “Family Violence in Cross-Cultural Perspective: An Approach for Feminist Interpreters of the Bible,” in Athalya Brenner and Carole Rader Fontaine (eds.), \textit{A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible} (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), pp. 306-25 (308); Carol Klose Smith and Darcy Davis-Gage, “The Quiet Storm: Explaining the Cultural Context of Violence Against Women within a Feminist Perspective,” in Dereck Daschke and Andrew Kille (eds.), \textit{A Cry Instead of Justice: The Bible and Cultures of Violence in Psychological Perspective} (Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies, 499; New York and London: T & T Clark International, 2010), pp. 107-130 (121); Mark-Peter Lundquist, “Beaten into Submission,” \textit{The Clergy Journal} 77.8 (2001), pp. 13-14 (13).} As a result, pastoral caregivers must address issues of domestic violence, submission, and forgiveness not only in the private counsel of victims but also in the life of the church body through preaching, education, and social action against domestic violence.

This section focuses specifically on the question of forgiveness in the pastoral care of victims of domestic violence. I identify three main problems in pastoral writings about forgiveness. First, while most sources advise against pressing victims to forgive in the
crisis moment, forgiveness remains the goal. Second, pastoral caregivers often conflate biblical forgiveness with contemporary therapeutic definitions of the term, which can result in pressure on victims to forgive without any repentant expression from their abusers. Finally, forgiveness is often presented as the only alternative to being consumed by anger, bitterness, and resentment. In the pastoral care context, the prayer from the cross becomes the ultimate example of the unconditional forgiveness that victims should imitate.

Pastoral caregivers could better serve victims of domestic violence by more carefully interpreting the biblical material. Forgiveness in the teachings of Jesus is neither unconditional nor a matter of improving the victim’s mental health. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus insists that forgiveness requires repentance (17:3-4), and the Lord’s Prayer also presents a model of forgiveness that is paired with an expression of repentance (“Forgive us,” 11:4). Moreover, the cry from the cross actually represents a prayer—an imperative that demands action—for forgiveness rather than a direct act of forgiveness. The image of Jesus struggling with forgiveness in the face of violence can be an empowering one for victims who also struggle. The prayer represents an alternate response for faithful Christians in accordance with Lk. 6:26 (“Pray for those who abuse you”). Thus, instead of an impossible example for victims to imitate, Jesus choosing to pray on the cross becomes a model for victims to reclaim their agency by choosing not to forgive their abusers. This is not to say that all victims of domestic violence must pray for their abusers in order to be faithful to the text. Adopting a prayerful stance at a distance is one response, but it is not the only one. As demonstrated in the introduction, non-forgiveness is consistent with Jesus’ teachings in the Gospel of John, when he instructs
the disciples and the community to use their own judgment in deciding which sins to forgive and which to retain (Jn 20:23).

Psychology and pastoral care

Drawing on the biblical image of the shepherd, “pastoral” care “refers to the solicitous concern expressed within the religious community for persons in trouble or distress.” Pastoral care may take the form of private counseling, but it should extend beyond this model. Liston Mills writes, “[Care] may refer to any pastoral act motivated by a sincere devotion to the well-being of the other(s). In this sense liturgical forms and ritual acts may reflect care as may education and various forms of social action.”

Pastoral care became increasingly influenced by psychology around the turn of the twentieth century. Psychology has had such an impact on pastoral care that some have worried that it has supplanted theology as basis of contemporary pastoral practice. This chapter focuses specifically on pastoral care in the context of Christian practice (mostly Protestant), primarily in the United States.

In the context of domestic violence, pastoral caregivers often offer psychological solutions conflated with theological or biblical guidance. A primary example of this is seen in the emphasis on forgiveness. Where the forgiveness advocated by Jesus is conditional and closely related to repairing broken relationships within the community, pastoral caregivers often promote a kind of forgiveness that takes place only in the mind.

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505 Mills, “Pastoral Care,” p. 836.
506 McClure, “Pastoral Care,” p. 272.
and heart of the victim. This kind of forgiveness is touted as “healing” and the only way to avoid being eaten up by anger and resentment.

At its worst, such forgiveness can lead victims to forgive their abusers and return to dangerous home situations. Any return to a previously abusive relationship is fraught with danger, but urging victims to “forgive” before the abuser has made any change can be especially problematic. At its best, it provides victims with a way of thinking about forgiveness that lets them control its conditions and its timing, but still holds them responsible for forgiving their abusers as the ideal Christian outcome. Pastoral caregivers who present this account of forgiveness draw heavily on psychological explanations in place of biblical illustrations.

In the context of abuse, pastoral caregivers are called to a more complex vision of care. Bonnie Miller-McLemore writes, “Pastoral care disturbs as well as comforts, provokes as well as guides...[it] calls for confession, and moves vigilantly toward forgiveness and reconciliation, knowing that both are more difficult to effect than people have hoped.”507 In other words, pastoral caregivers must challenge victims as well as console them by making “a space for difficult change.”508 The acknowledgment that forgiveness is difficult is an important one, but forgiveness as the way to repair the marriage still emerges as the goal.

I propose a further step. The Gospel account requires repentance from the offender (Lk. 17:3-4) and accountability from the community (Mt. 18:15-20). Relying on these biblical instructions and examples, pastoral caregivers light the way for victims to assert

their moral agency in the face of abuse and refuse forgiveness where such conditions are not met. Instead, the refusal to forgive may reflect strength and self-protection in the face of abuse. Even in cases where repentance is visible and sincere and the community is supportive, a victim may still choose not to forgive. Along with his instructions on forgiveness and repentance, Jesus commissions his followers to make their own decisions about what to forgive and God will follow suit (Jn 20:23). Repentance, then, is a necessary but not sufficient requirement for forgiveness.

*Redemptive suffering*

In the context of pastoral care, well-meaning advice from pastors about the redemptive value of suffering and the importance of forgiveness sometimes leads to women returning to dangerous situations only to be further abused. It is not uncommon for victims of domestic violence to be told they should endure their suffering patiently. Joanna Dewey observes, “Many a woman…has embraced or endured suffering that could be alleviated because she has come to believe that such a way of life is pleasing to God and an imitation of Christ.”

Indeed, for many Christians, the suffering of Jesus has a redeeming value for all humanity. Citing Isaiah’s description of the “suffering servant” (53:5, “But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed”) and reading these words as a prophecy of Christ, they understand his suffering as necessary for “healing”

It is likely that Jesus interpreted his own experience in this way, argues N.T. Wright: that the sufferings of Israel would be focused on one person, that that suffering would have redemptive significance, and that this person would be Jesus himself. Paul develops this theme of redemptive suffering as in Romans 5:3, “We also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance” and Philippians 1:29, “For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well.” Just as Christ’s suffering on the cross served to redeem humanity whether as atoning sacrifice or sign of righteousness or even as confrontation of Roman oppression, victims of domestic violence are sometimes advised that their own suffering may serve a greater purpose.

And finally, 1 Peter presents God as approving of righteously motivated human suffering: “If you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God’s approval. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps” (2:20-21). Such an understanding of suffering as redemptive, morally good, and in imitation of the Christ stands to trap women in abusive situations. That this interpretation of suffering may have comforted early Christian martyrs who suffered under persecution for their faith is of little help to twenty-first century women who suffer at the hands of abusive spouses. As Betsy J. Bauman-Martin observes, “to use the text to encourage women to remain in abusive

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relationships is a blundering cross-cultural misapplication of the text.” Of course, not all women have the means or social support to escape from abusive relationships, and for these women, the idea that suffering is somehow redemptive may be all they have to hold onto. For these women, the vision of Jesus on the cross—also struggling, also unable to escape—can give meaning to suffering that may continue indefinitely.

Enduring suffering is not the only way women are instructed to follow Christ’s example; pastoral caregivers often present forgiveness as a non-negotiable Christian virtue. Pastoral counselors Robert W. Harvey and David G. Benner write, “It is obvious that pastors must make the understanding of forgiveness central to their care for the members of the body of Christ. The unforgiving cannot grow into the image of Christ when the most Christ-like virtue is resisted.” Speaking directly to victims of domestic violence, Patricia Diann Heathman emphasizes that forgiveness is necessary for victims both to follow Jesus’ example and to secure their own salvation. She writes, “While He was still on the cross, enduring the shame, anguish and pain of the crucifixion, Jesus prayed that God would forgive his abuser. Christ-likeness requires that we do the same.” Along with patient suffering, forgiveness of one’s abuser thus becomes the ultimate imitation of Christ.

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513 On making suffering meaningful in these situations, see Bauman-Martin, “Feminist Theologies,” pp. 78-81.
514 Robert W. Harvey and David G. Benner, Understanding and Facilitating Forgiveness: A Short-Term Structural Model (Strategic Pastoral Counseling Resources; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), p. 68. The authors do not offer a straightforward definition of forgiveness.
Many pastoral theologians are critical of such approaches. Nancy Nienhuis writes, “If we encourage the belief that suffering should be accepted as a means of becoming like Christ, we are endorsing violence as a vehicle for Christian character development.” Many note the destructive results of such pastoral counsel to forgive and return to falsely repentant abusers. Joy M.K. Bussert argues, “Although the cross as a symbol of comfort and hope does give significant meaning and dignity to the suffering, it is not enough. I find in working with battered women that all too often the direct application of this theological perspective to a woman’s life-experience actually serves to glorify suffering and reinforces her belief that it is ‘Christ-like’ to remain in a violence relationship.” While the cross may provide dignity and meaning, the symbol alone does not point to a way forward for women who suffer in abusive relationships. Pastoral caregivers would do well to point to the ultimate outcome of the crucifixion. On the third day Jesus reappeared. With the wounds still on his hands, he talked and ate with the disciples, offered them a blessing, and ascended to heaven (Lk. 24:28-51). Jesus’ story doesn’t end with suffering, and neither should the stories of victims of domestic violence.

Pastoral caregivers counter the notion of abuse as redemptive suffering in several ways. James Leehan writes, “Jesus’ suffering and death on the cross was not redemptive because it was painful. Its redemptive value was made possible through the resurrection.” In the first century, suffering could be redemptive because it was one way of expiating sin. Such understandings do not hold in contemporary contexts.

517 See the discussion of whether victims are obligated to forgive offenders who are sincerely repentant in the first two chapters.
518 Bussert, Battered Women, p. 65.
519 Leehan, Pastoral Care for Survivors, p. 111.
According to Leehan, the suffering is not what “redeems” humanity, but rather the resurrection and defeat of death. Abused women who are counseled to imitate Christ may do well to remember that they not likely survive their own murders.

Marie M. Fortune counsels victims to focus on the transformation of Jesus’ suffering through the resurrection instead of on the suffering itself. Just as the resurrection transforms the suffering of Christ, women are called to transform their own suffering into something better rather than remaining patiently in an abusive relationship. Marie Fortune writes, “Transformation is [having faith] that the way things are is not the way things have to be…the means by which, refusing to accept injustice and refusing to assist its victims to endure suffering any longer, people act. By refusing to endure evil and by seeking to transform suffering, we are about God’s work of making justice and healing brokenness.” In this view, standing up against abuse becomes a way of following Christ’s example in transforming suffering. Where Jesus’ suffering is transformed, it follows that victims of abuse may accomplish their own transformations by protecting themselves or leaving their abusers. Jesus is resurrected in spite of his suffering, not because he suffered.

However, Jesus’ suffering is very different from domestic abuse. There is a qualitative difference between being summarily executed by the state and being systematically abused in one’s home. For this reason, Nienhuis calls for transformation rather than veneration of suffering. “In the Christian tradition, if we are told to imitate Christ, and Christ was crucified, and the story ends there, we are left to endure suffering,”

she writes. However, Christ’s suffering is different in two ways. First, Jesus went to the cross on his own volition. Second, the point of the cross was not Jesus’ suffering, but his resurrection. Calling attention to these differences allows victims of domestic violence to see the limits of the call to imitate Christ in either his suffering or forgiveness. Jesus made a choice to go forward into his own suffering and death; victims of domestic abuse have suffering imposed on them. The idea that the crucifixion is meaningless without the resurrection may help victims of domestic violence understand that the most exacting imitation of Christ is to release themselves from suffering into better futures for themselves and their children.

The crucifixion may serve as a model of empowerment for victims of domestic violence. Carol J. Adams suggests harnessing the image of Christ suffering on the cross in a way that encourages women to take action rather than pressures them to forgive their abusers. She urges ministers to say to victims, “Let Jesus off the cross. We are a resurrection people. Let yourself off the cross. Your suffering should be over, too. Because of Jesus you do not need to die to experience the meaning and power of resurrection [here understood as new life, an end to suffering, and a new beginning]. If you don’t get off the cross, however, you very well may die.” Adams writes, “In the case of battering, the death of Jesus is the metaphor for the death of the marriage as it now exists. The resurrection is the new possibility of a relationship without violence, either with or without the man who batters.” Thus, not only the victim may hope for new life, but also the abuser and the relationship may not be beyond repair. However, the

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523 Adams, Woman-Battering, p. 111.
524 Adams, Woman-Battering, p. 111.
metaphor of murder may not be helpful in cases of domestic abuse. If the marriage is dead, the implication is that someone killed it. There is no room in this analogy for that person to be held accountable. Moreover, Jesus does not rise as a new-and-improved version of his former self; he still bears the wounds that caused his death. While the hope for “new life” as seen in the resurrection may be a powerful image for victims, envisioning the marriage as murdered and resurrected may not get them there.

Forgiveness as a double bind

In the pastoral care of victims of domestic violence, authors identify “premature forgiveness”\(^{525}\) and “cheap grace”\(^{526}\) as problems. Pastoral caregivers often counsel victims to withhold forgiveness until there is genuine repentance (or repentance the victim judges to be genuine or sufficient for forgiveness),\(^{527}\) or suggest that forgiveness is


a process that may be difficult or take time.\textsuperscript{528} Even so, an ideology of forgiveness persists and whether tacit or explicit, a preference for forgiveness comes through.

Even though she leaves room for non-forgiveness, Pamela Cooper-White describes forgiveness in religiously appealing terms. She suggests pastors say to victims, “Do not blame yourself if you cannot forgive yet. Forgiveness is a gift of grace, and if it is right to happen, it will be given to you by God and in God’s own time. In the meantime, don’t worry, and let it go.”\textsuperscript{529} Such platitudes contain tacit pressure to forgive; what Christian victim doesn’t want to receive such a “gift of grace” from God? The flip side of this is that such language relieves victims of the burden to summon forgiveness on their own as a psychological challenge. Instead, they can wait for God’s “gift of grace” just as Jesus waits on the cross.

Rita Lou Clarke warns against rushing women into forgiveness and cites the necessity of repentance and confession, and an acknowledgment by abusive men of the damage they have done to their wives.\textsuperscript{530} With that condition, forgiveness can and should proceed. She writes, “Forgiveness means recognizing that the batterer is human and that both he and she are made in the image of God. Forgiveness does not mean condoning his behavior or excusing it, but it does mean being able to accept God’s gift of the future

\textsuperscript{529} Cooper-White, \textit{Cry of Tamar}, p. 259.
\textsuperscript{530} Clarke, \textit{Pastoral Care of Battered Women}, p. 79.
possibilities [for a restored relationship] in spite of what has happened.”

For many conservative Christian women, however, the “image of God” is a dominating male figure, and so not necessarily a helpful conceit in this instance. Here again, forgiveness comes as “God’s gift,” so there is no need for victims to rush to enact it. In this way, foregrounding theological ideas rather than psychological concepts allows victims to collaborate with God toward forgiveness rather than confronting the entire task by themselves.

Many pastoral counselors paint an attractive picture of forgiveness against the backdrop of the dark alternative of negative emotions. Ron Clark writes, “Through time, healing, and validation, victims can one day forgive those who abused them. They do not have to live the rest of their lives with anger, bitterness, and guilt. They are not forced to forgive, but they can one day make that choice.”

No Christian victim would refuse the hope and opportunities provided by the resurrection, or choose to live with the other option: anger, bitterness, and guilt. In this context, forgiveness may be a choice, but for the faithful Christian, there is only one option.

When a victim is faced with the implicit “choice” of forgiveness now or forgiveness later, she becomes alienated from the very faith community that should be a source of support. Carol Klose Smith and Darcy Davis-Gage write, “The Christian tradition, with its emphasis on ‘preserving the family’ and ‘forgiveness,’ has placed the battered woman in a no-win situation. What choice does she really have?” When forgiveness is held out as a goal—immediate or ultimate—a victim remains defined by her response to the abuser. If she chooses to forgive, that may mean reconciliation and a return to the cycle of

531 Clarke, Pastoral Care of Battered Women, p. 79.
532 Clark, Freeing the Oppressed, p. 126.
violence. If she doesn’t forgive, she could feel she is not being a good conservative Christian.  

Conflating biblical and therapeutic forgiveness

Pastoral care authors conflate therapeutic forgiveness with biblical forgiveness in two ways. First, they advise victims that forgiveness need not involve the offender or the community and that it must be achieved for their own emotional and physical health. Second, they present victims with a false dichotomy with forgiveness together with its concomitant categories of healing, freedom, and peace on the one side, and on the other side they place the dark world of negative emotions: anger, bitterness, indignation, vengeance, resentment, rage. Either a victim forgives, or she is consumed by these negative emotions. Neither of these ideas has biblical warrant.

When biblical forgiveness is conflated with contemporary psychological quick fixes, the communal character of forgiveness gets lost. Peter Horsfield writes, “The practice of forgiveness is more than just the psychological action of an individual… I believe that in our current [cultural and historical context], much of our thinking about what forgiveness is has become ‘unethical,’ i.e. separated from the ethos of its origins and from the communal context within which it has meaning.” Thus, the presumption that the victim alone can (and should) forgive the offender neglects the basic structure presented in the teachings of Jesus; namely, that forgiveness involves the community holding the offender accountable for his actions (Mt. 18:15-17).  

533 Smith and Davis-Gage, “Quiet Storm,” pp. 129.
Reading the prayer from the cross as non-forgiveness has two direct effects for victims of domestic violence. First, it discloses that there are circumstances in which forgiveness is morally wrong. Second, it restores the moral agency of victims by allowing them to choose a course that is not defined by their response to abuse. The question, “Why doesn’t she forgive him?” is closely related to another common question in situations of domestic abuse: “Why doesn’t she leave?” Rather than having her responses to abuse questioned, I suggest the victim does not have any primary obligation to forgive or otherwise correct the violent situation. Rather, the question ought to be, “Why doesn’t he stop hitting her?” and pastoral caregivers and the church community should be the ones asking it. It is not the victim’s responsibility to escape abuse—as though she is responsible for her own continued injury because she doesn’t leave the home or the relationship—or resolve the question of forgiveness—by forgiving an abuser who makes no effort to repent or change his behavior.

Imitatio Christi and the ideology of forgiveness

I propose a model of responding to domestic violence that takes into account Jesus’ forgiveness instructions, the moral agency of the victim, and considerations of the impact of forgiveness on the future as well as its effort to reconcile past wrongdoing. Where victims of domestic violence are often pressured to suffer in silence and to forgive their abusers in imitation of Christ on the cross, I say that there is more than one way to imitate Christ.

The ideology of forgiveness raises it to the level of an idol to be venerated. Forgiveness is a good thing simply because it is forgiveness. A reexamination of the biblical texts about forgiveness can counteract this overvaluing of the concept. What
Jesus demonstrates in the Gospels is that forgiveness is not a good thing at all times and in all places. There is at least one sin that cannot be forgiven, by human beings or by God (Mt. 12:31; Mk. 3:26; Lk. 12:10), and there are conditions for forgiveness that involve community rebuke (Mt. 18:15-17) and offender repentance (Lk. 17:3-4). Individual disciples are charged to forgive and retain according to their own judgment and assured that God will follow suit (Jn 20:23). In light of this, Jesus’ prayer from the cross is not surprising. It is possible that he determined that he simply could not forgive his attackers or the Jewish leaders at that time. At the very least, he is unable to forgive them in the absence of repentance. In either case, he recalls his earlier instruction (Lk. 6:28) and prays for them instead.

In doing so, Jesus becomes an empathetic partner in suffering rather than an impossible example for victims to imitate. In the midst of abuse, victims often see forgiveness as impossible or distant at best. On the cross, Jesus struggles, just as victims of domestic violence struggle. Even though he has chosen to accept this suffering, the fact remains that he is suffering. He is in excruciating pain. For Jesus in this moment, prayer is an option, but forgiveness is not.

There are occasions—and the crucifixion might be one of them—where forgiving is morally wrong. When abuse is ongoing and a woman’s life is in danger, pastors agree that forgiveness [that leads to reconciliation] is not advisable. However, in such cases forgiveness is usually deferred to some future time or circumstance, not canceled. On the other hand, reading Jesus’ words on the cross as non-forgiveness offers victims a faithful

alternative that is not primarily reactive. Peter Horsfield suspects this reading might reveal a faithful understanding. He asks, “What if, when women survivors of abuse say they are not able to forgive, they are not being weak, aberrant, or damaged, to be quarantined through prayer or counseling until they have recovered normality, but are reflecting a profound insight into the nature of Christian forgiveness?” Indeed, the refusal to forgive is in exact imitation of Christ on the cross, and it suggests strength rather than weakness.

Further, the refusal to forgive allows victims to stand in defiance to the abuse that was perpetrated on them. “Holding wrongs ‘unforgivable’ is a way to mark the enormity of injury and the malignancy of wrongdoing as exceeding anything that could be made to fit back into a reliable framework of moral relations.” There are abusers who will never stop abusing, and there are acts of violence that may be beyond the reach of forgiveness. This does not mean that the unforgiving victim is morally deficient. Rather, it testifies to her agency in looking ahead to define the moral world and its boundaries. Jesus’ prayer from the cross is consistent with this concern for the future. By praying that those responsible for his execution might be forgiven, he accomplishes two things. First, he moves the responsibility for forgiveness from himself to God. Second, he looks to a future of restored moral relations. In order for the soldiers and Jewish leaders to be forgiven, they must repent their actions. Given that they are ignorant of their own wrongdoing, this is unlikely, but Jesus’ prayer contains the hope that they will do so.

536 Horsfield, “Forgiving Abuse,” p. 57. Along with naming the sometimes impossible nature of forgiveness, this “insight” points to the patriarchal influence in the development of what forgiveness means in the church and questions whether it would look different if women had a greater role.
537 Walker, Moral Repair, pp. 189-90.
Following Jesus’ example is one way victims may communicate the seriousness of their suffering by refusing to forgive their abusers. For victims of domestic violence, this account of forgiveness as unconditional and unilateral holds little hope. Here I argue that a close reading of forgiveness in Gospels reveals a more limited portrayal that requires repentance as a necessary but not always sufficient condition for forgiveness and makes room for individual discernment (as in Jn 20:23) with non-forgiveness as a morally acceptable response. In imitating Christ by refusing to forgive their abusers, victims of domestic violence reclaim their moral agency and protect the life of the world to come.
Excursus: Luke 23.34a and the Question of Authenticity

The text-critical debate

There are four possibilities about the origin of the Luke 23:34a (“Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing”): 1.) the verse was spoken by Jesus and recorded only by Luke, then removed by later copyists who found it unacceptable; 2.) the verse was spoken by Jesus and not recorded by Luke, then inserted by later copyists who thought it fit with the Gospel’s message; 3.) it was not spoken by Jesus but was formulated by Luke, then removed by later copyists; 4.) it was not spoken by Jesus but was invented in post-Gospel thought, inserted by a later copyist who thought it was appropriate to the context.\(^\text{538}\)

The verse is absent in many of the oldest and most complete New Testament manuscripts (P75, B, \(\mathcal{K}\), D\(^*\), W), but is included (with only minor variations) in other early witnesses (A, D\(^c\), \(\mathcal{N}\)*). The verse is present in the earliest extant manuscript of Codex Sinaiticus (330-360), but is removed in later versions of the same text (e.g., \(\mathcal{N}\)\(^c\)).

That the verse is present in the original hand of Codex Sinaiticus suggests anti-Judaism in the early church may account for the verse’s later excision since Jesus appears to forgive the Jews for his execution. Robert Tannehill points out that Luke 23:28-31 (in which Jesus tells the daughters of Jerusalem, among other things, “Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed,” v. 29) if understood as an indication of God’s final rejection of the Jews, would seem to conflict with 23:34.\(^\text{539}\)

\(^{538}\) Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, vol. 2, p. 975.
\(^{539}\) Tannehill, *Narrative Unity*, p. 272 n. 126.
Bruce Metzger considers the absence of the verse from some early manuscripts to be the result of copyists who viewed the fall of Jerusalem as evidence that God had not forgiven the Jews, so they removed the prayer that seemed to go unanswered.\textsuperscript{540} Such arguments based on anti-Judaism and high Christology in the early church could account for the verse’s absence in such major witnesses as later versions of the Codex Sinaiticus.

The presence of the Aristotelian “excuse of ignorance”\textsuperscript{541} suggests that the verse was likely original and later excised. Instead of an addition, the verse was more likely excised by later scribes who didn’t like the suggestion that those responsible for Jesus’ death were absolved of their crime. The ignorance motif here and in Acts also suggests the verse is original to Luke.\textsuperscript{542}

Literary and theological analyses tend to judge Luke 23:34a as authentic based on its thematic coherence with the entire Lucan project.\textsuperscript{543} The language and thought match Lucan theology, and the narrative unity of Luke-Acts shows that Luke 23:34a is connected to the overall themes of ignorance and prayer for adversaries, as seen in the martyrdom of Stephen (“Lord, do not hold this sin against them,” Acts 7:60). While this prayer is directed at Jesus rather than God, it lacks the excuse of ignorance, and it doesn’t mention forgiveness, it is still considered to be in imitation of Jesus’ prayer for his

\textsuperscript{541} See above for a discussion of the excuse of ignorance.
adversaries in Lk. 23:34a. Thus, the cry from the cross prefigures this theme of ignorance that runs throughout Acts.

The canonical argument for later inclusion suggests that the verse was ultimately included after the four Gospels were collected out of a desire for Jesus to speak seven rather than six “last words” from the cross. Locating a four-gospel tradition from the mid-second century, Whitlark and Parsons demonstrate that trends aimed at harmonizing these gospels would have highlighted the group of six (an undesirable number; see Rev. 13:18; Jn. 2:6, 19:14; Lk. 23:44) last sayings of Jesus. Thus, the verse (which likely was already in circulation as a “floating tradition”) was added by gospel harmonizers to achieve the typologically significant number seven. The verse is in place yet out of order in Tatian’s Diatesseron (170; the earliest extant witness collecting the words of Jesus from the cross), suggesting that its position in the Gospel of Luke was not yet secure.

Some argue for the verse’s authenticity based on purely aesthetic grounds. Brown asks, “Why would copyists have omitted this beautiful passage from mss. that contained it?” In the final analysis, he reveals his investment in the verse to be an aesthetic and emotional one. He writes, “It is ironical that perhaps the most beautiful sentence in the Passion Narrative should be textually dubious. The sentiment behind it is the essence of responding to hostility in what came to be thought of as a Christian manner.”

Matthews, “Clemency as Cruelty,” p. 120.
Brown, Death of the Messiah, p. 979 (emphasis in original).
Brown, Death of the Messiah, p. 980.
Questioning authenticity

For the purposes of this dissertation, I leave the question of textual authenticity open. Those arguing against the authenticity of the verse cite the verse’s thematic, stylistic, and theological consistency with the rest of Luke’s gospel as evidence for interpolation; supporters cite the same consistency as evidence for authenticity. The fact remains that the verse *is* present in the Byzantine text type (Textus Receptus) and thus it is in the King James Version. Therefore, it is printed in every modern version (although in double-brackets). The modern church has always had this verse, and regardless of its textual authenticity, pastors, priests, scholars, and individual believers have to deal with it.

The important point for my project is not that the verse appears in double-brackets with a microscopic text-critical apparatus in a footnote; the point is that the verse is there. In red-letter Bibles, the verse appears in red letters. The anguished cry, “Father, forgive them; they don’t know what they are doing” (uttered in Aramaic and subtitled in English) is the centerpiece of the bloody crucifixion scene in Mel Gibson’s “The Passion of the Christ.”\(^5\) The verse is considered by many to be an awe-inspiring, and crucial instruction on how to live a perfect Christian life in the imitation of Christ. Textual authenticity has little bearing on the use of this verse in today’s culture to encourage victims of violence or other offenses to forgive perpetrators without bound. For most contemporary readers, the model of unconditional forgiveness on the cross supersedes any text-critical concerns.

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CONCLUSION

THE FUTURE OF FORGIVENESS

In the United States, restorative justice is receiving new attention thanks in part to a recent feature in the New York Times Magazine, appearing under the headline, “Can Forgiveness Play a Role in Criminal Justice?” After Ann Grosmaire, 19, was shot and killed during an argument by her boyfriend, Conor McBride, also 19, her parents chose to engage in victim-offender mediation with McBride. The article embraces the restorative justice rhetoric of an idealized forgiveness, especially the notion of forgiveness-as-healing: “The [parents] said they didn’t forgive Conor for his sake but for their own.” That forgiveness extended into influence over the prosecuting attorney and resulted in a somewhat lighter sentence for McBride. According to the article, restorative justice—packaged as forgiveness—gets the credit for allowing the girl’s parents to move forward. While in this case McBride is repentant and expresses remorse, nowhere does the article indicate that this is a requirement for the restorative justice process or the parents’ forgiveness.

In 2008 in South Africa’s North West Province, Alex Ndlovu, a black squatter-camp resident, survived being shot in the shoulder while he was cleaning up his yard. Four other black South Africans were killed in the shooting spree, including a three-month old

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551 Tullis, “Can Forgiveness Play a Role?”
552 Tullis, “Can Forgiveness Play a Role?”
child. Later, white South African teenager Johan Nel was sentenced to 169 years for the racially motivated attack.

Recently, reporters asked Ndlovu to respond to the call for forgiveness from the mayor of his community. “I find it very difficult to forgive someone who went out to kill us for no reason at all,” Ndlovu responded. “Even during his court appearances, he would look at us and smirk. That made me very angry.”

Nearly twenty years after the end of apartheid and the opening of South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, racial violence and calls for forgiveness continue to make headlines. Forgiveness has not brought an end to all racial conflict in South Africa, nor does it come easy to victims of continued violence. Moreover, the systemic racism many South Africans hoped the TRC would address only continues. Millions of black and coloured South Africans continue to live in abject poverty in townships and improvised housing—including Ndlovu—even so many years after the TRC was declared a success and forgiveness heralded as a vehicle for change.

Another recent publication calls attention to the role of forgiveness in cases of domestic abuse. Jill Filipovich warns against turning the focus to the victim to forgive the offender rather than to the offender to cease his abusive behavior. She writes, “While most people profess disgust at domestic violence, in reality, abuse victims are often pressured to work on the relationship or told they must have done something to provoke

Filipovich is critical of the McBride article and especially of how the issue of domestic abuse—McBride had been physically abusive of his girlfriend leading up to the murder—is dwarfed by that story’s celebration of forgiveness. She asks, “Does [the victim] have the support to get what she really needs – which is to get away from her abuser, and to have her community and her society take seriously acts of violence against her?”

This dissertation makes a constructive contribution to that discussion. Each of the three cases under consideration here reveals a preference for an idealized version of forgiveness presented as a biblical imperative. Restorative justice advocates claim biblical warrant but promote unilateral, unconditional forgiveness to victims engaging in VOM practices. In post-apartheid South Africa, Desmond Tutu and the TRC—often cited as a grand achievement of restorative justice—also promoted a brand of forgiveness that began and ended with a change in the victim’s emotional disposition toward the crime. Such forgiveness is fastened to the future of the reconciled state, and victims are pressured to forgive and thus participate in the “new South Africa.” Pastoral caregivers also posit a version of forgiveness that claims both biblical and psychological foundations. Victims are pressed to imitate Christ on the cross and forgive their abusers even in the absence of repentance.

As a result of these appropriations of forgiveness, victims may find themselves physically or emotionally vulnerable to those who injured them. Premature forgiveness (and reconciliation) can endanger victims. In restorative justice contexts, advocates claim to work on behalf of victims but neglect to consider the difficulty of promoting a

555 Filipovic, “Restorative Justice in Domestic Violence.”
particular emotional response to victims, especially victims of violence. Restorative justice advocates—who are often legal professionals in positions of authority—might succeed in coaxing a forgiving response from a victim using moral or religious pressure. However, such forgiveness might come at the expense of the victim, whose emotional responses might change with the day or hour, and who may quickly regret succumbing to pressure to forgive.

In Chapter 2, I present an alternative version of forgiveness that takes into account the seventy-times-seven instructions that advocates of restorative justice often cite as foundational. A more rigorous interpretation of these passages reveals a complex model of forgiveness that involves community rebuke and offender repentance before victims are expected to forgive. I challenge restorative justice proponents to consider the seventy-times-seven material in the fullness of its biblical context and to incorporate calls for offender repentance alongside their forgiveness imperatives. Moreover, I call for a scaled-back model that relies on a bilateral process rather than idealized notions of unilateral and unconditional forgiveness. Presenting victims with a forgiveness imperative that includes such emotional and psychological feats can serve to derail their ability to deal with their experience. Suggesting that a failure to achieve this kind of forgiveness represents a moral or religious failure only makes things worse.

Chapter 3 takes up similar questions in the context of post-apartheid South Africa. Through an analysis of the discourse around the end of apartheid and the TRC hearings, I show that Desmond Tutu and others also adopt an idealized version of forgiveness that while they claim comes from biblical sources, actually has its roots in psychological understandings. Tutu and others demonize negative emotions such as anger and
resentment, and victims are seduced with visions of unconditional forgiveness in which they contribute to the new, reconciled South Africa. By reading this discourse through the lens of the Lord’s Prayer, I show that Tutu and other commissioners adopt the prayer’s forgiveness imperative (“as we forgive”), but overlook the plea for forgiveness (“forgive us”) that should be interpreted as an expression of repentance. Offenders are not expected to repent or apologize for their crimes in order to receive amnesty, but the pressure to forgive is immense. I suggest that a national ethic based on a more balanced approach stands to be more successful in the long term.

Finally, in Chapter 4 I consider forgiveness in the context of the pastoral care of victims of domestic violence. Here again, psychological understandings of forgiveness as unilateral and unconditional become conflated with biblical teachings. In this case, I offer a close reading of Jesus’ cry from the cross (Lk. 23:34a) to demonstrate how the biblical understanding of forgiveness provides an opening for victims not to forgive their abusers. Where some pastors advise women to imitate Christ on the cross by patiently enduring their suffering and forgiving their abusers, I argue that this text provides the opposite message. Here, Jesus prays for his abusers; he does not forgive them himself. Indeed, his teachings up to that point are consistent: forgiveness requires repentance, and some crimes are unforgivable. On the cross, either case might hold. Imitation of Christ might involve praying for one’s abuser, but need not require forgiving or reconciling with an unrepentant partner. This reading offers victims a way to remain faithful while also remaining safe.

Together, these case studies highlight the tendency to idealize forgiveness and the negative impact that might have on victims of violence and other offense. I maintain that
the biblical text offers strict guidelines for a kind of forgiveness that requires participation from both the victim and the offender. As such, forgiveness may flourish as a mode of community cohesion or relationship repair. In these pages I do not mean to suggest that forgiveness be abandoned. Quite the contrary; I challenge advocates to work toward a more thoroughgoing understanding of forgiveness, especially when they claim biblical mandate. Forgiveness more accurately understood provides opportunities for victims and offenders to repair relationships, or for victims to move forward without guilt or pressure when the conditions for forgiveness are not forthcoming.

The concept of forgiveness, lifted from the biblical text and conflated with pop-psychological understandings, is often idealized and laden with emotional freight. When people ask what I am writing about, I give a simple answer: “Forgiveness.” This usually elicits very positive, even awe-filled responses. “That’s amazing,” some say. Or, “Oh, that’s wonderful! The world needs more forgiveness.” These conversations may be my best evidence for how forgiveness has taken on a life of its own where general perceptions are concerned. On this point, David Konstan observes:

That the demand to grant forgiveness may be coercive, the preconditions for eliciting it may be faked, its efficacy in assuaging rage may be overestimated, and, finally, the very concept may depend on assumptions that are philosophically incoherent—all this is reasonably well-known, and points to the possibility that we are dealing here with a notion that serves a particular ideological function in today’s world.556

556 Konstan, Before Forgiveness, p. 170.
Biblical scholars in particular might take his words as a warning, as it is often the biblical account of forgiveness that is cited as the foundation of the most idealized versions.

Forgiveness, understood in religious or secular contexts, has enormous potential for binding communities and restoring relationships, but stands to be harmful when presented to victims as a moral or religious obligation. In everyday reality, forgiveness is an ongoing and even mundane process: I am late for lunch and you say it’s okay; you step on my toe and I say, no problem; we trade harsh words but later resolve our differences. As the stakes get higher, though, forgiveness involves more effort and more risk. I present the biblical text as a way of navigating this terrain. I do not dare to say when forgiveness is possible and when it is not.

The basic argument of this dissertation is that forgiveness has limits, and our relationships are strengthened and guarded when we understand what those limits are. These boundaries are reflected in the biblical instructions, and victims may be morally and religiously correct in refusing to embrace forgiveness in some cases. Properly questioned and carefully negotiated, forgiveness stands to resolve differences and secure a better future than what came before. Imposed on victims who already suffer, however, it becomes but another burden with its emotional demands and promise to restore toxic—or even dangerous—relationships. It is the task of the believer to determine the difference.

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