

No Peace Without Justice and No Justice Without Forgiveness: The Enigma of Reconciliation in Times of Conflicts

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Abstract

This article explores the current and increasingly popular concept of forgiveness and reconciliation from the perspective 'no peace without justice and no justice without forgiveness'. It argues that forgiveness and reconciliation are essential elements in Christian faith because they represent the possibility of conversion which is the goal of Christianity and most religions. In this perspective, this article maintains that a genuine and true reconciliation is the outcome of the victim's readiness to abandon his or her desire for revenge. There can no real peace without forgiveness. Thus, the task of real forgiveness and reconciliation needs both the victim's effort and God's grace. The main concern here is to show the context of conflict in Nigeria and recommend the necessity to advocate for reconciliation and forgiveness in order to build a new society. The work discusses the pitfalls toward the roadmap of justice and peace. Since there is no peace without justice and neither is there justice without forgiveness, taken from the message of John Paul II on world day of peace 2002. The paper is hedged on the stages of reconciliation and forgiveness and concludes that these are prerequisites for peace and justice.

1.0 Introduction

Overcoming disunity is only achieved when humans are able to reconcile with one another and with God. The first African synod notes with dismay that Africa for several years has been the theater of fratricidal wars which are decimating the population and destroying their natural resources. Their causes are many and include tribalism, nepotism, racism, religious intolerance, the thirst for power fueled by totalitarian regimes, armed conflict, structural factors, socio-economic factors and cultural factors. It is not in the direction of this reflection to discuss the details of these factors. The inevitable consequences are the systematic corruption that corrupts the whole of public life and the exportation of capital. The populations are crushed, reduced to silence, as innocent victims, they are often resigned to this situation of injustice (see *Ecclesia in Africa*, no.45). As a result, many have IDPs camps as their homes. All of these produce the great alarming waves of migration, real modern

exodus, in which millions of men, women and children set themselves at the borders of other countries, with the effect of provoking further armed conflicts. This situation has caused malnutrition, diseases, lack of proper hygiene, and consequently, high mortality rate (Emilia, 2010). This also contributes to the difficulty of overcoming conflict. Never before has human life cost so little, to the point of being severely humiliated. Even in our present time, there are genocides of entire human groups, of people held under the grip of tyrannical dictatorships, which act with full impunity, even when they use savage methods of torture and of assassinations, cultural and religious discriminations legalized by the states (Emilia 2010, p.200).

In spite of these dreadful experiences, in line with the sermon on the mount, Emilia encourages that the society should be that;

community of men and women who, recognizing themselves as sons and daughters of the same Father, are joined and bound together by the one law which is reciprocal love, which makes them each out to the weakest of the society in a culture of true solidarity and justice, which does not resort to violence and revenge, in which there is no other way to be a leader than to be the servant of all and which bases its own authority on the coherence of one's own life. It is that human community which God intended, in the act of creating it anew (p.201).

As such, this paper explores the context of conflict in Nigeria and recommends that it is necessary to advocate for reconciliation and forgiveness in order to build a new society.

2.0 Enigma of Reconciliation

Ambrose Bwangatto opines that the theme of reconciliation gained prominence in religion and in social affairs in the late 1980s. This was prompted by the social catastrophes such as wars, social disputes as well as natural disasters that affected large parts of the world (Bwangatto, 2009). One would think that reconciliation is an old idea in the Christian practice and discourses on justice; quite the opposite. Humans have always been challenged by their lifestyles because there has been less efforts to deal with situations of conflicts. As a result, it is often assumed that forgiveness is impossible in the face of extraordinary evil (Ramirez, 2009).

Reconciliation as a conflict management mechanism says Dokun Oyelshola entails a couple of characteristics. These include "honest acknowledgment of harm or injury done, readiness to apologize for one's role in inflicting injury, readiness of the conflicting parties to let go, commitment by the offender not to repeat the harm, and sincere effort to redress past grievances and openness to

enter into new mutually enriching relationship” (Dokun 2005, p.197). Reflecting on forgiveness, our minds turn naturally to certain situations of conflict which endlessly feed deep and divisive hatreds and an unstoppable sequence of personal and collective tragedies. The topic of reconciliation is strategic and timely because everywhere one looks at life, whether within Nigeria or the world at large, conflicts between persons and groups are playing themselves out, with publicized, prolonged, and uncivilized struggle over differences, differences in values and ethics, differences in religious views, differences over land claims, territorial rights, political ends, and a host of other fractious debates. All of them are deepened by the drama of power and its abuse. Conflict holds the center stage in our time and in all places, and voices of wisdom addressed to those involved in the fray or the number of persons of good will to help quell the conflicts are all too few. This explains why forgiveness looks hard in the face of many injuries.

Reconciliation, Charles Thomas notes may broadly be considered as the “repairing, restoring, and mending of that which has been broken, namely, relationships be they interpersonal, communal, national due to some type of conflict between two parties. Reconciliation seeks to restore Justice and communal order, repair broken relationships, heal communities, and provide an atmosphere for stability and safety” (Charles 2014, p.84). On this basis, Biggar Bar-Siman-Tov reports that at the heart of reconciliation “lies a necessity of dialogue to facilitate the principal aspects of repair that are necessary to establish or reestablish relationships between conflicting parties” (Biggar 2007, pp.7,12). The often long and tedious climb to recovering, rebuilding and reestablishing a sense of order is the murky process of reconciliation.

Reconciliation theorists, however, differ on their approach to how reconciliation is to be achieved. Some theorists contend that a judicial process is the primary aspect of reconciliation; they frame their theories upon a restorative Justice model. Social-Psychological theorists on the other hand take as their starting point an emphasis upon the trauma and social disconnection that are incurred by the victims and focus on the cognitive processes that must happen in the individual, victim and perpetrator, as well as the community in which the crime has occurred (Charles 2014, p.84). Religious theorists respond to reconciliation from the perspective of the divine and move toward the moral and finally to the ethical reciprocity that ought to occur among humanity in light of the template offered by narratively situated implications of sacred texts.

The actual events and constituents involved in conflict can range from interpersonal, moral and criminal offenses to national and international infractions of human rights, genocide, and civil and national war. However, when the conflict has ended, what ought to occur? What direction does life take for those involved in the conflict? How is the potential for conflict to resurface

curtailed? The answer to these questions for many theorists is reconciliation. "In its simplest form, reconciliation means restoring friendships and harmony between the rival sides after conflict resolution or transforming relations of hostility and resentment to friendly and harmonious ones" (Charles 2014, p.84). The goal of reconciliation is not the end of conflict, for it is at the end of conflict that the process of reconciliation begins. The often long and tedious climb to recovering, rebuilding and reestablishing a sense of order is the murky process of reconciliation.

3.0 Forgiveness begets Conversion

One of the saints of the early church, Abbot Moses, had a witty way of living the gospel among his community. He was once asked to take part in a community meeting which was preparing to condemn a certain lax brother. The old Man arrived the venue of the meeting carrying a basket from which sand was pouring through many openings. Why are you doing that, he was asked? "You ask me to judge a brother while my own sins spill out behind me like the sand from this basket". The embarrassed community was moved to forgive their erred brother. We live in a world where forgiveness is a hard commodity because human hearts are engrossed with a lot of bitterness that block the way to mercy. Forgiveness is at the heart of faithful living to seek conversion. Nothing is more fundamental to Jesus' teaching than his call to forgiveness; such as giving up debts, letting go of grievances, pardoning those who have harmed us. Every time we say the Lord's Prayer, we are telling God that we ask to be forgiven only in so far as we ourselves have extended forgiveness to others: "and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Mt 6:12; Lk 11:2-4). Again, Jesus teaches us: "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own?" (Mt 7:1-3).

In unlocking the mystery of forgiveness, on another occasion, Peter asks Jesus how often he must extend forgiveness. As many as seven times? Jesus responds; "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times" (Mt 18:22). Jesus goes on to tell the parable of the servant whose king forgave him a huge debt, but who afterwards refused to forgive the slight debt due to him from a colleague of his. The king says to the unforgiving servant: "you wicked servant I forgave you all that debt because you besought me. Should you not have mercy on your fellow servant as I had mercy on you?" (Mt 18:32-33).

It is not hard to identify with the servant in the above parable. Who doesn't know how much easier it is to ask God to forgive us than to extend forgiveness to others? For we are wounded, and the wounds often last a lifetime; they even spill across generations. As children, as parents, as husbands or wives, as

families, as workers, as jobless people, as church members, as members of certain classes or races, we often experience quite serious sins committed against us, we may feel damaged, scarred for life, stunted. Others we love may even have died of evil done to them. But as Jim Forest suggests, we are not only victims of injury. In various ways we are linked to injuries others have suffered and are suffering. If one allows herself or himself, one will discover that not only in my own home but on the far side of the planet there are people who are my victims. Through what one has done or failed to do, through what one's community has done or failed to do, there are others whose lives are more wretched than they might have been; there are those dying while we feast (Forest, 1988). Simply put, when I feel about others, I should know that others feel bad because of me.

Many a time, many renew their collective preparations for a festival of death such as the world has never before witnessed: a war fought with weapons of total annihilation. The argument is put forward that such war preparations can actually prevent the dreaded event. But, in fact, we are like children playing with matches in a sand-pit filled with gun powder. The temptation is that we are quick to condemn the evils we see in others and excuse the evils we practice ourselves. In this way we fail to realize that those who threaten us feel threatened by us, and often have good reasons for their fears. The problem is not simply a personal issue, for the greatest sins of enmity are committed *en masse* with very few people feeling any personal responsibility for the destruction they share in doing or preparing. "I was only following orders is one of humanity's most frequently repeated justifications for murder and destruction of properties, heard as often from those who profess religious convictions as from those who deny them" (Forest 1988, p.75). Hence, the reprisal of constant attacks and counter-attacks between the Herdsmen and farmers in northcentral Nigeria could be explained as having roots from this analysis.

Consequently, we must appreciate here that peace-making is impossible without conversion of the heart. Forgiveness is difficult because there is looming anger within our hearts. The compelling question then is, does one have the right to be angry? When one is hurt, should one pretend not to feel the hurt? And if one manages to pretend, to hide his/her hurt and anger, is one lying for thinking this way? In fact, we can see moments of stunning anger in Jesus' life. He was furious with those who made a house of worship into a place of thieves; he was furious with those who laid heavy burdens on others which they did not carry themselves. If you want to see Jesus angry, read Matthew 23. Jesus was a passionate man and never hid his passion.

A forgiveness that is pretentious, that seeks to hide pain and rage behind pretty wallpaper, is of no value. Such does no justice to peace, for without justice, no

forgiveness. But anger should lead one to conversion of heart no matter how it takes. Sooner or later one will discover that the complaints are still there, still fresh, more explosive than ever seeking vengeance. Until one allows oneself to feel the hurt and to express it, it is unlikely that an act of forgiveness will be genuine. If the forgiveness we seek to offer to those who need our forgiveness is to be of any use to them, they need to be aware of what they have done and the pain or hurt it has caused (Forest 1988). How can they know it if we are silent? Jesus teaches that we have the obligation to speak out in charity. "Take heed to yourselves; if your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him" (Lk 17:3). To my mind, this is what pope Paul VI meant "if you want peace work for justice".

Anger has its place in the path of forgiveness and conversion. But until we have allowed ourselves to get beyond anger, to forgive, or to let God's forgiveness flow through us, we are burdened with our injuries, bitterness and complaints. In the midst of afflictions and untold pains, we are called to forgive. We need to seek forgiveness, offer forgiveness and accept forgiveness. This is the imperative of the Lord's prayer. We are followers of Jesus who taught us forgiveness even when his hands were being nailed to the wood of the cross; Father, forgive them. They know not what they do (cf. Lk. 23:34).

4.0 Pitfalls of Reconciliation and Forgiveness

Reconciliation is a process, not an event. An event has a beginning and an end. A process is ongoing; it is a journey that begins but does not end. A celebration is an event. But the real work begins after the celebration is over. Here are some of the major pitfalls of reconciliation and what will be required to overcome them. First, reconciliation is not a 'romantic' process wherein we return to a previous state of existence. Rather, it is forward movement wherein we build a future out of the brokenness of our present. We do that by accommodating the bruises and scars that we take into the future with us. The thought that we can leave our bruises behind is an illusion. Far too many of our brothers and sisters think that when we rebuild burned structures we have solved all of the problems. Burned structures, for instance, could be a reminder that there is a cancer in this society called ethnicism. Rebuilding structures does not get rid of it. Second, if my leg is amputated as a consequence of somebody's action, I will never walk like I use to. I must learn to live with that fact. In the final analysis, it is not important that I walk like I use to. It is only important that I get up and walk. I might have to use a crutch, a walking stick, or lean on a tree limb; that does not matter. But I must get up and walk. That's what matters. When Jesus encountered the paralyzed man at the pool he did not say "Walk like you used to." He said, "Get up, take up your bed, and walk." The man walked among his peers and his enemies. And so, it is with us. We will walk among our peers and our enemies, among those who are responsible for the pain we suffer and the physical and psychological

bruises we carry. We may be the same again but that is part of growth. Reconciliation requires that we accept the fact that we will not be able to walk like we used to. But we can walk even if we walk with a limp.

Finally, how can you be reconciled with one who causes you to lose your leg? How can you be reconciled with one who has betrayed your trust? There is only one way that can be done. We must be willing and able to forgive. Forgiving is central to human relationships and our common life together. Without the ability to forgive, it would be impossible to live in human community. The ability to forgive makes it possible to live with the psychological bruises that occur when we feel a sense of betrayal. Forgetting is not important, but Forgiving is (Forest, 1988). Forgiveness is so central to our life together as Christians that God has made forgiving others a requirement for receiving divine forgiveness. Matthew 6:14-15 says that if you forgive others their trespasses, God will forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will God forgive you. That is divine justice which leads to peace.

Of all the elements in human relationships, forgiveness is the most difficult (Forest 1988, p.78). In Matthew 18:21, Peter confronted Jesus and said, "Tell me; if a member of the church sins against me, how many times should I forgive, seven times?" Jesus knew Peter was getting tired of people messing with him and was looking for an excuse to capitalize on. But getting even is an illusion. You cannot fix what is wrong by committing another wrong. Getting even proportion or vengeance only shifts the need for revenge from one side to the other. Jesus knew this! Accordingly, he said, "How about seven times seventy?" Now, that is a total of 490 times. There is nothing magical or important about that number. You simply cannot forgive someone 490 times without forgiveness rubbing off on you. You yourself become a forgiving person. This is what Jesus was saying to Peter. Reconciliation is a win situation. You cannot win if you cannot forgive. Forgiveness does not eliminate the damage that has been done. It makes it possible to build bridges across damaged places, so we can move on with life. Reconciliation is not about going backwards. It is about going forward. One of the tragedies of race relations is that those who victimize others, too often, mistake the willingness of victims to forgive them as evidence that they have done nothing seriously wrong. Thus, oppressors tend to have a distorted view of forgiveness. This is a dangerous pitfall. And so, Terrorist groups, Farmers and Herdsmen rhetoric is a case in point. Asking the Fulanis to forgive the natives for interfering with their means of livelihood may sound impossible. Be that as it may, such a conclusion ignores the fact that you have said that your response would have been the same had race been proven as a motivating factor. Furthermore, it ignores the fact that forgiveness is an essential survival response for victims of oppression. From a perspective of survival, oppressed people know from daily experiences that forgiveness is the

only way to move from brokenness to wholeness, to live forward into reconciliation. Our willingness to forgive does not mean the absence of pain and suffering. It is because we have suffered so much and have been mistreated for so long that we know we must forgive. If oppressors could only learn that they must be able to forgive, forgive themselves for being oppressors, forgive themselves for enjoying the benefits of racism or tribalism, they would be able to accept the forgiveness of the oppressed. Then we would be able to move forward into reconciliation instead of languishing in an illusion. Are you able to forgive? Remember, some conflicts turn out to be positive whereas some do not (though conflicts should not be encouraged from the onset). The positives of conflicts bring out the best of us (Dokun 2005). The roadmap to peace is the justice we offer ourselves by forgiving unconditionally.

5.0 Liberation from Violence

Robert Schreiter decries that dealing with the violence perpetrated on individuals, families and whole societies may be “the most painful and terrifying aspect of the reconciliation process. “Violence inflicts not only physical but also psychic pain. It corrodes our fragile webs of meaning and attempts to destroy our self-sustaining narratives and to replace them with its own narrative of the lie” (Schreiter 1992, p.34). To overcome the suffering caused by violence, it is necessary to overcome the narrative of the lie by embracing a redeeming narrative. The first stage is reconstructing memory as the principal repository of identity, whether of an individual or a people. This involves working through the suffering: acknowledging the violence, crying out in protest and lament, naming the perpetrator, expressing the pain, calling others to our side to help to restore some form of social network and, in situations beyond our ability to cope, appealing to God (Schreiter 1992, p.45). Through repeating the narrative of violence, it is necessary to disengage from the older memory of violence and reestablish an ability to trust, so that our true humanity may be revealed in the act of faith in a new narrative. On the basis of his experience in Ireland and in our experience in Nigeria, Alan Falconer has spoken of the important role of memory in enabling liberation in the face of oppression. But memory may also imprison communities as it does in Northeast Nigeria, where memory is constituted by each group's own interpretation of its own history defined in opposition to the other (Falconer, p.95). In the context of the biblical injunction, it is necessary to remember in order to worship (cf. Deut. 26). It is on this background that the Passover meal was instituted, in which the past was to be remembered and made present. As well as the meal, there was to be a peace offering, prayer, and sin and guilt offerings. For memory to be truly liberating, Falconer argues, the forgiveness of sin must take an important place. Forgiveness may empower the subjects to embrace responsibility for their own actions, thus assuming responsibility for creating or exercising power over the other (Falconer, p.95). Forgiveness may

represent the unexpected response which frees the others and allows them to be themselves. It is for this purpose that Schreier speaks of the victim's imperative to forgive the oppressors, enabling them to repent and rebuild their own humanity: only "out of God's grace welling up in the victim's shattered life may humanity be offered to the perpetrators of violence" (Schreier 1992, p.45).

Falconer also speaks of the role of the oppressed in seeking forgiveness to open the way for a new relationship and of the need for the appropriation of the history of the other as part of the reconciliation of memories, so that "through this process of forgiveness both are empowered to be and to enter a new relationship which is able to embrace the memories of hurt and alienation". This standing alongside the others with their memory of pain, in the quest for the forgiveness of sins, generates an "integrative power" able to lead to a new creation (Falconer, p.95). This reveals the dynamism to effective justice and peace towards reconciliation.

6.0 Building the Roads to Reconciliation

Integrating Christianity with local cultural traditions and claiming elements of liberation and reconstruction discourses, reconciliation theology has emerged in the past decade as the most dynamic stream of African theology. Its claims are initially impressive. First, the language of reconciliation is deeply rooted in religious discourse of the African in various forms. This is why Barnabas Samaila avows that reconciliation is synonymous to conversion, repentance and healing (Shabanyang 2018, p.60). More than inculturation, liberation or reconstruction, reconciliation stands at the heart of the Christian gospel. Moses liberated Israel from Egypt, Nehemiah rebuilt Jerusalem, but Jesus reconciled a fallen world to God. In the words of the paradigmatic text 2 Corinthians 5:18, "all this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation." Reconciliation holds together the vertical and the horizontal, recognizing that love of God cannot be separated from love of neighbor. It recalls the church's historical challenges in integrating the other, whether Greek-speaking gentiles at the Council of Jerusalem, Protestant reformers at the Council of Trent, or Enlightenment moderns at Vatican II. The paradigm demonstrates the formative potential of Christian practices, from the Eucharist to sacramental confession to the washing of the feet. In the light of this, the South African theologian John de Gruchy may not exaggerate when he claims that reconciliation is the "sum total of what Christians believe about God's saving work in Jesus Christ." Reconciliation not only has deep Christian roots, but like all successful theology, it speaks to the current context. If construction emerged from the ephemeral hopes of the second wave of African democratization, reconciliation grew out of the enduring pain of ethnic and political conflict in places like Northern Uganda, Nigeria, and Burundi (Carney 2010, p.54).

7.0 Forgiveness as a Building Block of Peace and Justice

Pope saint John Paul II in his annual message of world day of peace of 2002 entitled “No peace without justice, no justice without forgiveness” has this to say:

How do we restore the moral and social order subjected to such horrific violence? My reasoned conviction, confirmed in turn by biblical revelation, is that the shattered order cannot be fully restored except by a response that combines justice with forgiveness. The pillars of true peace are justice and that form of love which is forgiveness.

Here, the Holy Father admits that justice and forgiveness are the bridge to peace, though it is not an easy path. He believed that forgiveness is the opposite of resentment and revenge, not justice. Explaining the relationship of peace, justice, and forgiveness he declares:

True peace therefore is the fruit of justice, that moral virtue and legal guarantee which ensures full respect for rights and responsibilities, and the just distribution of benefits and burdens. But because human justice is always fragile and imperfect, subject as it is to the limitations and egoism of individuals and groups, it must include and, as it were, be completed by the *forgiveness which heals and rebuilds troubled human relations from their foundations*. This is true in circumstances great and small, at the personal level or on a wider, even international scale. Forgiveness is in no way opposed to justice, as if to forgive meant to overlook the need to right the wrong done. It is rather the fullness of justice, leading to that tranquility of order which is much more than a fragile and temporary cessation of hostilities, involving as it does the deepest healing of the wounds which fester in human hearts. Justice and forgiveness are both essential to such healing.

John Paul II reaffirms in this message that forgiveness inhabits people's hearts before it becomes a social reality. By this, it means that forgiveness starts with a personal choice, a decision of the human heart to go against the natural instinct to pay back evil with evil. He noted that all human beings want to be forgiven but very often hate to forgive others. This want, Jesus sermonizes “treat others as you want them to treat you”. Forgiveness offers an opportunity to raise one's eyes to the future and to discover new possibilities of trust and commitment. The failure to forgive in a prolong conflict, is extremely costly in terms of human development. Resources are used for weapons rather than for development, peace and justice. Peace is essential for development, but true peace is made possible only through forgiveness.

Creative justice is the ability to forgive in order to reunite. This can be seen from the example of the prodigal son parable. The father forgives his wasteful and repentant son so that he can be reunited with his family, even though this kind of justice seems offensive to the elder son who has remained faithful. This path of power of forgiveness is shown in the reality of Nelson Mandela, who after twenty-seven years behind the bars as a political prisoner, led the people to reconciliation and forgiveness in south Africa. This is why the Nobel Prize winner; Desmond Tutu is well celebrated for his famous book: "No future without Forgiveness". Indeed, without forgiveness we shut the doors to embrace the new dawn. This path of education is often lost.

For Christians, then, reconciliation names that central concern that unites all justice issues. The classical definition of justice as "giving to each his due" simply fails as a Christian formulation. While we want to give to each what is right, this "rightness" must be judged by its ability to promote reconciliation, especially the restoration of those who are at the edges of our communities: the impoverished and oppressed as well as the criminal and the enemy. We worship the God who does not count our trespasses against us, who gives us not what is due to us but rather what is good for us, and this, not as entitlement, but as grace.

The parable of the Sheep and the Goats in Matthew 25 further illustrates the unity of justice and its reconciling goal. Jesus tells us in this parable that when we give food, clothing, and care to "the least of these," we have "done it to him." So, we are told to see in the poor, the sick, and the marginalized, the face of Christ himself. True enough, but there is more. We must remember that among "the least of these" Jesus included not only the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, and the sick, but also the prisoner. And he made no indication that he meant only those unjustly imprisoned. Even those who have committed crimes, who have harmed others and are paying for their wrongs, they, too, constitute those to whom we must extend reconciling care.

8.0 Stages to Forgiveness

Forgiveness is indeed costly. It requires a moment of deep silence, remembering forbearance from revenge. As Wabanhu Emmanuel observes, "it requires abandonment of your desire, intention and even your right to revenge and look forward to repairing both the broken horizontal with others and vertical with God relationships. At this point, forgiveness may seem even impossible" (2008, p.286). Bobby Cunningham offers us four stages toward forgiveness and reconciliation. The four stages of the forgiving process are cyclical rather than linear. They intertwine with each other, and they all demand repeating, even as many times as seventy times seven! The first stage he refers to as the judgment verses denial stage. In this stage, one is confronted

with the reality of sin and being sinned against. One is faced with the reality of the affront, the betraying of trust, the brokenness of a relationship, the brokenness of promises, or the reality of destructive behavior towards one's self. One experiences feelings of hurt and anger accompanied with feelings of self-protectiveness and revenge. By judgment, we do not mean to imply placing oneself in the position of power to ascertain blame and punishment. Rather, we mean to suggest opening oneself to the realities that have occurred and the consequences that have arrived. Forgiving is not a nice and neat endeavor to undertake. On the contrary, it means a willingness to dirty oneself with realities that are painful in others as well as in one's self (Cunningham 1985, pp.141-149).

The second stage is referred to as the humility versus humiliation stage. When affronted and wounded many of us tend to internalize the injury and turn it against ourselves in ways that result in the painful state of humiliation which produces the view of one's self and one's offender as adversarial and alien to one another. However, in the spirit and will to forgive, tension arises to develop and recognize a state of humility that counters humiliation. Humility is characterized by an awareness of one's need for forgiveness in the light of one's own imperfections, vulnerabilities and tendencies towards meanness and insensitivity. Humility enables a person to perceive the offender from a perspective of empathy and an openness towards understanding and compassion. I do not mean to imply, however, that humility is characterized by permissiveness and a denial of the real consequences of behavior and attitudes. It is a clearer and more certain look at the realities of life occurrences and the consequences that result (Cunningham 1985, p.142).

The third stage is designated as the opportunity of mutuality and negotiation. In this stage the forgiver becomes different; he or she becomes open to change and growth. He or she becomes free from the need to accuse and the compelling needs to punish and to seek revenge. In confronting one's own needs for forgiveness, one experiences a new resource which enables him or her to reframe the affront. The sinful or destructive behavior takes on a new meaning and a new perspective is developed that reorients the person in life and in relation to the offender. Likewise, in this stage, the forgiven one also becomes different. The forgiven individual becomes free to experience real guilt feelings and suffering which comes from having wronged another. As a consequence, he or she can deal constructively with the wrongs and be freed from them. The forgiven one moves away from defensiveness, denials and reprisals. He or she is confronted with a humility that allows him or her to own sinfulness without the fear of humiliation, condemnation and total estrangement. At this stage, the forgiving process can become a mutual experience of healing and reconciliation. However, it is not essential that the offender participate in the process in order for the forgiving person to experience the freedom and healing

of letting go of the affront and its painful consequences (Cunningham 1985, p.143).

The fourth stage of forgiving is characterized by the actual living out of the forgiving process where perspectives on one's self, others and God takes place. This stage of forgiving is the ongoing process of redefining one's relationship with the offender based upon a developing awareness of one's self and the offender. It is being aware not only of his or her limitations and capacities for sin and evil, but also of his or her kinship and commonality in humanness under God. Here, relationships are renegotiated with new promises made and new covenants formed. In other cases, it can be the end of a relationship that is mutually or unilaterally determined. In the process of forgiving, the person experiences a freedom and power to disentangle one's self from another, and thereby to move on in his or her life unencumbered with the weight of life frozen in humiliation, hatred and estrangement. I do not mean to imply that this stage is characterized by resolved ambivalences and the disappearance of deep wounds. On the contrary, this stage is more often identified by the willingness of a person to live "as if he or she has forgiven another. This is not a call for denial or a plea for fantasy. Rather, it is a realistic acceptance that we all live with scars that are tender and often easily opened as a result of hurts. This stage is characterized by a deepened knowledge of one's ability to be hurt and healed. The reframing that is a result of forgiving enables one to live with one's hurt and wounds and not be enslaved to them. The process of forgiving culminates in the courage to accept the realities of one's life and to move on in faith and humility (Cunningham 1985, p.143).

9.0 Conclusion

The pastoral strategic plan toward reconciliation as a project for both church and political society is the manifestation of the gestation of a new world. No one could be exempted from this clarion call. As human beings, we are limited in our capacity to forgive and help others forgive. By relying on the grace of God, we can achieve forgiveness that would be impossible to reach on our own. We must equally remember that spiritual, psychological and physical healing require time, energy and sustained human efforts as well as support, lest we abuse the victim of a violent crime of spiritual suicide.

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