

THE POLITICS OF FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION: A WAY OUT OF THE DYNAMICS OF CONFLICT AND REVENGE

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ABSTRACT: *In fact Forgiveness may be contrary to human logic that often yields to the dynamics of conflict and revenge. But forgiveness is inspired by the logic of love. One needs to forgive others as well. The new person is a forgiven person, a person who makes restitution, a person who is honest about failings and weaknesses, a person who is open to the future and who recognizes the dignity of all. This paper calls all men and women and politicians across the globe to a stubborn fact that forgiveness is a key to peace and love which we as individuals and the world in general need today more than ever to effect a genuine and lasting healing and eschew reprisal conflict and revenge.*

KEYWORDS: forgiveness, reconciliation, conflict, vengeance, genocide,

INTRODUCTION

Today, our wounded world yearns for "Healing. This brings to mind the poetic meditation penned about 41 years ago by Pope John Paul II, as the then Archbishop Karol Wojtyla of Krakow in 1979 in a text entitled "Sign of contradiction". One of the passages read thus, "The earth has become a cemetery.... Among all the tombs scattered over the continent of our planet"¹². This a fact when we remember that the first nuclear weapons were built by the United States during World War II And they have been used twice in war, both times by the United States against Japan near the end of World War II. On August 6, 1945, the U.S. Army Air Forces detonated a uranium gun-type fission bomb nicknamed "Little Boy" over the Japanese city of Hiroshima; three days later, on August 9, the U.S. Army Air Forces detonated a plutonium implosion-type fission bomb nicknamed "Fat Man" over the Japanese city of Nagasaki. These bombings resulted in the deaths of approximately 200,000 civilians and military personnel from injuries sustained from the explosions"³

Hence, in this quagmire, the only way of releasing ourselves from the pains we have experienced from others and obtaining genuine healing is through forgiveness. Robert Enright, a developmental psychologist at the University of Wisconsin defines forgiveness as "giving up the resentment to which you are entitled and offering to the person who hurt you friendlier attitude to which he is not entitled". Again Mona Gustafson Affmito says "forgiveness means deciding not to punish a perceived injustice, taking action on that decision, experiencing the emotional relief that follows". Thus forgiveness does not mean that you agree with the wrong the other person meted to you. It does not also mean that we can change what has happened and erase what people did, free criminals from prison, return to old jobs and friendship as such. It is a function of love that seeks to understand the negative impact of another person and then to release the pain and find inner peace. On the

other hand, reconciliation is a process. It can contribute to consolidating peace, breaking of a cycle of violence, restoring justice at personal and social levels, bringing about personal healing, reparation for past injustices and building non-violent relationships between individuals and communities. Thus, the Bishops of Sierra Leone speaking about the situation of their Country after the civil war remarked that the lasting peace should be sought along the paths of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Forgiveness a problematic and difficult concept

Forgiveness is a difficult concept easily spoken of especially by Christians. In Christian ethics, forgiveness is a central concept. Reihold Niebuhr calls it "the crown of Christian ethics" and Paul Lehmann speaks highly of forgiveness when he calls it "the sumum Bonum of Christian ethics"⁴. We must acknowledge that it is not always easy to forgive. If we fail to accept this fact of life, then we are not honest to ourselves. Simon Wiesenthal's book "*The Sunflower*" presents a case study that lends credit to this. The book records that a critically injured Nazi soldier recognises the magnitude of his own wrongdoing and seeks for forgiveness from a Jewish person so that he can die in peace. He calls a Jewish inmate of a concentration camp into his hospital room, expresses his anguish and repentance and begs for forgiveness. The Jewish man leaves the room without a word and later struggles with the question of whether he should have forgiven the soldier. This Nazi soldier in *The Sunflower* helped to burn an entire village of Jews alive and in so doing failed to respect the intrinsic worth of Jewish people. Moreover he failed to recognise them as valuable human beings with a moral status equal to his own.

But why is offering forgiveness difficult? Reihold Neibuhr observes that the reason is within us. According to him, "it is the ordinary problem in us, our small selfishness, our small greed, our small hatred, our private claim to exemption from moral law and above all our lack of knowledge of Christ the lord that is behind the staggering sum of sin in the world that creates unforgiving hearts"⁵. The political philosopher Hannah Arendt proposes two factors that underline and plague human beings as they try to live together in community. The first factor is that life is irreversible. When an injustice, a tragedy or wound occurs, there is no way to rewind the tape and do it over again. As the saying goes once the eggs are scrambled, you cannot unscramble them. The second factor is that life is unpredictable; people and environment are unreliable. Over and above all, most often people cannot predict the outcome of their action. We see that life is ripe for chaos, pain and betrayal. However Arendt goes on to say that it is forgiveness that allows us to handle these two aspects of life and enables us to live in relationship with others. In any case, we must admit that the pains occasioned by the divisions and conflicts never die. The hurt and resentments are produced from generation to generation into the future - a future that is over determined by the past. But how can people address the collective trauma of the past in a constructive and future-oriented manner. This is actually a crucial issue not just for individuals but also for societies and communities emerging out of division, bloodshed and collective nightmare. A few examples will bring out our fears clearly.

The bombardment and devastation of Nagasaki

The US bombardier who dropped an atomic bomb on Nagasaki offered to attend the 40th anniversary commemoration and to tender a public apology to the city. The city officers refused the offer. The bomb killed an estimated 70,000 people and devastated the city. Actually we can understand his good sentiments but there are many atomic bomb victims who are still suffering and who do not wish to meet this man as the city officers said. The response of Nagasaki leaders was understandable and even very appropriate. But the proffered apology was appropriate as well. It put on the public record the contrition of a person who had committed what he himself identified as a war crime and that may be all that could be done. In this case, reconciliation was not apparently possible but the very fact of repentance was a step towards healing. This is so because it is acknowledged that US interpretation of the bombing (it was necessary in order to save million American lives) is false patriotism, and was no longer held by the person who actually released the bomb.

September 11, 2001 Terrorist attack on America

If we look at the carnage, the wanton destruction of lives and property by the terrorist at the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and in Pennsylvania and the people who saw visions of those missiles crashing into American public buildings, whose friends, fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, children, relatives were killed, whose firemen, policemen, service personnel's lost their lives, whose business have collapsed, whose futures are in jeopardy, whose grief is overwhelming we would be surprised if anybody could honestly say at the moment that he or she was ready to forgive the criminals responsible for that inhuman act. How can they respond to the call for forgiveness? It will not ring bell in our ears if anyone calls for forgiveness of those responsible for the death of more than 6,000 men, women and children. Frankly speaking, people will not have any willingness to think about forgiveness. In any case, this is not to say that we are trying to throw over boards the thoughts and feelings that led to those attacks; or that America is entirely blameless in a world that is still poisoned by greed, exploitation, and militaristic threats and posturing. Far be us from that. But then, this in no way excuses or condones or lessens the evil effect of criminal attacks against innocent people coming from all over the world. However, terrorism is not mostly rooted in a psychotic love for violence and that is what we have to note. It is rooted in anger, in perception of injustice, in fear, in resentment and of course in envy. But the question is, how can this evil be forgiven and those involved and their families placated? A priest Lindsay Bates in his sermon after the September 11 terrorist attack on America says:

But in this High Holy Day, these days of Awe leading to the Day of Atonement, I can't avoid the issue. At this time when our Jewish root calls us to honest contemplation of our contribution to the sadness, the pains, the injustices of our lives and our world, we cannot ignore the spiritual demand that we seek to balance our just anger with mercy. We have to contemplate at least the possibility of forgiveness - and that is not easy.³

We can see how difficult it is for the priest to tell his congregation to forgive outright the atrocities meted to the whole world by the terrorists.

American and its Foreign Policy

To a good number, America is viewed as a chauvinistic international bully, promoting a global economy that brings prosperity to the rich and deprivation and suffering to the poor. People see America as controlling their lives. They see America as supporting tyrannical governments and rulers who in turn protect their interest and thus deny people of freedom and democracy, which America takes the lead in shouting. For instance, if America and the West rejected the last Zimbabwean general elections that brought Robert Mugabe to power once again on the grounds of irregularities and rigging, why did they accept 2003 general elections in Nigeria and even sent congratulatory messages to President Matthew Obasanjo. The 2003 elections that witnessed unprecedented rigging in the history of democratic elections in the world, killings, tortures, brutality, intimidation, bribery, deceit, irregularities, police and military assault on innocent and democratic citizens, molestations, all crimes against humanity and human right.

What a double standard! Perhaps the West would gain economically in Obasanjo's administration and lose highly in Mugabe's regime. Well that is obvious considering the plight of white farmers in Zimbabwe. What other interpretation does one require? This could count for one of the causes of hatred for America. Henry A. Gustafson an American and a professor Emeritus of New testament Theology, at United Theological Seminary laments this ugly situation when he remarks:

*Last year, a short time before 9/11, I listened to Charlie Rose interview, the historian Arthur Schlesinger. With respect to the century that had recently begun, Schlesinger was quite pessimistic. He observed that the last century had been the bloodiest in history, and when considered negatively many people of the world regarded our activity of protecting our interests in their countries he feared the future offered little hope. Many in these other countries want to retaliate, he said, and if they succeed what do we do?*⁶

The Biafran Genocide

Reporting on the atrocities and inhuman acts committed on Biafra, Monsignor Georges Rocheau the emissary of Pope Paul VI, sent to Nigeria on fact-finding mission has this to say: "There has been genocide, for example on the occasion of the 1966 massacres...Two areas have suffered badly {from the fighting}. Firstly the region between the towns of Benin and Asaba where only widows and orphans remain, Federal troops having for unknown reasons massacred all the men"⁷. How can we commit the memory of the Biafran genocide into oblivion, where a million Igbo and thousands of other ethnic groups that made up Biafra were butchered in the name of false patriotism. The people were affected with violence and abuse, forced out of their homes and looted, raped, tortured and dispossessed. My father was a business man at Onitsha city (a commercial nerve of Southeastern Nigeria) before the outbreak of the Biafran war of self-defense. He often told me excruciating ordeal he went through when the Nigerian federal troop entered Onitsha. And yet after the so-called war of unification, the federal government continued its abuse of Biafran people. Of all the money my Father had in Bank, he was given back only 20 pounds by the Yakubu Gowon government that declared **NO VICTOR NO**

VANQUISHED and claimed to embark on policy of **RECONSTRUCTION, REHABILITATION AND RECONCILIATION**.

In certain cases the whole family was extinguished. I met an Igbo man in Germany who told me that he can never forgive Gowon and his men. I was shocked because he is a learned man and well exposed. In fact, he is one of the best architects in one of the political regions in Germany. So I asked why? Do you still remember what happened in those days? He replied: how can't I?. He continued, the Nigerian troop entered our village near Enugu and killed my two brothers who were civilians in the presence of my mother. My brothers were 12 and 14 years respectively. Our entire village was devastated. From that moment my mother had been in pains and never came out of it until she died in 1995. This discussion took place in year 2000, the year of Christian Jubilee, reconciliation and forgiveness and thirty three years after the Biafran war of self-determination. This is the pitiable story of this man who lost members of his family in a genocidal war. For him, forgiveness is an illusion.

How can the people of Asaba let go of their memory of the atrocities and one of the worst of man's inhumanity to man that left the town in fallow - widow's town. The commander of the troops that entered Asaba city assembled all the male civilian adults in the city stadium in pretence that they were trying to establish friendly relationship and little did they know that that was their end. They were slaughtered in a broad day light all in the name of patriotism. According to Achinua Achebe, "Asaba Massacre as it would be known, was only one of many such postpogrom atrocities committed by Nigerian soldiers during the war. It became a particular abomination for Asaba residents, as many of those killed were titled Igbo chiefs and common folk alike, and their bodies disposed of with reckless abandon in mass graves, without regard to the wishes of the families of the victims or the town's ancient traditions"⁸. This is absolutely false patriotism What for goodness sake could lead to this crime? Is it not this type of war crime that Slobodan Milosevic underwent trial for in international court at Hague? But those who committed this evil in Nigeria related the incident in "Opota panel" (a Nigerian version of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation commission) and boasted with upraised hands that they did it for the sake of patriotism. Look at what Major General Ibrahim Haruna, belligerent and unremorseful commander (as Chinua Achebe refers to him) submitted at the panel:

"As the commanding officer and leader of the troops that massacred 500 men in Asabe, I have no apology for those massacred in Asaba, Owerri, and Ameke-Item. I acted as a soldier maintaining the peace and unity of Nigeria....As for me I have no apology"⁹

Is Asaba case not genocide? Does it not qualify to be tried in international court? That will be a discussion for another day? The Calabar Massacre was no difference. It was the same as Holocaust, the policy of eradicating the Jews throughout Europe. The brutal and blood lust federal troops decided to purge this city of its Igbo inhabitants. At the end of the treacherous ordeal, they shot at least 2000 Igbos and most of them civilians. Is this not genocide? And the hard question is, why have the perpetrators not been tried in international war criminal court at Hague for these atrocities against humanity? Perhaps

the world was fooled about what happened in Biafra because of the inadequate communication technology at that time. Let us define what genocide means.

Robert S. Leventhal states that the term genocide derives from the Latin (genos=race, tribe and cide=killing) and means literally the killing or murder of an entire tribe or people. The Oxford English Dictionary defines genocide as the deliberate and systematic extermination of an ethnic or national group...By genocide we mean the destruction of an ethnic or national group. The UN General Assembly adopted this term and defined it in 1946 as "...a denial of right of existence of entire human group. Hence UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide establishes genocide as an international crime. It defines Genocide as any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group such as:

1. Killing members of the group
2. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group
3. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part
4. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group
5. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group¹⁰.

Chinua Achebe remarked that at the end of the thirty-month war, "Biafra was vast smoldering rubble. The head count at the end of the war was perhaps 3million dead, which was approximately 20 percent of the entire population. This high proportion was mostly children. The cost in human lives made it one of the bloodiest civil wars in human history".¹¹ But the international community has never queried the perpetrators of this heinous crime against humanity.

However, the question is: How can this incident be removed from the bleeding hearts and sorrowful minds of the widows, children, friends and relations of those men who painfully lost their lives? This makes forgiveness rather difficult. Hence Hannah Arendt famously said: "These crimes do «transcend the domain of humane affairs»"¹² but humans can, and must, nevertheless confront them.

World full of evil

When we reflect deeply on our world today we notice that we are in the age full of evil. What in all intents and purposes that can cure the massive disease of the world sin that produces the pitiless Colombian drug Cartels or the situation that leads to the manufacture of products that the manufacturers know that they cause cancer, as they line their packets with profits. What can release the evil of Nigerian traders who import and sell expired drugs just to make quick money? What will heal the wound by afflicted those who conducted experiment that brought AIDS, which is devastating human beings and causing humanity much pains and agony?

We know the sufferings took place and are still taking place right now in Syria, Iraq, Sudan, as starvation is decimating the population. How can we forgive those who are behind so

many deaths in Nigeria in the name of ethno-religious disturbances, Herdsmen's killings in the North, the Massacre of the youths of the Indigenous people of Biafra by the military? How can we forgive those who are in the position to apprehend the culprits but advertently neglect their duty? How can we throw into oblivion, Timothy Mcvey's blowing up of a large building in Oklahoma city and killing so many grownups as they worked and innocent children as they played.

I went to Sierra Leone in March, 2003 for a meeting of Aecawa Seminary Rectors and experience what an English philosopher Thomas Hobbes meant when he said that man is a wolf to man. I visited the camp where thousands of young men amputated during the civil war were kept. Some were cut two legs, some one leg, some two hands some, one hand leaving their legs. The "rebels" I was told, were making experiments with human bodies. It was really an awful sight, which made me, ran down in tears. I wonder if that will ever go out of my memory. The priest who took me to this place said to me "we will never forgive the rebels". That was when the international court for war crimes has fixed a time to try the war criminals of Sierra Leone. I asked him: who are the criminals? Those who did the actual killings? What of those who provided the weapons that were used to affect the atrocities? As far as I know, there is no factory in Africa sub-Sahara that produces sophisticated ammunition. So, are those who sell those ammunitions legally or illegally not also war criminals? Of course market must be created in other not to keep those who are qualified to be human beings out of job. But where must the market be created? Of course the answer is straight - in the third world.

If what the West is doing is not only for their economic and political interests, why should Milosevic be tried for war crimes and the war criminals in Rwanda and Burundi tried but those of Nigeria left untouched? Is this not selective justice?

Forgiveness an Impossible possibility

The great American Jewish thinker of our epoch "Hannah Arendt is one of the few philosophers who recognize the world-shaking power of forgiveness"¹³. She traced its origin to the preaching of Jesus of Nazareth. Certainly the willingness to let go resentment and the desire to retaliate has a religious quality. Aristotle added a moral quality to it. In discussing prudence, he says that good sense has two dimensions: the ability to make correct judgment of what is fair and equitable; and a sense to forgive, to put oneself in another's place. Unless many people learn to put themselves in the other's place, our contemporary world seems doomed to worse violence than in the past. In his preaching and his way of life, Jesus as it were, takes forgiveness out of heaven and declares it to be a human necessity and possibility.

For him Christian forgiveness implies conversion (Mark 11:25). The promethean revolution which Jesus started and with which he radicalized Jewish tradition is that he has fetched the divine fire of forgiveness out of heaven for us and that he has shown that it is enclosed in our own action as a possibility and a necessity. . Because, according to Hannah Arendt, "our deeds are irreversible and unpredictable"¹⁴, thus, speaking of forgiveness remains wholesome and bearable only as long as forgiveness is continued to be viewed as an impossible possibility.

Forgiveness: A challenge to the injured

A German philosopher Karl Jaspers reflecting on the nature of German guilt and responsibility for the Holocaust, “distinguished four types of guilt: the criminal guilt of those who actually committed the crimes; the political guilt of those who helped such people to get power; the moral guilt of those who stood by doing nothing as the crimes were being committed; and finally the metaphysical guilt of those who survived while others were killed, thereby failing in their responsibility to do all that they might have done to preserve the standards of civilized humanity”¹⁵. In Nigerian case, the church cannot standby and watches the crimes being committed in Nigeria with the upraised hands. We note with dismay and grieve the situations of injustice, corruption (we are rated as the second most corrupt country in the world, if not the most), which is so gravely corroding public life, tribalism, political killings of all sorts, intimidation in every shape and form, oppression, lack of accountability which has taken roots in our administration quarters Harassment and extortion is the other of the day. The people travelling go through the ordeal of excruciating scrutiny at so many check points in this country with harsh treatment just for nothing but for the sake of extorting money from transporters. There was a case at Onitsha where the mobile policemen killed two people because they refused to be extorted. There are so many cases of confusion and mess of vouchers, inept bureaucratic system. . “All these are possible because of our heartless leaders. The situation causes untold hardship, lots of deaths, and sickness of all sorts, frustration on the part of poor masses and loss of hope for the future”¹⁶ ‘ Consequently, the situation breeds serious hatred for the people at the helm of affairs. And this calls for forgiveness on the part of poor masses that are always vulnerable to all these anomalies by the different regimes.

In fact, we Nigerians are in a society where we are faced with many problems. I met the military Bishop of France in 1999 during the world Christian military pilgrimage in Lourdes. I introduced myself as a Nigerian priest. He shouted immediately "O a great country with great problems". What baffles me was that when another person in our group .introduced himself as coming from Indian, a country thrice more populous than Nigeria the bishop in question did not make any negative comment.

In any case our Nigerian society partly shares in the guilt of our corrupt leaders: we give them seat in high places and some of us help them to assume responsible offices. The saying that "so long as men worship the Caesars and Napoleons, Caesars and Napoleons will duly arise and make them miserable" becomes true of any country that compromises with bad leadership.

What should we forgive?

Jubilee calls simply for forgiveness. So forgiveness is what receives priority. We all know that in Jubilee year 2000, the issue that came up most on the surface was the injustice in the distribution of world God-given wealth. The coalition that originated in the United Kingdom and later included the U.S. and over 60 other countries called for the cancellation of the debt to the poorest countries. Such a fundamental option for the poor is directly linked to the Jesus teaching in the New Testament. The Our Lord's prayer says forgive us

our debts as we forgive our debtors. The central point here is that during the Jubilee, all debts must be cancelled.

Whom should we forgive and from whom should we ask forgiveness

Alice Walker, a poet and novelist recounting her personal experience of racism in America remarked that, were she to refuse to forgive racism directed toward her, it would feel like a stone and a knot in her psychic system. This will obviously impede her from getting on with her own life peacefully. Her grace in forgiving reminds us of the great sin of America's white people-racism. The situation is still the same in America and Europe even though there is always a diplomatic and political pretence to regard the world as a global village using the word "one world" instead of "Third world" or undeveloped world or the current globalization moves which I see as neo-colonization. In Europe for example, a girl or a boy who went to business school and obtain Diploma certificate for a year's course in salesmanship feels strongly that he or she is superior to a black who studies medicine for seven years or any professional courses and obtains degree certificate. What is the reason for this? Just because of nothing but colour. Yes there are many colours - red, white, black, brown, yellow, green, pink and so on, but aesthetically speaking, who can give us the criterion for determining which colour is the best. As a matter of fact, colour is simply accidental and not substantial aspect of man. So to use colour as criterion for determining who should or should not be human being is a sin against nature, humanity and above all against God. It requires forgiveness from those who suffer because of their colour.

A serious case in point is the racism of the Nisei, in which the Japanese Americans were interned in their own country (America) during the World War II. The U.S government has asked for partial forgiveness fifty years later in the form of monetary grants. It reminds us of forgiveness which the Americans have to ask from the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki for destroying these cities and killing so many people. Here we can mention one Rev. Dr. Dan Chun of the Presbyterian Church of Honolulu who "narrated his personal experience of the effect of the action like this on the people of Japan"¹⁷. He said that when he visited Japan, he heard a Japanese member of the parliament share his feelings with more than hundred people from Japan, America, and other countries in Africa and Asia. He got up and said that he was a member of submarine. That he used to hate Americans because he fought against them during the World War II. But that night over the dinner, in front of more than hundred businessmen, politicians and military veterans, he shared a Japanese proverb that goes "The enemy of yesterday can be a close friend of today". And then he said that he now chose to reconcile with Americans and have them as close friends.

Again on another occasion, another member of the parliament got up to speak. He said that there were translators available at the international meeting holding in Japan but he chose to speak in English. He said he has never spoken English publicly before until that day because he hated Americans. He fought against them during the war. When the Americans dropped the bomb on Nagasaki he lost every one of his relatives. He wanted to revenge. But during that gathering in the year, 2001 in Tokyo, he said, "I desire reconciliation and so I shall speak English". We can see how much pain and depression this man has suffered from Americans.

Rev. Fr. Mateo has this to say:

*We must learn to forgive ourselves.... We often begin to blame ourselves and have guilt feelings. We should learn to forgive our own selves, put these things behind us and keep God at the centre of our life. If we do that, we will have a real love, peace, joy and happiness*¹⁸.

We should also forgive each other our shortcomings, our outbursts, our displaced angers and fears, our discriminating spirits - the dark sides of our hearts. We are obliged by calling as humans to hear one another with love even especially when we do not agree

Politics, Forgiveness and Reconciliation

According to Hannah Arendt, “without being forgiven, released from the consequences of what we have done, our capacity to act would, as it were, be confined to a single deed from which we could never recover; we would remain the victims of its consequences forever, not unlike the sorcerer's apprentice, who lacked the magic formula to break the spell”¹⁹. Forgiveness is both a spiritual and political act. She further avers, that forgiveness and reconciliation are embedded in politics. She attributes to Jesus the role of discovery of forgiveness in human affairs. The issue we have to address is this: How do societies get over evils of the past and how do they change for better? Here we find forgiveness relevant to social, economic and political life of the people as well as their personal relations. Arendt defines two faculties, which societies have and which can offer some suggestions as to a way out and some reason for hope. One is the faculty of forgiveness and the other is making and keeping promise. She sees in forgiveness some hope for the future. The contrast between the political behaviours of the victors in the World War I and those in World War II gives some support to her optimistic view. The vindictive spirit experienced by the German Weimar Republic after World War I contributed greatly to the rise of Hitler, and this differs clearly from the spirit expressed in Marshall plan and other restorative measures following World War II.

The South African truth and reconciliation commission is another good example where Archbishop Desmond Tutu and others have stressed that they would have No future without forgiveness. They had to find a way of healing their nation that took them beyond the cycle of violence and vengeance. Justice Oputa panel, a similar commission in Nigeria “created with the aim of healing the wounds of the past military regimes and Biafran genocide like our other commissions went into oblivion”²⁰. But we need the outcome for us to forgive easily the perpetrators of the tragedy we suffered and are unfortunately still suffering under the Nigerian political structure.

However, Arendt regards forgiveness and promises as human possibilities, which are born out of the necessity to live together. Hence “without forgiveness, the deeds from the past will remain hanging over the head of each new generation as Damocles sword and we would remain victims of the past. And without making promises, we would not be able to start durable relationship with one another”⁷ for promises create Island of security in ocean of uncertainty. Thus both faculties regard living together as a form of mutual dependence. More prosaically, President Clinton, speaking at the funeral of the assassinated Israeli

premier Yitzak Rabin, advised, "Those who cannot let go of the hatred of their enemies risk sowing the seeds of hatred within their own communities"²¹

So without a world that allows people to see forgiveness and reconciliation as a valid way of proceeding, and that it is not inappropriate for politicians to be moving in this direction, there would be no forgiveness in politics. The Peoples Democratic Party in Nigeria that massively rigged election and inflicted severe injuries on so many contestants especially from other parties and thinks that it is by surrounding its candidates with heavily armed security men, they will bring peace to the already polarized system. They have wrongly won the battle and have forgotten that peace has by that very act of political misdemeanor eluded the nation. It is good that they have now apologized to the democratic citizens of Nigeria for their mistakes of the past and promised to put things in proper perspective when voted to power in 2019 elections.

I am very strongly of the view that all should be involved in teaching that the best way to come out of social and political impasse is not violence and vengeance. I think it is also part of the works of Priests, Imams, and Rabbi and other religious leaders to help shape the society along line of reconciliation and forgiveness as always a better option. A story was told about how at the outbreak of fighting between Croats and Muslims in the central Bosnia, two Franciscan priests from Guca Gora decided to try to stop the fighting from spreading into their region. Despite threats to their lives, they walked through both Croatian and Muslim army lines in order to find Imam from the neighbouring village. They proposed bringing two local Muslims and Croat commanders to see if they could prevent violence from erupting among these troops. The three religious leaders then met at a Cafe where they negotiated an agreement that the two armies would not fight. Although, the region was later overrun by other troops, these commanders and their troops did not take part in the hostilities. This presents a food for thought for religious leaders in Nigeria, Iraq, Iran Afghanistan, Sudan, Syria and other countries with so many instances of religious riots.

The necessary conditions for forgiving the past

A Break from the Past

One and clear necessary condition for people to begin to forgive the past is the experience of a clear break from the past. A key element in this direction is to put an end the bloodshed, violence and abuse. For people to hope for the future, they must experience a significant degree of personal and collective security. After all, the seeds of the most horrendous crimes against humanity do not start just that way. They have their origins in the denial of the full humanity of the stranger and the non-recognition of the other as a human being. So cultures of violence and vengeance replaced by counter-culture that embodies values of peace, justice and truth that can help people come to terms with the traumas of the past in a constructive-future-oriented manner become imperative.

Culture of Justice and Peace

In addition to personal and collective sense of security, people will need to perceive some degree or form of justice. One of the major challenges facing those seeking to foster reconciliation between divided people is fashioning the most appropriate form of justice.

For example in Nigeria, in the case of Igbo massacre and that of the recent massacre of Benue people, appropriate form of justice fails because of the fact that it is polarised with religious and ethnic bigotry.

On the other hand, too active pursuit of justice in societies emerging out of division can result in a return to violent conflict and bloodshed. It is this fear that informed the Spanish transition process. It is also widespread in Cambodia. For example, a Cambodian Journalist arguing against attempts to hold trials of Khmer Rouge Cadres implicated in the genocide of 1975-79, expressed his view with painful honesty when he wrote in December 1998, saying that he knows that Khmer Rouge are bad and criminals, but there are too many to convict and some still remain strong. Therefore to safeguard the living, it is better and safe not to seek justice for the dead. Thus the type of justice we advocate transcends the conflicts of the past, for it contains seed of reconciliation. It is the one that acknowledges others as persons, created by, love by, and valued by the creator - God. Justice that makes us resist those that continue to inflict evil, by preventing their unjust actions, depriving them their freedom of inhuman behaviour. But above all, it is necessary that we have to forgive, and creative justice involves this function of forgiveness.

Culture of Truthfulness

This is very essential to reconciliation in societies emerging out of conflict and gross human rights abuse. In most cases, the truth, which makes men free, is the truth, which men prefer not to hear. But we must know that it is very important to unveil and acknowledge the truth about the criminal acts and wrongs of the past as a necessary condition for people to move on individually and collectively. Many advocates of truth commissions argue that they can heal the wounds of division and that trial, purges and pursuit of punitive justice can be very effective. Be it as it may, there are historical examples of transition process where elite have agreed to "bury the past" as a means of moving on to a new future. Such was the case of Spain after the death of the dictator Franco in 1975. He came to power through military rebellion and subsequent civil war. Then after his victory in 1939, his regime became infamous for its barbaric treatment of defeated Republicans and repression practiced throughout the country. It is really amazing that after his tyrannical regime and death, there was nothing like purge or truth commission but rather an exercise in collective amnesia, a pact of oblivion. What was prominent was the peaceful transition to democratic rule. Even though this process of letting bygones be bygones was carried out by the elite class, the people at the grassroots supported it. It was so because to be sure, to introduce the past into the present might lead to further bloodshed, conflict and pain.

However, in most cases for those who suffered loss and pain to be denied justice and at the same time required to accept an inadequate and incomplete version of truth is a bitter pill to swallow. Speaking about the case of Sierra Leone, The Bishops of ITCABIC said:

To have peace, those who have been wronged must be prepared to forgive. This presupposes that those who have wronged others must be willing to demonstrate a true and genuine sense of remorse and repentance. The deep seated feelings of anger, bitterness

*and hatred in the different societies cannot be glossed over by token words of sorry let bye-gone be bye-gone or forgive and forget.*²²

As a matter of fact, it is doubtful that the pain of the past can be left behind, and reconciliation in any deep sense approached without addressing the structure of power, inequality and exclusion that constituted the framework within which the violence of the old order was perpetrated and endured. This is exactly the problem we are facing in Nigeria today. The same old order that perpetrated marginalization, corruption, hatred, abuse, ethnic, racial and religious bigotry, injustice and human right violation of all sorts since the country's independence still hold the country to ransom. Dim Odumegwu Ojukwu the leader of the defunct Biafran Freedom Fighters, aptly remarks in Ahaira declaration about 50 years ago:

"The federation of Nigeria is today as corrupt, as unprogressive, as oppressive and irreformable as Ottoman Empire was in Eastern Europe over a century ago. And in contrast, the Nigerian federation inform it was constituted by the British cannot by any stretch of imagination be considered an African necessity. Yet we are being forced to sacrifice our very existence as a people to the integrity of that ramshackle creation that has no justification either in history or in the freely expressed wishes of the people -Nigeria was made up of peoples and groups with very little in common"²³

Today, these evils of the past are still with us. So for us to move together along the path of reconciliation, it is crucial that a sustained effort is made to transform the structures and circumstances of everyday life that embody and perpetuate the old divisions between "us" and "them", between the perpetrator and the victim. This informs the clamour from all sides of Nigeria for a Reconstruction of its political/administrative structure. . As it is, if Nigeria or any other country that is in need of reform wants to have a sincere and lasting peace, a Reconstruction that will address and counter the inequalities and injustices that formed her base is a *conditio sine qua non*.

The great power of Forgiveness

A saying attributed to Francis Bacon goes that a man who studieth revenge keeps his own wounds green. Let us note here that choice is always present in forgiveness. If we do not want to forgive, we face the negative consequences. But if we forgive we gain a lot. Let us see now the value of forgiveness and the miracle it can perform in our lives as individuals and political society.

It helps us to live in the light of the present

Forgiveness helps us to live in the light of the present potentialities rather than in the shadow of past sins. He who seeks and offers forgiveness, shows that he does not want to shut himself up in the past. He does not want to be dictated by the past. What is written in the Lenten Meditation pamphlet of 2002 of the Franciscan Fathers in Bardel Germany brings this out clearly:

Man mochte vergeben und sagt dock: Warum hast du mir das angetan? An solchen Tagen gibt es nur eine Losung: Geduld. Viel Geduld und suche nach Versohnung. Wenn du nicht

*vergeben kannst, entsteht eine Mauer. Und eine Mauer ist der Anfang van einem Gefangnis*²⁴.

This portion of the meditation in German language, tells us of “that person who wants to forgive and still says: Why have you done this to me? On days like that, there is only one solution: Patience, a lot of patience and search for reconciliation. If you cannot forgive, there stands a wall before you. And a wall is the beginning of prison.

Forgiveness is really about the future. It is the will to live together again in community. In forgiveness, there is creative moment of grace, a break between the past and the future which a German philosopher Martin Heidegger says, *kommrecht von Oben* -comes direct from the above.

Forgiveness takes us completely away and disconnects us from the fantasies of retaliation and vengeance we harbour towards those who have previously hurt us. Why do we direct our energy in spending time and thought on how we have been wronged; the unfairness of life? Those who consume their resources in this way, have few left for growth and development. Their wounds stay open for years and they block healing completely. Hence we can channel the energy that released anger into new projects with new people. This helps us to see something in a new light. In line with this thinking the Bishops of ITCABIC remark:

*We cannot remain prisoners of the past. We need a healing of memories so that past evils will not come back again. This does not mean to forget the past but to re-examine them with a new attitude where we see love building up ane*²⁵

We must know that to forgive the past and start life anew could be amazingly rewarding.

Healing power

Forgiveness is the heart of healing process because it promotes new beginning both for the forgiver and the forgiven and thereby setting both free. An expert research has shown that repressed bitterness and hatred is bad for health. Chronic stress or bitterness compromises the human immune system in a way that makes people more vulnerable to wide variety of diseases. Whatever is repressed is bound to resurface. Resentment limits one's emotional, physical and spiritual growth. Forgiveness releases the offender from prolonged anger, rage and stress that have been linked to physiological problems such as cardiovascular diseases, high blood pressure, hypertension, cancer and other illnesses. A study at Harvard school of public health found that men who scored highest on an anger scale were three times more likely to develop heart disease over a seven year period than low scores. These negative outcomes from held anger have been repeated a number of times. It is plausible that those who forgive were less depressed and anxious, slept better and were free from obsessive thoughts and also from revenge fantasies.

If we let go the mistakes of others, a lot of bitterness and pain will vanish. It means dumping our excess luggage - those suitcases of bitterness and hatred towards others. In the healing endeavour of psychotherapy, much effort is expended in helping clients to learn to forgive.

One can also be restored to health by receiving forgiveness from the one who has been harmed. Therefore the spirit that is able to forgive frees itself for healing, for creative growth, for renewed possibilities for connection, community and ultimately for both personal and social peace.

Forgiveness breaks the cycle of harm

Forgiveness carries with it extraordinary power to break the cycle of harm, anger, revenge and resentment. Without it, life is governed by an endless cycle of resentment and retaliation. It is not a case of forgetting or excusing or **smoothens** over evil actions. It is rather a decision by the one who was injured not to remain trapped by bitterness, anger or the desire for revenge.

As a matter of fact, the popular assumption is that justice involves retaliation and revenge. Well, it has a long history. We can see it prescribed in the code of Hammurabi almost 4000 years ago, "If a free man has put out the eye of another free man, they shall put out his eye". One text in the book of Exodus (Ex. 21:23) advocates the same: "You shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot". This is nothing but law of retaliation. This was also common with the Greeks. One of their dramatists Aeschylus witnessed it at Athens and was worried about its consequences. Just like Ghandi, long after him, imagined what a world of eyeless and toothless people would look like if we continue to demand an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. His aim was to find out whether there was any other way to deal with crime than by committing another.

In his drama about "Orestes and the Furies", King Agamemnon sacrifices his daughter Iphegenia to the goddess Diana to secure favourable winds for their conquest of Troy. His wife Clytemnestra, Iphegenia's mother, is outraged and in retaliation kills her husband, Agamemnon. Their son Orestes is left in a tight position - to kill or not to kill his mother. To kill his father's murderer is thought to be right. But then to kill his mother is wrong, which he non-the-less did. Now the question is, should Orestes be killed? Aeschylus seeks a way to put a stop to this retributive, retaliatory justice. As the drama develops, the jury decided to reject vengeance and thus avoids civil war and corrects what is evil in their society. This story reminds us of the situation once upon a time in Nigeria. It was the case of 1966 military coup in Nigeria, which was wrongly interpreted as Igbo (tribe in Nigeria) intrigue to eliminate the Northern political elites. In revenge, the Northerners committed another crime of massacring thousands of Igbos in the North, which eventually led to Biafran war of self-defense. We can imagine how many people lost their lives and properties to that war brought about by vengeance. Human relation in society is a matter of justice and healing, not revenge. Forgiveness heals wounds and happiness is possible again.

Restores broken relationship

Forgiveness is exact opposite of revenge. It offers wholesome openings that are capable of restoring broken relationships, which keeps perpetrator and victim captive in endless

vicious circle. Revenge is based on repetition; for each blow, one can expect a counter-blow, while forgiveness is a creative and innovative act for restoring good relationship.

Helps our "enemies" not to gain power over us

Many of us do not know that when we hate our enemies, we are giving them power over us; power over our appetites, our blood pressure, our health, and our happiness. Most people feel that they cannot forgive until the other has made some move to recognise the harm done. But this is simply not the case. They may not recognise or admit the harm. So admission is not essential for healing. This is in line with the instruction of the Holy Father Pope John Paul II. Bishop George Biguzzi from Makena diocese, Sierra Leone in his Easter message of 23' April, 2000 says:

WE Christians pray daily to be forgiven as we forgive those who sin against us. Jesus from the cross forgave his murderers.... We must offer forgiveness even when the guilty side is not repentant. We must conquer evil with good. Offer forgiveness and receive peace²⁶

We must know that forgiveness is 100% the responsibility of the injured party because it is only our behaviour that we can control. The most important truth here is that forgiving is for our own sake, even if the other does not ask for forgiveness or admits any wrong. It is for our health, our wellness and future openness to life.

Helps us to hold to our dignity as human beings

In exercising the power of forgiveness, people can liberate themselves, escape the grasp of the past and become more fully human. For instance, the discriminated blacks in America can only save themselves from the sin of the past through forgiveness. In most cases as this, forgiveness is most often the only recourse we have that will not make things worse. The past is left where it belongs - to the past, so that people can liberate themselves, escape the grasp of the past and become more fully human. It brings sense of peace and well being. It can as well enhance our self-esteem and give us hope again. Yes, it empowers us. Anger, appears powerful but leaves us feeling frustrated and powerless, but forgiveness which appears weak in the eyes of men leaves us feeling stronger and less vulnerable to others.

It creates a healthy love relationship

A saying goes "To err is human, to forgive is Divine" and I believe and agree with this. Mother Theresa warns that if we really want to love, we must learn how to forgive. Thus healthy love relationships are not possible without forgiveness. We cannot have a loving and rewarding relationship with anyone else, much less ourselves if we continue to hold on to things that happened in the past. Regardless of whatever the situation may be, making peace with our past love partner, our parents, children, boss, or anyone who we think may have wronged us is only to improve our chances of healthy relationship ; with ourselves and others. In actual fact, it is not really possible to truly be present and available to new relationship until we heal the hurt and upsets of the past. So if we want peace of mind, we must forgive. The Bishop of ITCABIC expresses the same view when reacting to the ugly situation of hatred and anger brought by civil war in Sierra leone saying:

"Many people have been deeply hurt by war. The warmth of human relationship marked by respect; understanding and acceptance can help to overcome such feelings of hurt. The freeing encounter with forgiveness can be experienced even by a wounded heart thanks to the healing power of love"²⁷

As a matter of fact, the same energy we use to hate (not to forgive), is the same energy we need to create a new and exciting relationship together; a relationship anchored in unconditional love. Hence forgiveness makes an enduring love possible.

CONCLUSION

Vengeance is nothing more than the "re-acting against an original trespassing. Therefore, in conclusion, we stress once more that vengeance and conflict which have continued to trail the globe are very much rooted in the lack of forgiveness and reconciliation. In fact, forgiveness has become a political and legal ideal in cases where massive moral injuries threaten to extinguish human plurality and dignity. Seen as a willingness to continually participate in an imperfect world with civility, those willing to forgive demonstrate the ability to begin again not only despite the social facts of moral injuries and atrocities of the past. Forgiving victims who are able to respond creatively rather than vindictively are said to escape the vicious cycle of violence and conflict. And an ideal reconciliation prevents, once and for all, the use of the past as the seed of renewed conflict. It consolidates peace, breaks the cycle of violence and strengthens newly established political and social relationship among members of community.

Footnote

¹ Wojtyla K., Sign of contradiction, (St. Paul Publication, 1979), 195.

²² The Bishop of ITCABIC speak, 2001, 131.

³ Effects Resaerch Foundation, Achieved from the original on September 19, 2007, Retrieved September, 18, 2008. Total number of deaths is not known precisely – acute (within two to four months) deaths Hiroshima, 90,000-166,000, Nagasaki, 60,000-80,000.

⁴ Reihold Neibuhr, An introduction of Christian ethics, (New York/London: 1932, 223. Lehmann O., "Forgiveness" in John Macquarrie/James Childress (eds), A New Dictionary of Christian ethics).

⁵ Reihold Neibuhr, 224.

⁶ Spirituality while Facing Tragedy: How than shall we live. This article appeared in No Foundation, Summer, 1998, pp. 5-10.

⁷ Chinua Achebe , There Was a Country: A personal History of Biafra,(Allen Lane an imprint of Pengium Books,, 2012), 134

⁸ Chinua Achebe, 134

⁹ Chinua Achebe, 135.

¹⁰ <http://www.usmmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?moduleIeld-10007043>

¹¹ Chinua Achebe, 227.

¹² Arendt H., The Human Condition, (University of Chicago Press, 1958,),307.

¹³ Arendt H., The Human Condition, 238.

¹⁴ Arendt H., The Human Condition, 233.

¹⁵ Anowai, E., Easter and Forgiveness, (Pub. Rex Charles & Patrick Ltd.2005),16.

¹⁶ Easter and Forgiveness, 15.

¹⁷ Chum Dan, Sermon of the week: First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu, September 1, 2002, 1.

¹⁸ Mateo, S., This is Christian Renewal, Provincial of Hawaii, Dec. 1968, 13.

¹⁹ Arendt H., The Human Condition, 213.

²⁰ *Chinua Achebe*, 135.

²¹ This speech was delivered on 6 November, 1995

²² This Bishop of ITCABIC Speak, March 2001, 11.

²³ Ojukwu Odumegwu, The Ahiara Declaration (the principles of the Biafran Revolution), Mark Press, Geneva, Switzerland, 1969), 10-11.

²⁴ Fastens- Meditationen, Montag, 18 Marz, 2002, 40.

²⁴ Bishop of ITCABIC Speak

²⁵ Bishop of ITCABIC Speak, 110.

²⁶ , Bishop of ITCABIC Speak 122.

²⁷ This is from the joint Pastoral letter of the bishop of ITCABIC, 8th December 1999, Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception.