The coherence of forgiveness : an essay on the theology of being forgiven and forgiving others.

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THE COHERENCE OF FORGIVENESS

AN ESSAY ON THE THEOLOGY OF BEING FORGIVEN AND FORGIVING OTHERS

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ABSTRACT

The Christian understanding of redemption includes the idea that the individual needs forgiveness of God for sins committed. But forgiveness is understood not only as a divine action; it is also as an ethical obligation. Christians need to be forgiven but equally they need to forgive; they are necessarily both the object and subject of forgiveness. The question which lies behind this thesis regards the sense which this objective and subjective forgiveness makes: is the Christian concept of forgiveness coherent?

One feature of this work is that it considers and connects the discussion of forgiveness in several different kinds of writing. The first part of the thesis is a review of the way in which forgiveness is understood in the synoptic gospels and in British atonement theology of the twentieth century.

Secular writing on forgiveness is considered in the following section. This is done in such a way as to allow a comparison of the insights afforded by various approaches. Thus in chapter three recent discussions of forgiveness in philosophical ethics are considered against the background of a real case of forgiveness. In chapter four, on the other hand, recent theological writing on forgiveness and atonement is considered in relation to discussions of forgiveness in contemporary literature.

In the third part of the thesis Anglican and Roman Catholic approaches to liturgical forgiveness are discussed. This leads to a consideration of the nature of guilt and shame and a reappraisal of their theological and ethical significance.

The work concludes with an argument about the nature and coherence of forgiveness based on the foregoing studies and analysing the relationship between forgiveness and others, time, God and the self.

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Table of Contents

PROLOGUE

In this thesis I examine the nature and meaning of forgiveness in a variety of intellectual contexts and make an exploration of the distinction between the moral emotions of shame and guilt. The thesis is not, nor could it be, an exhaustive study of forgiveness in all kinds of theological literature. It is a study in some depth of certain areas which have been chosen partly because of what they reveal about the nature of forgiveness in their own right, partly because of their theological importance and partly because of the way in which placing them together reveals important aspects of what I am calling here the coherence of forgiveness: that is the way in which interpersonal and divine forgiveness mutually make sense of each other.

The predispositions of the author are important factors in the editorial process of deciding what areas to include in the study, as are the time and place of writing and the fact that the work will be submitted for degree examination. Another author may have given less space to the sacrament of penance and liturgical forgiveness, but it is only by studying such phenomena in historical and ecclesial context that the underlying dynamics in the development of the Anglican and Roman traditions can be seen and the theological and indeed psychological questions predicated by such developments revealed. It is the in-depth study of this area of confession and absolution which clarifies the need for a theological and then pastoral and liturgical response to the philosophical and psychological nuancing of the language of guilt and shame which have recently become possible.

Time of writing is not the only factor behind the decision to integrate narrative and more propositional and analytical philosophy and theology. Part of the power of the *question* of the thesis: 'what is the relationship between forgiveness between people and that of people by God?' lies in making the human

subject, and therefore subjectivity, relevant at every level. Another author, or one with more space, may well have had a chapter on the psychology of response to injury, offence or violation, but this particular work makes use of fictional narratives which present plausible scenarios in which the possibility of forgiveness is raised, or in which pertinent questions about forgiveness are asked.

Similar reasons lie behind the detailed study of the synoptic accounts of forgiveness narratives and the conceptual integrity of the evangelists' approaches rather than an examination of the Pauline account of justification or the Johannine poetry of love. The point is to allow the human subject, with its irrationalities and emotions, into the theology of forgiveness. This is no idle humanism. Forgiveness, for all its importance in Christian, and other, theology is a way of coping with the conflicting demands of human emotions and the theology of forgiveness is a second order reflection involving analysis of the logic of such responses but also a deeper study of their nature and dynamics.

However, this work does not extensively draw on the area known as the psychology of religion nor on any schools of pastoral theology. The reason for this not unrelated to another reason why narratives are used. What is at issue here is the fluency with which connections can be made between one area or one study and another. It was a matter of authorial judgement that the more technical psychological material was not malleable to the needs of the developing argument. Moreover, while some have looked at forgiveness from the point of view of counselling, their conclusions and methods leave one with little to say about forgiveness itself. In this way the psychological material was surprisingly infertile compared with the liturgical material which, in consequence, has been given more space.

It does not seem necessary to argue for the inclusion of a chapter on the way in which forgiveness has been discussed in philosophical ethics. The rigor of the discipline is sufficient reason, especially when considered alongside the recency of many of the studies. While some important works are criticised for

their lack of breadth and sense of context, the apparatus which has been formed through the disciplined examination of some of the concepts implicit in the exercise or talk of forgiveness is helpful, both directly and indirectly, in exploring the theology of forgiveness.

In the pages that follow, then, is to be found an exploration of the nature and theology of forgiveness which has at its heart a question about the relationship between human and divine forgiveness. Some material has been chosen to assist this exploration on the grounds that it gives an insight into the established theology of the area and also has something important to add to the understanding or answering of the basic question of coherence. This is the rationale for both chapter one on forgiveness in the synoptic gospels and chapter two on the way in which the concept of forgiveness and the model of human forgiveness is used and developed in British atonement theology. Other material is included because it represents a lively and rigorous area of contemporary enquiry or exploration: specifically the holocaust narrative and philosophical writing in chapter three and the contemporary atonement theology alongside the current literature in chapter four.

The detailed study of the dynamics of the sacrament of confession in chapters five and six give opportunity for a historical approach to a situation where Christian forgiveness is very much at stake and possibly even defined: in the ministration of priests to whom auricular confession is made. The question of absolution is helpfully clarified by the ethical distinction between forgiveness and pardon and the pastoral, liturgical and theological developments which have occurred in both Roman and Anglican churches in this area attest a process of considerable seriousness and importance.

The final chapter, like the previous two, is somewhat elliptical in its approach to forgiveness. For while they attended to the theologisation of a liturgical context and occurrence, this focuses on those emotions which forgiveness itself might be expected to remove, or indeed, the presence of which would or should lead the

subject in the pursuit of forgiveness. Just as it was felt that a consideration of the historical and liturgical context of priestly forgiveness would clarify the nature of forgiveness so the question of what it is that forgiveness deals with, in the emotionality of the one who needs forgiveness, should throw light on what it is that forgiveness does for a human being.

The advantage of the method employed here, with its use of narratives, non-theological disciplines and its interest in liturgy and the philosophy of psychology is first that it attempts to do justice to contributions that have been made in all the areas investigated and second that it throws unique light on the concept and reality of the coherence of forgiveness.

INTRODUCTION

THE DIVERSITY OF FORGIVENESS

Theologians who write about forgiveness refer to the centrality and prominence of the concept within the Christian religion. For R.C. Moberly, for instance, it was of 'exceeding prominence'[1] and for H.R. Mackintosh it is "one of the foci from which it is possible and natural to survey the whole circumference of Christian truth".[2] It was Charles Williams, however, who put it most bluntly: "If there is one thing which is obviously either a part of the universe or not - and on knowing whether it is or not our life depends - it is the forgiveness of sins."[3]

However, several authors have suggested that there is relatively little writing in Christian theology and ethics which directly addresses the questions of forgiveness. In a bibliographical note attached to a dictionary article on forgiveness Paul Lehmann notes that, "the discussion of forgiveness in the literature of Christian theology and ethics is conspicuously slight."[4] It has also been remarked that forgiveness has been a relatively unexplored topic in philosophical ethics.

One reason that forgiveness is a neglected topic is that the word itself became unpopular. The origins of this lie in the suspicion generated by psychoanalytic criticism of the language and systems of guilt. It is clearly articulated by Paul Tillich. In conversation with Carl Rogers, for instance, Tillich remarks:

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[1]Moberly, R.C. *Atonement and Personality* (London: Murray) 1901 p48
[2]Mackintosh, H.R. *The Christian Experience of Forgiveness* (London: Nisbet) 1927 p1
[3]Williams, C. *The Forgiveness of Sins* (London: Faber) 1950 p107
[4]Lehmann, P. 'Forgiveness' in *A New Dictionary of Christian Ethics* (London: SCM) 1986 p233

> "I do not use the word 'forgiveness' anymore because this often produces a bad superiority in him who forgives and humiliation in him who is forgiven. Therefore I prefer to speak of the concept of acceptance. If you accept this acceptance, then I think I can confess that I have learned it from psychoanalysis. I have learned to translate an ideological concept which doesn't communicate any longer and replaced it by the way in which a psychoanalyst accepts his patients: not judging him but accepting him just because he is not good, but he has something within himself that wants to be good."[5]

In *The Courage to Be* he underlines the importance of this language of acceptance, seeing it as part of a new reformation.

> "One must remind theologians and ministers that in the fight against the anxiety of guilt by psychotherapy the idea of acceptance has received the attention and gained the significance which in the Reformation period was seen in phrases like 'forgiveness of sins' or 'justification by faith'. Accepting acceptance though being unacceptable is the basis for the courage of confidence."[6]

Tillich's inspiration for interpreting the condition of the sinful individual before God is the image of the guilty person with the non-judging counsellor. As he puts it in a famous sermon: "You are accepted. You are accepted, accepted by that which is greater than you, and the name of which you do not know. Simply accept the fact that you are accepted."[7]

The language of acceptance is also taken up in J.V. Taylor's *The Go-Between God*. "Men did not have to be good for God to accept them," he urges, "God dealt only in gifts not in wages... No rules - only God! No conditional merit - only forgiving acceptance".[8]

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[5]Kirschenbaum, H. and Henderson, V.L. *Carl Rogers Dialogues* (London: Constable) 1990 p72

[6]Tillich, P. *The Courage to Be* (London: Fontana/Collins) 1952 p160 It is worth noting that while Tillich sees acceptance as the basis of *confidence* Kenneth Kirk writing earlier in the twentieth century saw forgiveness as the basis of *zeal*. The languages are different but convey a similar idea. See Kirk, K. *Some Principles of Moral Theology* (London: Longmans)1920

[7]Tillich, P. *The Shaking of the Foundations* (London: Penguin) 1962 p163

[8]Taylor, J.V. *The Go-Between God* (London: SCM) 1972 p99

This emphasis on the gratuity of forgiveness is of course appropriate, but it is simultaneously unsatisfactory. The reason for this is that the language of grace and acceptance seems to leave the problems of ethics and responsibility untouched. This is not merely nascently antinomian but also suggests a simple passivity on the part of the one who is being accepted. The language of acceptance is therefore sometimes being used at the expense of the idea of personal responsibility.

There are many points in the chapters which follow where this tension between acceptance and responsibility is at work behind the scenes. On the one hand it is possible so to emphasise the responsibility of the offender or injurer or sinner as to deny that there is anything in forgiveness other than a self-generated repudiation of the badness of their past. This is forgiveness as radical repentance which transforms the individual into a new moral identity. On the other hand it is equally possible to so emphasise the empathy and warmth of the one who accepts or forgives that there is nothing for the offender to do other than offend and wait. This is forgiveness as radical acceptance. The truth, of course, is that forgiveness involves both repentance and acceptance, and both in a complex plurality of ways. At different times and in different cultures, however, different poles of forgiveness are emphasised, sometimes to the apparent distortion and destruction of the concept. During the era sometimes (very roughly) known as that of Latin theology, which ran in the Roman Catholic Church from the time of the Counter-Reformation to the Second Vatican Council forgiveness was seen as repentance, and repentance understood in a particularly limited and proscribed way. A reaction to this is found in a more modern era, which could be described (just as roughly) as American, in which repentance is almost entirely eclipsed and is replaced by acceptance as the primary or even exclusive aspect of forgiveness. The author Don Browning comes close to this in his *Atonement and Psychotherapy* when he writes that: "Forgiveness is [God's] unconditioned empathic acceptance in spite of man's rejection of it.

Forgiveness is the nature of grace."[9] The reference here is to Carl Rogers' 'unconditional positive regard', which is the basis for non-directive client-centred therapy.

To focus on 'forgiveness', however, is to consider both the 'repentance' and the 'acceptance' sides of the coin. As the brief analysis suggested in the previous paragraph was intended to clarify, this is not merely a matter of the use of words. For instance, sometimes people will use either the word 'repentance' or 'acceptance' with a richer meaning than that which was suggested above and thereby get closer to the heart of forgiveness. This is the case in some occurrences of Tillich's use of 'acceptance' language where it is clear that his uneasiness about forgiveness is in part merely semantic. What he means by 'acceptance' is recognisable as a form of forgiveness; as, for instance, when he writes in *The Courage to Be* that the acceptance of God is, "the only and ultimate source of a courage to be which is able to take the anxiety of guilt and condemnation into itself."[10] And the point might be made that he is using psychological language not in a merely uncritical way but in an attempt to enrich that discourse with a theological dimension. The truth of this, however, does not impinge on the undeniable reality that there are many instances where acceptance language is used at the expense of a full understanding of forgiveness, one which does justice to the personal responsibility of the offender.

This point is one of the concerns which lies behind a pertinent contribution to a Liturgical Symposium on Penance and Reconciliation by Karl-Heinrich Bieritz.[11] Basing his contribution on a short story by the Russian author Tendriakov, Biertiz argues that what is at issue in penance is the need not so much to be accepted as to take responsibility. He puts it that in our culture excuse and explanation replace accountability and responsibility as the response to human action.

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[9]Browning, D. *Atonement and Psychotherapy* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press) 1966 p707

[10]Tillich, P. *The Courage to Be* p162

[11]Bieritz, K.-H. 'Humankind in Need of Reconciliation' in *Studia Liturgica* 18 1 A Worshipping Church Penitent and Reconciling 1988

> "Who can still seriously speak of personal individual guilt, when the behavioural sciences so clearly and irrefutably discover the biological, psychological, and societal mechanisms that ultimately determine this behaviour? All that remains are at most feelings of guilt, burdensome and even injurious relics of an assumed false consciousness that still thinks it has its own responsibility for actions and attitudes which are determined in one way or another by environment or natural disposition."[12]

He bemoans the secular and vapid nature of our exculpatory culture writing that:

> "Where, previously, religious systems were able to proclaim the forgiveness of guilt, today we have offered to us clarificatory theories which can explain to the wrongdoer and his accusers the deeper causes of his behaviour and so acquit him of final responsibility for his deeds."[13]

It is for this reason that he finds the short story such a helpful vehicle for his thoughts. The simple plot is that a sixteen year old schoolboy shoots his drunkard father who had been maltreating his mother for years but then suffers both from a guilty response and from a barrage of excuses and justifications for his action provided by members of his community. The situation is resolved, however when the boy stands up to assert his own guilt, responsibility and blame. Bieritz applauds the courage of self-blame:

> "*I myself am to blame*: when I say that, I step outside the endless chain of cause and effect. I interrupt the chain, for a brief eternal moment. Whatever may have contributed to causing my deed, I am guilty. In saying that, I claim for myself a little freedom, a bit of humanity, which cannot simply be derived from the facts themselves."[14]

Responsibility, culpability and blame are not necessarily liberating. The point, however, is that they are proper consequences of adult

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[12]Bieritz, K.-H. 'Humankind in Need of Reconciliation' p40
[13]Bieritz, K.-H. 'Humankind in Need of Reconciliation' p41
[14]Bieritz, K.-H. 'Humankind in Need of Reconciliation' p47

actions and as such assert the dignity and humanity of the actor. But while guilt and responsibility affirm the facticity of the consequences of human actions, forgiveness primarily has to do with transcending the consequences of responsible actions.

This point is made in a classic text on forgiveness in twentieth century writing, namely the brief passage devoted to it in Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition*[15]. Arendt defines forgiveness as redemption from what she calls the predicament of irreversibility. She sees this as especially important because the consequences of an action are often not apparent to the actor at the time of commission:

> "Without being forgiven, released from the consequences of what we have done, our capacity to act would, as it were, be confined to one single deed from which we would never recover; we would remain the victims of its consequences for ever, not unlike the sorcerer's apprentice who lacked the magic formula to break the spell."[16]

But, as she equally asserts, there is a parallel need for people to be held to their promises and to the consequences of their actions, for without this they lose their identity. These faculties of promise and forgiveness are, she maintains, ineluctably social, as is all morality. "No one can forgive himself and no one can feel bound by a promise made only to himself; forgiving and promising enacted in solitude or isolation remain without reality and can signify no more than a role played before one's self."[17]

In order to be habitable, however, the social and moral sphere must be an arena of forgiveness. She credits Jesus of Nazareth with this discovery, understanding his teaching to be that unwitting offences should be overlooked when the offender engages in *metanoia* and reports a change in mind from that mentality which led to the offence.

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[15]Arendt, H. *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) 1958
[16]Arendt, H. *The Human Condition* p237
[17]Arendt, H. *The Human Condition* p237

The moral and social import of forgiveness resides in the fact that it is based on the determination to act freely, to *respond* rather than to *re-act* to an offence or injury. In this way an act of forgiveness frees the victim as well as the offender:

> "Forgiving, in other words, is the only reaction which does not merely re-act but acts anew and unexpectedly, unconditioned by the act which provoked it and therefore freeing from the consequences both the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven. The freedom contained in Jesus' teaching of forgiveness is the freedom from vengeance, which incloses both doer and sufferer in the relentless automatism of the action process, which by itself would never come to an end."[18]

Forgiveness is thus a serious and social matter. In it the fault is weighed against the value of the person who injured and the decision is taken in favour of the person. Consequently forgiveness is not always possible. It exists, as she puts it, in a mutual relation with punishment: it being possible only to forgive those cases which it is possible to punish and possible to punish those cases which it is possible to forgive. This means that the language of forgiveness does not connect with what Kant called radical evil. She also notes that Jesus' teaching on forgiveness is directed against *hamartanein* 'trespasses', and not *skandala* 'offences'.[19]

There was very little extended theological reflection on forgiveness at the time when Arendt wrote. In 1968, however, a series of papers was published in *Theology* which taken together sketch out the scope and compass of any work which would address the question of the coherence of forgiveness.[20] The papers reveal some of the different ways in which the word 'forgiveness' can be taken within the bounds of theology.

What the papers have in common is a sense of the importance and centrality of their subject. John Hapgood's opening sentences make

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[18]Arendt, H. *The Human Condition* p241
[19]Arendt, H. *The Human Condition* p240
[20]These papers were originally presented to a conference of the clergy of the diocese of Leicester.

the point: "Christianity is about the forgiveness of sins. The theme was anticipated by the prophets, proclaimed by Jesus and the early Church, and summarised in the Lord's prayer. The duty to forgive is a prime responsibility placed upon all Christians. And the world certainly needs forgiveness, both among individuals and groups."[21] The contributors, John Hapgood, C.F.D. Moule, Jack Dominion and Peter Walker attend to facets of theology, psychology or spirituality which are implicated in the concept of forgiveness. Hapgood, for instance, is concerned about the moral arrogance and condescension of the would-be forgiver and suggests that: "True Christian forgiveness is only possible on the basis that we ourselves are equally involved in the evil we seek to forgive - and are forgiven!... True forgiveness lies beyond morality; like sin it is a religious rather than a moral concept".[22]

C.F.D. Moule has in mind divine-human reconciliation, atonement, in his consideration of 'forgiveness'. He aims to "clarify certain considerations that seem to me basic in any approach to a Christian understanding of forgiveness"[23] His considerations are: that analogies (such as ransom, sacrifice, sanctification, the clearing of debt, the pronouncing of a verdict) for the process of forgiveness are crucial to religious seriousness; as is the remembrance that they are analogies. The value of free, responsible personality is an axiom and must be a controlling factor in the language, especially the analogical language, which attends to forgiveness. This means that any attempt to relate to a wrong-doer must be motivated not by the thought that they should get what they deserve but by the thought that they should be morally raised to the level of repenting of what they have done. The third point is that forgiveness is a costly process precisely because persons are precious. "The lesions in the tissues of personal relationships (personhood being what God made it) cannot be repaired and healed without *expenditure* - the

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21 Hapgood, J. 'Guilt and Forgiveness' in *Theology* 71 1968 p387

22 Hapgood, J. 'Guilt and Forgiveness' p392

23 Moule, C.F.D. 'The Christian Understanding of Forgiveness' in *Theology* 72 1968 p435

expenditure of healing, creative, life-energy such as is mobilised in a living organism when it suffers disease."[24]

The Roman Catholic psychiatrist, Jack Dominion suggests that dynamic psychology is the key to the understanding of forgiveness, and that parental responses to children's moral transgressions are the key to developing personhood.[25] He argues that people learn how to relate and forgive long before they know anything about reason, and so reason, and therefore most of what theologians have to say, has very little to do either with the way in which people receive or offer forgiveness. People grow up with a variety of pathologies, one of which is a 'guilt for wanting', but there are other guilts too, and the Church must be careful in the way in which it deals with such innocents as experience them.

Dominion considers that only two faults require forgiveness: failure to love self and failure to love neighbour. He is relatively silent on the first and by way of considering the second he deals with the psychological issues which arise when coping with an aggressor, especially if that aggressor is a child. Forgiveness must be that response which builds up rather than breaks down the aggressor; the merciful God or the forgiving parent will not diminish the worth of a child. Thus a response which is accurate, neither authoritarian nor permissive, is necessary for the maturing person. "Appropriate recognition and the opportunity for reparation allow a central core of goodness to be maintained in the identity".[26] The reparation, moreover, should be an act of personal growth which reduces the likelihood of repetition.

As Principal of Westcott House Peter Walker has ordinands and young clergy on his mind as he reflects on 'The Ministry of Forgiveness' in the context of a reading of 2 Corinthians 1-6. He commends open-ness, realism and prayer as basic to this ministry.

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[24] Moule, C.F.D. 'The Christian Understanding of Forgiveness' p440
[25] Dominion, J. 'Forgiveness and Personality' in *Theology* 73 1968
[26] Dominion, J. 'Forgiveness and Personality' p500

"[Is] not an essential part of knowing ourselves forgiven that we should be open to receiving from others the truth about ourselves, vulnerable to the realisation, it may be for the first time, of the full truth of what we have been to them? And reciprocally, is not the candour of our own acknowledgement of what the other has been to us a measure of the reality of our own forgiveness of him?"[27]

"The ministry of forgiveness" he contests, "is about our receiving the reality about ourselves: our helping others to receive the reality about themselves."[28]

For Walker the sacrament of confession is a specific incidence of the larger ministry of intercession. The ministry of forgiveness is focused before Christ on the cross: imaginatively to be "taken into that dying, but finally triumphant, outreach to the world." Here:

> "the prayer of reparatory intercession spills over into the *life* of reparatory intercession which is precisely Christ's life in me: his outreach in me, his would-be drawing of the world, my world, despite all the disintegrative pulls of its disorder, into its union with God".[29]

This series of papers demonstrates that forgiveness is a complex process which involves different kinds of intellectual, moral and emotional factors. The idea of forgiveness contains the complex and contradictory agendas of depth psychology and atonement theology as well as the spiritual dynamics of confession and inter-personal forgiveness. What the series of papers fails to achieve is an integration of their concerns. This is inevitably the case partly because the scale of that task is much greater than the scope of these brief papers, but also because theology and ethics have only recently begun to address the complexities of inter-personal forgiveness in an energetic way.

As we have noted the subject of forgiveness was, in the middle years of the twentieth century, a neglected one in theology and

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[27] Dominion, J. 'Forgiveness and Personality' p532
[28] Dominion, J. 'Forgiveness and Personality' p533
[29] Dominion, J. 'Forgiveness and Personality' p536

ethics. The nineteen eighties, however, saw a great deal of theological writing on the question of forgiveness. *Concilium* had a special number on the subject[30], *Societas Liturgica* had a conference on liturgical penance[31], the British Council of Churches had a series of studies on 'Politics and Forgiveness'[32] and the Irish School of Ecumenics ran a series of seminars on the 'Reconciliation of Memories'[33]. In addition to this there was a resurgence of interest in the theology of the atonement[34] and renewed concern with regard to the sacrament of penance in both the Roman Catholic[35] and the Anglican Churches[36]. In the non-theological academic world forgiveness was subject to unprecedented attention during the eighties with an important study on philosophy and law entitled *Forgiveness and Mercy*[37]and the first monograph on the ethics of forgiveness being published[38]. Furthermore, as the eighties moved into the nineties interest in forgiveness became a more public matter. As the legacies of totalitarianism in Eastern Europe and Southern America became the material out of which people had to construct their personal and communal lives, questions of the possibility, the justice and above all the need for forgiveness came to the surface. This was especially reflected in drama. Later in this work I refer to Ariel Dorfman's play *Death and The Maiden* as a particularly significant examination of the issues involved in forgiveness and freedom and Peter Shaffer's *The Gift of the Gorgon*

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[30]Floristan, C. and Duquoc, C. Forgiveness special number of *Concilium* 184 1986

[31]*Studia Liturgica 18* 1 A Worshipping Church Penitent and Reconciling 1988

[32]Frost, B. *The Politics of Peace* (London: DLT) 1991

[33]Falconer, A. Ed. *Reconciling Memories* (Dublin: Columba)1988

[34]See Swinburne, R. *Responsibility and Atonement* (Oxford: Clarendon) 1989; Gunton, C. *The Actuality of Atonement* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark) 1988; Grey, M. *Redeeming the Dream* (London: SPCK) 1989; Fiddes, P.S. *Past Event and Present Salvation* (London: DLT) 1989; and White, V. *Atonement and Incarnation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 1991.

[35]See Hellwig, M. *Sign of Reconciliation and Conversion* (Wilmington DI: Michael Glazier)1982; Dallen, J. *The Reconciling Community* (New York: Pueblo) 1985; and Fink, P. *Alternative Futures for Worship:* Reconciliation (Collegeville: Liturgical Press) 1987.

[36]See Smith, M.L. *Reconciliation* (London: Mowbray) 1986; Dudley, M. and Rowell, G. *Confession and Absolution* (London: SPCK) 1990; and Silk, D. *In Penitence and Faith* (London: Mowbray) 1988.

[37]Murphy, J.G. and Hampton, J. *Forgiveness and Mercy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 1988

[38]Haber, J.G. *Forgiveness* (Savage, Maryland: Rowman and Little) 1991

as an important exploration of the relationship between passion and justice in forgiveness and retribution.

The aim of this particular study is to attempt to address the question of forgiveness in a way that draws upon and reflects this broad and recent interest in the subject. For this reason it will raise and address questions about forgiveness which are generated both inside and outside the parameters of atonement theology and liturgies of penance - the main areas of theology in which questions of forgiveness have been considered.

It follows that this study will be of an interdisciplinary kind, drawing on Biblical studies and ethics, philosophy and psychology, as well as liturgy and literature, in an attempt to develop a coherent account of the human and theological phenomenon and imperative of forgiveness. Forgiveness is above all else a reparative way of relating. If ways of relating are fundamental to human and divine existence it follows that an enquiry into what it takes to forgive will be an enquiry into what it means to be God and to be human. This is an insight which has been affirmed by the tradition which has refused to separate theological understandings of atonement from those of incarnation, or the theology of redemption from that of creation. It suggests that a consideration of the theological significance of human forgiveness is likely to engender a sense of the meaning of incarnation and atonement in the language of subjectivity and relationships.

Overview

In the New Testament the gospels suggest that there is in the actions and teaching of Jesus Christ a witness to what we are here calling the coherence of forgiveness. That is the view that forgiveness is a profoundly integrating concept and action. So that, for instance, there are theological connections between being forgiven and being a forgiver and between divine and human forgiveness.

This thesis therefore begins with a reading of the New Testament in general and the synoptic gospels in particular. It is widely held that one of the distinctive marks of Jesus' teaching was his emphasis on forgiveness. This is undoubtedly true. But what is the meaning of the idea of forgiveness in the synoptic gospels? By carefully reading the accounts of Jesus' teaching and healing in the synoptic gospels, as well as considering important moments when the idea of forgiveness surfaces, some clarity can be brought to the rather vague impression that Jesus was in favour of forgiveness.

In the second chapter there is a consideration of the way in which the idea of forgiveness has been discussed and used in British atonement theology in the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. Several theologians in our period have used the concept of forgiveness in their explication of the work of Christ. Their methodology tends to work from the experience of human forgiveness, often with references to the cost of this forgiveness to the one who forgives, to an understanding of the meaning of the death and resurrection of Christ.

Few theologians consider that human forgiveness is a straightforward matter. Indeed Arthur Lyttleton describes it as mysterious. Nor do theologians necessarily see human forgiveness and divine forgiveness as distinct realities. William Temple and Charles Williams, for instance, repeatedly emphasise the connectedness of human and divine forgiveness, or to put it another way, being forgiven and forgiving others.[39]

In the third chapter I turn to the question of forgiving others. Although Bishop Butler preached notable sermons on both resentment and forgiveness in the seventeenth century it is only recently that philosophical ethics has begun to re-examine some of the fundamental issues in this area. Part of the stimulus for this interest has been the problem of the issue of justice in the context of the emotional burden of memories of the holocaust. Simon Wiesenthal's monograph *The Sunflower* is a biographical account not

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[39]One feature of theological writing on forgiveness is that the question of being forgiven by another human being is rarely if ever raised.

so much of the physical horror of the concentration camp but of the moral and religious horror of the suggestion that the victims should forgive the perpetrators. Heeding the strictures of those who have argued that forgiveness must be considered in narrative structures, the distinctions and arguments of ethicists who have contributed to the recent debate about the meaning and morality of forgiving others will be considered against the background of Wiesenthal's account.

In chapter four I attempt an integration between some of the questions about forgiveness which have been raised in recent works of literature and some of the thoughts about forgiveness which have been generated in theological writing. This is a helpful way of testing and developing the meaning of theological insights into forgiveness. A distinction which emerges is between pro-active and reconciliatory forgiveness. Pro-active forgiveness is understood as an act of a certain kind of power and reconciliatory forgiveness as a process which involves the repentance of the offender and the restoration of the sense of dignity and respect of the offended.

The two chapters which follow focus on one aspect of the Christian understanding of forgiveness, namely the means whereby individuals are forgiven by God in the course of the liturgy of the Church. It is thought by many that liturgical penance is not an Anglican or Reformed practice. The writings of Luther, Calvin and Hooker, as well as the provision of the prayer books of the Anglican Communion, reveal that this is patently not the case. The main difference between the Roman and other western approaches to penance, however, is that it is only the Roman Catholic Church which has maintained regular confession as a necessary discipline for the communicant member of the Church. A secondary difference is that the Roman Church has only moved into the area of liturgical revision since the Second Vatican Council and so has changed its rites both more radically and more recently, thereby generating a greater sense of confusion.

Questions concerning the nature, meaning and importance of the Sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation have proved to be very difficult ones for the Roman Catholic Church since the second

Vatican Council, so difficult in fact that the phrase 'crisis of confession' is often used. Chapter five is an examination of this crisis which reveals it to be of far more than merely liturgical interest. Penance is in crisis not simply because liturgists have yet to find a formula to win people back to confession but because the whole question of what it means to need, to seek and to be granted forgiveness in a liturgical way has become extremely complicated. This chapter reveals both the depth of the crisis and the nature of that complexity.

In chapter six I consider the history of liturgical penance in the Anglican Church. This survey reveals that auricular confession has an established place in Anglican practice, particularly deriving from the place reserved for it in the order for the Visitation of the Sick in the Book of Common Prayer. This primary location, together with the teaching that confession should be available but not compulsory, help to establish a tradition of liturgical forgiveness with complimentary strengths and difficulties to that of Roman Catholicism

In chapter seven I explore the emotions of guilt and shame. This is an important area to consider in a study of forgiveness because it has often been assumed that the Judeo-Christian tradition is based on a history of law-giving and consequently on a theology of a redemption which is intended to rescue those who have transgressed, and that forgiveness therefore has its primary meaning in relation to personal guilt. It has further been assumed, at least in the post-Freudian western world, that guilt is a problematic emotion, which is in fact far more likely to be generated by actions and events for which the subject has no responsibility than for those which he or she is responsible and therefore truly guilty. Yet another assumption has made this situation more complex still, namely that guilt, for all the psychological complexity of the construct, is a more sophisticated moral emotion than the alternative, shame, which is the hall-mark of relatively heteronomous and unreflective societies. The purpose of this chapter is to examine these assumptions and to replace them by understandings of both shame and guilt which allow for the

possibility that it might be both realistic and appropriate for individuals to experience these moral emotions and therefore both realistic and appropriate for them as individuals and as members of social and theological communities to deal with them positively.

In the final and concluding chapter I draw together what has been gleaned from the various investigations outlined above. The argument here is that human forgiveness is profoundly connected to divine forgiveness, and that the Christian vision of each individual as both in need of and needing to offer forgiveness makes good human and theological sense. The relation between human and divine forgiveness is not so much condition, as Charles Williams feared and a reading of the exclusively Matthean texts would suggest, as one of connectedness. The forgiveness of God is the inspiration of human acts of forgiveness, but it can also be the consequence of intentions, intimations or completions of human acts of reconciliation.

CHAPTER ONE

FORGIVENESS IN THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS[1]

As we have seen, Hannah Arendt was of the view that the role of forgiveness in human affairs was discovered by Jesus of Nazareth.[2] The Greeks, she argued, knew nothing about it and the Romans only had the occasional commutation of a death sentence. The Indian Jesuit George Soares-Prabhu also makes the point that forgiveness has a special place in Christianity, suggesting that the Indian reader of the New Testament would be struck by the frequent invitation to forgive.[3] Unlike the Greeks and Romans however, the Indians would have found the notion of forgiveness familiar, so that it would have been the prominence of the teaching to forgive in the *dharma* of Jesus which would be striking: "For if these are not exclusively Christian attitudes, the importance given to them in the teaching of Jesus, and the concrete forms they assume in the New Testament, give them a specifically Christian significance."[4]

Readers of the Hebrew scriptures are also familiar with forgiveness. The Old Testament has several prayers which are based on the understanding that God might forgive.[5] There are also prophetic moments, such as David's encounter with Nathan, when forgiveness is pronounced: "the Lord has put away your sin" (2Sam 12:13). In fact it is possible to argue that the whole of the narrative of the Old Testament is based on an act of divine forgiveness. When on Sinai the Lord perceived that the people made a golden calf he was enraged. Moses interceded by asking the Lord to remember the

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[1]Biblical quotations are from the Revised Standard Version.
[2]Arendt, H *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) 1958 p241
[3]Soares-Prabhu, G. 'As We Forgive' in *Concilium* 184 2 1986
[4]Soares-Prabhu, G. 'As We Forgive' p57
[5]Eg. Daniel 9: 3-19, See also Exodus 34:5-7, Isaiah 1:18 and Psalm 32

offence in the context of the covenant, and it is on the basis of this that the Lord puts away his anger. "Remember Abraham, Isaac and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou didst sware by thine own self... And the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do to his people." (Ex 32:13&14) It is in this way that Hebrew salvation history is underwritten by an act of forgiveness just as much as by an act of liberation or covenant.[6]

But even if there are ways of overstating the significance of Jesus in the history of the idea of forgiveness it remains the case that he is a singularly significant figure. Although the Pauline view that "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures" (I Cor 15:3) has framed most western atonement theology, this is only half the story of forgiveness. The other half is the teaching and practice of Jesus with regard to forgiveness. It is recorded in all three synoptic gospels that Jesus not only healed a paralytic man but also pronounced that his sins were forgiven. Forgiveness also features in Jesus' direct and parabolic teaching. And again, there are narratives concerning the way in which Jesus related to people which can be interpreted as stories of forgiveness.

1. FORGIVENESS IN THE GOSPELS

The purpose of this chapter is to discern what the gospels have to say about forgiveness. The treatment will be thematic but will not be negligent of differences between the different evangelists' understandings. Our purpose, however, is not redaction criticism, nor is the point of this study to determine the facts about Jesus' teaching on forgiveness and his forgiving actions. Rather it is to draw to the surface what is said and done with regard to forgiveness in the gospels.

There are, in fact, no passages which could be claimed to be directly and overtly concerned with forgiveness which are common to all the gospels. In addition there is important material which appears in

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[6]Notice for instance the tremendous significance which Exodus 34:5-7 has in Yom Kippur liturgy. "The Lord, the Lord, a God of mercy and compassion, slow to anger, generous in love and truth, showing love to thousands, forgiving sin, wrong and failure; who pardons."

one gospel only. Mark is the only evangelist to have it that the baptism of John is "of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mk 1:4). Only Matthew has it that the wine offered at the Last Supper is "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Mt 26:28). It is only Luke who has the words, "Father forgive them, they know not what they do" (Lk 23:34) on the lips of the crucified Jesus. Finally, it is only John who has the Easter-cum-Pentecostal inspiration of the disciples: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven, and if you retain the sins of any they are retained" (Jn 20:22b, 23).

Of the gospels Mark and John have the least material which is directly concerned with forgiveness. Mark has very little teaching material in general and John has hardly any reference to the word forgiveness at all. The account of the response of Jesus to the putative stoning of the woman taken in adultery is troublesome. While it is a classical New Testament text on forgiveness, it is not a genuinely Johannine passage. John works on a more abstract theological level than any of the other evangelists and shows himself to be relatively unconcerned with matters of social psychology. Consequently he has descriptions of Jesus such as: "the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (Jn 1:29). It is wrong therefore to suggest that John is not interested in forgiveness, and there are passages which, when read very closely, reveal an interest and an understanding of some of the issues which the claim that Jesus is a forgiver raise.

An example of this is the narrative of Bethesda (Jn 5:1f). In many ways this does not seem to be a forgiveness story at all. However, it becomes more than a healing story when Jesus encounters the healed man in the temple and says; "See you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse befall you." (Jn 5:14) Bultmann is not convinced that this is important:

"The saying reflects the Jewish idea of retribution, according to which sickness must be attributed to sin. This is most surprising on the lips of the Johannine Jesus since it makes men accept the principle he had rejected in 9.2f[7]. Moreover, the saying bears no relation to the question which was raised in v10, and the only point of v14 is to prepare the way for the next scene."[8]

Barrett, however, takes a different line. He does not read into this the implication that the disease was the result of sin, rather the implication is the more subtle one that the man was not chosen for his merits. But there is a hint that the healing is more than bodily repair, that it may also be a matter of forgiveness. "In John nothing is said of forgiveness, but the whole chapter implies a treatment of evil too radical to be exhausted in the healing of physical disease, and the command to sin *no more* suggests that sins up to that point have already been dealt with."[9]

Mark's references to forgiveness are all direct and important. There is the healing of the paralytic (Mk 2:1-12), the question of unforgivable sin (Mk 3:28) and the relation of forgiveness and prayer (Mk 11:25). All of these are taken up by both Matthew and Luke and we will consider them as the core of the teaching on forgiveness presented in the gospels.

In addition to this core there are the Matthean and Lucan flanks. Both these evangelists integrate their understandings of the importance of forgiveness in the life and teaching of Jesus with their more general theological stance and thereby give emphasis to a particular aspect of forgiveness. Matthew is the evangelist who most emphasises what we might call the conditionality of forgiveness, or the duty of the disciple to forgive. Luke, on the other hand, while he has this idea, gives more attention to forgiveness as

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[7]Jesus, when asked whether a man was blind because of his own sins or those of his parents replies: "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be manifested in him."

[8]Bultmann, R. *The Gospel of John* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell) 1971 p243

[9]Barrett, C.K. *The Gospel According to St John* Second Edition (London: SPCK) 1978 p255

a response to repentance. These emphases are important enough to be described in more detail.

1.i. Forgiveness in Matthew

For Matthew, entrance to the Kingdom of Heaven is the supreme, but not very easily attained, goal of life. The figure of judgement hangs over the narrative, and the text which, as well as being permeated by references to the fulfilment of Hebrew prophecy, contains lengthy sections of ethical teaching. These can be construed as a moral development of Jewish law. The prospect of judgement is thus balanced by the ethic of the golden rule: "do unto others what you wish them to do to you" (Mt 7:12). Matthew's moral imperative does not stop there, however. Towards the end of chapter 5 ultimate and potentially treacherous moral heights are scaled: "Love your enemies... you must be perfect even as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:43-48).

The spiritual importance of the way in which human beings comport themselves with regard to each other is emphasised in the final discourse (Mt 23-25). Most of the sins which are castigated in the Scribes and Pharisees are social: accusations of treating others badly and religious extravagance are woven into the repeated charge of hypocrisy in the seven woes (Mt 23:13-33). In identifying justice, mercy and faithfulness as the 'weightier' matters (Mt 23:23) Matthew distinguishes spiritual and relational aspects of the law from the personal and religious. In the parable, or apocalyptic vision, of the sheep and the goats this emphasis is developed further. Judgement is made on the basis of the way in which others have been treated. Relations are all significant because God is in, or at least identifies with, the other: "whatever you did for the least of my brethren, you did to me" (Mt 25:40).

Matthew's ethics are driven by an antipathy to hypocrisy. This is why he emphasises both subjectivity and relations with others. If these are right then religious practice will have its proper place. If they are wrong then religion is vain, damning hypocrisy. Forgiveness is important in Matthew as a virtue alongside kindness and charity. People should be merciful, broad-minded and tolerant in the face of

being sinned against by others. This is congruent with his ethics of non-exploitation and integrity: the best thing a person who is offended against can do for themselves and the other is forgive. This judgement is final. Individuals are blessed or condemned according to the way in which they have treated others. But while people are judged according to the criterion of whether or not they have been merciful, the final judgement is not itself a matter of mercy. Consequently people are kind, and therefore saved, or callous and therefore condemned.

Matthew's imperative to forgive does not extend to God. Failure to forgive is severely punished: "And in his anger his lord delivered [the unforgiving slave] to the jailers, till he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."(Mt 18:35) Thus rather than being the end of judgement, forgiveness is a basis of judgement. Matthew's theological message is not that God is merciful but that God the righteous judge demands mercy and kindness in human beings. As Beare has observed:

> "[In] this whole passage there is no trace of a doctrine of the forgiveness of sins, or of the grace of God. The righteous are invited to enter into the kingdom because they have shown themselves worthy by their kind deeds, not because their sins are forgiven. There is no trace of a saving faith - the righteous have done their good deeds without any thought that they were serving Christ (or God)."[10]

1.ii. Forgiveness in Luke

Christopher Evans writes that, "Repentance with a view to forgiveness is, for Luke, the sole content of the universal proclamation made in Jesus' name."[11] Luke considers both inter-human and divine-human forgiveness to be important. Like Matthew he emphasises the priority of forgiveness among the virtues of the disciples, and like both Matthew and Mark he stresses that divine forgiveness is of central importance within the area of salvation,

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[10]Beare, F.W. *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell) 1981 p496
[11]Evans, C.F. *Saint Luke* (London: SCM) 1990 p95

and that Jesus' authority to forgive sins is pivotal in his dispute with the religious leaders.

As we have noted the cry for forgiveness from the cross is only found in the gospel according to Luke. The verse, however, is absent from many ancient sources and is widely held to be a later addition to the gospel text.[12] Nevertheless the sentiment is not alien to Luke's understanding. In Acts the words on the lips of the martyred Stephen are: "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (Acts 7:60). The difference is that whereas Jesus exculpates his murderers as he prays for them, Stephen affirms that they are responsible while he prays that they may not be condemned to the consequences of their guilt. Stephen prays that they might be forgiven: Jesus that they might be excused.[13]

Luke is also the only evangelist to tell the story of the prodigal son (or loving father or grumpy brother). He sees that there is: "more joy over one sinner who repents than over ninety nine righteous persons who need no repentance" (Lk 15:11). Whether or not Luke knew ninety nine just people who needed no repentance is not clear. What is clear, however, is that he was concerned to reinstate those who, on contemporary understanding, would be cast out. Luke, the transvaluer of people is primarily concerned with forgiveness as a way of changing things. He has the story of the healed paralytic (Lk 5) but also that of the woman who anointed Jesus at the house of Simon the Pharisee (Lk 7). This precipitates not only a social scandal but also a dialogue sermon on forgiveness. The point is that those who have been forgiven a great deal are greatly loved and respond with great, even extravagant love. This sort of teaching scandalises and leads to the question: "who is this, who even forgives sins?"(Lk 7:49).

While both Matthew and Luke end their gospels with commissionings of the disciples it is only Luke who includes the idea that: "repentance and forgiveness should be preached in his [Jesus']

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[12]Evans, C.F. *Saint Luke* p867

[13]The relationship between excuse and forgiveness is examined more closely in chapter 3.

name". This is an interpretation as much of the meaning of the whole of the Hebrew scriptures as it is of the life and resurrection of Christ. Although the ideas of repentance and forgiveness are severally associated with Jesus in this gospel, this conjunction is elsewhere associated with the mission of John, who was: "preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Lk 3:3). But the emphasis in this post-resurrection appearance is more closely related to the presentation of the Church's mission in Acts. Evans makes the point that in these passages, "repentance and forgiveness are not connected with any doctrine of the death of Christ as an atonement or sacrifice, but with his resurrection and exaltation to be both judge and gracious messiah."[14] This is also the case in this passage: "it is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead" (Lk 24:46).

The passage can be contrasted with the equivalent in Matthew (Mt 28:18-20). For both evangelists the core is the mission to the nations. Matthew emphasises baptism and includes the formulaic, "in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (v19). Luke has it that the gospel should be preached in the name of Jesus, meaning that members of the apostolic community should be regarded as his representatives. The most interesting difference however focuses the respective references to ethics. While Luke demands that repentance and forgiveness be the message, Matthew's concern is that the new disciples should be taught, "to observe all that I have commanded you" (v20). As we have seen, Matthew is not convinced that there is a way to the kingdom of heaven other than perfect obedience of the new, spiritual law. Luke, on the other hand, has a gospel of salvation for sinners.

1.iii. The Unforgivable Sin

The references to the sin which cannot be forgiven in the synoptic gospels (Mk 3:28; Mt 12:31; Lk 12:10) have long been a source of anxiety not only for those inclined to scruple about their behaviour and intentions but also those who reflect on the forgiveness of God.

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[14]Evans, C.F. *Saint Luke* p923

In a tradition which stems from Augustine and is based in Hebrews 6:4 the unforgivable sin is apostacy. It is the lapsing of those who had once received enlightenment. Another tradition equates it with the notion of mortal sin derived from 1 John 5 which became such an important part of Latin penitential theology. A third approach is to follow Karl Barth in the view that it is a persisting with a theology of works-righteousness. Yet another sees it as blasphemy, although the key texts are quite explicit that blasphemy against the son of man is forgivable. As Berkouwer argues, however, the unpardonable sin cannot be defined simply in terms of deliberateness, stubbornness or blasphemy. The situation is a specific one of calculated and wilful misattribution.

> "The admonition is not concerned with a general antagonism of men against Christ or with Israel's daily rejection, but rather with the circumstance in which the Holy Spirit is obviously present in this act of the humble Lord, and yet the credit is given to Beelzebul."[15]

The phrase was not original or unique to Jesus but was common among the scribes, those towards whom it is, in this passage, addressed. The point, according to Lane, is that the scribal accusations amount to a denial of the power and greatness of the Spirit of God. This is a statement of the limit of faith in salvation.

> "By assigning the action of God to a demonic origin the scribes betray a perversion of Spirit which, in defiance of the truth, chooses to call light darkness... [it] denotes the conscious and deliberate rejection of the saving power and grace of God released through Jesus' word and act."[16]

To call good evil is to cut oneself off from good. That is why it is, so to speak, unforgivable. "Only the man who cuts himself off from forgiveness is excluded from it."[17]

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[15]Berkouwer, G.C. *Sin* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans) 1971 p340

[16]Lane, W. *The Gospel According to Mark* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott) 1974 p145

[17]Rengstorf, K. in *Theological Wordbook of the New Testament* ET 1964 p304- quoted by Lane *The Gospel According to Mark* p145

According to Lane extrapolation from this particular context is not appropriate. Jesus is addressing Scribes, legal experts whose responsibility was: "to be aware of God's redemptive action".[18] The imperfect tense in 'because they were saying that he was possessed' suggests a repetition and allied hardness of heart: "tokens of callousness which brought the scribes to the brink of unforgivable blasphemy".[19] The scribes were not lightly attributing the work of the Holy Spirit to Beelzebul and it is the gravity of their misattribution which renders it unforgivable.

None the less the teaching is important. The idea of the unforgivable sin clarifies the point that there is a limit to forgiveness. This is not a contradiction of the faith that God is infinitely merciful, but a statement about the human ability to accept that mercy as forgiveness. Forgiveness cannot just be handed out. The saying contains the germ of the idea that forgiveness is not a thing but an aspect of a transaction. The sin against the Holy Spirit is the self-alienation from the forgiving power of the Christ-Spirit by a wilful want of repentance. In this way the teaching connects with the Pauline warnings not to grieve or quench the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:30, 1Th 5:19). Moreover it connects forgiveness with repentance and faith. It is in the faith of Christ that the sinner learns and lives repentance and receives the acceptance and forgiveness which is itself the animation and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

1.iv. The Dialectic of Forgiving and Being Forgiven

The interest shown in the gospels with regard to forgiveness can be divided into two kinds of concern: that with being forgiven by God and that with forgiving one's neighbours. When considering the question of being forgiven, issues such as the relation between forgiveness and healing, the way in which forgiveness involves acceptance,and the extent to which it is immediate and personal, even to the extent of being a carnal matter, all surface. When considering the question of forgiving others, however, issues such as the relation between forgiveness and mercy, forgiveness and

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[18]Lane, W. *The Gospel According to Mark* p146
[19]Lane, W. *The Gospel According to Mark* p146

prayer and forgiveness and judgement assume priority. Both being forgiven and forgiving others involve ethical, psychological and theological questions. What distinguishes them is that in one case forgiveness is conceived in a proximate, subjective and existential way. The main concern is placed on describing and effecting forgiveness in the immediacy and confusion of the present. In the other case forgiveness is conceived more objectively, abstractly and from a distance so that the concern is, in a sense, to estimate ethical implications of living under a law of forgiveness.

Ultimately the teaching of the gospels is that the distinction between being forgiven and forgiving others is only an analytical one. Indeed much of the complexity of the material derives from the fact that it is striving to show precisely the extent and the nature of the inter-connectedness between forgiving and being forgiven. In what follows the two sets of questions will be treated separately under the titles of the physicality of being forgiven and the spirituality of forgiving.

2. THE PHYSICALITY OF BEING FORGIVEN

In this section the focus of our concern will be the way in which the gospels suggest that in his actions and teaching Jesus was forgiving and offering forgiveness as an aspect of healthy and healing relationship. As we shall see, such an approach involved proximity and immediacy and tended to scandalise those who were not immediately involved or connected. The main texts which need to be read in order to come to an understanding of this aspect of forgiveness are the healing-cum-forgiving narratives and the parables of forgiveness.

2.i. The Healing of the Paralytic

2.i.a. Mark

Commentators on the gospel of Mark agree that the healing of the paralytic (Mk 2:1-12) in which Jesus pronounces the forgiveness of sins, is a development of the controversy which focuses on the person and actions of Jesus from the beginning of that gospel. Critical tradition is right in suggesting that the authority of the Son

of Man is at issue here, but there is more to it than this. The tradition that sins are against God alone (Ps 51:4) is also being challenged. The point is not so much that forgiveness is the prerogative of a special human being but that sin is importantly interpersonal. The Son of Man must be able to forgive sins because sins impinge on the sons of men. Forgiveness of sins belongs on the human level, just as healing does.

In the Old Testament sickness is understood to be a consequence of sin and therefore healing and forgiveness are closely related categories. In some cases, however, they are not merely connected but are interchangeable (Ps 41:4, Jer 3:22 and Hos 14:4). Distinctions are thus important. Forgiveness can deal with the fact that someone is a sinner without necessarily removing the objective consequence of the sin - the disease. However, to heal someone is to free them from such consequences. That this is an important meaning of forgiveness is the message of the narrative of the healing of the paralytic. But this is problematic because in the Old Testament forgiveness of sins is the prerogative of God alone.

The penitential practice of the church is anticipated (or perhaps reflected) in this discussion. As a reading of Matthew chapters 16 and 18 would lead one to expect the Matthean parallel puts the point with greater strength: "The crowd glorified God, who had given such authority to men" (Mt 9:8). This interpretation raised the question of whether this text is a reliable account of what Jesus said and intended. Rudolf Bultmann suggests that what we have here is a healing miracle with a forgiveness section written into it by the early church in an attempt to bolster the idea that church leaders had authority of absolution. This suggestion that all the forgiveness material (Mk2 vv5b - 10) is an accretion has some merits. Certainly the story reads very well without these verses, which are linguistically as well as theologically awkward. But Lane is against this.[20] He puts it that there is not enough evidence to support the deletion, and that the awkwardness can be singularly appropriate. The grammatical difficulties of the link between v10 and v11 are explained by the fact that at this point Jesus is addressing three

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[20]Lane, W. *The Gospel According to Mark* p94

sets of people: the paralytic and his supporters, the scribes and the readers.

F.W. Beare comments on the Matthean version of this story (Mt 9:2-8) noting that it is shorter and rather later in the gospel. His view reflects that of Vincent Taylor that the 'forgiveness' verses may have had a different origin to the healing miracle, but: "it will hardly be seen as a Marcan addition, rather as a supplement introduced into the miracle story at some earlier stage of the tradition"[21]. The point here is that the supplement is an authentic saying which did not belong in any other particular context. C.F. Evans follows neither Taylor nor Bultmann in his understanding of the place of these verses in the Lucan version. His view is that: "The awkwardness may be accounted for by the story's importance, which ensured that it be told in lengthy, dramatic and naive form compared with the shorter and smoother combination and controversy in e.g. Mk 3:1-6"[22].

If we accept this pronouncement of forgiveness as an authentic part of the gospel we must place it in narrative context. The immediate context is the healing of the paralytic, but I would suggest that the context of the following narrative, which in Mark is the call of Levi, is equally important. This passage may not have any reference to forgiveness but there is something similar about it. Levi is not forgiven but called. This is significant however because Levi is not an acceptable person to call. Such acceptance of the unacceptable is very close to forgiveness. There are linguistic differences: 'Follow me' replaces 'your sins are forgiven'. Moreover the forgiven person is given unlimited freedom, they are 'let go' (*aphiemi*). Those called to follow Christ, on the other hand, are constrained, they become 'disciples'. But the difference is not simply that those whom Jesus forgives are set free to live as they choose whereas those whom Jesus accepts are the ones who become his disciples. The fact that there are many instances where Jesus' acceptance of others is just as unconditional as his forgiveness establishes this. Let the case of

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[21]Beare, F.W. *The Gospel According to Matthew* p221
[22]Evans, *Saint Luke* p297

the very next passage (Mk 2:15-17) where Jesus is observed to eat with sinners serve as sufficient example.

The crucial distinction here is not between those whom Jesus forgives and those whom he calls. Rather it is between those who respond to Jesus' acceptance/healing/forgiveness and those who observe and disapprove. Eating and healing are bodily realities. Jesus is physically, bodily, involved with those with whom he shares food or whom he heals. The critical onlookers, on the other hand, are only intellectually involved; they comment, observe and are scandalised. Physical involvement is crucial. There is far more to this than Schweitzer allows when he suggests that Jesus is proclaimed here as: "the one who reconciles outcasts by his actions as well as his words"[23]. Eating with people is not merely action, it is significance, nourishment and community. But in addition to the social and biological basics of eating together there are the theological fundamentals. The associations with the supper on the night on which he was betrayed and the other meals not only in the gospels but also in the Exodus narratives should not be passed over.

In the following section (Mk 2:18-22) the contrast is made between the fasting of John's disciples and the celebrating of those who follow Jesus. This reveals the obverse of the significance of eating together. Abstention from the physical is not praised here, rather enjoyment is seen as appropriate. Another level of analysis supports this. John's disciples were baptised 'into repentance' and thus they live the penitence of the day of atonement, which would be a cleansing from sin and affliction of the soul. Their life was one of repentance in preparation for expiation. But it was also a misunderstanding of the power and the significance of what was going on close to Jesus. Even the metaphor chosen to describe the events occurring around Jesus suggests physicality and immediacy "fresh skins for new wine" (Mk 2:22). This pattern of proximate and physical actions which heal and nourish those involved but scandalise religious observers can also be seen in the final parts of this section of Mark. The priority of the human over the traditional is asserted when heads of grain are plucked on the Sabbath (Mk 2:23-

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[23]Schweitzer, E. *The Good News According to Mark* (London: SPCK) 1971 p66

27), and a withered hand is restored, again on a Sabbath (Mk 3:1-6). In consequence the controversy is heightened. Jesus is angry with the observers, and they seek new allies with whom to plot his destruction.

The healing and forgiving acceptance of Jesus is thus available to those who are in some kind of physical, bodily, contact with him. Those who benefit from Jesus' pastoral actions are intimates not necessarily in the sense of being disciples or friends but those who, quite literally, come near. It is Jesus' physical openness and vulnerability which heals those who respond in an immediate, generous and somatic way but which scandalises those who keep their distance and appraise on the basis of received religion.

2.i.b Matthew and Luke

Matthew has a shorter version of the Marcan narrative of the healing of the paralytic. He shows no interest in the faith of the paralytic man and follows the story, as does Mark, with the call of Levi. His version stresses less the controversial nature of the event putting more emphasis on the authority, power, even danger of the Son of Man. Not only are people healed, but: "even the wind and the sea obey him" (Mt 8:27) and demons are cast out of a man into swine which are then thrown into the sea where they perish (Mt 8:33). People perceive Jesus as dangerous; moreover, "they begged him to leave their neighbourhood" (Mt 8:34).

In his account of the call of Levi, Luke (Lk 5:27-32) adds a characteristic nuance and thereby changes the meaning of the passage. By including the word *metanoia* at the end: "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Lk 5:32) Luke has moved from an account of the incident to addressing his readership. This change, however, does not enhance the passage. In his zeal to encourage *metanoia* in his hearers Luke ignores the fact that there is no evidence of the man's repentance in the story.

2. ii. The Anointing By Mary

This exclusively Lucan narrative (Lk 7:36-50) begins with Jesus at table with the Pharisees. Being at table with people is already

established as a way of accepting sinners in this gospel, moreover it is a form of acceptance which has received the critical attention of the Pharisees and their scribes (Lk 5:30). The woman is described as a sinner by Simon, and in the end Jesus affirms that her sins are many (Lk 7:47). At no point, however, is it made clear what the nature of her sins or sinfulness is. Some have interpreted the saying that she had many sins to mean that she was a prostitute, and tradition sometimes identifies her with Mary Magdalene.

The main action of the story is again physical. The woman anoints Jesus' body. In accepting her devotion Jesus accepts her. Nothing is said and, for the meanwhile, nothing needs to be said. But, as in the case of the account of healing of the paralytic and the acceptance passages which follow, it is the onlookers, those who are slightly at a remove, those who are not in bodily contact, who are provoked to protest. In this case it is the host, Simon, who mutters to himself and to whom Jesus replies with a story. The parable told to Simon is based on the debt-release (*apoluein*) language of forgiveness, whereas the actual forgiveness of the woman uses the sin-letting-go (*aphiemi*) language. It is significant that this central narrative fuses these two ways of discussing forgiveness found in the gospel. But while it is the woman who is forgiven and who displays much love, she does not speak. Her actions may be deemed to speak louder than words, but given the absence of verbal material it is impossible to be precise about what it is that she is communicating. Certainly there is nothing which could be called confession nor is there any evidence of repentance. Her actions are expressions of love, trust and intimacy. She does not approach Jesus in the hope of pardon nor yet of forgiveness or healing. Rather she approaches him in a devout though quite physical way. When Jesus says to her that her sins are forgiven he is responding primarily to Simon. It is only possible for him to say it, however, because she is who she is and because she is present and with such an attitude. As in the narrative of the healing of the paralytic there is an expression of dissension and disquiet among the observers. Jesus' absolution is felt to be audacious and provocative. The dismissal of the woman with the words that her faith has healed her is also parallel. The woman's love and devotion have in turn brought her to wholeness and spiritual health.

The passage is of central importance in Luke's gospel of repentance and forgiveness. Indeed it is more important than that of the paralytic as illness and morality are not confounded. The woman was a sinner and is now grateful and generous and loving in response to her acceptance and forgiveness. Her righteousness exceeds that of a perfectly acceptable Pharisee not because of her relation to the law but because of her relationship with the Christ. She becomes whole in her response to being accepted, a response which evidences the quality of her love.

2.iii. The Parable of the Prodigal Son

The whole of the fifteenth chapter of Luke is material unique to that gospel. It consists of three parables, only one of which can be thought of as a parable of forgiveness. The other two, those of the lost coin and the lost sheep, can, however, be read as preparations for the central parable of the prodigal son.

The occasion of the teaching is the typically Lucan one of a response by Pharisees and Scribes to Jesus' association with tax collectors and sinners: "This man receives sinners and eats with them"(15:1). It is in response to this that Jesus tells the parables. The first two are parallels. Something is lost. Its value seems trivial in comparison with either the effort taken in searching for it, or the risk taken by leaving other responsibilities to engage in the search. Both stories have the same meaning: that the rejoicing over the finding of something lost allegorises the joy of the angels in heaven over the repentance of an individual sinner.

Different commentators find the focus of the parable of the prodigal son in different places. For Jeremias it is about the father: "The father, not the returning son is the central figure... The parable describes with touching simplicity what God is like, his goodness, his grace, his boundless mercy, his abounding love."[24] Others consider that the son and his experience is the focus. The emphasis in these cases is on the teaching about: "disobedience, the necessity

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[24]Jeremias, J. *The Parables of the Jesus* (London: SCM) 1972 pp128-131

of repentance and the joy of forgiveness"[25]. But while the first interpretation fails because it relies too much on the straightforward allegory of the father as God, which breaks down even within the text (Lk 15 v18 & v21), the second is inadequate because such attention on the experience of the son does not do justice to such a large proportion of the story. A better reading of the parable is obtained by attending to what is going on in the *relationships* depicted rather than in the individuals. The focus of the story is not the prodigality, repentance or joy of the younger son nor the grief and generosity of the father, still less is it the self-righteousness and indignation of the elder brother. The focus of the story is in the relationships, not in the individuals. Shifting attention to them reveals the parable to be about forgiveness. Moreover, read in this way the parable comes to be seen as a coherent narrative, not a series of episodes.

In the parable the relationship between the father and the son is challenged by the son taking his inheritance and moving away. That between the elder son and the father is stable. The younger son's behaviour ruins him and he realises that he is without human contact or place in the world. It is at this point that he initiates a process of thought and action which is aimed at restoring some kind of relationship with his father. Interestingly he comes to see himself as an offender, and that his offence is not merely against his father but before heaven, a periphrasis for God. Thus he places his relationship with his father in the context of his relationship with God. Moreover his confession does not concern specific actions. He is not so much concerned about the details of his behaviour as about what he has become: "I am no longer worthy to be called your son" (Lk 15 v18 & 21). Thus the son, in returning and confessing his shame, is doing two paradoxical things. He is seeking to reinstate a relationship with his father at the same time as owning that he is not worthy of the relationship to which he is naturally entitled. But the father, rather than accepting the son's self-estimation, accepts the son. The best robe, ring, shoes and fatted calf are all prepared in his honour and the father restores the son to a position of honour within the household. Luke makes the point that the story is about

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[25]Evans, C.F. *Saint Luke* p590

finding one who is lost, but the significance here is in the restoration of honour, which is the removal of shame. It is a story of the restoration of a relationship, a story of forgiveness.

The elder brother is like all the other onlookers we have encountered in these stories of forgiveness. He is present but not very involved. He has never tested nor even strained the relationship with his father. He is provoked and indignant at the party which is both the sign and the means of forgiveness. The elder brother fails to perceive that the celebration around the younger is a celebration of the restoration of a broken relationship. The elder brother's loyalty has been responded to loyally, but without a crisis there can be no forgiveness and no celebration.

2.iv. The Acceptance of Zacchaeus

The story of Zacchaeus (Lk 19:1-10) is unique to Luke. Evans characterises it as a lively story which is marked, like other Lucan narratives, by "a certain lack of logical unity"[26]. When the word *soteria* appears in verse 9 it is making a very rare appearance in this or any gospel. This is certainly the only place where it appears on the lips of Jesus. It emphasises that this is a story of salvation.

The story begins as one of acceptance. Jesus, on seeing the rich but small of stature Zacchaeus, invites himself to dinner. 'They' are scandalised, and say: "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." (Lk 19:7) But Jesus does not respond to this, rather it is Zacchaeus who speaks. He declares his response to the events of the day; that he will give half his goods to the poor and return fourfold any fruits of fraud. Jesus then announces that: "Today, salvation has come to this house" (Lk 19:9).

Is this a story of forgiveness? Zacchaeus makes no confession or apology prior to Jesus' acceptance of him. Moreover he does not engage with Jesus after the fact of his acceptance. Evans is right that the story is not precisely focused, but that is not a reflection of its quality so much as of the subject matter. Jesus' response to

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[26]Evans, C.F. *Saint Luke* p660

Zacchaeus is a key factor in transforming Zacchaeus' ways of being with and for others. It is because he has been accepted that Zacchaeus decides to deal differently with others. This theme of transformation through visitation is strong in Luke, ("Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people" Lk 1:68) and is given a new significance in this text. The story of Zacchaeus is a story of salvation through forgiveness. But there is a difference here to the usual pattern of 'repentance then forgiveness' in Luke's ethical teaching. The pattern here is acceptance/visitation then transformation of relationships, all of which adds up to forgiveness and salvation.

3. THE SPIRITUALITY OF FORGIVING

Just as the gospels show a connection between physicality and being forgiven so also they show an equally strong connection between spirituality and forgiving others. The idea that forgiveness is a necessary aspect of the ethical behaviour of the disciple is thus another focus of their concern. The evangelical material with regard to these questions is not only to be found within the ethical teaching in the sermons on the mount and on the plain. A significant proportion is found where the wider context is teaching on prayer (Mk 11:25; Mt 6:12; Lk 11:4; Lk 18:9-14) and the last judgement (Mt 18). The content as well as the context of such teaching also suggests that the matter of forgiving others is of more than ethical significance and that it is directly caught up with the divine-human relationship.

3.i. Forgiveness and Prayer

3.i.a. Being Merciful

Matthew's sermon on the mount (Mt 5-7) and Luke's sermon on the plain (Lk 6:20-49) contain the most direct and extended ethical teaching in the gospels. Into this teaching they integrate the understanding that the disciple must be a merciful person who exercises forgiveness. Matthew's sermon is longer and fuller than Luke's and provides our starting point.

The beatitudes are not particularly Christian, but rather are described by Beare as: "expressions of simple Jewish piety"[27]. Certainly the one which is closest to our theme, "Blessed are the merciful..."(Mt 5:7) is found in the sayings of Rabbi Gamaliel II: "So long as you are merciful, the merciful one is merciful to you"[28]. It is also anticipated in Ben Sirach: "Forgive your neighbour the wrong he has done, and then your sins will be pardoned when you pray"[29] . Luke also encourages mercy: "Be merciful, even as your father is merciful" (Lk 6:36). But the teaching goes on from this. Rather than responding as the merciful father might, the emphasis becomes one of being merciful in order to obtain mercy. "Judge not and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive,[30] and you will be forgiven[31] . . for the measure you give will be the measure you get back." (Lk 6:37-38)

This, like the other evangelical material, stresses not only the importance but also the inter-connectedness of forgiveness. The emphasis found in Ephesians: "be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph 4:42) and Colossians: "forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive" (Col 3:13) is consistent with this.

3.i.b. Prayer and Forgiveness

Developing from this spiritualisation of ethics there is in the sermon on the mount an internalisation of piety. The Matthean teaching to "be perfect" is followed immediately by warnings against seeking the social reward of practising public piety in the form of almsgiving, praying and fasting. But as well as privacy, economy in prayer is advocated and the Matthean Lord's Prayer enunciated. The understanding of forgiveness outlined in the beatitudes is reinforced here: "And forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors"[32] (Mt 6:12). But in Matthew special attention

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[27]Beare, F.W. *The Gospel According to Matthew* p134

[28]Beare, F.W. *The Gospel According to Matthew* p131

[29] Ecclesiasticus 28:2

[30] *apoluein* - literally to release. Evans suggests that this is a reference to release from debt which he equates with the idea of pardon. Evans, C.F. *Saint Luke* p337

[31] *apoluein.*

[32]Matthew uses the word *hopheiletes* for 'that from which we need to be forgiven'. It is not found elsewhere in classical or New Testament Greek with this meaning of sins as

is given to this petition to be forgiven and the eschatological dimensions of the ethics are drawn out. "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Mt 6:14)

Luke also has Jesus teach the disciples a prayer but not in the context of the sermon on the plain. The prayer, like the sermon, is more concise than Matthew's version and does not contain any additional inducement to act in accord with its implications. Rather the ancillary teaching is about the graciousness and generosity of the heavenly Father who will hear and respond to prayer. The specific prayer is limited to five clauses but it does contain a petition for forgiveness: "and forgive us our sins, as we forgive every one who is indebted to us" (Lk 11:4).

Mark also suggests that forgiveness is a point of connection between ethics and eschatology, between inter-personal and divine-human relationship: "And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against any one; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses" (Mk 11:25). The context of this remark is the cursing of the fruitless fig tree (Mk 11:12-14 and 20-25) but this text is caught up with that of the cleansing of the temple (Mk 11:15-19) and cannot be distanced either from the triumphal entry which has just been narrated or from the dispute over the authority of Jesus which ensues (Mk 11:27-33) and which leads into the parable of the vineyard (Mk 12:1-12).

Schweitzer notices the parallel to the petition in the Matthean Lord's Prayer (Mt 6:14) and comments that, "a right relation to God always involves a right relation to one's fellow men"[33]. Lane's view

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debts. Luke uses the more common *aphiemi* in the Lord's Prayer but uses this word in 13:4 in a passage about the general need for repentance in which there is no possibility of a financial connotation. The septuagint knows nothing of the coincidence of sin and debt which *hopheiletes* implies, though it does occur as a figure of speech in Targums and rabbinic literature (See Beare p177) This is, in fact, an Aramaic usage. The Aramaic word *hoba* can carry the meaning of either debt or sin. Certain contemporary synagogue prayers include similar sentiments in a similar language., for instance there is a new year prayer: "Our Father, our king, forgive and remit all our debts"

[33]Schweitzer, E. *The Good News According to Mark* p235

that this is a free floating logion does not, however, inhibit him from commenting on the implication of having this text in this context.

> "The effect of the juxtaposition of v23-4 and 25 is to suggest that not only faith but also the willingness of the Christian to forgive conditions the efficacy of prayer. The conjunction of these two thoughts in Mark affirm that the right to pray the prayer envisioned in v23-4 belongs only to brothers who are mutually reconciled and united in a community of faith".[34]

Does it make sense to insert this teaching about the importance of human forgiveness into this context? The triumphal entry and the cleansing of the Temple are powerful signs of the significance of the mission and message of Jesus. Jerusalem is stormed by the Messiah of the merciful God who is concerned with righteousness and justice but who, far from being convinced that the current religiosity is a means to this end, challenges it both directly, by casting people out of the Temple, and indirectly, through the parable of the vineyard. The cursing of the fig-tree and attendant commentary are a worked and concrete example of the point, and it is at the heart of this, the focus of the section, that the verse about the necessity of forgiveness is inserted. At the very least this points to the centrality of the forgiveness teaching in the religious ethics of Jesus. Certainly divine-human relations are set on a different footing, but the divine partner cannot sustain forgiveness against the spirit of unforgiveness.

3.ii. Forgiveness and Judgement

The eighteenth chapter of the gospel according to Matthew is part of the larger section which stretches from chapter 14 to the end of chapter 25. It is the fourth major discourse in that gospel and in it several themes closely related to forgiveness are combined with the parable of the unforgiving slave.

Two kinds of vulnerable and weak people, children and those who have sinned, are the concerns of the early part of this chapter.

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[34]Lane, W. *The Gospel According to Mark* p411

Humility is pronounced as a necessary virtue for those who would enter the kingdom, and in this way it is similar to, if not identical with, forgiveness: the disciple is to be humble 'like a small child' (Mt 18:4) and ready to forgive 'seventy times seven' (Mt 18:22). The language is of conditionality and Matthew's emphasis is thus on the virtue that is required of the disciple. The second half of the chapter is concerned with the forgiveness that disciples have for each other. It is assumed that certain faults can be legitimately described as interpersonal sins and that it is appropriate to bring such a fault to the light of day (Mt 18:15). Matthew then sets out a process by which such sins may be dealt with within the fellowship.[35] This culminates, should the sinner refuse to attend to his admonishers, in the casting out of the sinner.[36] This is then bolstered by: "whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven..." (Mt 18:18). Then, by way of immediate contrast, Peter's question about forgiving his brother is asked. This is surprising because the language had steadily devolved towards the prospect of damnation of those who do not, will not or cannot acknowledge their sins against others; and yet Peter's question is about the human expression of forgiveness. Peter, at least, articulates the contrast between the emphasis on forgiving in the earlier teaching and this sudden stress on the product of sin against others. His suggestion of forgiving someone seven times can be read either as the words of a generous and compassionate spirit or of a confused man trying to reconcile the irreconcilable. In any case the answer of seventy times seven is as much a contrast with Jesus' previous line of thought as it is of this suggestion of Peter's.[37] This unresolved tension is the occasion of Matthew's parable of the unmerciful servant which is

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[35]Luke has this teaching but in a greatly condensed form with a different emphasis. Lk17:3 "Take heed to yourselves; if your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him;"

[36]It should be noted that this excommunication process, in which the local church acts as a kind of assize is based on a non-hierarchical and egalitarian community - see Mt 20:25-27 and Mt 23:8,10. The emphasis is thus very different here to that read in Jn 20:23 in which the authority to forgive or retain is donated to the small group of disciples.

[37]Luke has this teaching but without the drama of the Matthean excommunication process, he simply continues the logic of 17:3 (see note above) "and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, and says, 'I repent', you must forgive him."

not, like so many, a parable of the kingdom.[38] It is a parable about the Last Judgement.[39]

The initial debt of the servant was enormous, so large that Beare suggests that it is 'incredible': ten thousand talents was the largest unit of account; it would be the total revenue of a wealthy province.[40] Selling the servant and his family would not cancel the debt and might, therefore, best be thought of as an expression of wrath. The point is that this is a debt which could not possibly be repaid. The plea of the servant for more time in which to pay is quite fatuous. In the parable forgiveness of the debt becomes the criterion and judgement under which the servant lives. He is therefore judged on his failure to forgive even trifling debts. But this is not a failure to be just. The servant's problem was that he did not let his relationship with his master inform his relations with those under him. It was the small-minded pursuit of 'justice' which was his down-fall. According to Jeremias this is a teaching which develops the imagery of the two measures in Jewish apocalyptic thought, but which is without parallel in Jewish literature. "Jewish apocalyptic thought that God rules the world by the two measures of Mercy and Judgement; but at the last judgement he only makes use of Judgement... On the other hand, Jesus taught that the measure of Mercy is in force at the Last Judgement also".[41] Jeremias suggests that the relevant question is: when does God measure by Judgement and when by Mercy? "Where God's forgiveness produces a readiness to forgive, there God's Mercy grants forgiveness of debts again at the last Judgement; but he who abuses God's gift, faces the full severity of judgement, as if they had never received forgiveness."[42] The point of the parable can be described as indicating that Mercy *is* Justice in as much as it replaces justice as the eschatological criterion. Judgement concerns, in other words, whether the character is merciful and forgiving.

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[38]C.H. Dodd *The Parables of the Kingdom* (London: Nisbet 1936) p33 "I have failed to find any specific link between this parable and the idea of the kingdom"
[39]Jeremias, J. *The Parables of Jesus* p213
[40]Beare, F.W. *The Gospel According to Matthew* p382
[41]Jeremias, J. *The Parables of Jesus* p213
[42]Jeremias, J. *The Parables of Jesus* p214

Luke has a briefer passage which deals with some of these issues. (Lk 17:1-4) There are important differences between the Lucan and the Matthean treatment, however. Matthew emphasises keeping disputes in proportion: "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother." (Mt 18:15) But Luke has: "Take heed to yourselves; if your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him." (Lk 17:3) Luke, that is, does not insist upon forgiveness unless there is repentance, *metanoia*. However, if a sinful brother does repent there is no effective limit on the extent to which he can be forgiven: "and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, and says, 'I repent', you must forgive him"(Lk 17:4). It is noteworthy that for Luke repentance is a necessary precondition for forgiveness, whereas for Matthew it is not (Mt 18:21-22). Both Matthew and Luke value forgiveness but for Luke is it a response, whereas for Matthew it is an initiative.

3.iii. Forgiving and Being Forgiven

Although this chapter has been structured around the distinction between being forgiven and forgiving, a central aspect of the way in which the forgiveness is discussed in the gospels draws attention to the interconnectedness between the two. This interconnectedness is most evident in the Lord's Prayer: "forgive us our sins *as* we forgive those who sin against us". An equal but different connectedness is evident in Colossians and Ephesians where encouragement to forgiveness of others is based on the teaching that this is a consequence of the fact of having being forgiven (Colossians 3:13 and Ephesians 4:32).[43]

In the epistles then, the connection between being forgiven and forgiving is one of enablement. In the gospels, however, the connection seems to be one of condition. In Paul the origin of

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[43]"...if anyone has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you so you also must forgive." Colossians 3:13
"Be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you." Ephesians 4:32

forgiving is to be found in our having been forgiven, whereas, or so it seems, in Matthew and Luke the origin of our being forgiven lies in our action of forgiving others.

C.F.D. Moule discusses the relationship between forgiving and being forgiven in the synoptic gospels. While affirming that these texts are to be interpreted as suggesting that forgiveness is conditional, he argues that it is quite wrong to think of forgiveness as something which can be merited. "The key to an answer to this question lies in distinguishing between, on the one hand, earning or meriting forgiveness, and on the other hand, adopting an attitude which makes forgiveness possible - the distinction that is between deserts and capacity."[44] His view is that forgiveness is conditional on repentance not because it will be withheld unless the sinner repents but because unless a sinner repents that sinner will not be able to receive forgiveness. Consequently real repentance, *metanoia*, is truly a *sine qua non* of forgiveness.

> "That forgiveness is conditioned by repentance is true, because reconciliation is a personal relationship, and cannot be achieved without responsiveness on both sides of the relationship. But that forgiveness is earned by repentance or deeds of reparation is not true."[45]

Moule makes his case with reference to Matthew 18. The point here is that the forgiveness of the servant is conditional not on merit but on the ability to receive the forgiveness which is freely offered. This narrative, he argues, "says no more than that the free forgiveness could not be had without the debtor's capacity to receive it."[46]

But Matthew 18 is quite clear that unless the disciple forgives others that disciple will not be forgiven, rather condemned as a non-forgiver. And, as the parable of the publican and tax collector demonstrates, inter-personal attitudes are fundamental to the

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[44]Moule, C.F.D. 'As We Forgive' in *Essays in New Testament Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 1982 p281
[45]Moule, C.F.D. 'As We Forgive' p282
[46]Moule, C.F.D. 'As We Forgive' p285

relationship with God, which, for Matthew, has as its ultimate reference last judgement. Moule attributes this aspect of the chapter 18 narrative, what he calls its 'vindictive tone', to its origin as a piece of popular preaching. But in doing so he fails to account for the repetition of the idea in 6:14 and to locate the teaching within the framework of eschatological judgement. For Matthew the forgiving of others is necessary to avoid condemnation: to fail to forgive is the unforgivable sin.

Moule's argument is much stronger in the case of the gospel of Luke. For one thing there is less material which suggests that God forgives those who forgive, and for another there is more evidence, as we have seen, that Jesus is quick not only to accept those who intimate *metanoia* but also to accept and to forgive in advance of any repentance. Indeed, Moule's argument is based on his interpretation of the text in Luke 6 of the woman who anoints Jesus. As he rightly points out, the key issue here is the suggestion that the words of Jesus to Simon imply that the woman is forgiven because of her love. This is a view which the Revised Standard Version of v47 supports: "Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little." Moule argues, however, that this is a mistranslation which focuses not on the translation of the verb to forgive but on the word *oti,* 'because'. This, he contends, applies not to the reason that she was forgiven but to the reason that it is possible to say that she has been forgiven. .The reason that Jesus is able to say that she has been forgiven is because she is so loving. This point is taken in the New English Bible which translates: "her great love proves that her many sins have been forgiven" and the Jerusalem Bible which has: "For this reason I tell you that her sins, her many sins, must have been forgiven her, or she would not have shown great love."

Thus while Matthew and Luke, like Paul, stress the interconnectedness of forgiving and being forgiven they do so in different ways. For Matthew, forgiving others is the *sine qua non* of being forgiven whereas for Luke being forgiven by God or accepted by Jesus necessarily issues in consequences which are characterised by

generous love; whether it is the personal and extravagant kind such as that of the woman who anoints, or the socially responsible and reparative kind shown by Zacchaeus. Paul understands forgiveness as a moral duty on those who have been forgiven. This approach overlaps with Matthew's idea that human forgiveness is an imperative and with the Lucan one that a generous and healing spirit is the product of divine forgiveness.

4. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter the understandings of forgiveness expressed in the synoptic gospels have been surveyed with special attention to the question of the nature of the relation between divine and human forgiveness. The study has confirmed that forgiveness is a complex reality which is characteristically embedded within narrative structures.

All the evangelists record that Jesus not only encouraged forgiveness but also forgave individuals. The forgiveness of Jesus was experienced by those who came sufficiently close to engage with his openness and vulnerability in a physical and healing way. In the teaching of Jesus such forgiveness was associated with the acceptance both of those who were outside, or condemned by, the law and with the acceptance of intimations of repentance. In each case the act of forgiveness was described as immediate and open-ended.

Jesus also taught his disciples that they should be merciful and forgiving towards others. While his actions of forgiveness were characterised by their physical quality the teaching on the need to forgive was contextualised by the theological matters of prayer and judgement. Moreover the teaching on forgiveness pointed to the connection between the way in which people related with others and with God. The argument here is that Matthew and Luke understand this interconnection in different ways. For Matthew it is necessary to forgive others in order that one receive divine forgiveness. For Luke, however, human forgiveness is one of the many gracious and generous responses which there can be to the experience of having

been accepted and forgiven. This seems, at first sight, to be the opposite of an earlier conclusion that for Luke forgiveness was a response whereas for Matthew it was an initiative. The two conclusions are reconciled, however, when it is clear that for Matthew it is human forgiveness which is the initiative. It has no origin other than the volition or decision to forgive. For Luke, on the other hand, forgiveness is a particular dimension of the idea that human relating should be characterised by love and acceptance.

CHAPTER TWO

FORGIVENESS IN BRITISH ATONEMENT THEOLOGY

1890 - 1940

One of the central paradoxes with which this work has to come to terms is the fact that forgiveness is on the one hand such a self-evidently central aspect of Christian doctrine and ethics and yet on the other hand is not a subject to have been approached directly in book length studies. One of the reasons for this is that much work on forgiveness has gone on under the heading of atonement. Such work as this has characteristically taken human forgiveness as a primary analogy for the divine-human reconciliation effected by the work of Christ. In this chapter I offer a review of such British writing on forgiveness as comes into this category in the years 1890 to 1940. Most of the work in this chapter is written by Anglican theologians, the exception being that by the Scottish Presbyterian H.R. Mackintosh. All the writing is characterised by what one might call 'human interest'. None of the theologians makes any positive use of the developing science of psychology but all of them refer at several points to human and relational experience. This is done informally and anecdotally as well as, especially by Charles Williams, in a literary way. This is helpful to us as it allows for the development of a fuller picture of the nature and meaning of forgiveness than would be allowed by a merely propositional or rational analysis of the concept. All the writers have something to say about forgiveness both as an aspect of interpersonal life and as atonement. None of these authors underestimates the complexity of forgiveness between people and many important issues are revealed as they attempt to clarify what the atonement means by talking about human forgiveness. There is an apologetic note to be heard in some of the works but there is also genuine theology to be read here. Forgiveness is not straightforward in theory, even if it is in practice, and genuine insights into the

nature of God and the significance of relationships and relational repair are to be gleaned by attending to the work of Arthur Lyttleton, R.C. Moberly, William Temple, H.R. Mackintosh, and Charles Williams.

1. ATONEMENT AND FORGIVENESS ARTHUR LYTTLETON

Arthur Lyttleton's *Lux Mundi* essay has atonement as its subject, but the tenor of his paper suggests that in order to understand the atonement there must be a real effort to place it in the context of the rest of theology. In isolation atonement makes no sense. But while his case is, in part, that atonement must be considered alongside doctrines such as incarnation and those of God and sin he also makes the point that divine forgiveness and human forgiveness must be considered together if the nature of any forgiveness is to be understood. This is because human forgiveness is something not only parallel to but also as mysterious as atonement itself.

> "And even if the Atonement could be altogether reduced, so to speak, to terms of human experience, it will be shown that man's forgiveness, the nearest analogy of which we have any knowledge, is an experience of which no logical explanation can be given, which seems to share, indeed, something of the mystery of the divine anti type."[1]

When Lyttleton speaks of forgiveness he means both the human experience of being forgiven, and the human knowledge or faith that one is forgiven of God; something which he believes to come from a meditation on or observation of the death of Christ. His most substantial thoughts with regard to forgiveness are revealed, however, when he moves on from the questions pertaining to the divine dealing with the unrighteousness of the sinner and the vulnerability of the sinner to the power of sin, to consider the possibility that the work of the atonement was not merely for man but also *in* man.

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[1]Lyttleton, A. *The Atonement* in Gore, C. *Lux Mundi* (London: John Murray)1891 p285 All references to Lyttleton in this chapter refer to this essay

"The Atonement is, after all, God's forgiveness of us in Christ, and no forgiveness is conceivable which does not in some degree relieve the offender of the consequences of his offence. Human forgiveness... must, in the very act of forgiving, put away and abolish the anger of the offended person, the alienation which the offence has caused, and which is certainly part, sometimes the greatest part, of the penal consequences of an offence. Human forgiveness therefore transgresses the strict law of retribution."[2]

Lyttleton is at pains here to show that some of the criticism of any Christian understanding of atonement is based on an inappropriate form of reasoning: we might say now that what was required here was not so much logic as psycho-logic, not so much rationality as human-sense. He continues to describe human forgiveness:

> "Inexplicable though the fact may be, experience tells us that forgiveness avails to lift the load of guilt that presses upon an offender. A change passes over him that can only be described as regenerative, life-giving; and thus the assurance of pardon, however conveyed, may be said to obliterate in some degree the consequences of the past. It is true that this result of forgiveness cannot be explained logically so as to satisfy the reason, but the possibility and the power of pardon are nevertheless facts of human experience."[3]

It is in this analogous way that human and divine forgiveness relate:

> "The Atonement is undoubtedly a mystery, but all forgiveness is a mystery. The Atonement undoubtedly transgresses the strict law of retribution, but all forgiveness transgresses it. And we may believe that human forgiveness is, in spite of all its imperfection, like that of God, for this is surely the lesson of the Lord's Prayer, 'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.'"[4]

Lyttleton follows these thoughts of analogy with reference to what he calls, "the truth, stamped on every page of the New Testament, of

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[2]Lyttleton, A. p302
[3]*ibid.*
[4]*ibid.*

the mystical union between Christ and his people."[5] This means that while the work of atonement is Christ's alone there is not only room for a human contribution to the process, the process itself will not occur without the human contribution of faith.

> "But like the gifts of grace which come after forgiveness, the forgiveness itself has to be personally accepted by us; it must be brought into contact with each man's will. So regarded, the Atonement, though the great gift of reconciliation is absolutely free, the product of the spontaneous love of God, does lay on us an obligation. On our part faith is demanded that we may realise, and appropriate, and associate ourselves with the pardon which is ours in Christ."[6]

In this Lyttleton strikes a note which will become a resonant chord in the work of Moberly, picking up, as it does a central idea in the understanding of the atonement of McLeod Campbell, that is the identification of the sinner with Christ: "Faith identifies the individual with the sacrifice which has been offered for him, and therefore with Christ's attitude towards God and towards sin, and though it is but the first step, yet it is emphatically that by reason of which we are justified."[7]

There is more to atonement than justification, however. For Lyttleton sanctification is: "the imitation of Christ in that task of learning of obedience to which His life was devoted, and which his death completed"[8]. Humanity has been saved from some suffering, but not all. However that suffering which remains is not "penal, but remedial and penitential"[9].

The emphasis which develops in this section of his chapter is on the need for human participation in the atoning work of Christ so that it can be realised in the individual.

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[5]Lyttleton, A. p303
[6]Lyttleton, A. p304
[7]Lyttleton, A. p305
[8]Lyttleton, A. p306
[9]*ibid.*

> "Our personal share in the Atonement is not mere passivity. It consists, first in the acceptance of God's forgiveness in Christ, our self-identification with Christ's atoning attitude, and then in working out, by the power of the life bestowed upon us, all the consequences of forgiveness."[10]

Lyttleton's understanding of atonement is only possible because he treats human forgiveness as a serious and important activity. What he does not do at any point, however, is suggest that there is in the act or activity of human forgiveness a manifestation of divine grace, nor does he develop the thought that there might be a theologically significant relationship between being forgiven and being a forgiver. He does refer to the need for obedience to the law of perfect righteousness, but he does not indicate whether this has as much to do with having a forgiving response when offended as it does with doing the right thing by God and by human neighbours. What he ignores is the possibility of developing a human moral sympathy and compassion which makes forgiveness the prevailing attitude towards others who are, inevitably, within the thrall of sin.

2. ATONEMENT AND PERSONALITY R.C. MOBERLY

Reviewing R.C. Moberly's *magnum opus* almost sixty years after is was published Vincent Taylor was very positive.

> "*Atonement and Personality* is a work of great beauty and suggestiveness. Written by an outstanding Anglican scholar, it combines subtlety of expression with warmth of religious feeling. It is the work of a theologian, a philosopher, and a worshipper all in one, and is written on so broad a scale that it gives the reader a liberal education in theology in general".[11]

The book is full of difficult and audacious questions for the theological mind. What *is* punishment? What *is* penitence? What *is* forgiveness? It raises the issues of subjectivity and objectivity and pushes on to include within the architecture of the Atonement discussion of the Trinity, Pentecost, Church and Sacraments. The

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[10] *ibid.*

[11] Taylor, V *The Cross of Christ* (London: Macmillan & Co.)1957 p78

focus of concern however is not the cross of Christ but the heart of the penitent, its healing, nourishment, growth and its home both in God and in the reconciling community.

Hastings Rashdall's review written at the time of publication is far less positive in tone than Taylor's remarks. Yet there is an appreciation of the effort and insight of the chapter on penitence which is only exceeded by his favour for the understanding of forgiveness proposed in the third chapter. As Moberly insists, forgiveness is such an exceedingly prominent part of the Christian religion that we need to ask the question of what it *is*. It is related to punishment but is not the mere remission of punishment or penalty, although it may involve this, especially if this is likely to lead to the reformation of the penitent. Moreover he agrees with Lyttleton that there is a need for a special, human and sympathetic kind of thought necessary to the understanding of forgiveness. "Forgiveness is not a transaction which can be taken by itself and stated as it were in terms of arithmetic. It is the attitude of a person to a person. It can only be understood in terms of personality."[12] It is complex, and it involves: "treating, nay even a recognising, of the person forgiven as good".[13] But it is also in pursuit of justice, which is the reform of the sinner, the reformation, or transformation, of the character. It is no "indifference to sin which is itself a new sin".[14]

Moberly's understanding is that forgiveness occurs to the extent to which a person is 'forgivable'. He appreciates that putting it this way courts the danger of evacuating the idea of forgiveness of human meaning. If I forgive those who are forgivable, and if I have no choice about it because their 'forgiveableness' is irresistible, then I do not *act* in forgiving; it merely happens. This is clearly wide of the mark. Forgiveness does not just happen, it is a matter of agency. But this is something of a theoretical quibble because people are never perfectly forgivable.

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[12]Moberly, R.C. *Atonement and Personality* (London: Murray) 1901 p54 all references to Moberly in this chapter refer to this book
[13]Moberly, R.C. p55
[14]Moberly, R.C. p56

Moberly sees forgiveness as a generous response to a germ of penitence which may be perceived, and when perceived and treated gracefully, will begin to grow.

> "Earthly forgiveness - real in the present, but real as inchoate and provisional - only reaches its final and perfect consummation then, when the forgiven penitent - largely though the softening and enabling grace of progressively realised forgiveness - has become at last personally and completely righteous. It is not consummated perfectly till the culprit *is* righteous: and love does pour itself out to welcome and to crown what is already the verdict of righteousness and truth."[15]

Moberly is clear that forgiveness is not a kind of action or attitude which is distinct from love. Indeed it *is* love in certain circumstances: "There is no difference at all between Divine forgiveness and Divine love... Forgiveness *is* love in its relation to a personality which having sinned, is learning, and to learn, what the sin-consciousness of penitence means".[16]

Divine and human forgiveness are profoundly connected. "Human forgiveness is to find its inspiration in man's experience of the forgiveness of God. God's forgiveness must find an expression of itself in man's forgiveness of man."[17] Human and divine forgiveness are not the same thing but they may sometimes approximate much more closely than others. The parent's response to the naughty child is seen as a close parallel and is described as the 'diplomacy of love' in a charming and sympathetic paragraph.[18] The main point is well put in this contrast: "Love dare not, can not - being love - forgive in the height of passion. Love dare not, can not - being love - fail to forgive from the moment when forgiveness is possible."[19] Moberly sees forgiveness as integral to moral and personal development. It is the 'sunshine in which character grows'.

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[15]Moberly, R.C. p61
[16]Moberly, R.C. p62
[17]Moberly, R.C. p63
[18]Moberly, R.C. p64/5
[19]Moberly, R.C. p64

Moberly appreciates that there are many other circumstances in which the meaning of the duty to forgive, or for that matter to love, would be different. The starkest of these are the many circumstances in which the subject to offer forgiveness is a victim. He asks himself what makes it possible for a victim to forgive and concludes that it is the realisation first that the victim has no right not to suffer and second that the offender is: 'not a thing but a man'[20]. These two attitudes make forgiveness a real possibility. In martyrdom there can be acceptance of death and prayer for the murderers. In less than terminal victimisation, "our forgiveness takes the form of the consecrating of our will, the uplifting of our appeal, to God on their behalf."[21] The point is that if we are seeking to understand divine forgiveness through an analysis of human forgiveness we will do better if we start with the relationship of parent to child than with that of victim to oppressor, as the former is a better analogy of our relationship with God. Forgiveness is always provisional and is primarily a morally educational mode of love, one which leads to the perfection of penitence and thus the fullness of righteousness and forgiveness itself. Forgiveness is a way of God doing battle with sin, for forgiveness, like sin, gets inside the self, it informs, reforms, transforms the personality.

Moberly's vision is of the transformation of the self. Central to this, as to all this thinking, is the idea of free will. His argument is that human will is at its most free when conforming to the divine will, and that there is a process of development operative throughout life which may tend in this direction. This is not an isolated activity of a section of the psyche but is quite fundamental and integrative.

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[20]Moberly, R.C. p68
[21]Moberly, R.C. p69

> "The gradual enlargement of the capacities of selfhood, the emancipation from disability, the perfecting of power, till, under conditions as transfiguring as the visible glory of the holy mountain, the self, in its own transcendent consummation, finds at last what it meant, in God's truth, to be a self"[22]

Such romantic subjectivity was not common in the theological writing of Moberly's period, but he persists, convinced that, "my free will means the capacity in me of a perfect response, of personal will and personal character, to God"[23]. And he is closest to his appreciation of Schleiermacher when he writes that: "Free will is not the independence of the creature, but rather his self-realisation in perfect dependence"[24]. Such perfection is humanly impossible and therefore the Holy Spirit of Christ is the only basis of free living.

> "This is what free will means. In its perfectness it is the self become another. It is Christ in the man. It is the man become One Spirit with Christ. It is the love of God reproduced in the man until the man, in God's love, or God's love in man, has become a divine response, adequate to, because truly mirroring, God."[25]

In this way he argues that to be without sin and to be free are the same condition. No human being but Christ attains this state. However all people have the possibility, we might now say the *potential,* of tending towards it. Such a tendency is not a feature of the isolated individual, however. It is a product of the person in the sacred community. Moberly bemoans the individualism of western Christianity. For too long the concept of 'I' has been used in theology in a naive and unreflective way, as if human identity were complete and entirely individual, and this notwithstanding the thought so familiar in Christianity that: "the excellent glory of a man is only in personal union and communion with the Spirit of

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[22]Moberly, R.C. p225
[23]Moberly, R.C. p226
[24]*ibid.*
[25]Moberly, R.C. p227

Jesus Christ".[26] But Moberly insists that the gift of the Spirit is the kind of gift which effects such a transformation that, as it were, after the gift has been received the identity of the recipient is more like the gift than the initial self. So that it is fair to say, speaking of the presence of the Spirit of Christ:

> "He is not a mere presence *in* me, overruling, controlling, displacing. What he does in me, I do. What He in me wills, I will. What he in me loves, I love. Nay, never is my will so really free: never is my power so worthy of being called power: never is my rational wisdom so rational or so wise; never is my love so really love; never moreover is any one of these things so royally my own; never am I, as I, so capable, so personal, so real; never am I, in a word, as really what the real 'I' always tried to mean; as when by the true indwelling of the Spirit of God, I enter into the realisation of myself; as when I at last correspond to, and fulfil, and expand in my fulfilling, all the unexplored possibilities of my personal being, by a perfect mirroring of the Spirit of Christ; as when in Him and by Him I am, at last, a true, willing, personal response to the very Being of God."[27]

The rhetoric compares most favourably with many of less helpful images of the way in which the Holy Spirit might enter into a subject's personhood. There is no pouring down or filling up here, no thought that the Spirit of God and that of a person might not mix too well, but rather that they tend towards identification. On interaction the perfect perfects the imperfect. This is not the language of the laundry, so prominent in thinking about baptismal and post-baptismal forgiveness, but that of alchemy and magic. Uncleanness, dirt, imperfection, stain is simply no more; it has vanished without trace. All that is left is clean, perfect, pristine, good and pure. This is washing-up not merely without dirty water left in the bowl but with the water and the bowl somehow entering into the china and making it radiate an infectious cleanliness.

This Levitical logic is found in his reflections on holy communion where he refers to: "The foulness of eating foulness; the strength of

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[26]Moberly, R.C. p250
[27]Moberly, R.C. p252

eating strength; the sanctity of eating sacrifice".[28] This then becomes his basis for understanding the human nurture provided in the sacrament of Holy Communion.

> "The Holy Communion is the perpetually fresh and fresh imparting, to the congregation, and to every qualified individual member of the congregation, of the humanity of Christ; that is to say of that Humanity, divinely spiritual, which, perfect in its own inherent holiness, has through the consummation unto death, of the sacrifice of contrition, felt and crushed the whole accumulated power of sin."[29]

The sacramental system is thus not at all in tension with the theology "of consummation of human personality only in and thorough personal union with the Spirit of the Incarnate".[30] And this emphasises that the atonement cannot be conceived of as a transaction by which God is spared the demands of justice. Rather,

> "it is a real transformation of the conditions and possibilities of humanity, which, being consummated first in the person of Jesus Christ, becomes, through him, a personal reality in all those whose personality is ultimately determined and constituted by the progressive realisation in them, of His Spirit - which is, in its final consummation, their absolute identity, in Spirit, with Him."[31]

For Moberly forgiveness is the means by which human and imperfect penitence is met and brought to the fruition of union with God in the Church. Penitence, like punishment, is of value but it is not the right order of response to the problem of human corruption. It does not get to the heart of the matter which is the wayward and therefore unfree human will. Of particular interest is his use of the language of self-hood and the thought that there is within the self the possibility of development towards fulfilment. But it is equally significant that he sees that this is a process which will forever subvert itself. Moberly is certainly no humanist, but believes that salvation comes through a forgiveness which is mediated by

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[28]Moberly, R.C. p268
[29]Moberly, R.C. p273
[30]Moberly, R.C. p275
[31]Moberly, R.C. p275/6

processes of identification and inspiration which in the end transform the individual sufficiently that there is no moral problem with the cancelling of their fault.

> "The doctrine, then, of the atonement through Jesus Christ, the doctrine of the redemption of sinful man, means a real change, not a fictitious one, in the man who is redeemed. It means a change no less portentous, in himself, than the change from being personally identified with sin, to being personally identified with the very Divine perfection of holiness."[32]

3. FORGIVENESS AND FELLOWSHIP WILLIAM TEMPLE

In his early book *Mens Creatrix* William Temple wrote an essay on the problem of evil. In his later work, *Christus Veritas*, he attempted to address some of the questions which this raised in a chapter on forgiveness. It is to this that we turn for a more developed understanding of forgiveness and atonement.

Temple's starting point is the need for restoration of unity. "The very notion of forgiveness presupposes an alienation, a severed unity."[33] But if this is the starting point, what is the nature, the 'doctrine', of forgiveness?

To begin with the gospels. "Dr Rashdall is perfectly right... the plain teaching of the parable [of the prodigal son] is that God freely forgives all who repent, and that the rest of the teaching of our Lord accords with this."[34] But there is more to the question of forgiveness than this. And here Temple usefully states two questions which have often competed for theological attention: how can forgiveness be freely given without loss to the majesty of the moral law? And, how, if repentance is the condition of forgiveness, is that condition fulfilled?

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[32]Moberly, R.C. p277

[33]Temple, W. *Christus Veritas* (London: Macmillan) 1925 p255 All references to Temple in this chapter refer to this work.

[34]Temple, W. p256

In the course of his discussion Temple makes the following important and germane points. The answer to the two questions is to be sought in the cross; the motivation of the cross is to be found in the love, not the wrath, of God; forgiveness does not consist in remission of penalty but in restoration to a relationship of affectionate intimacy of sons with their Father; God really is antagonistic to the sinner in sin (and sin is a perversion of will); Christ came to save people not from punishment for sins but from their sins. From all this it follows that: "The atonement is accomplished by the drawing of sinful souls into conformity with the divine Will."[35] The problem is to do justice both to the evangelical witness and to the moral realisation that in order to be God, God must forgive through care and effort rather than indifference. To this Gethsemane and Golgotha provide ready answers. And at this point it becomes clear that Temple's theological effort prefigures much which has been written more recently about the need to relate atonement and theodicy: "There are two ways of expressing antagonism to sin; one is to inflict suffering on the sinner, the other is to endure suffering. Either repels the charge of moral indifference".[36]

When it comes to questions of substitution and propitiation Temple is sagely cautious. There is no doubt that the cross was *for us*, but that does not mean the end of any suffering nor does it mean that there has been any propitiation. He prefers rather to think of the desire for propitiation as primitive and to say that the cross fulfils and supersedes the mentality which construes justice in this way. The significance of the cross is to make it possible that repentance might follow sin. The cross is a vehicle of repentance. "His love, shown pre-eminently in His Death, has transforming power over all those who open their hearts to it."[37] Temple is walking up the path once cleared by Moberly, but his concern is not so much to explore the psychology of penitence as to make it clear how the language of sacrifice can persist although the language of substitution, vicarious suffering and propitiation all begin to pass away. "We

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[35]Temple, W. p259
[36]Temple, W. p261
[37]Temple, W. p263

plead His Passion, not as transferred penalty, but as an act of self-sacrifice which re-makes us in its own likeness".[38]

This established, Temple is free to begin to look at the relationship between divine and human forgiveness.

> "God's forgiveness is restoration to intimate fellowship with God; but fellowship with God is fellowship with self-forgetful and self-giving Love, of which forgiveness is a necessary outcome. If we do not forgive, we are not in fellowship with God. The repentance, which is the condition of God's free forgiveness, is a turning away from our selfish outlook and the adoption of God's outlook, from which forgiveness necessarily proceeds. God's forgiveness of us and of our brothers are not related as cause and effect but rather as the obverse and reverse of one spiritual fact. They are in their own nature indissolubly united. It is not by an arbitrary decree that they are associated together; they are one thing... He *can* only forgive us, as we forgive our brothers."[39]

This is an extremely significant point not least because it brings the question of what true repentance might mean into the arena of everyday concerns. It means forgiving those who have offended you, be they your sworn enemy or your beloved wife. It is powerful because it generates a dialectic, but more than a dialectic, which is to be spiritually explored to the extent to which real relationships are improved and real relations loved. It moves the focus of the holy from the neuroses of the anxious man in mid-life crisis to the busy mother extending her tired arms to lift up a naughty little boy; from the musty confessional to the stubborn adolescent venturing to talk again with her friends who have been spiteful; from the petulant striving after perfection in all things, even penitence, to the old man struggling to write a note of greeting to his long estranged son.

"The Forgiveness of Sins is an article of the Creed... when [a man] says that he believes in the forgiveness of sins, he ought not to mean that he holds the opinion that God forgives sins, but that he believes in forgiving sins as a principle of practical life - God's life and man's."[40]

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[38]Temple, W. p264
[39]Temple, W. p265
[40]Temple, W. p266

This is a significant example of the integration of theological and ethical aspects of forgiveness. But Temple's contribution is not spent there. He suggests a distinction between 'forgiveness' and 'forgiving-ness'.[41] The latter being the internal attitude, the former the process involving the acceptance of an offer and the restoration of intimacy. He also stresses that while the forgiveness of sins is the 'practical and human' part of atonement, there is more to the doctrine than that. This should be born in mind, though it is reasonable to ask how far forgiveness alone, as it were, can go towards healing the lost unity between not only God and humanity, but also God and creation. But Temple is no simple triumphalist. The real victory of the cross is in the revelation that God can truly suffer, and that of the resurrection is that the defeat and suffering of the cross is itself the victory. "Cross and Resurrection together give us Tragedy transmuted into triumph as the key to the interpretation of the world".[42] The language of change is central, as it was to Moberly, but Temple's change is in a different sort of space. It involves, for instance, the change in the value or meaning of a sinful action. Thus forgiveness, atonement, does not change the facts of the past, and certainly is no mere forgetting, rather it is a placing of whatever would alienate the two parties in the context of an energy which would heal the rift.

4. FORGIVENESS AND CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE H.R. MACKINTOSH

F.W. Dillistone has described H.R.Mackintosh's *The Christian Experience of Forgiveness* as: "The most extensive attempt in modern times to interpret the Atonement in terms of the category of forgiveness."[43] He also recommended the work's, "deep insight into the nature of personal relationships and... profoundly religious quality"[44]. Dillistone draws attention to Mackintosh's understanding of the cataclysmic scale and quality of his subject, noticing how he

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[41]Temple, W. p268
[42]Temple, W. p271
[43]Dillistone, F. *The Christian Understanding of the Atonement* (London: SCM) 1968 p299
[44]*ibid.*

speaks of: "The 'shattering' discovery of personal failure: the 'shattering' experience of pardoning personal wrong"[45].

For Mackintosh forgiveness is a synonym of justification and he contends that the common distinction between the two, that forgiveness did not include the restoration to fellowship but was focused on the blotting out of offences, is invalid at the level of human experience rather than analytical theory.[46] The reason for discussing forgiveness rather than justification is the *ordinariness* of the word, and the consequent possibility of relating the theological and human interpretations of experience. And forgiveness is a reality. Mackintosh dismisses the objections that forgiveness is impossible because it is 'contrary to the nature of the world' and equally that forgiveness is immoral, and that the Christian insistence on it, "betrays a serious ethical inferiority to other, more sombre, faiths"[47].

Mackintosh argues that forgiveness is not remission of penalty. Indeed, "pardon and retribution invariably go together...[because] If God did not chastise sin in the very act of forgiveness, and in the persons of the forgiven as a sequel to forgiving them, He would not be more loving than He is; He would cease to be God."[48] But the forgiveness of God *does* sweep away guilt, 'that painful sense of accountability and self-contempt'. We are not totally reformed, not rendered sinless, by the divine forgiveness and so our sinful and rebellious natures will be in tension with the fellowship which we prospectively enjoy. It is in this way, he argues, that we suffer nothing more or less than divine punishment. Forgiveness is not the restoration of innocence but of fellowship. And fellowship with God is not for the human being unalloyed bliss, rather it is external (objective) challenge and internal (subjective) turmoil. None the less, and we know this, he claims, from human life, "forgiveness is an active process in the mind and temper of a wronged person, by means of which he abolishes a moral hindrance to fellowship with

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[45]Dillistone, F. *The Christian Understanding of the Atonement* p300

[46]Mackintosh, H.R. *The Christian Experience of Forgiveness* (London: Nisbet) 1927 p3 All references to Mackintosh in this chapter refer to this book.

[47]Mackintosh, H.R. p13

[48]Mackintosh, H.R. p25

the wrong-doer, and re-establishes the freedom and happiness of friendship."[49] From the forgiver there is no hostility or aggression, but this does not mean that the forgiven person does not experience any pain. In fact it is the surprising reason for it. Forgiveness: "differs by a whole moral universe from the mere abandonment of revenge"[50] and the language of forgetting is not entirely inappropriate to the forgiver's cognisance of the offender's guilt[51]. Equally, "forgiveness is emphatically more than the ignoring of trespass".[52] This is because the turning of a blind eye to the sin drains life of its passion.

Divine forgiveness must be at least as ethical as this understanding of human forgiveness. This has not always been the case in theology or preaching: "The Christian religion has suffered gravely in the past because on too many occasions it has been supposed to stand for a conception of Divine pardon less noble than that which the best moral opinion would look to see exemplified in the life of any ethical pioneer".[53] And yet: "The wonder of Christianity lies in this, that the Holy God receives sinners... It is all but unbelievable that the Righteous one should forgive unrighteousness, yet the Church knows it to be the commonest thing in the world"[54]. Mackintosh believes that: "The reality of pardon, imparted by such a God, can never be demonstrated to one who has not known it from within".[55] This is an experience which has its origin and initiative in God and not man, and which is real not for the good but for the bad, nor is it for the few but rather for the many.

Mackintosh refers with much approval to the theology of Herrmann of Marburg for whom: "Forgiveness as an idea is unconvincing; forgiveness as happening to us in real life changes everything and is its own evidence".[56] Mackintosh adds to this the understanding that

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[49]Mackintosh, H.R. p28
[50]Mackintosh, H.R. p29
[51]*ibid.*
[52]Mackintosh, H.R. p30
[53]*ibid.*
[54]Mackintosh, H.R. p33
[55]*ibid.*
[56]Mackintosh, H.R. p46

the love of God is perceptible only to those who have known true human love. The situation with regard to forgiveness, however is slightly different because, "No one can forgive his neighbour's sin"[57] and "...man's power to forgive man is undermined by his own sinfulness, which leaves him with nothing more than ability to condone this or that particular fault or shortcoming."[58] In other words, only God can forgive fully. And: "The only way in which we can receive the forgiveness of God is this, that He makes us feel the penalty of our sin, and yet at the same time brings home to us the incomprehensible fact that he is seeking us and not giving us up... It is a religious experience."[59]

Mackintosh is fascinated by the relationship between holiness and sin and observes that, "historically, every closer approach to true knowledge of God has been accompanied by deeper insight into sin."[60] And we are right to be surprised by this, it is as if these two contrasting realities were actual mirrors rather than mirror images of each other. And this is the case. Sin reveals holiness and holiness reveals sin. This is a convenient launching pad for a discussion of sin which is understood neither as misfortune[61] nor as error or ignorance[62] but as a perversion of will: "the claim, explicit or implicit, to live independently of God and to put something, whether self or world, in his place."[63] It is, of course, our own responsibility and so: "To put sin down to the account of external influences is not to lessen but to increase our sin by covering it with false excuses and poisoning the springs of truth within"[64].

Sin is powerful but forgiveness is primarily directed against the guilt rather than the power of sin. For Mackintosh guilt is essential for forgiveness, since it is a part of penitence. But more than this,

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[57]Mackintosh, H.R. p43
[58]Mackintosh, H.R. p47
[59]Mackintosh, H.R p48 quoting Hermann
[60]Mackintosh, H.R. p54
[61]Mackintosh, H.R. p55
[62]*ibid.*
[63]Mackintosh, H.R. p60
[64]Mackintosh, H.R. p60/1

he sees guilt as a part of hope. He is extremely hostile to those psychologies which concern themselves with the health of the guilt-ridden and emphasise subjectivity and the autonomy of the individual in moral reasoning. In Mackintosh's view moral authority is located far from the individual conscience. The religious context is essential, as it furnishes morality with the crucial concept of sin which provides a positive context for the experiences of guilt and forgiveness.

It is when he comes to consider the doctrine of the atonement that Mackintosh makes theological use of his understanding of the experience of forgiveness. The real issue, of course, is how to fit forgiveness into a moral framework forged on the anvil of the *lex talionis*. His starting point is the troubled Pauline perception that there is something which transcends the fundamental category of law. Like John Oman, whose *Grace and Personality*[65] makes very similar arguments on this point, he argues that justification or forgiveness is not so much a breaking of the law as an elevation of the level of the discussion to the personal rather than the legal sphere. Both these reformed theologians seek to make sense not of the traditions of penance but more of the nature of faith and grace which they estimate to have its most germane and powerful manifestation in the experience of forgiveness. Mackintosh's forgiveness, like Luther's justification, is nothing much to do with law or merit but everything to do with righteousness, a right relationship with God. It is a relationship of faith. But faith does not imply ethical perfection, rather it means thinking and loving in a way which connects with the way in which things ultimately are. It means living with the cognisance that human beings are by grace forgiven and by the same grace enabled to live with a transformed self and self-understanding in which a sense of both being responsible and having been forgiven persist.

This is the background for Mackintosh's exploration of the category of atonement. The roots of this understanding are in the Hebrew prophets who, "took the personality of God seriously; they took the personality of man seriously and as a result they took seriously the

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[65]Oman, J. *Grace and Personality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 1925

contact between God and man which forgiveness is"[66]. And this is a line which he, like Oman in *Grace and Personality*, perceives to be crucial to an understanding of humanity: "forgiveness, imparted by God's love, is indeed the act by which we are constituted as persons in the full sense".[67] Mackintosh believes that human forgiveness, although much neglected in moral philosophy, is a crucial analogy for the theology of the atonement. For a human to forgive another, he follows Horace Bushnell in believing, requires sympathy of the offended for the offender to the point of suffering or expense: "one man can really pardon another only in so far as he takes the other's sin upon himself in the cost he personally bears on his behalf".[68] To forgive another is, "an experience of sacrificial pain, of vicarious suffering. It is the state of the soul under great stress".[69]

Mackintosh argues that Anslem's attempt to argue from first principles for the need of a saving God-man is hopeless.[70] There is only one way to come to an understanding of atonement, and that is through the experience of the effect of 'holy love' on our hearts. Atonement, like forgiveness, is literally incomprehensible, and certainly incredible to intellect and reason.

> "Many people, if they were frank, would confess that so far as they have gone in life, they have never yet been able to understand what forgiveness means. That is not surprising: there is in forgiveness something that baffles common thought.. it appears... both impossible and immoral."[71]

The cross, then, is the meaning of the relationship between holiness and love which is God for us. It is a magnifying glass held over our moral nature, revealing the truth about it and showing its effect. But it is more than judgement. The cross makes forgiveness possible because it reveals the connection between sin and suffering. This is 'heart-subduing'[72] because it is God suffering for

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[66]Mackintosh, H.R. p179
[67]Mackintosh, H.R. p181
[68]Mackintosh, H.R. p186
[69]Mackintosh, H.R. p188
[70]Mackintosh, H.R. p95
[71]Mackintosh, H.R. p211
[72]Mackintosh, H.R. p209

us. The death of Christ, "not merely reveals God's antecedent forgiving love; it actually conveys forgiveness and renders it effective."[73] Forgiveness, then, is always "bought with the suffering of the offended spirit".[74] In the cross "the world is shown how awful goodness is".[75]

In the final section of his book Mackintosh turns his attention to the more subjective questions of human forgiveness. At an important point he takes issue with a view which he attributes to R.C. Moberly that forgiveness is an incremental or developmental process. Forgiveness cannot be, "conditional, subject to revision, in a real sense precarious and asymptotic"[76] as this is so far from the parable of the prodigal son. Christian life can be full of joy, and so the pardon must be full and real, not partial or provisional. It is for *sinners*, those who are morally as well as emotionally unworthy. In developing this he follows Rashdall's point that Moberly's theology would be better had he read Ritschl, and he repeats the claim that the forgiveness of God is not analytic but 'synthetic' or creative. This means that: "the forgiving love of God does not presuppose our worth but calls it into being."[77] Because, "God who by His holiness shatters our claim to live before Him nevertheless by His love gives us new life".[78] Forgiveness is a creation; theologically it is new creation.

Forgiveness, because it is a product of grace and spirit is itself a form of inspiration. To be forgiven is to be inspired: "So far then is pardon from being a moral sedative, that it is the most powerful stimulus to self-forgetful goodness of which we have any knowledge".[79] It is not a path to antinomianism, but to gratitude, but not only to gratitude, but also to fear, by which he means sensitivity of spirit and conscience rather than blind terror. More

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[73]Mackintosh, H.R. p212
[74]Mackintosh, H.R. p216
[75]*ibid.*
[76]Mackintosh, H.R. p242
[77]Mackintosh, H.R. p245
[78]*ibid.*
[79]Mackintosh, H.R. p264

important than the emotionality however, is the spirituality, or ethics.

> "The content of the new morality inspired by forgiveness is social... We cannot have God apart from our neighbour... To be blessed in pardoned fellowship with the Father is to be conscious of the impulse, which will not be denied, to share our lives with all for whom God cares. Thus a vital connection exists between forgiveness and the Church, or rather all mankind. The pardoned life, when equal to its idea, is a life in which each is a debtor to all the rest."[80]

Mackintosh sees the Church as 'an ethically indispensable' medium of Divine pardon. "Were the Church to disappear, the reality of Divine pardon would disappear along with it."[81] Mackintosh suggests that: "If the presence of a forgiving spirit is an indispensable prerequisite of our receiving pardon... then it is only as non-Christians are forgiven by their Christian neighbours that they can believe in the forgiveness of God to them personally."[82] Forgiveness has to start somewhere, otherwise the vicious circle of sin and hypocrisy cannot be broken. He knows that it is broken in the Church, and therefore it is the duty of the Church to break its bounds and let the spirit of pardon and forgiveness abroad. This is an important point: "the experience of receiving God's pardon involves the consciousness that we form part of a pardoned company; it means that we are content to share and share alike with them, for in the kingdom of God none can be saved in isolation."[83] To be forgiven of God is to live and forgive, and for that matter be forgiven, in a fellowship which will not, from any perspective other than that of the forgiven sinner, seem particularly attractive.

5. FORGIVENESS IN THE FLESH CHARLES WILLIAMS

Williams is both the most central and the most eccentric of the authors who will be considered this chapter. Writing during the war, and not so much from technical theological materials as from the

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[80]Mackintosh, H.R. p268
[81]Mackintosh, H.R. p271
[82]Mackintosh, H.R. p279
[83]Mackintosh, H.R. p284

insights of poets and saints, he attempts to make sense of what he considers to be one of the most important calculations which a sentient being must make. "If there is God there is sin, if there is sin there is forgiveness, we must know it in order to live to him."[84]

Williams' is a reluctantly written monograph in which the human and the divine, the social and the personal dynamics of forgiveness are related to the doctrine of the atonement. The poets Shakespeare and Blake, Dante and Milton and the visionaries Julian and Paul are his main sources. Although it lacks an explicit theological metre his work clearly develops from the fertile soil of the teaching of Jesus and the thinking of Augustine. Williams does not forget his Anglican inheritance and there are references to William Law and O.C. Quick. For Williams atonement is of a piece with the redemptive purposes of God shown in incarnation and already implicit in creation.

Williams prefers the language of 'chastity' and 'courtesy' as well as that of 'co-inherence' to what he dismisses as fashionable theological vocabulary. But as well as such classical and intellectual resonances he is determined to ground his understanding of sacrifice in the Hebrew spirituality of blood and offering. It is for this reason that it is not appropriate to read Williams in the same way as other theologians. His idiom is quite different to that of a Temple or a Moberly and perhaps his work should be thought of as belonging to the category of theological poetry. The point of his theological language and style is to reveal the theological significance of all things and to establish that the divine interest is in the indivisible process of creation and redemption. The context, then, is provided by drama: both the drama of the fall and the dramatic nature of forgiveness. Shakespeare reveals something of the human generosity of spirit which is basic to the process of forgiveness. And the fall is interpreted as a revelation of the state of human being and relating so that it is regarded as disintegrated and at odds with itself and its origins. His central concept is 'charity' which is precisely that which was lost in the fall. The two

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[84]Williams, C. *The Forgiveness of Sins* (London: Faber and Faber) 1950 p108 Williams wrote the book in 1942. All references to Williams in this chapter refer to this work.

primary constituent elements of charity are 'chastity' which is love of the soul for God, and 'courtesy' which is the love of the soul for its created companions: "chastity is courtesy towards God; courtesy is chastity towards men"[85].

Another key notion is that of 'co-inherence' which describes perfect relationship, found originally in the relations of the persons of the Trinity. There is a perfect mutuality and intimacy in co-inherence, it is the realisation of the purpose of creation. Sin is an aspect of the difference between co-inherence and incoherence: "Sin is the name of a certain relationship between man and God. When it is fixed, if it is, into its final state, he gives it other names; he calls it *hell* and *damnation*."[86] It is on the basis of this understanding that he offers a definition of forgiveness. "But if a man were to be restored, what was to happen to the sin? He had a name for that relationship too... he called it 'forgiveness'."[87] Putting it in terms of the language which he is adopting he describes it as: "Something at least by which the sin was to be brought into perfect accord with the original good, the incoherence into the co-inherence."[88]

Williams considers the sacrifice of Christ on the cross to be the paradigm of forgiveness which is continuous with all other attempts at, and achievements of, forgiveness. In particular he views it in the context of the Hebrew tradition of sacrifice. But he sees that the blood sacrifice tradition makes only imperfect sense because the alienation between the one who offers and the offering persists. Christ is, as he puts it, "Forgiveness in the flesh"[89] because he is the incarnation of God and therefore "lived the life of forgiveness."[90] When Williams makes points such as this he is stressing the necessary connection between incarnation and forgiveness. It is not a matter of words or law or contract or

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[85]Williams, C. p127
[86]Williams, C. p132
[87]Williams, C. p133
[88]*ibid.*
[89]Williams, C. p146
[90]*ibid.*

transaction, rather it is, as he puts it, 'an act... something to be *done*'.[91]

Williams' high doctrine of incarnation convinces him that the whole of the life and person of Christ was an initiative of forgiveness: "It was the Life that was the fact - of forgiveness as of everything holy else, and there was no moment in that life which was not towards men and women, a fact of Forgiveness, or at least a fact of the offer of Forgiveness."[92] But he is equally sure that the offer of forgiveness was not withdrawn when it was apparently definitively rejected in the passion and death of Christ.

> "The Resurrection was the Resurrection of Forgiveness, but the sin which brought it about was no longer to be covered, even in and by God himself. He became an energy of forgiveness in the Church. He had stated the principle in the years of his life - almost, as it were, by accident, as an answer to a question or as a clause of a prayer. That principle was that the active and passive modes of forgiveness were not to be separated; that they were indeed, in some sense identical; one could not exist without the other... To forgive and to be forgiven were one thing."[93]

Thus forgiveness itself is like the unity and co-inherence which it seeks to bring about. It is not possible to disconnect the parts of forgiveness, not possible to imagine being forgiven without oneself forgiving. Thus there is judgement in Jesus' teaching about salvation, or as he puts it, there is *threat*.

> "The threat implicit in that clause [forgive us our sins as we forgive those who trespass against us] is very high; it is the only clause which carries a threat, but the threat is clear. No word in English carries a greater possibility of terror than that little word 'as' in that clause; it is the measuring rod of the heavenly city, and the knot of the new union. But also it is the key of hell and the knife that cuts across the union."[94]

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[91]Williams, C. p145
[92]Williams, C. p147
[93]Williams, C. p156/7
[94]Williams, C. p157

Forgiveness is a matter of integrity, but while on the human, subjective and emotional side the implications are those of judgement and dread and anxiety lest one is not forgiving enough, on the theological side there is the gloriously perichoretic spectacle of perfect co-inherence.

> "The condition of forgiving, then, is to be forgiven; the condition of being forgiven is to forgive. The two conditions are co-existent; they are indeed the very point of coexistence, the root of the new union, the beginning of the recovery of the co-inherence in which all creation had begun."[95]

Forgiveness then is both a commandment and a theological duty. There is, from the divine side, no choice but to enter into it, but from the human side, as Williams concedes, it is a difficult and testing possibility. Nonetheless: "Forgiveness of injuries is demanded of the Christian because of the nature of Our Lord, and it is demanded entirely."[96] In this way the demand for forgiveness on the part of the disciple is related to the demand that the disciple be perfect. This is not an unrealistic expectation, it is rather the appreciation that redemption is not a process which is external to the human will. But there is something peculiarly unbalanced about all this as he suggests: "Heroic sanctity is required perhaps to forgive, but *not* to forgive is ordinary sin"[97]. The failure to forgive, like evil itself, is often banal.

Williams pays some attention to what he calls the techniques of pardon and notes, as the novelist he is, some of the quirks of human nature which make forgiveness more or less easy or difficult. He suggests, for instance that the faculty of memory is important but that its influence is not straightforward. "There are two methods of reconciliation: that which remembers the injury in love and that which forgets the injury in love."[98] He also observes that forgiving and pardoning are activities which are themselves couched around by temptations. It is easy for pardoners to become proud and superior

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[95]*ibid.*
[96]Williams, C. p165
[97]Williams, C. p167
[98]Williams, C. p168

in their action, and this means that acts of forgiveness or pardon must, like all exercises of virtue, be entered into with humility and seen not as ends in themselves but as part of a larger process, that of creation-redemption.

It is important, because it can be self-flattering to do so, not to enter too lightly into forgiveness, not, that is, to attempt to forgive those who do not need to be subject to the (implicit) humiliation of forgiveness.

> "We had better be very sure indeed that we have been injured at the heart before we even think about forgiving; and we had better be very careful indeed that we are not forgiving other's injuries, or no injuries, or merely the inevitable pain of existence."[99]

In order to forgive, it may seem rather pedestrian to comment, one must have been hurt in a profound way. "Without a direct sense of present personal injury by a particular person or persons there can hardly be any question of forgiveness."[100] And his eye for the tragic dimensions of the ordinary can hardly help to observe that: "Many reconciliations have unfortunately broken down because both parties have come prepared to forgive and unprepared to be forgiven".[101]

It is for this reason that he sees snares for those who are genuine objects of forgiveness. "It is not easy to be forgiven; certainly not to continue in the knowledge of being forgiven."[102] It is the task therefore of the forgiver, the pardoner, to make forgiveness easy to bear. This is a tremendous responsibility which makes sense only when one sees that the writing is a commentary on the sacrificial forgiveness of Christ. However the same sentiment seems to make the forgiveness which is owed to an aggressor by a victim more than unreasonably burdensome. But given what he has said about the unity of all forgiveness it is proper to comment that the following remarks, while theologically constructive, or even creative, are

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[99]Williams, C. p199
[100]Williams, C. p190
[101]Williams, C. p193
[102]Williams, C. p171

humanly and psychologically problematic. "Pardon itself is an example of [substitution]; the injured bears the trouble of another's sin; he who is forgiven receives the freedom of another's love."[103] But for all that it speaks a truth. Forgiveness *is* as difficult as this. As Williams goes on to remark in the following chapter, forgiveness has its place among the particularly Christian virtues. "Pity is still half a pagan virtue; compassion is a Christian. To forgive is indeed compassion, the suffering with another. To refuse to forgive is to refuse that other as himself or herself; it is to prefer the spectre of him, and to prefer a spectre is to be forever lost."[104] Again and again he comes back to the personification of forgiveness in Christ and the implications which this has for human participation in divine life, the object of redemption, the restored co-inherence of all that is. "If our Lord was indeed the very Person of forgiveness, then certainly it is the very person of forgiveness which is communicated in the Eucharist; it is a mutuality between God and man which is also expressed between man and man."[105] But this is not just piety or religion, it is ethical duty:

> "We must forgive the evils we suffer because of the dreadful co-inherence of all mankind, even if we do not know who inflicts them; and we must be prepared to be forgiven when we discover, knowing wholly and wholly known, the results of our own sin. To dwell on this is superfluous."[106]

But Williams is pulled by theological conviction into an unjustifiably simplistic ethical position here. Certainly forgiveness participates in the virtue of compassion as he suggests and is at odds with the distant, objectifying sub-virtue of pity. But his argument about its ethical necessity is unfortunate given that there has been no discussion about the ethical questions raised by the imperative to forgive. The situation is redeemed to a slight degree by his suggestion that forgiveness is something to be learned and that instruction in this action is part of the purpose of the incarnation. "He as a man would forgive *thus* [that is as a person

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[103]Williams, C. p174
[104]Williams, C. p180
[105]Williams, C. p182
[106]*ibid.*

subject to the vicissitudes of other people's actions] because men also should not merely be forgiven but also, in every corner of their natures, learn how to forgive."[107] This is one half of his sense of the significance of incarnation; incarnation as human vulnerability. But, as we have seen, incarnation was also, for Williams, a materialising, that is to say a making concrete and real of the ideal: "It was this heavenly humanity which forgave; say, he forgave in his flesh, and therefore his very flesh forgave... It is therefore that the Eucharist is also that forgiveness of his flesh, and that we literally feed on forgiveness."[108] Forgiveness, therefore, is a mark both of the Church and eternity.

> "The Church consists only of those who have so gone out of themselves or are going or who desire to go out of themselves. The little word 'as' in the Lord's Prayer is the measurement of the distance gone. Its final reach is to the Union; the inGodding of man."[109]

For Charles Williams forgiveness is not so much a universal as an ultimate. He understands history not to be passing away or forever to be forgotten. Rather there is an eschatological cast to his thought such that memories and actions do not die but rather are brought either to forgiveness or to judgement. That is why, he explains, the article of belief in the forgiveness of sins is part of the final, eschatological, section of the Apostles' creed alongside the communion of saints, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting all of which are ways if describing the same 'co-inherence of relationship'. "The Communion of Saints involves the resurrection of all the past, and therefore the forgiveness of sins. The resurrection involves forgiveness and communion. But forgiveness is the necessity of all."[110]

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[107]Williams, C. p186
[108]Williams, C. p187/8
[109]Williams, C. p189
[110]*ibid.*

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this review chapter we have seen the way in which five theologians have developed their understanding of forgiveness through reflection on human experience and Christian doctrine. There is no doubt that the most important image and idea has been that of the cross of Christ. Christ died for our sins. This belief has informed most of what has been written on the subject of forgiveness and has led our authors to emphasise both the reality and the gravity of forgiveness. Forgiveness is costly they affirm, but it is also real.

Some writers more than others refer to the mystery or inexplicability of forgiveness. Lyttleton emphasises this. It seems impossible that guilt, being guilt, can be removed and yet both on the theological and the human plane this is exactly what forgiveness does. Moberly tries to penetrate further into this mystery and in doing so seems to be in danger of destroying the essence of forgiveness. The significance of Moberley's argument is his emphasis that forgiveness is a positive response to an intimation of penitence. It is not the natural completion of a non-gracious process which is driven along by regret, remorse or repentance. Rather it is a gracious moment which initiates an educational process.

As was remarked in the text of the chapter H.R. Mackintosh's work has been of great influence and importance in that it is the most extensive attempt to interpret the atonement in terms of forgiveness in the English language. Much of it is in fact an attempt to translate the traditional Pauline arguments about justification into the contemporary language of forgiveness. His view is that the experience of being forgiven is a life changing, indeed 'shattering', experience,. His argument is not that the repentant are forgiven but that the forgiven repent. Forgiveness, like the grace it is, is prevenient and leads to ethical and holy living in the fellowship of the Church.

William Temple breathes a more philosophical air than Mackintosh and his theology is more incarnational than the Scot's. When he

reads the Bible it is the gospels which attract his attention and when he thinks about atonement he also has in mind questions of theodicy. The result is that while he sees in the death of Christ that which transforms the sinner it is not into a penitent so much as into a forgiver. For Temple forgiving others is the necessary and theological consequence of knowing oneself forgiven. Temple also offers a distinction which is along the lines of that spelt out more fully by Leonard Hodgson when he clarifies that forgiveness is a relational process whereas forgiving-ness is more like an internal attitude.[111] Forgiving-ness is a slightly generic form of what Hodgson was to call intransitive forgiveness. It does not relate to the particularity of offences and injuries. Rather it is a part of the outlook of certain individuals. Less a particular response, forgiving-ness is more like a virtuous character trait.

Charles Williams takes an even more radically incarnational view than Temple so that in his 'theological poetry' he can talk about Jesus as 'forgiveness in the flesh'. The constructs of rational theology are too limited to contain his thought and the current categories of theological writing too narrow to provide him with the material to make himself clear. His is a view which contradicts the thought that forgiveness is merely a matter of verbal or performative exchange. It is not the case that forgiveness is the product of the meeting of an expression of repentance with a word of grace. Williams draws less on the prophetic antecendents of Christian forgiveness in the Hebrew scriptures than on the priestly traditions of sacrifice. His view could be described as one of theological materialism. Sin matters and material must be involved in putting right, in redeeming and forgiving. His metaphysics are therefore quite different from those of Mackintosh or even Moberly. He is a radical realist and therefore in a different camp to William Temple although in some ways their thoughts about the relationship between divine and human forgiveness, between theology and ethics, are rather similar.

Both Williams and Temple are clear that atonement is a product of the whole story of Jesus, from incarnation to resurrection rather

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[111]Hodgson, L. *The Doctrine of the Atonement* (London: Nisbet) 1951 p63

than being the work that he did on the cross. Both are also clear that forgiveness is far more than a change of heart, far more even than the restoration of a good relationship. Forgiveness is like atonement for them because it is to do with the development of relationships of such profundity and significance that it is appropriate to speak in terms of the development of what Temple calls unity and Williams calls co-inherence.

CHAPTER THREE

FORGIVING OTHERS: AN ETHICAL INVESTIGATION

1. FORGIVENESS AND PARDON

1.i. The Sunflower

Simon Wiesenthal's *The Sunflower* is an account of a moral predicament.[1] While held in a Nazi concentration camp the author is involved in a working party at a hospital. He gets called aside by a nurse and taken to a room in which a young S.S. officer is dying of very considerable wounds. The officer, Karl, seeks forgiveness of Wiesenthal for the part which he played in the massacre of a group of several hundred Jews in Dnyepropetrovsk. Wiesenthal listens to his confession but he does not forgive him. Instead he leaves the room in silence. The following day a nurse finds Wiesenthal and gives him the small bundle of things which are Karl's belongings. It was the dying man's wish that he should have them. Wiesenthal refuses the gift. After he has been liberated Wiesenthal seeks out Karl's mother. When he visits her he reports that he had met her son but he does not tell her of her son's war crimes or of his request for forgiveness. The author is subsequently haunted by the question of whether or not he did the right thing by not forgiving Karl. This anxiety also motivates Wiesenthal to circulate his account to thirty six eminent people, Christians and Jews, diplomats and statesmen, writers and critics, for comment.[2]

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[1]Wiesenthal, S. *The Sunflower* (London: W.H. Allen) 1970 All the references to Wiesenthal in this chapter refer to this book.

[2]Their replies are appended to *The Sunflower* as *A Symposium* in W H Allen's 1970 edition.

The text places the encounter with Karl in the context of German-Jewish relations during the Nazi era. Conditions in the camp and the existence of the ghetto are the moral backdrop. Karl summons Wiesenthal to his bedside not in his individuality but as a representative. "I do not know who you are, I only know that you are a Jew and that is enough."[3] This dehumanisation is typical. The contrast between the lack of dignity, identity and acknowledgement afforded the Jews and the affirmation of every single Nazi is an important aspect of the moral background. Its symbol is the sunflower. The fact that Wiesenthal may soon lie in a mass grave whereas Karl will lie in a cemetery with a sunflower sprouting from the earth over his feet is a recurrent contrast.

Karl's Catholic mother brought him up in that religious tradition and he alienated his parents when he joined the Hitler Youth. The repentant Karl structures the conversation on the model of the confessional: one talks about himself while the other listens; the truth about the confessing self is spoken in private; evidence of regret and repentance is important but not conclusive. In the end the confessee waits on the word of the confessor. However, this 'confessor' is not an authorised representative of God but one randomly selected from the victims. Indeed, had things worked out differently the 'confessor' may himself have been a victim. This raises the question of the relation between theological and racial aspects of the situation, one which several addressees of *The Symposium* take up. But there is more to this than the Jewish-Christian dimension. Wiesenthal frames the narrative with the suggestion that God is on leave during the Nazi era, and this angry agnosticism informs the whole text.

When he returns to the camp after his encounter with the dying Nazi Wiesenthal asks several of his codeportees whether or not he had done the right thing by remaining silent when asked for forgiveness. Two of them (Adam and Arthur) do not even countenance the question. Their immediate reaction is that it is a good thing that there is one more Nazi dead. Another, Josek, is more idealistic. Wiesenthal's only error lies in worrying about his decision. The only

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[3]Wiesenthal, S. *The Sunflower* p57

people who could forgive the man were those who actually suffered at his hands. Wiesenthal had no right to forgive. Later Arthur rejoins the discussion, taking Josek's line. "A superman has asked a sub-human to do something which is superhuman. If you had forgiven him, you would never have forgiven yourself all your life."[4] He also makes the ironic suggestion that had the man really wanted quick forgiveness the best thing would have been to send for a Christian priest. Two years later a polish seminarian named Bolek replaces a dead cohabitee of Wiesenthal's bunk. Wiesenthal then discusses the question of the encounter with the S.S. officer with him. Bolek's view was that there had been true repentance and a return to the childhood faith on the deathbed. Wiesenthal had thus been something of a saviour since it was his listening to the confession which had allowed Karl to die in peace. On the other hand, Wiesenthal was wrong not to have met the genuine repentance in some way.

In *The Symposium* several authors refuse to answer the question and eshew the opportunity to be drawn into any discussion of the philosophy of forgiveness. Many couch their contributions around with remarks of the sovereignty of individual conscience or the importance of subjective, emotional or contingent factors in determining anyone's response in such a situation. The overtly religious, however, tend to be among those who have the clearest views about the question of whether Wiesenthal should have forgiven Karl. Immanuel Jakobvits, for instance, takes a very straightforward view. "It was neither within your power nor your right to absolve him from these crimes, or to forgive him. In the Jewish view, such a pardon is a Divine prerogative and not a human right or duty, whether he acknowledged his wrongs or not."[5] Primo Levi also supports non forgiveness arguing that although a word of forgiveness would have soothed the man for Wiesenthal it would have been: "an empty formula and consequently a lie."[6] Abraham Heschel affirms the point made by Josek in the narrative, that only the victims themselves can forgive, and so not to forgive was

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[4]Wiesenthal, S. *The Sunflower* p69
[5]Wiesenthal, S. *The Sunflower* p142/3
[6]Wiesenthal, S. *The Sunflower* p157

correct. "According to Jewish tradition, even God himself can only forgive sins committed against Himself, not against man."[7]

Most of the Christians are motivated to comfort the dying man, even when, like Martin Niemöller, they agree that forgiveness is in the gift of the violated.[8] Jacques Maritain takes this point but goes on to counsel forgiveness in the name of God. He suggests a particular form of absolution for the occasion: "'What you have done is, humanly speaking, unforgivable. But in the name of your God, yes, I forgive you.'"[9] Gustav Heinemann, President of the German Federal Republic, identifies with the remarks of Bolek in the narrative. He believes that Wiesenthal was wrong in his silence both with the dying man and his mother. Jesus Christ added the quality of forgiveness to that of justice and therein lies a path to salvation. Christopher Hollis also lines up behind the seminarian. The author should have offered a word of compassion.

> "The theology of the matter is surely clear... The law of God is the law of love. We are created in order to love one another, and when the law of love is broken, God's nature is frustrated. Such bonds when broken should be reforged as soon as possible. We are under obligation to forgive our neighbour even though he has offended against us seventy seven times."[10]

One way of describing this difference is as that between a retribution/justice ethic and a repentance/reparation one. Those who give the primacy to justice insist that the consequences of immoral actions cannot be done away with and that the anguish of a bad conscience is just part of the process. Those who value reparation pay closer attention to the anguish and if they discern regret and a desire not to repeat then they will do what they can to ease the burden and to restore the possibility of relationship.

Several of the contributors to *The Symposium* use the language of strength or weakness either in their approval or disapproval of

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[7]Wiesenthal, S. *The Sunflower* p129
[8]Wiesenthal, S. *The Sunflower* p169
[9]Wiesenthal, S. *The Sunflower* p167
[10]Wiesenthal, S. *The Sunflower* p133

Wiesenthal's silence. For some it is a mark of strength not to succumb either to pity or to deference at the death bed. To mouth a disingenuous forgiveness would be weak. For others forgiveness would have required real strength and courage. But Jacob Kaplan, Grand Rabbi of France, takes a more subtle view which does justice to more of the nuances of the situation. He sees that Karl was different to most S.S. officers in that he did not hate Jews or take pleasure in persecuting them. Moreover, he interprets his seeking out a Jew rather than a priest very positively. "He could have called upon a chaplain of his cult who would most probably have granted him absolution. But he valued the forgiveness of a Jew more highly than the absolution of a priest."[11] But while none of this authorises Wiesenthal to forgive him what he did against others there is some sense in Wiesenthal's continued discomfort over the memory of the encounter. "I have the feeling that you are disturbed not so much at not having given the S.S. man the forgiveness you were unable to grant him as not having given full expression to the pity you could have shown him."[12] And Kaplan is sure that Wiesenthal would have felt pity. "Is this not a characteristic of the Jewish soul, so much so that the descendants of the Patriarch Abraham are called: merciful, sons of the merciful? But your pity was not expressed in words and because of this it has remained unsatisfied."[13]

The Spanish diplomat, Salvador de Madriaga, is at pains to avoid judging Wiesenthal and argues strongly that his subjective state would have been a profoundly important factor in determining his response. He interprets Wiesenthal's silence as a want of energy to do anything more. But he also examines what he calls the tension between the universal and the tribal man in Wiesenthal. The universal man would have forgiven, whereas the tribal man would not. Madriaga does agree that Karl was a murderer, but sees this as the tribal perspective. The universal man sees him as excused by the extenuating pressures that were brought to bear on him. Wiesenthal saw him in both ways and so when he died he took with him Wiesenthal's peace of mind. Whether or not one accepts this

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[11]Wiesenthal, S. *The Sunflower* p144
[12]Wiesenthal, S. *The Sunflower* p146
[13]*ibid.*

view it is consistent with a strand which emerges in some of the contributions which suggests that the expression of pity or compassion may have been appropriate. However improbable Madriaga's view may be it does give the lie to one oversimplification in many of the responses: Wiesenthal both is and is not a victim of Karl. At the entirely personal level he is not. But he certainly identifies with the victims and suffered greatly in listening to the confession. Moreover, by making the confession Karl made it clear that he was rebelling, at least in spirit, against the ideology which lay behind the massacre. So perhaps he too was beginning to identify with them, to see them as fellow human beings. His confession, while a monologue, was possibly an expression of his recognition of their humanity and his inhumanity in participating in the massacre.

Wiesenthal's story is an important one for any theology of forgiveness but especially for a Christian one. The central question is one about the rightness of forgiving and this rightness depends on two further factors: the authority by which one individual forgives another and the meaning of that forgiveness. The second question is the primary one and in this instance needs to be approached not so much by defining forgiveness as distinguishing it from related concepts such as pardon and mercy.

2. ESTABLISHING THE CATEGORIES OF FORGIVENESS

2.i. Forgiveness and Condonation Aurel Kolnai

For Aurel Kolnai the question of forgiveness, despite the importance which it has had as a religious question, is primarily an ethical one. Kolnai assumes an inter-personal situation in which one person knowingly injures another and accepts responsibility for the injurious action. He also takes it that the injurer and the injured have a sufficiently congruent morality and understanding of the episode of offence as to agree about what was wrong. He begins his paper to the Aristotelian Society with the stark and surprising alternatives: "forgiveness is either unjustified or pointless"[14].

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[14]Kolnai, A. 'Forgiveness' *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 1973-4 p99

The argument begins with Kolnai establishing that forgiveness is quite different to condonation. Condonation is a reprehensible response to offence, it being a way of 'acquiescing' in it which makes no effort to either act or to engender a moral response. "[Condonation] is not only undignified and self-soiling but also unfair in so far as it may reveal that Fred[15] is ready to put up with the starkly offending Ralph while being perhaps mercilessly hard on a far more lightly offending and possibly even repentant Robert."[16] But in order for forgiveness not to be a disguised form of condonation, he argues, it must be based upon some distinction between the person as offender and the person as one being forgiven. Such a distinction can have two potential bases. The first is to distinguish, after Augustine, between the sin and the sinner and to love the sinner while hating the sin. The second is for the offender to repent. In the first case it is the offended who distances the offender from the offence, in the second it is the offender who effects the distance. But neither of these is satisfactory.

Kolnai opposes the neo-Augustinian approach arguing that:

> "It postulates a neat separability between the sin and the sinner, which is fictitious, and insinuates a wholly misleading analogy between wrongdoing and illness: in fact a sick man is inflicted with his disease, whereas Ralph [the wrong-doer] inflicts a wrong upon [the forgiving victim]"[17]

In other words the separation removes the sense of responsibility and so suffers from a similar fault to the response of condonation. Kolnai finds no problem with the action of forgiving a repentant offender. He doubts, however, whether it is reasonable to talk of forgiveness at all in the wake of thorough repentance: "forgiveness has now lost its ground and *raison d'etre*: ... there is no room for it, seeing that *there is nothing to be forgiven.*"[18] In short Kolnai's view is that to forgive is either to condone or to act redundantly.

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[15]Kolnai uses a phonetic alliterative code here and elsewhere in this article. Fred is the forgiver and Ralph and Robert are wrongdoers.
[16]Kolnai, A. 'Forgiveness' p96
[17]Kolnai, A. 'Forgiveness' p97
[18]Kolnai, A. 'Forgiveness' p98

This is not, however, the conclusion of the argument, it is merely the point at which the case in favour of forgiveness begins. This takes the form of softening the starkness of the contrast presented in the first section and allowing that on the one hand forgiveness may be a response of the offended to less than complete repentance and on the other that it is also possible to take a larger view of the one who was responsible for the offence than that he is adequately described as the offender. Thus he allows the contribution of both the factors which he was at pains to eliminate from the process. He asserts that: "Genuine forgiveness on the part of the forgiver does not necessarily presuppose a dramatic and fundamental change of heart evinced by the wrongdoer."[19] In this way he characterises forgiveness as 'a generous venture of trust'. It is to be entered into where there is some reasonable basis for a shift in the attitude of the offender in the direction which would, had it not already been granted, almost require forgiveness. It is because the forgiver does not know what the result of forgiveness will be that he describes it in the language of generosity and trust. Moreover:

> "The sin and the sinner are not separable but they are distinguishable, and this suffices for the possibility of one kind of forgiveness. It is possible to 're-accept' somebody - the essence of forgiveness - without exculpating him and without hoping for anything like a thoroughgoing repentance on his part."[20]

The conclusion, then, is that while cases of near complete repentance on the part of one who is responsible for an injury impose a quasi-obligation on the injured party, this is not the normal nature of forgiveness. Rather, "the standard situation which makes forgiveness legitimate and virtuous is that in which the injured party has at least some reason to hope for *metanoia* on Ralph's part and for making it easier for the injurer by forgiving him."[21] Thus even while it may seem to be such to an observer forgiveness is not mere, and immoral, condonation if it is based on

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[19]Kolnai, A. 'Forgiveness' p100
[20]Kolnai, A. 'Forgiveness' p104
[21]Kolnai, A. 'Forgiveness' *p105*

the judgement that there is a genuine basis for trust. None the less the distinction between forgiveness, which is based on at least putative repentance and condonation, which is based on none, is fundamental and significant.

2.ii. Forgiveness and Pardon R.S. Downie

Writing in the 1960s R.S. Downie began to formulate a distinction between forgiveness and pardon which has been received with approval by those who have written on the ethicality of both notions.[22] Two assumptions underlie his position: first that for A to forgive B, A must believe himself to be injured by B, and second that the forgiving spirit is itself always to be approved of. He goes on to argue that A can only be said to have forgiven B if he exhibits the forgiving spirit towards him. This does not mean that the injury is overlooked, nor that it is condoned, because in either case worse may come of such a response and forgiveness cannot issue in wrong. Of course pardon and forgiveness are often used inter-changeably. Both are based on the notion of a gift (*perdonare* means 'to give', and forgiveness encapsulates the word 'give') People might ask to be forgiven or to be pardoned for minor breaches of etiquette, for instance, but equally they might asked to be *excused* such breaches. It does not follow from this, however, that excuse and forgiveness are the same thing. Clearly they are not. To excuse is to fail to account a person responsible for an offence which they committed whereas to forgive is to find them responsible but not to let this responsibility be the only factor in framing the understanding of the offence or the future of the relationship.

Downie develops his analysis of pardon and forgiveness in his book on social ethics *Roles and Values*. "To pardon a person" he argues, "is to let him off the merited consequences of his actions."[23] This 'overlooking' is, of course, a condoning of the bad or injurous action. It is the declaration that it will not be counted or that it does not matter. But what are people pardoned for? Here Downie finds his first distinction between pardon and forgiveness. People are

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[22]Downie, R.S. 'Forgiveness' *The Philosophical Quarterly* 15 1965

[23]Downie, R.S *Roles and Values* (London: Methuen)1971 p151

pardoned for offences, such as the transgression of rules, whereas they are forgiven for injuring another person. It follows, then, that pardon is given by one who is in a sense responsible for the order which the rules establish and maintain. For instance, the club committee can choose to pardon one who breaks their rules but cannot so act with regard to injuries inflicted on another member. Moreover, an injured member can forgive a personal injury whereas he is not, unless perhaps he is the chair of the committee, in a position to pardon one who transgresses club etiquette. For Downie then, "we pardon as officials in social roles but forgive as persons."[24] This is the crucial distinction. Downie's concern is with social rather than theological ethics, but we might adapt his point to suggest that pardon is the product of a theological role and forgiveness is a personal act in the gift of the victim. He goes on to assert that it is for this reason that pardon is a performative action: it is no sooner said than done, the saying is effective, performative in Austin's sense. Forgiveness, on the other hand, is not. To say 'I forgive you' is not the end of the matter. The victim's response to their injury is deeper than words. If 'I forgive you' is hissed it is a lie. Pardon, however, does not depend upon the tone of voice or internal disposition.

In this argument Downie himself moves beyond the social to the theological in his discussion of its implications. He makes the point that if it is the case that only God can forgive sins it does not mean that only God is injured by actions which are sinful but that: "If God embodies impersonal moral values in a manner similar to that in which a monarch embodies the laws of the land... we can say that God is able to pardon them."[25]

2.iii. Forgiveness and Supererogation David Heyd

In his book *Supererogation*[26] the philosopher David Heyd offers a comprehensive view of the morality of going beyond moral duty or obligation. When he comes to deal with practical examples of his moral case he discusses 'forgiveness, mercy and pardon' as the

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[24]Downie, R.S *Roles and Values* p152
[25]Downie, R.S *Roles and Values* p153
[26]Heyd, D *Supererogation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 1982

supreme, though generally neglected, paradigms. The idea of supererogation is caught up with Christian understandings of ethics and the value of various kinds of action, which may or may not be duties. Furthermore, the notion demands some clarity with regard to the question of the relationship between, say, forgiveness and virtue. In part this is clarified by Heyd's point that supererogation applies to actions whereas virtue applies to persons. Thus supererogatory acts such as forgiveness may or may not be carried out by people who are virtuous. It may be the case, however, that certain acts of forgiveness are ineluctably heroic, sacrificial or costly, but we should be on our guard against the assumption that they always or often are.

Heyd surveys the place of supererogation in Christianity, Aristotelianism, Kantianism, Utilitarianism and Contract theory. His survey is objective, being neither historical nor doctrinal. He is concerned to see how the various systems can cope with this idea of actions which are moral and yet go beyond duty. Heyd's definition of supererogation is as follows:.

> "An act is supererogatory if and only if
> 1. It is neither obligatory nor forbidden.
> 2. Its omission is not wrong, and does not deserve sanction or criticism - either formal or informal.
> 3. It is morally good, both by virtue of its (intended) consequences and by virtue of its intrinsic value (being beyond duty).
> 4. It is done voluntarily for the sake of someone else's good, and is thus meritorious."[27]

He then goes on to discuss the particular examples of moral heroism, beneficence (charity, generosity, gifts) favours, volunteering, supererogatory forbearances and, at last, forgiveness, mercy and pardon. "Forgiveness, mercy and pardon are all responses to some kind of wrongdoing (injury, offence, crime, insult, etc), which are alternative to other, and no less just, reactions - like resentment, punishment, and retribution."[28] If forgiveness, mercy and pardon are

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[27]Heyd, D *Supererogation* p115
[28]Heyd, D *Supererogation* p154

in themselves good this generic description creates a puzzle. Why is it good to respond with forgiveness if, say, retribution is justified?

Heyd argues against two theories of the goodness of forgiveness and pardon. The first, from Hastings Rashdall, is that forgiveness is 'touching' because it involves sacrificing private resentment to the public good. The second, Alwynne Smart's view of mercy, is that punishment might be justifiably withheld because it would do more harm than good; there being more to any one situation than a particular offence, however culpable. This does not impress Heyd who pushes on with his project of explaining these actions in terms of a general theory of supererogation.

> "If forgiveness, mercy, and pardon can be shown to be supererogatory, the problem of reconciling them with just punishment naturally disappears. What is needed is not proof of the compatibility of the duty to forgive with the duty to administer justice, but simply an analysis which makes it plain that acting benevolently does not necessarily conflict with the requirements of justice."[29]

It is in pursuit of this proof that he offers distinguishing definitions of forgiveness, mercy and pardon. Forgiveness involves the restoration of personal relations which were severed by an act of injury. It is a reaction to an insult or an injury rather than to an offence which presupposes recognition by both parties of the wrongness of the action and its agent's responsibility. It is the alternative to continued resentment and must be expressed in actions other than a declaration of intent. Moreover because it is a matter of personal relationship, it implies the equality of the forgiver and the forgiven. Equally, forgiveness may, but need not be mutual. Finally, forgiveness is not subject to any rules. Pardon, however, involves the remission of penalty and is not exercised by the injured person but by a third party who, in pardoning, is exercising a power conferred upon some person in a special role or capacity. Pardon may be granted through a performative utterance and implies a superiority-inferiority relationship. No reciprocity can be expected in pardon which is guided by certain rules and can be

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[29]Heyd, D *Supererogation* p156

granted to innocent people, or asked for by people who know they have done nothing wrong. In Heyd's view mercy is a less coherent or independent category than either pardon or forgiveness. To begin with it can mean a variety of things including the leniency of the courts, the pardon exercised by an official or benevolent concern for suffering people. Unlike forgiveness but like pardon it involves a superiority-inferiority relationship and can be requested without acknowledging culpability but thereby acknowledging or creating a relationship of dependency.

3. ANALYSIS OF *THE SUNFLOWER*

The distinctions drawn by Kolnai, Downie and Heyd provide some of the apparatus needed for a consideration of the issues raised by Wiesenthal's story and the commentary on it which has been noted. The central dynamic in the incident concerns the relation between what Karl was seeking and what Wiesenthal was able to offer. The possibilities generated by the consideration of Kolnai, Downie and Heyd are excuse, mercy, condonation, pardon and forgiveness.

It does not seem from the account that Karl was looking to be excused. In confessing his involvement he does not argue that he was not responsible, nor does he argue that there were extenuating circumstances. He asks for forgiveness and this implies that he accepts responsibility for his actions. Karl is not looking to be excused. He confesses himself to be guilty.

Equally Karl is not in pursuit of mercy. He is a dying man and seeks out a representative of his victims. The only power which Wiesenthal has over him is the power of giving or withholding either pardon or forgiveness. He cannot have Karl punished in any way; he is not in a position either to hasten or to delay his death nor to make it more or less painful. Karl neither needs nor seeks mercy.

There is evidence of mercy in the story, however. This is when Wiesenthal visited Karl's mother. In this case his silence was merciful. He chose not to speak out of a benevolent regard for the suffering which would have been inflicted on her had he spoken of

the atrocity. His silence before Karl was more ambiguous, however. In as much as he did not utter words of consolation to a dying man it was not an expression of compassion. But equally Wiesenthal did not take the opportunity to curse and abuse the S.S. Officer. It can only be said to have been a merciful silence, however, if it represented a forswearing of the second alternative.

The question of condonation is similar to that of mercy. Karl was certainly not asking Wiesenthal to condone his actions. Had he done so the answer would of course have been negative, but it is clear from the account that part of Karl's problem was that he was dying with the memory of an action which while some would condone he could neither condone nor forgive nor pardon in himself.

Karl used the language of forgiveness in his request but, as we have seen, this is often confounded with the quite distinct idea of pardon. In as much as Wiesenthal was not a victim but a third party it seems that Karl must have been looking for pardon. There is support for this in the fact that it was a death-bed confession. He was looking for a pronouncement, a performative utterance which would have removed his guilt rather than the restoration or creation of a personal relationship.

Certainly some of the contributors to the symposium responded as if the request were for pardon. This is the force of the contributions of Jakobvits and Levi who put it that Wiesenthal did well not to presume to pardon that which he was not authorised to pardon. Other contributors, however, perceived a different level of desire in the request. Madriaga, for instance, suggested that he was looking for pity and Kaplan that he was making a positive gesture by confessing to a Jew.

A crucial question concerns the degree to which Wiesenthal could be identified with the people who died in the house. From Karl's point of view there is no question that the identification is close. Jews are Jews after all, had Wiesenthal been there he would have been among the murdered. From Wiesenthal's point of view, however, the relationship was not so close. He was alive, for instance, how could

he speak for the dead? For Wiesenthal to pardon Karl it must have been the case that he would have identified with the victims and that identification would have given him some power over Karl. But Wiesenthal is not empowered simply by the fact that he is 'another Jew'. Quite the opposite. Even his hearing of the confession is forced. He is not in a position to punish or to judge Karl and therefore he can no more offer pardon than he could extend mercy. In order for Wiesenthal to pardon Karl the circumstance would have to be quite different. In the first place it would need to be established by some cultural or socio-political process that Wiesenthal was authorised to judge Karl. Second, it would have to be clear that Wiesenthal or his delegate would be empowered to execute any punishment which was deemed appropriate.

Finally, then, there is the question of forgiveness. Downie's point is that forgiveness is in the gift of the injured individual. On this ground alone it seems that forgiveness is not possible. Wiesenthal was not killed by Karl *ergo* Wiesenthal cannot forgive him as the murderer. On this argument, of course, murderers cannot be forgiven. But this is to neglect the fact that forgiveness is not so much a legal as a relational category. As Heyd insists, those who seek and offer forgiveness are making a contribution to a personal relationship. It is possible to imagine that Wiesenthal might forgive Karl, but this could only be for any injury or suffering which Karl has inflicted on him.

It is manifest that Wiesenthal suffers and that part of his suffering has as its origin both the confession and the request which Karl made to him. Wiesenthal does have the potential to forgive him for inflicting these sufferings. Such a possibility, however, is beyond Karl's imagination. The whole incident is predicated on the Nazi assumption that individual Jews have no particular identity, personhood or right to respect. Karl's concern is not to do what he can to relate well to this one particular man whom he summons to his bedside. His attitude, as well as his imminent death, mean that there is no prospect of a healing relationship. By *making* Wiesenthal hear his confession he reveals that it is impossible for Wiesenthal to forgive him just as much as it is impossible for him to pardon

him. In order to pardon him Wiesenthal would have to have been empowered by the victims or those who were closest to them. In order to forgive him Wiesenthal would have to have been empowered by a word or gesture of Karl's which would have intimated respect for his personal identity.

In short, Karl was not seeking to be excused or to be granted mercy. Moreover his request could not be considered as one for forgiveness because it was predicated on the denial of Wiesenthal's personal identity. The request was one for pardon, presumably based on the analogy of the absolution given by the priest in auricular confession which Karl had experienced in his youth. Wiesenthal was not authorised to pardon, however, and so was right to keep silence.

This conclusion is only satisfactory on the abstract level, however. The truth is that there was more going on in the story than this analysis has revealed. What, for instance, of the significance of the bundle of clothes? It was a post-mortem gift and as such strangely gratuitous. Karl could not know whether or not it was received. On the one hand it is sad that Wiesenthal did not accept them because to do so would not be to forgive or pardon or to excuse or be merciful. It would be to be accepting. On the other hand there is no reason why he should accept such a gift. Even if it was the beginnings of an affirmation of his individuality this was inappropriate as the only effect it would have would be within the community of his fellow concentration camp inmates. Consequently the decision of Wiesenthal not to accept the gift is revealed to have been a wise one. It did no harm. Karl was dead and his gesture of giving was complete. It would have been wrong however for Wiesenthal to accept such a gift. He could not do so without accepting the implication that he was elevated to special significance by Karl's selection of him and that would be, of course, to capitulate to the Nazi ideal that Jews were not only without personhood but also without the possibility of enabling or helping each other to personal dignity.

Furthermore Wiesenthal's visit to Karl's mother can be seen in a positive light, as can his writing of the story and his involvement of

many people in it through the collating of the symposium. While the matter was not one of forgiveness or pardon the exchange was certainly a surprising one. In it Karl did hint at the beginnings of a respect for the victims of his actions. Even to speak to 'any Jew' is a improvement on saying or doing nothing. To hope that it might issue in instant pardon or the warm embrace of forgiveness was, however, naive. Part of the value of the narrative and the discussion which has ensued is to establish this point: that the need for forgiveness and the possibility of forgiveness are not always proximate. Forgiveness, and for that matter pardon, might best be considered as possibilities towards which individuals and the relational gambits and gestures which they construct might be in progress rather than ideals which either are or are not achieved in any given exchange.

4. DESCRIBING THE DYNAMICS OF FORGIVENESS

4.i. Forgiveness and Resentment Bishop Butler

In the late seventeenth century Bishop Butler preached two sermons relevant to our theme. One was on the forgiveness of injuries, the other was on resentment. Both are based on Matthew 5:43-44 which is one of the antitheses in the Sermon on the Mount.[30]

In the first sermon Butler asks himself why it is that the passion resentment exists at all. Surely if God is good there is no need for such a troubling emotion. In answer he replies that there is a crucial distinction to be drawn between a hasty and sudden passion of anger and the settled and deliberate attitude of malice and revenge. His conclusion is not however, that anger is acceptable and resentment not. Rather that they serve similar but distinct ends. Whereas anger is a natural instinct for self-preservation, resentment is implanted to prevent moral injury. Anger protects the individual in the natural world, resentment offers similar protection in the moral and social world. The possibility of resentment by an

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[30]"Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you."

offended or injured individual is a way of inhibiting aggression from those who are not sufficiently virtuous to constrain themselves. Further it is an important ingredient in the matter of self-control; existing in the mind as a possibility it can encourage restraint by posing in potential self-condemnation.

In his sermon on forgiveness he builds on this understanding by arguing that: "the precepts to forgive, and to love our enemies, do not relate to that general indignation against injury and the authors of it, but to this feeling, or resentment, when raised by private or personal injury."[31] This does not imply that all personal hurts should be merely taken. They can legitimately elicit a response in us. The doctrines of love and forgiveness, however, refer to the need to keep such responses proportionate and to the duty not to allow the passions of anger and resentment to develop an inertia or a logic of their own. Butler does not, however, encourage a retributive approach to personal wrong or injustice. He argues that retribution leads to an unending cycle of injury and response. "Malice or resentment towards any man hath plainly a tendency to beget the same passion in him who is the object of it; and this again increases it in the other. It is in the nature of this vice to propagate itself..."[32] Resentment is not in itself a valid response to an injury because it is itself painful. It is a secondary passion and not to be indulged in, rather it is to be used in an effort to terminate wrong. Resentment is a vice, but it is a different kind of vice from all others as it aims at the termination of vice (although as we have seen, it can have the opposite effect.)

It is against resentment that the doctrine of love and forgiveness is taught. Forgiveness is no more and no less than the love of enemies. But equally love and resentment can co-exist in a relationship. "We may therefore love our enemy, and yet have resentment against him for his injurious behaviour towards us."[33] But this is not always the case. Resentment can become so strong as to destroy love and good-will. The point about the doctrine of forgiveness is that it is

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[31]Butler, J. *Butler's Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel and a Dissertation on the Nature of Virtue* (London: SPCK) 1970 p81

[32]*ibid.*

[33]Butler, J. *Fifteen Sermons* p84

against the development of resentment. "The command... to forgive injuries, is the same as to love our enemies; because that love is always supposed, unless destroyed by resentment."[34]

Butler goes on to develop his understanding about the significance which it is proper to attach to moral injury received. One point is that we should value the community in which we live more than particular infringements of rules, even if this is to our cost, because not only are we social before we are moral but also because we are sensible before we are social. Thus while ever more serious injuries generate ever more angry and resentful responses it is never appropriate that the response should be allowed to escalate to the point where love and good-will are excluded. Another point is that individuals should not allow their passionate responses to injury to follow their own logic. He sees that people are too sensitive to wounds received and cautions that an injured person: "ought to be affected towards the injurious person in the same way as any good man, uninterested in the case, would be."[35] Resentment and anger ought to be felt in a dispassionate, reasonable, objective way. As he goes on to say:

> "[We] should not indulge a passion, which, if generally indulged, would propagate itself so as almost to lay waste to the world: that we should repress that partial, that false self-love, which is the weakness of our nature: that uneasiness and misery should not be produced, without any good purpose to be served by it: and that we should not be affected towards persons differently from what their nature and character require."[36]

The sermon concludes by commending the attitude of forgiveness as the limitation of anger and resentment and reinforcing it from the Matthean teaching, which as we have seen, has it that forgiveness is a matter of judgement. "A forgiving spirit is therefore absolutely necessary, as ever we hope for pardon of our own sins, as ever we

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[34] *ibid.*
[35] Butler, J. *Fifteen Sermons* p85
[36] *ibid.*

hope for peace of mind in our dying moments, or for the divine mercy at that day when we shall most stand in need of it."[37]

Butler's teaching is a *locus classicus* of the interaction between the theological, ethical, psychological and social aspects of forgiveness. The sermons were for several centuries the most profound Christian reflection on the subject. During the last thirty years there has been much more interest in forgiveness in ethics than before. One aspect of this can be considered as a development of Butler's notion of forgiveness as the forswearing of resentment. An important moment in the development of this idea was Aurel Kolnai's 1965 paper to which we have already referred. In more recent years there has been very important debate which has touched on the ethical, legal, psychological and theological dimensions of forgiving others. In what follows the two most important books in the debate will be reviewed before being subjected to more thoroughgoing criticism.

4.ii. Forgiveness and Mercy J. Murphy and J. Hampton

This book is a dialogue between the two authors both of whom find aspects of received understandings of forgiveness problematic. The dialogue opens with Hampton proposing a Christian, if not a fully worked through theological, argument for forgiveness and Murphy presenting the case for punishment and retribution. Apart from an interest in forgiveness both authors share a dissatisfaction with the methodological assumptions of modern political and legal philosophy and are keen to rehabilitate the place of passion or emotion in the understanding of ethics and psychology as well as to engage with the moral significance of human reflexivity. The book does not have an argument. It is one. Murphy puts the case against forgiveness. Hampton is for it.

Murphy begins with a moral critique of the idea that to forgive is to put resentment away. This is because resentment is an important moral emotion. Forgiveness is not the forswearing of resentment *simpliciter* but the forswearing of resentment on specifically moral grounds. He argues that in order to be moral, forgiveness must be,

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[37]Butler, J. *Fifteen Sermons* p89

"compatible with self-respect, respect for others as moral agents, and respect for the rules of morality or the moral order."[38] It cannot be given in the face of every injury. There are certain conditions, however, which justify the dropping of resentment. According to Murphy forgiveness can be appropriate if the offender repents, or if the offence was caused by the faulty application of good motives, if the offender has suffered enough already or has already experienced an appropriate humiliation or because the offended party recognises a positive value in the relationship which transcends the negative value of the offence; Murphy calls this old times' sake. Murphy goes on to distinguish between mercy as a legal concept and forgiveness as a personal or inter-personal one. "Forgiveness involves the *overcoming* of certain passions (resentment, hatred) when they are inappropriate, whereas mercy involves acting in a certain way *because* of certain passions (love, compassion)."[39]

Hampton questions Murphy's point that there are times when forgiveness may not be appropriate and enquires into the nature not so much of forgiveness as of the passions which attend having been wronged and the relation of these to valuations of self and others. Hampton does not believe that the essence of forgiveness is to be found in the quality of the offender's repentance or in the *status quo ante* of the relationship but in the offended person's view of the offender. She distinguishes between 'a person who offended me' and 'a person who is of value in other ways' and sees the wrong which an agent does as less than the total and complete destruction of their personhood. "Forgiveness is the decision to see the wrong-doer in a more favourable light."[40] The action is not condoned, but neither is the actor damned. The sinner and the sin are distinguished, St Augustine is happy and Aurel Kolnai can relax. The key to understanding forgiveness, in her view, lies in the appreciation that it is a process. Murphy, like Bishop Butler, does not help the matter by using 'forgiveness' to refer to a particular part of that process, namely the change of heart with regard to the offender. Such an

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[38]Murphy, J.G. and Hampton, J. *Forgiveness and Mercy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 1988 p24

[39]Murphy, J.G. and Hampton, J. *Forgiveness and Mercy* p34

[40]Murphy, J.G. and Hampton, J. *Forgiveness and Mercy* p84

approach, typical as it is, cannot capture the essence of forgiveness. Hampton attempts an analysis of the process, but only after a consideration of the psychology of response to moral wrong and the way in which such a change of heart takes place.

The essence of the matter is that in offending the offender has insulted and degraded an innocent party. This may quite justifiably lead to *indignation*: "the emotional protest against immoral treatment whose object is the defence of the value which this action violated"[41] or *resentment*: "an emotion whose object is the defiant reaffirmation of one's rank and value in the face of treatment calling them into question in one's own mind".[42] But things are different if the offended person responds with *hatred*. And again there are different kinds of hatred: simple hatred, moral hatred and malicious hatred. For Hampton it is crucial to discern whether the feelings, be they indignation, resentment or whatever species of hatred, attach to a *person* or to *actions*. Generally and often, if not always, there is confusion, but the important steps towards forgiveness are made together with this distinction.

Forgiveness can occur when the wrong-doer is viewed as, "not rotten as a person, but as someone with whom it may be possible to renew a relationship".[43] Not that this occurs because the wrong-doer proves their worth rather it is, after Kolnai, a matter of trust. "Forgiveness is thus the decision to see the wrongdoer in a new, more favourable light."[44] This is not condonation as the action is still viewed as wrong, the difference is in the relevance of the action to the status of the person of the wrong-doer.

Murphy's next contribution to the dialogue is to define a special and important and much maligned sort of hatred: retributive hatred. This is exemplified by: "feelings that another person's current level of well-being is undeserved or ill-gotten (perhaps at one's own expense) and that a reduction in that well being will simply represent his getting his just deserts."[45] Such feelings, he argues,

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[41]Murphy, J.G. and Hampton, J. *Forgiveness and Mercy* p59
[42]Murphy, J.G. and Hampton, J. *Forgiveness and Mercy* p60
[43]Murphy, J.G. and Hampton, J. *Forgiveness and Mercy* p83
[44]Murphy, J.G. and Hampton, J. *Forgiveness and Mercy* p84
[45]Murphy, J.G. and Hampton, J. *Forgiveness and Mercy* p89

are natural and ethical, and are therefore to be cast as neither immoral nor irrational. On the other hand they are strong and powerful. It is dangerous to be led by such passions as these. They should not have their own way. There is a case against such hatred, indeed, most of the chapter is devoted to outlining it. But it is not ultimate, rather there are a range of 'cautions' which it is proper to exercise when occupied by such hatred. It is rarely wise to proceed with retributive hatred. But retributive hatred *is* a moral and logical possibility.

Hampton's discussion of the nature of retributive hatred begins with the observation that retribution comprises both a basic instinct and a more cognitive element. It is this cognitive aspect which she sees the need to analyse. Only in this way can there be reconciliation of what she calls: "Jesus' retributive-sounding anger with his attacks on the *lex talionis*, his insistence on loving one's enemies and his encouragement of forgiveness."[46] She is sure that the only way forward is with an understanding of retribution as a way of restoring the worth of the victim by bringing the offender low, that retribution, the infliction of suffering for wrong-doing against another is "the victim's value 'striking back'"[47]. Retribution is thus: "our name for the Furies, and at a fundamental level it is punishment we desire because we see it... confirming that we *are* valuable, and that their actions (in offending us) were indeed wrong and that we must be treated with respect."[48]

This, as she notes, is a cool version of retributive hatred. "[What] Murphy characterised and defended as retributive hatred is in fact the desire for retribution coupled with the experience of moral hatred of the wrongdoer."[49] People who engage with this desire the harm of the wrongdoer both as a restoration of their own value, but also as a deterrent to the evil cause. Hampton's point is that it is possible both to believe that the wrongdoer should be punished for what they have done and also to seek a restored relationship with

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[46]Murphy, J.G. and Hampton, J. *Forgiveness and Mercy* p122
[47]Murphy, J.G. and Hampton, J. *Forgiveness and Mercy* p123
[48]Murphy, J.G. and Hampton, J. *Forgiveness and Mercy* p143
[49]Murphy, J.G. and Hampton, J. *Forgiveness and Mercy* p146

them. She admires a colonial custom in New England of having a party with someone sentenced to death the night before their execution. The most important aspect of this approach is the distinction between the evil action and the person, who may certainly be pretty bad, but whom we must never think of as being rotten to the core. Forgiveness, and for that matter mercy, are never deserved as they depend on people going beyond the evidence of behaviour when making a judgement about an individual.

It is this cool and social retribution, rather than Murphy's personal and hot retributive hatred, which is the proper method for re-adjusting the status of the injured person with that of the injurer. It is on this basis that she distinguishes forgiveness as 'the forswearing of resentment' and mercy as 'the forswearing of retribution' and that she advances the cause of what might be called *merciless forgiveness*. That is, a dropping of the feelings of hatred or anger but at the same time insisting that retribution takes its merciless but dispassionate course. It is just, she believes, to punish wrongs, but right for sinners to be friends.

4.iii. The Ideal of Forgiveness J.B. Haber

J.B. Haber delimits a Kantian model of inter-personal forgiveness, and identifies the conditions under which it might be justified.[50] His interest is entirely with situations in which a person has been injured by the actions of a particular other. His concern is with the propriety of the two moral ways in which an injured party might respond to their offender: resentment or forgiveness. The model developed here owes much to Bishop Butler's understanding of forgiveness as the forswearing of resentment, but it is not quite that. Rather, Haber takes an Austinian speech-act approach and scrutinises the moral meaning of the phrase, 'I forgive you'. In a parallel way, Nietzsche's antagonism to Christianity as the religion which sponsors the corruption of *ressentiment* is the backdrop but not the essence of his argument about the morality of forgiveness. The approach is also personal and absolutist. Forgiveness is what may transpire between an individual and the other who injured her.

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[50]Haber, J.G. *Forgiveness* (Savage, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield) 1990

It cannot exist elsewhere, for instance between someone who is indignant about but not yet personally injured by another's behaviour. Moreover, Haber is not interested in the circumstances in which tolerance, or forgetting, or ignoring may be the human response to injury. Neither is he concerned with social factors such as the nature of the relationship between the injured and the offender. However, his argument implies a critique of many of the ways in which too easy a peace with the past is made.

Against what he considers to be the mainstream view that forgiveness is not forgiveness until the one who is offended rids him or herself of every last ounce of resentment against the offender, Haber considers the expression of forgiveness to be a performative utterance. When we forgive, according to Haber, whether we say 'I forgive you' or do something more subtle, we refer not to the fact that we no longer resent an action but that we are *willing to overcome* that resentment. In taking up this position Haber is responding to the suggestion of the philosopher N.H.J. Horsburgh who argued that forgiveness is always a personal response to a personal injury and that in order to be morally significant it must be based on an act of volition: namely a decision to forgive.[51] But Horsburgh goes on to argue that this decision is not in itself the act of forgiveness. There is also a second, emotional phase which is the putting away of all negative feelings towards the offender. This is more important, he argues, than either the restoration of the *status quo ante* in general or the restoration of the relationship. His point is that forgiveness occurs not at the level of observable behaviour but at the hidden level of volition and affect. Forgiveness does not happen 'just like that' and people often refer to being in the process of 'trying to forgive'. This, he insists,is evidence enough. Forgiveness takes time and is not complete, "until the negative feelings engendered by the injury have been eliminated."[52]

Haber concedes that resentment is often present long after a decision to forgive,[53] but does not see this as proving Horsburgh's

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[51]Horsburgh, N.H.J. 'Forgiveness' *The Canadian Journal of Philosophy* IV 2 1974
[52]Horsburgh, N.H.J. 'Forgiveness' p273
[53]Haber, J.G. *Forgiveness* p19

point. Rather it is evidence that the project of the removal of negative feelings is a long and complex one upon which the forgiveness does not necessarily depend. For Haber, Horsburgh's analysis depends on the false distinction between forgiveness and *true* forgiveness as well as on "a facile parsing of psychological states".[54] His response to this is to deny that the forswearing of resentment is a necessary condition of forgiveness and to locate it in the will and its linguistic expression rather than in the emotions.

Haber is like those who stand in the Butlerian tradition of forgiveness as the forswearing of resentment in as much as his attention is devoted to the question of the response to injury. He follows Jeffrie Murphy in arguing *for* resentment on the grounds that it is a way of preserving self-respect. The point here is that although resentment *can* be ugly and bitter, while it *can* lead to revenge or retribution or uncontrolled hatred, it need not nećessarily do so. Resentment has had a bad press not because of what it is, a self-affirming response to being treated badly, but because some responses to being treated badly are themselves bad and make matters worse. Haber is at one with Murphy in reckoning resentment to be a moral emotion, one which preserves self-respect. But he is at odds with him with regard to the particular reasons why resentment may be forsworn. Murphy, it will be recalled, offers five reasons none of which Haber finds convincing. To begin with he finds little merit in Murphy's understanding of repentance which he suggests boils down to being no more than regret and is not necessarily being infused with either *metanoia* or contrition. The second reason is that the offender meant well. But Haber argues that this is to offer an excuse rather than to forgive. The third and fourth reasons, that the offender has suffered enough or has undergone some humiliation, are not relevant either. Suffering and humiliation may or may not be redemptive and so evidence of suffering or humiliation are not in themselves sufficient justification for forgiveness. Finally Haber does not recognise 'old time's sake' as a reason for forgiveness. Indeed it is likely that the fact of friendship in the past may well deepen the sense of hurt.

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[54]Haber, J.G. *Forgiveness* p21

But Haber has an even more profound disagreement with Murphy than this. Like Hampton, Murphy found the essence of ethical forgiveness to be in the preservation of self-respect in the act of forgiving. This much Haber concedes. He does not agree, however, that this is to be achieved by exercising the neo-Augustinian distinction between the immoral act and the immoral agent, the sin and the sinner. The problem with this is that it places the onus not on the wrong-doer but on the victim. "Before we as the victim tender forgiveness, we want the wrongdoer to withdraw her endorsement for what she did. Then, first we can join her in condemning her evil deed, and then we can forgive."[55] This distancing from the offence he calls repentance.

When resentment meets repentance forgiveness might occur. But repentance is not mere regret. Haber follows Martin Golding in distinguishing three types of regret, I-regret, M-regret and O-regret. I-regret is the appreciation that, for whatever reason, the injurious act was not advantageous, M-regret ('moral-regret') is based on the idea that the injurious behaviour was wrong, but does not include the appreciation that it wronged someone in particular. Only O-regret ('other-regret') recognises the injury inflicted on a particular person. While both M-regret and O-regret can therefore lead to a moral promise to change or desist, only in the case of O-regret can this be made to a particular individual and thus meet the particular resentment and thereby lead to forgiveness.

Haber also addresses the important question of the value of repentance. The case has been made, by Spinoza and Nietzsche and others, that it is an unrealistic and unhelpful emotion, a form of self-deception. William James, for instance eliminates the element of regret in repentance when he writes that: "The best repentance is to up and act for righteousness, and to forget that you ever had relations with sin."[56] Why does Haber see repentance as consisting not only of the vow not to act thus again but also of O-regret?

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[55]Haber, J.G. *Forgiveness* p105
[56]Haber, J.G. *Forgiveness* p95

The answer to this lies in the predicate of the book, namely that morality is more than action, it has to do with identity and emotion as well. Haber dismisses, however, the Kantian view of the efficacy of repentance. Kant argued that repentance indicated a change in personal identity so great that discontinuity overrides continuity. If this were right then it would hardly be possible not to forgive the 'new' person. But Haber rightly questions the rebirth theory, although he does not enter into a description of the metaphysical mess it causes. However, remaining in the ethical realm, we would note that this renders notions of responsibility extremely problematic. Haber finds Norvin Richards' more modest claims for repentance more congenial. Richards sees repentance as part of moral development, "the repentant wrongdoer acquires a new moral principle when she realises that her old ones are morally bad."[57] Seeing that a set of moral principles led to immoral behaviour the actor sets about revising these principles. Thus repentance, if not yet a change of identity, is substantial and real change. Forgiveness is always *of* an offender *for* an offence, as Haber is at pains to emphasise. Similarly, repentance refers to particular actions; although the transformation of moral cognitive apparatus implied may, of course, have ramifications for many actions both in the past and the future.

Forgiveness, the expression of the intention to drop resentment, is therefore quite consistent with self-respect once it is clear that the offender now holds to moral principles which see the injury as injury. This view leads to a very high doctrine of apology: "By apologising, the wrongdoer makes it known that she need no longer be the object of her victim's resentment."[58] There is something unfortunate about the phrasing of this. It presumes that apology is *necessarily* acceptable and that when certain conditions are reached the offended has no choice but to forgive. This is inappropriately mechanistic and behavioural. Although the offender regrets a wrong action and vows not to do it again the offended party must retain the option of forgiving or not. Without this freedom forgiveness is not a responsible act of the victim. Haber sees this point later on and

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[57]Richards, N. 'Forgiveness' *Ethics* 99 Oct 1988 p97

[58]Haber, J.G. *Forgiveness* p99

contrasts the censure which is made of generally unforgiving persons with individual freedom to forgive or not in any particular instance. None the less he is in favour of a general predisposition to forgive, Butler's and Downie's 'forgiving spirit', seeing this as something which builds moral communities.

4.iv. The Reality of Forgiveness A Critique of Haber

In a paper in *Mind* William Neblett engages very critically with the philosophical approach to forgiveness which derives, more or less, from the distinctions of R.S. Downie.[59] The nub of his critique is that it sets up an ideal of forgiveness as non-performative, psycho-emotional process. Haber, of course, agrees with the point that forgiveness is performative and volitional. His argument with Horsburgh is that while the latter thinks forgiveness to be complete only when the last remnant of negative affect is gone, Haber sees the decision to accept an intimation of repentance as the moment of forgiveness. But there is a dispute between Neblett and Haber with regard to the extent to which forgiveness is to be conceived in an essentialist or in a Wittgensteinian way. Neblett is of the view that forgiveness has a variety of meanings in everyday speech and that the meaning of forgiveness is nothing other than a compendium of these meanings. Haber, on the other hand, wishes to reduce forgiveness to a very particular set of circumstances.

Haber was aware of Neblett's critique of the essentialist approach to forgiveness and deliberately forwent the Wittgensteinian alternative, advocated by O'Shaughnessy, of, as Haber puts it, 'merely' describing its usage. But searching for a particular meaning for forgiveness which can be represented in a model, and thought of as paradigmatic, does not involve a contradiction of Wittgenstein's insights into meaning.[60] While it may be true, however, that there is no meaning without analysis it does not follow that Haber's analysis might not suffer from being idealist. There are two points to be made here. First that his model is too narrow and second that his moral psychology is too limited.

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[59]Neblett, W.R. 'Forgiveness and Ideals' *Mind* 83 1974

[60]Haber, J.G. *Forgiveness* p27

First it is clear that Haber has a very idealised understanding not only of forgiveness but also of the human beings who injure, resent and repent. This is a product of his Kantian approach. There are ways, however, in which the precision of this theory is the result of oversimplification. While it is a good theory in certain paradigmatic cases, it does not tell us enough about the complexity of forgiveness in many circumstances. Haber's person, be they one who resents or one who repents, is a rational creature with a good memory. Moreover they exist in a world of discreet and identifiable moral episodes in which responsibility can be simply and incontestably assigned. Throughout his presentation he uses this basic model:[61]

1. X did A;
2. A was wrong;
3. X was responsible for doing A;
4. V was personally injured by X's doing A

Haber shows us how difficult forgiveness is even when circumstances are as simple as this. But often, even generally, life is not so simple. Granted that we might be able to identify X and V, quite what A is might be confused, or at least described, in a variety of ways. Furthermore X and V might evaluate A differently. While it is implicit in his understanding of repentance and resentment that a common evaluation of act A is necessary for forgiveness, he offers nothing by way of analysis of what it means for V to come to terms with either act A or person X aside from this confluence of evaluation. In other words, his thesis concerns only forgiveness in his own sense, not forgiveness in the wider sense of making some kind of peace with a past which has included moral offence against one's self.

Secondly there is a problematic assumption in what we might call Haber's moral psychology. He seems to believe, and this is most clear in his discussion of repentance, that people injure each other because they believe that it is morally right for them to do so. Thus he believes that repentance is caught up with the transition of

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[61]Haber, J.G. *Forgiveness* pp6, 40, 81, 99, 101.

morality. There are two problems with this. First, people do not always do only what they think is right; for instance some people offend against their own moral precepts, and as a result are far from happy with themselves. It is curious that Haber has nothing to say about the phenomenon of the guilty conscience. Second, morality is not necessarily thought out and defined in terms of principles, and even when it is it does not follow that all actions can be classified as right or wrong with even internal consistency. If this were not so there would be no need for ethics at all. Ambiguity surrounds moral actions, whether something was right or wrong may often be a matter of perspective.

A further problem is consequent on Haber's failure to take into account the fact that offences and injuries might vary very considerably in gravity. Haber has assumed that injury leads to resentment and that resentment may be diminished as part, at least sometimes, of a morally valid forgiveness. We have already considered the psychological possibility that injury may not lead to resentment *simpliciter*, but that guilt and shame may be responses of the injured. But in some cases there may be, because of the nature of the injury or the routineisation of an offence, a metaphysical aspect to the response. The very offence or injury, in other words, may rob the offended of their self-respect, or their sense of moral worth. Sometimes the word 'injury' is not sufficiently serious to describe what people do to each other. Certainly murder is worse than injury. But fates are sometimes worse than death. Sometimes 'injury' is *violation*. By violation I mean an action or set of actions which manage to convince their object that they are not worthy of respect. That they are sub-moral, neither dignified nor responsible human beings. Such injuries wound at the very core of the sense of self. Haber does not raise the question of whether or how they might be forgiven.

5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter a number of views about the nature of inter-personal forgiveness have been considered. In the first part of the chapter distinctions were offered between excuse, condonation, pardon and

forgiveness. These distinctions were used in an attempt to analyse the ethicality of the request for, and the silence with regard to, forgiveness in Simon Wiesenthal's account of his experiences in *The Sunflower.* The conclusion was that Wiesenthal was faced with a request for pardon couched in the language of forgiveness and that it would have been inappropriate for him to have responded with a word of forgiveness as this would have been taken as a positive response to the veiled request for pardon. Pardon, it might be added, was not possible partly because Wiesenthal was not authorised to give it and forgiveness was not possible because there was no attempt on the part of Karl to repair his relationship with Wiesenthal. Indeed by insisting that he heard his confession and request for forgiveness Karl proved that he was not in a position to be reconciled to Wiesenthal as an autonomous and equal human being.

In the second part of the chapter the tradition of ethical writing on forgiveness was considered. The most important ideas in this tradition are the Butlerian notion that forgiveness is the forswearing of resentment and the neo-Augustinian idea that forgiveness is achieved by distinguishing the immoral act and the immoral agent. The most significant recent writing on the subject is the monograph by J.G. Haber in which he argues against both of these ideas and suggests that forgiveness is only ethically appropriate when resentment, the moral emotion which preserves self-respect, is met by repentance, which includes both appropriate *metanoia* and what he calls other-regret but which might also be called sorrow or contrition. Forgiveness, then, can be the legitimate response of the victim to, for instance, apology.

Finally a critique of Haber's theory and approach was offered. Although cogniscent of the claim that the tradition in which he was following was too idealist to provide an adequate theory of forgiveness Haber persisted in producing a very narrow, precise and particular model which was both psychologically and ethically simplistic. An adequate theory of forgiveness would have to be based on a broader range of cognitive and emotional possibilities in both offender and offended together with a more sophisticated analysis of the effect of various kinds of injury on the sense of self,

wherein the adjustments of volition and emotion, which are basic to forgiveness, would occur.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE DRAMA OF FORGIVENESS

To enquire into the nature of forgiveness is not only to enter into the history of Christian theology but also, as the previous chapter made clear, to enter into the everyday world. For while forgiveness is that aspect of divine grace which those who describe themselves as sinners most earnestly seek, it is also that way of coping with the injurious or negative consequences of human actions which can lead to reconciliation and peace. Forgiveness, in other words, has both religious and secular references. The religious reference is to the divine action whereby the guilt of sin is removed from the individual, leaving that individual both responsible and healthy, whereas the secular reference of forgiveness is the restoration of human relations which have been rent by the injury of one party by another. But while it is possible and coherent to distinguish these two spheres of reference the meaning, indeed the theology, of forgiveness is a product of their mutual articulation.

One of the features of the recent general interest in forgiveness is that it often issues in the suggestion that forgiveness should be considered in what behavioural scientists call 'the field'. This is an approach which has been taken by writers such as Lord Longford[1] and Brian Frost[2] and was in 1989 the basis of a BBC television documentary produced by Catharine Seddon entitled *As We Forgive*. In the programme six case studies were presented, three of which were examples where after an injury there was no forgiveness on the part of the victim or in the case of a murder, a close relative of the victim, and three where forgiveness had ensued. The advantage of this approach was that it showed how the giving or withholding of forgiveness was a complex matter involving the personality of the injured, their relation with the person who injured them, the extent

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[1]Longford, F. *Forgiveness* (Northampton: The Buchebroc Press)1989
[2]Frost, B. *The Politics of Peace* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd) 1990

of their injuries, the political and cultural context of the injuring incident and the religious convictions or want of them in the respective parties. The disadvantage, and similar remarks apply to Longford's book, was that it did not manage to transcend the particularities in order to establish anything about either the ethics or the psychology of forgiving. As Frank Delaney commented in a review of Seddon's programme in *The Listener,* an investigation of the limits of the human capacity to forgive would have been more valuable. The material, as he rightly observes, is not limited to the contingencies of the injurious or forgiving incidents themselves, nor to the answers which subjects give to questions about forgiveness. Rather, "the real material ranges all over the psyche and arises daily."[3]

1. Some Recent Questions About Forgiveness

A resolution of the tension between the need to address the contingencies of particular situations and the importance of identifying the generalities of lay theories of forgiveness lies in the way in which questions of forgiveness are handled in drama and literature. In this chapter we therefore begin by considering the questions about forgiveness which are raised in Iris Murdoch's novel *Bruno's Dream*[4] as well as in two contemporary plays, Ariel Dorfman's *Death and the Maiden*[5] and Rudolf Shaffer's *The Gift of the Gorgon*[6].

1.i. Bruno's Question

In Murdoch's book, Bruno is a bedridden old man reflecting on his relationship with this wife Janie who died twenty years previously. He is not a religious person though his ruminations on his need to come to peace with his past bring a kind of pathetic religious yearning.

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[3] *The Listener* 9 February 1989
[4] Murdoch, I. *Bruno's Dream* (London: Penguin) 1975
[5] Dorfman, A. *Death and the Maiden* (London: Nick Hern Books) 1992
[6] Shaffer, P. The *Gift of the Gorgon* (London: Penguin)1993

> "Sometimes he would have liked to pray, but what is prayer if there is nobody there? If only he could believe in death-bed repentance and instant salvation. Even the idea of purgatory was infinitely consoling: to survive and to enter the embrace of a totally just love. Even the idea of judgement, a judgement on his cruelty to his wife, his cruelty to his son. Even if Janie's dying curses were to drag him to hell."[7]

Bruno has not lived a kind life. Both his wife and his son grew to hate him. His wife because of his infidelity, his son because Bruno was so hurtful about his marriage to an Indian woman. The focus of the tragedy is not these problems in themselves but the systematic way in which opportunities to overcome them, to give or receive forgiveness, were avoided. The starkest example of this was Bruno's refusal to visit his dying wife at her bedside. He had reason to refuse: "For weeks, months he was sorry, weeping, kneeling, buying her flowers which she threw out of the window, begging her to forgive him. 'Don't be angry with me, Janie, I can't bear it, forgive me, Janie, oh forgive me, for Christ's sake."[8] But Janie never would forgive, and Bruno got to the point where he could no longer even beg for it so that in the end he let her die alone. "He could not bear it... He heard her call.. he did not go up. He feared a curse but perhaps she wanted to forgive him, to be reconciled with him."[9]

He condemns himself for not allowing the possibility of forgiveness and is lost in self-pity: "Supposing Janie had wanted to forgive him at the end after all? She held out her hands to him saying, "Bruno, I forgive you. Please forgive me. I love you dear heart, I love you...' He would never know. The most precious thing of all was lost to him for ever."[10] The unforgiven Bruno is captivated by the need to be forgiven. He writes to his alienated son Miles in the hope of having a reconciling conversation, perhaps he can forgive him on behalf of all the others. But Miles is less than enthusiastic about adopting the

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[7]Murdoch, I. *Bruno's Dream* p8
[8]Murdoch, I. *Bruno's Dream* p13
[9]Murdoch, I. *Bruno's Dream* p15
[10]Murdoch, I. *Bruno's Dream* p36

role of confessor.[11] Bruno's situation is further complicated because he is so puzzled about this forgiveness which he so desires. As he puts it to his nurse Nigel when he tells him that he is to see his estranged son "Do you think that forgiveness is something, Nigel? Does something *happen*? Or is it just a word.?"[12]

Bruno's question is an alternative to Boso's as a starting point for a theology of forgiveness.[13] Anselm's Boso asks why God could not forgive merely as an act of will and Bruno asks whether forgiveness is real. Bruno's pathetic question draws attention to some of the major issues which need to be considered in a contemporary theology of forgiveness. Both questions have to do with the arena in which forgiveness occurs, but while Boso's question is intended to suggest a particular theological agenda, Bruno's is much more general and far-reaching. In Boso's case the question is posed as a challenge to ways in which the cross of Christ has been interpreted as being central to divine-human forgiveness. But in Bruno's case it is not at all clear what he means by 'something'. For instance, he might be referring to an ontological 'thing' which would be changed whereby he would be put at one with his late wife. Alternatively, he might be referring to the prospect of a change internal to himself whereby he would no longer be tormented by guilt. But then again the internal side of his experience may not be so much emotional as cognitive. He might be hoping not to lose his guilt but to be free of the repeated and unbidden memory of Janie's unanswered summons from her death bed. Against any or all of these he posits that it might just be a matter of words and that the utterance of words of forgiveness might not have any effects or implications. An important part of this study is to explore the possibilities suggested here and to show not only what they mean on their own terms but that they are all interconnected and that the interconnections between them are, in fact, a central aspect of the significance which attaches to forgiveness.

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[11]Murdoch, I. *Bruno's Dream* "He did not want emotions and memories and unmanageable unforeseen situations. He did not want to go through all the rigmarole of forgiving and being forgiven. It would all be play-acting. It would be something hopelessly impure." p65

[12]Murdoch, I. *Bruno's Dream* p75

[13]Boso is Anselm's interlocutor in *Cur Deus Homo?*

1.ii. Paula's Predicament

Ariel Dorfman's play *Death and The Maiden* is set in a Latin American Country[14] in the early years after the over-throw of a totalitarian regime. It is an intensely focused study of the chance encounter between Paula, a former victim of torture, Roberto, the doctor who presided over her torture, and her husband, Gerardo. The significant part of the play for our purposes comes towards the end when Paula has established that the man Roberto really is her torturer. But once his guilt is established, what next? What can or should Paula do?

One way in which the drama allows us to focus on this issue is in terms of what the various characters want. It is Paula's desires which are important for our purposes. Candidly she explains that her initial sentiment is to want revenge. "Doing to them, systematically, minute by minute, instrument by instrument what they did to me."[15] But in the end, although she dwells for a while on the means whereby she would extract such retribution, she realises what she really wants.

> Paula: I want him to confess. I want him to sit down in front of the cassette recorder and tell me what he did - not just to me, everything, to everybody - and then have him write out in his own handwriting and sign it and I would keep a copy forever.[16]

In the end Roberto does confess, but his confession is forced, it is a version of events told by Paula to Gerardo and in turn relayed by him to Roberto. We rejoin the drama with the guilty Roberto still tied up and confronted by Paula.

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[14]Although not stated this is generally recognised to be Chile.
[15]Dorfman, A. *Death and the Maiden* p34
[16]Dorfman, A. *Death and the Maiden* p35

Paula: Don't move, Doctor. There's still a little matter pending. It's going to be an incredibly beautiful day. You know the only thing that's missing now, Doctor, the one thing I need to make this day really truly perfect? To kill you...

...When I gave my word [To release him on confession] I still had a doubt . . . that you really were that man. . . Now that I know, that you are that man, I could not live in peace with myself and let you live.

She points the gun at him.

You have a minute to pray and really repent, Doctor.[17]

At which point Roberto stands up to protest not the injustice of shooting him now that he has confessed, but his innocence. He claims to have made up the confession to placate Paula and escape. But Paula knows better. In making the confession accurate and full Roberto unwittingly convicted himself. But in his confession about the way in which he made the confession he revealed his lack of true repentance.

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[17]Dorfman, A. *Death and the Maiden* p51

Paula: I'm not going to kill you because you're guilty, Doctor, but because you haven't repented at all. I can only forgive someone who really repents, who stands up amongst those he has wronged and says, I did this, I did it, and I'll never do it again.

Roberto: What more do you want? You've got more than all the victims in this country will ever get. A man who's confessed, at your feet, humiliated,
He gets down on his knees.
Begging for his life. What more do you want?

Paula: The truth, Doctor. The truth and I'll let you go.... Confess and I'll let you go. You have ten seconds... Time is running out, Doctor. Confess!

Roberto *stands up.*
Roberto: No. I won't. Because even if I do confess, you'll never be satisfied. You're going to kill me anyway. So go ahead and kill me. I'm not going to let any sick woman treat me like this. If you want to kill me, do it. But you're killing an innocent man.

Paula: Nine.

Roberto: So we go on and on with violence, always more violence. Yesterday they did terrible things to you and now you do terrible things to me and tomorrow the same cycle will begin all over again. Isn't it time we stopped?[18]

At the end of the Act the characters freeze in these positions and a mirror descends between them and the audience. Schubert's string quartet, *Death and the Maiden*, is played while the spectators watch themselves in the mirror. Does she shoot him or not? The audience are invited by the mirror to perceive themselves as part of the situation and also to reflect on how they respond to it.

Paula is a violated person wanting her violator to own the violation and thus to acknowledge not only her injury but also her status as person. Roberto is the violator who will neither admit any particular action nor its moral weight. He attempts to exploit the

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[18]Dorfman, A. *Death and the Maiden* p53

logic of forgiveness but his pleading is merely a crass attempt to distract the victim from the moral agenda of rediscovering her personhood.

The final Act is set at a concert several months later. Paula is haunted. The music is Schubert, *Death and the Maiden*, and the unseen-seen ambiguous figure at the concert is Roberto. She is not free of him. She is not free of the past. The play has no answers. It is a statement of the complexity and gravity of forgiveness.

1.iii. Edward's Passion

For Bruno and Paula the unachievable possibility of forgiveness might be seen as an additional burden for them to bear in their distress. Poor Bruno, to use his self-description, does not even know whether what he longs for is real. Perplexed Paula, on the other hand, knows and understands that forgiveness is a possibility but also knows that it cannot just happen; it is not merely a matter of words or of will but is a possible outcome of an exchange initiated by genuine repentance.

The main question which attracts attention is based on the appreciation that forgiveness is evidently an act of moral seriousness. To forgive is to respond to actions which are judged to be injurious or offensive. It is therefore to act on, among other things, that judgement. This raises the question of the justice of forgiveness. But while we might think of justice as an ethical abstraction it is more than this. In human terms, whether the arena is personal or political the question of justice is not only one of judgement but also of emotion or passion. This is one of the points which is made with great power in Peter Shaffer's play *The Gift of the Gorgon*. Indeed, in the central character in the play, the playwright Edward Damson, sees the pursuit of justice as the *only* moral passion.

The drama revolves around the relationship between Edward and his wife Helen. Edward sees himself as the champion of a hot, angry and vengeful response to violence in the interests of justice and

engagement. In the second act Edward and Helen hear the following radio announcements:

> BBC MALE ANNOUNCER This morning a bomb exploded at a War Memorial in the town of Enniskillen, Northern Ireland. It happened without warning as a crowd was assembling for a Remembrance Day Service, commemorating the dead of two world wars. At least eight people have been killed and many more injured.
>
> IRISH FEMALE ANNOUNCER Among the dead is Marie Wilson, a twenty one year old nurse. Her father says that he forgives the terrorists responsible. 'I bear them no ill will,' he said. 'I bear them no grudge.'[19]

Edward is appalled: "What a terrible thing to say," he exclaims. But Helen is delighted: "I think it's glorious! It's possibly the most moving thing I ever heard."[20] And a row ensues in which Edward calls Helen and all who would forgive 'the Brigade of Avoiders'.

Edward is stimulated by the news to write a play, 'IRE', which will be his manifesto for justice. "An IRA bomb explosion in the toy department of a large London store. Mothers and children blown to pieces: dolls and teddy bears splattered with blood and brains."[21] One of the children is the daughter of a woman MP who captures one of the bombers in Belfast and then executes him ritually, before the eyes of the audience. But as the play goes on to reveal, Edward's feelings about justice are not positively received and when the play opens he is jeered by the audience. Helen had opposed the writing and production of the play from when she first heard the idea, and it is her early speech against his sense that only those who seek justice are motivated by passion is the most important speech in the play for our theme.

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[19]Shaffer, P. *The Gift of the Gorgon* p54
[20]*ibid.*
[21]Shaffer, P. *The Gift of the Gorgon* p55

> "You go on about passion, Edward. But have you never realised that there are many, many kinds? - Including a passion to kill our own passion when it's wrong. I'm not just being clever. The truest, hardest, most adult passion isn't stamping and geeing ourselves up. It's refusing to be led by rage when we most want to be... Stubbornly continuing to say no to blood. All right, the Greeks wouldn't have understood this, but they were savages, finally, the whole of their country *ran* with blood. It was all entrails and screaming: no pity for anyone. They had Gods to take the big view for them. Athena could come down suddenly and stop the boys fighting, like a schoolmistress in a playground. We haven't got anyone to do that. We're the boys and the mistress, both - that's the impossible and wonderful thing about us! No other being in the universe can change itself by conscious will: it is our privilege alone. To take out inch by inch the spear in our side that goads us on to bloodshed - and still make sure it doesn't take our guts with it. My dad invented that image. My liberal old daddy."[22]

As Helen puts it, forgiveness is not mere avoidance or lack of engagement. It is passion against passion.

2. SOME RECENT THEOLOGIANS ON FORGIVENESS

In this section of the chapter I offer a review of some recent theological writing on forgiveness. Much of this is based on the paradigm of the atonement but also draws upon or attempts to explain the phenomenon of human forgiveness. The various writers touch on different aspects of forgiveness and I have grouped them in such a way as to draw attention to similarities and divergences. Differences should not be interpreted as disagreements in every case. As we have already seen, forgiveness is a broad subject and therefore it is understandable that in different writings different questions or dimensions of the subject are the focus of attention.

When I have reviewed the contribution of the writers under different headings I will offer some thoughts about what this theoretical work has to say to the situations and issues outlined in the first part of this chapter.

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[22]Shaffer, P. *The Gift of the Gorgon* p57

2.i. Forgiveness as Affirmation J. Baker and P. Hinchliff

Although forgiveness between people has not been a major topic in theological ethics there have been some attempts to wrestle with the questions which it raises. The relatively recent and wide-ranging works by John Baker and Peter Hinchliff touch on forgiveness in productive and related ways.

In his book *The Foolishness of God* John Baker argues that while forgiveness is the classic way of dealing with guilt, it does not eradicate it.[23] Rather, what makes forgiveness 'classic' or of great value is that it affirms guilt as "something that works for life and strength and good."[24] Baker considers the situations in which the offended and the one who offends are either known or unknown to each other and sees that forgiveness means different things in the two cases. In the case of an injury inflicted by a non-proximate stranger forgiveness is a refusal to add to the sum total of evil by entertaining bitterness.[25] In this case the new circumstances created by the infliction of the injury must be accepted and any resentment must be eschewed.

In the case where there is a relationship between offended and offender Baker first insists that forgiveness is not a trivialisation of the offence nor a foregoing of the right to live within a just society: "There is nothing in the virtue of forgiveness which necessitates our enduring injustice in helpless silence."[26] The offence must, as it were, be brought into the relationship and seen for what it is. Most importantly the offender must not indulge in self-excuse but in confession and repentance. If this is the case then there is the possibility of forgiveness. But forgiveness does not undo the past so much as draw a line under it. "The evil has happened; it is there in history forever. We like to delude ourselves

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[23]Baker, J.A. *The Foolishness of God* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd) 1970
[24]Baker, J.A. *The Foolishness of God* p120
[25]*ibid.*
[26]Baker, J.A. *The Foolishness of God* p121

that forgiveness rewrites the record, and makes us splendid characters once more, but it does not."[27]

Peter Hinchliff makes similar points in his *Holiness and Politics.*[28] He understands forgiveness to be at the heart of Christian faith and ethics. It is that which, "enables us to accept the reality of imperfect human nature without lowering our standards of what human beings and human life ought to be."[29] Like Baker he sees an integral connection between guilt and forgiveness. Ethics exist and as we err we become guilty. Forgiveness however means that guilt is not terminal. On this argument forgiveness is functionally identical to punishment. They both remove the guilty part of the consequences of an offence. The difference is that forgiveness depends upon repentance. Hinchliff goes so far as to say that forgiveness is experienced in repentance.[30] Forgiveness is also a mark of the social, a way of being in fellowship. This is so because repentance is an attitude of mind in which the consequences not only of one's own but also of other people's failures are borne: "repentance involves not merely the determination to do what I can to redeem and alleviate the consequences of my own sin, but also to learn the meaning of forgiveness by bearing willingly the consequences of other people's failures, individually and collectively."[31] This makes sense of his conviction that forgiveness is at the heart of faith. It means that forgiveness is more than an occasional transaction. It is a mode of life, a way of being with others and for a certain kind of community. For Hinchliff, forgiveness is the reconciling nexus at the heart of both faith and *koinonia.* It connects with the cross of Christ but in a way which sees the cross as unfinished business. Hinchliff also adds another dimension to the depth of this interconnectedness by insisting that the cross and the 'deeply ingrained and bitter sense of having been *wronged*' mutually 'earth' each other.

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[27]Baker, J.A. *The Foolishness of God* p122
[28]Hinchliff, P. *Holiness and Politics* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd) 1982
[29]Hinchliff, P. *Holiness and Politics* p59
[30]Hinchliff, P. *Holiness and Politics* p53
[31]*ibid.*

Reflection

Baker and Hinchliff would agree that Bruno was not to worry, forgiveness *does* exist. Baker would be the more salutary visitor however, assuring Bruno that while repentance was fitting it was not yet full reformation of character. He might also remind Bruno that he was in no position to demand forgiveness and that his self-pity was poor. We can be sure, however, that had he spoken to Janie he would have reminded her of her obligation to forgive the repentant Bruno, and he would certainly encourage Bruno in his endeavour to get in touch with his son, though again, he would remind him that whatever the outcome it should be accepted as a gift and that in any case, forgiven or not, Bruno's task was to be a loving and forgiving person in his own right. He would remind Bruno that whatever forgiveness he had not received he was also in receipt of manifold forgiveness. Similarly Baker would presumably encourage Paula to be forgiving in the first sense, that of letting go of her resentment for the sake of not adding to the evil in the world.

Hinchliff's response to Bruno would be similar to Baker's. He would, however, have more to say to Paula. For as well as seeing that she should try to be rid of her resentment at least for her own sake he would also sympathise with her poignant protest against the fact that in the face of *his* crime *she* is required to pay the price of justice. "Why is it always people like me who have to sacrifice, who have to concede when concessions are needed, biting my tongue, why?" Hinchliff is alive to the political dimensions of forgiveness and would assert that there is, in a sense, no justice in that the offended are those who pay the price of forgiveness even if that forgiveness is in the service of a just and positive social order. This is one of the reasons why he would suggest care rather than abandon in the act of forgiving. It is also the reason that, unlike Karl Barth from whom he distinguishes himself, he does not see the work of divine justice as achieved in the historical event of the cross but as the continuing work of those who sacrifice in the name of forgiveness. Hinchliff would therefore reckon both the ethical and the theological significance of any act of forgiveness on her part to be very considerable.

2.ii. Forgiveness as Costly P Fiddes and R Swinburne

According to Paul Fiddes, forgiveness is the basic process which operates in atonement and he is careful to distinguish this from 'mere legal pardon'. Forgiveness is not the passionateless and distant mitigation of a penalty, it is, "a painful relational experience."[32] But more significant than the pain of forgiveness is the costliness: "Reconciliation is a costly process because there are resistances to it in the attitude of the person who has offended; the one who has set out to forgive must aim to remove those blockages and restore the relationship. Forgiveness then involves relationship which is costly."[33] It is this aspect of costliness which distinguishes forgiveness from pardon and which explains the cross: "Forgiveness as an act creating response is therefore bound to be expensive in time and effort, requiring mental and physical anguish."[34]

Fiddes stresses that it is productive and orthodox to think of creation and redemption as a unity. Moreover God is not above suffering but is in a sympathetic relation with creation. But if the combined effect of points such as these is to persuade that atonement is an event in the present he is equally determined to show that it relies on a decisive event in the past. In other words that there was an act of atonement as well as the continual process of salvation.

Fiddes believes that the subjective and human aspects of salvation must have a priority in theology, but he is also convinced that the objective reality of atonement must be taken into account:

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[32]Fiddes, P. *Past Event and Present Salvation*: *The Christian Idea of Atonement* (London Darton, Longman and Todd) 1989p15
[33]Fiddes, P. *Past Event and Present Salvation* p16
[34]*ibid.*

"We are bound to understand reconciliation by analogy with the process of healing rather than by analogy with a legal or commercial transaction. Using traditional terms this might be called subjective, but it will work hard at understanding the 'objective focus' of God's activity, both in past and present events. This means... understanding the cross of Jesus as an event which has a unique degree of power to evoke and create human response to the forgiving love of God."[35]

More than this, it can be a resource for generating hope, indeed it is the basis, he claims, in an argument about the ability of the atonement to transcend time, of hope itself. "It is not just that there is an interesting parallel between the past event of atonement and the future hope of completed salvation. Each unlocks the meaning of the other."[36] This leads to the characteristic Christian way of recalling the past and expecting the future so that the individual can, "respond to the God who draws near in forgiveness."[37]

Fiddes is convinced that the reasons for the death of Christ must be allowed to interpret the meaning of the atonement. He sees the death as a product of Jesus' ministry in which: "he was creating a new *climate* of understanding about the way that God deals with people, placing the emphasis upon God's free offer of forgiveness for sinners rather than upon a style of life shaped by the keeping of regulations for right living."[38] To give but one vivid example: "Jesus outraged the religious establishment by eating with sinners while, in their view they were *still* sinners."[39] As a result of interpreting the reasons for Christ's death in these ways Fiddes comes to particular conclusions about the meaning of the atonement.

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[35]Fiddes, P. *Past Event and Present Salvation* p29
[36]Fiddes, P. *Past Event and Present Salvation* p33
[37]Fiddes, P. *Past Event and Present Salvation* p34
[38]Fiddes, P. *Past Event and Present Salvation* p42
[39]Fiddes, P. *Past Event and Present Salvation* p44

> "Since the atonement of the cross sums up and completes the whole course of Jesus' life, the controlling aspect of any doctrine of atonement must be the forgiveness and acceptance of God. As Jesus showed his sovereign freedom over the way of the law, so a doctrine of the atonement must be free from any notion of 'transaction' which somehow satisfies the demands of a divine law code."[40]

The point is well put. There is more irony than justice in the suggestion that the Gospel of forgiveness is proclaimed in an action which is the very opposite of forgiveness.

Richard Swinburne also suggests that divine-human atonement is a specific example of forgiveness. Basing his case on a metaphysical understanding of merit, he holds that wrongdoers have an obligation to see to it that their guilt is removed in some way. This is, in part, like repaying a debt, but guilt, he claims, is only incompletely analogous to debt and as such can only be imperfectly removed by a quasi-financial transaction. The truth is that guilt is more like dirt: "Objective guilt makes its bearer in a way unclean".[41] It is for this reason that the removal of guilt involves the wrongdoer making atonement which, he asserts, involves four elements: repentance, apology, reparation and penance.

But the objective aspect of guilt is only part of the problem. There is also the way in which the wrongdoer is responsible to himself for making himself a wrongdoer. It is for this reason that, having done wrong, the agent must express his disowning of the wrong act both to the one offended, which is apology, and also to himself, which is repentance. Swinburne stresses that apology and repentance are both difficult. He also stresses that they must be done seriously, and that the point of penance is precisely to add the *gravitas* which makes the apology and the repentance real. Thus, although a debtor may return a long-overdue debt, even accounting for the interest lost, 'something else' would be required for forgiveness. Swinburne suggests that offering a bunch of flowers or box of chocolates is a performative act whereby the wrongdoer disowns his wrongdoing

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[40]Fiddes, P. *Past Event and Present Salvation* p47f

[41]Swinburne, R. *Responsibility and Atonement* (Oxford: Clarendon) 1989 p81

and owns his repentance and apology. Such is the significance of the costliness of this that we can say not only that penance is the cost of repentance and apology but that eventual forgiveness depends on this price being paid.

Swinburne's analysis of human forgiveness has some value. He goes on to say that it remains for the victim to forgive, that is to accept the apology, reparation and penance by, "undertaking that in future you will not treat me as the originator of an act by which I wronged you."[42] Forgiveness is acceptance of the gifts offered by the wrongdoer. Like penance, it is a performative act. But pedestrian as this account might seem, Swinburne acknowledges that the act of forgiveness can be done in a variety of ways: "perhaps achieved by saying solemnly 'I forgive you', or perhaps by saying 'That's all right', or maybe by just a smile."[43]

On this analysis successful forgiveness is the meeting of two performative acts: 'I apologise' and 'I forgive', however phrased. In this way it is not only the quasi-financial debt incurred by the wrongdoer which is removed but the unclean status of the debtor is also dealt with: indeed it was precisely this which required not only repayment but 'work' from the debtor. From this Swinburne goes on to stress that it is wrong for a victim to forgive, "in the absence of some form of atonement at least in the form of apology from the wrongdoer."[44] This is a point criticised by Brian Hebblethwaite who feels that, when transposed to the question of divine-human relationships and taken to mean that divine forgiveness requires prior repentance, it "seems to fly in the face of the whole Gospel story".[45]

Swinburne's insistence on adopting not only an objective but also a sacrificial model does of course fit with his understanding of the need for the wrongdoer to offer gifts to the injured party. He takes his paradigm from the Old Testament: "a sacrifice is the giving of

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[42]Swinburne, R. *Responsibility and Atonement* p85
[43]*ibid.*
[44]Swinburne, R. *Responsibility and Atonement* p85f
[45]Hebblethwaite, B.L. 'The Doctrine of the Atonement: Does it make moral sense?' *Epworth Review* 19 3 Sept 1993 p70

something valuable to a God who consumes it whole (by inhaling the smoke) and often gives back some of it to be consumed by the worshippers (who eat the roasted flesh.)".[46] But he goes further and suggests that Trinitarian theology is the best background for understanding the crucial sacrifice of the cross. God makes the sacrifice available, and human beings become penitent as they plead precisely that offering and thereby make it their own. Indeed: "Christ's death has no efficacy until men choose to plead it in atonement for their sins".[47] Thus: "forgiveness is available through repentance and baptism in the name of Jesus Christ".[48]

In terms of the model of human forgiveness this offering of the sacrifice of Christ is seen not to be a repaying of the debt which we have accumulated *vis a vis* God by reason of our sins. Rather: "It is simply costly penance and reparation sufficient for a merciful God to let men off the rest."[49]

Swinburne contrasts this sacrificial model positively with the penal model which has God as a punishing judge in this first stage of the process of atonement, and argues that his approach as not so much Anselmian as Thomist. Anselm has as fundamental the rendering of satisfaction, "of an amount of reparation equal to the harm done and penance required".[50] Aquinas, on the other hand, maintains that Christ's life and death were not necessary for our forgiveness. What is necessary is human repentance and apology. However this itself is not a human possibility. It is only the sinless Son of God who can make the perfect sacrifice, just as it is only the particular, responsible sinner who can plead it on their own account.

In a concluding section Swinburne enters briefly into the ecclesial and sacramental dimensions and dynamics of his sacrificial and objective theory. Entering into the death of Christ in baptism is, on his model, a redeeming act of penitence, as is participating in the Eucharist. "We plead the sacrifice of Christ in joining and rejoining

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[46]Swinburne, R. *Responsibility and Atonement* p152
[47]Swinburne, R. *Responsibility and Atonement* p153
[48]*ibid.*
[49]Swinburne, R. *Responsibility and Atonement* p154
[50]Swinburne, R. *Responsibility and Atonement* p155

ourselves to the new humanity, the new and voluntary association of those who accept Christ's offering on their behalf, the Church. In so doing we repent and apologise and offer that sacrifice as our reparation and atonement."[51]

The theory is sacrificial and objective, based on a transaction with which we can choose to identify that the impurity of guilt might be removed from us. It is a separate act from sanctification, which he allows may be effected by the extent to which we find the life of Christ exemplary and moving. But this is essentially the clearest example of an objective sacrificial but non-penal model of atonement which one could hope to find. Unlike penal models we can not say that it removes the subject from the atonement. As Swinburne points out, the death of Christ has 'no efficacy' until pleaded and owned by sinners. "If the sinner could be forgiven as a result of Christ's death, without using it to secure forgiveness, we could be forgiven by God as a result of what had happened on Calvary independently of our knowing about it; and that seems a suggestion very distant from the New Testament."[52] This, then, is a model of atonement which is both objective and therefore not violated by the caprice or recalcitrance of the individual's will or imagination, and yet which is subjective in that it depends for its efficacy in any particular case on the response of the subject.

Reflection

Fiddes and Swinburne write in an apologetic and rational mode. Their consideration of the cost of forgiveness is forced upon them by their analysis of the logic of the problem of forgiveness. Forgiveness seems impossible and yet is also necessary if people are to live without the burden of the past. The idea is that if a price is paid, in some way and in some currency, then the fault is amended and life can proceed. How does this thought illuminate the situations of Bruno, Paula and Edward?

One way of interpreting the problems which led to Bruno's despair is to suggest that Bruno could not bear the pain of his situation. To

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[51]Swinburne, R. *Responsibility and Atonement* p161
[52]Swinburne, R. *Responsibility and Atonement* p153

make sense of this it is necessary to go behind the question to the time when he was begging his wife for forgiveness but getting no answer. This was certainly painful for him and he gained from it an intimation of the pain of unforgiveness. When she was on her death bed he had a further intimation of this, realising that this was an opportunity which she could use to inflict more pain on him by denying him forgiveness for ever. The interpretation being offered here is that he chose not to take the risk of that radical pain but to avoid it. The tragedy of this, of course, is that he also avoided the possibility of being forgiven by her and was left, after she died, both with the pain of being unforgiven and the recriminations due to not having the courage to avail himself of his final opportunity.

Bruno's predicament also helps to clarify some reservations about the fullness of Swinburne's writing on forgiveness. In particular with regard to the role of the victim, the would-be forgiver, in the process of forgiveness. Too much of what Swinburne writes neglects the very freedom which Bruno's wife exercised; the freedom to say: "No. I will not forgive." Unpleasant as such an utterance will always be its possibility is crucial to the meaning of forgiveness. Swinburne's suggestions that it is incumbent on the one who seeks to be forgiven to make good their repentance with, say, a bunch of flowers, is shown up for its want of depth by this. As Murdoch's narrative relates, the flowers were thrown out of the window. It is too much to say that they meant nothing to the woman but it is clear that such symbolic gestures can be read in many ways and that they may, rightly or wrongly, prove to be unacceptable adjuncts to apology. Bruno's situation is a salutary reminder of the freedom of the victim not to forgive.

Turning to the predicament of Paula the question of her bearing the cost of forgiveness is inevitably raised. It would seem from a first reading of the account that she was unwilling to accept the humiliation and apology of the man who wronged her and at this point we must ask whether her action is commendable or even just. There is an ambiguity in this case, however, and it takes the following form. Is the question one of Paula being ready to forgive, or is it one of the necessary conditions for forgiveness not being

reached? It is part of the art of Dorfman to make this situation really complicated in this way. For on the one hand we have even Roberto arguing that she must forgive for all the good reasons which theologians and ethicists cite about bringing cycles of retribution and hatred to an end. But on the other hand we have Paula saying to Roberto that what she requires from him is true repentance. It seems that Roberto has a point when he protests that he cannot speak honestly and candidly with a gun to his head. But this protest should not be taken at face value because it is used as a reason for not repenting, for not confessing. Roberto, while fluent in some of the arguments in favour of forgiveness is not fluent about the necessary pre-conditions. In his view Paula should be satisfied with his humiliation. There must, he suggests, be some satisfaction in this for her whether or not he is himself guilty and that satisfaction should be enough to let him go. This is precisely where Roberto's position falls apart because what he offers is not the basis for forgiveness but the basis for the termination of punishment or retribution. That he has suffered enough to satisfy her is a sentiment which does not connect with the logic of forgiveness. Roberto fails to see this precisely because he has no understanding of that logic.

This conclusion is borne out by his refusal to confess or repent with a gun at his head. Paula, who is beside herself with rage, professes to believe in forgiveness of those who repent; indeed part of what has become clear in the play is that she has progressed from a retribution-revenge view ('Doing to them instrument by instrument what they did...') to a repentance-forgiveness view ('I want him to confess, and write it out in his own handwriting and sign it'). Roberto's professed reason for not confessing is not that he is not guilty. The real reason is that he does not believe that she will forgive him because he does not believe in forgiveness. Roberto does not confess or repent because he is sure that as soon as he admits his guilt she will pull the trigger. This is why the curtain comes down. The drama cannot be concluded on these terms. Paula cannot, believing in forgiveness, pull the trigger. But Paula cannot, believing in repentance, let him walk free. Roberto cannot, having

revealed his guilt, claim innocence. But Roberto cannot, because he does not believe that he will be forgiven, confess or repent.

Turning now to *The Gift of the Gorgon* it can be said immediately that Edward is at one with Fiddes and Swinburne in believing that once there is an injustice there is also a price to be paid. They differ however in that Edward has very limited ideas about the way in which this cost can be borne. Swinburne would agree that it was not enough for a terrorist simply to repent and so one might suspect that he would side with Edward against the response of Gordon Wilson to his daughter's killers. Before concluding in this way however it is helpful to use a distinction between two types of forgiveness. On the one hand there is forgiveness which leads to relationship, whether new or restored, between the two parties. This could be called 'reconciliatory forgiveness' and is typically a matter of dialogue conducted over time and with generosity of spirit. This was the kind of forgiveness which Bruno failed to achieve with his wife. On the other hand there is what could be called 'pro-active forgiveness'. The initiative in this case does not lie with the wrong-doer but with the victim. Rather than wait for apology or repentance the victim responds in a pro-active way to a perhaps unknown offender by announcing that an attitude of resentment will not be taken up, nor will retribution be sought.

It is this pro-active sort of forgiveness which Gordon Wilson offers. Sadly it is a form of forgiveness about which Swinburne and Fiddes have very little to say. This is puzzling since such forgiveness is clearly costly. It is also strangely authoritative. If an individual reports that he bears no grudge then he must be taken to bear no grudge unless there is unequivocal evidence to the contrary, in which case the individual is either mad or lying. But this sort of bearing no grudge is not the sort of forgiveness which Fiddes and Swinburne are talking about. It is rather the sort of forgiveness which, as Vincent Taylor has argued, is the primary meaning of the word forgiveness in the New Testament.[53] It has to do not with the creation of a reconciled relationship but the removal of a barrier which would inhibit the process of relationship-making. As Taylor

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[53]Taylor, V. *Forgiveness and Reconciliation* (London: Macmillan & Co) 1946

argues, while this is the focus of the meaning of the words translated as forgiveness (*aphesis*, *apheimei* and *charisomai*) in the New Testament, the New Testament teaching on the subject, especially that of Jesus, has within it the germ of the larger and deeper form of forgiveness in the sense of 'reconciliatory forgiveness' which has become such a feature of later theology. Swinburne and Fiddes are speaking about reconciliatory forgiveness and therefore it is not appropriate to speculate about what their views with regard to pro-active forgiveness might be.

2.iii. Forgiveness as Re-Creation Colin Gunton and Vernon White

In his *The Actuality of Atonement* Colin Gunton offers a contemporary interpretation of the historical doctrine of the atonement which is based on a re-appreciation of the value of metaphorical language. While emphasising the importance of objectivity for the understanding of atonement Gunton does not suppose that this means that exemplarist or subjectivist aspects of atonement are unimportant: "If... we are to establish a case for an objective, past atonement, it cannot be at the cost of denying the subjective and exemplary implications."[54]

Gunton offers an account which uses his rekindled metaphors to integrate the creative, redemptive and eschatological dimensions of atonement in a model which recognises the connectedness of substitution and representation, and of the objective and subjective dimensions. Thus he constructs an understanding of the universe which has the relationship of the Trinity at the centre and the cross at the atoning heart of the Trinity.

By beginning with the notions of relation and Trinity Gunton gets straight to the heart of the atonement. His argument is not historical, and for all his emphasis on substitution is not materialist. His work is one of theology rather than apology, it is about the way in which God is involved in relating, the way in which

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[54]Gunton, C. *The Actuality of Atonement* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark) 1988 p157

human beings are involved in relating and the way in which God's involvement in humanity is the foundation of human relating with God. As he shows in his final chapter, his work issues in practical and ecclesial reflections and implications. His thoughts about forgiveness lie at the heart of his conception of the nature of 'The Community of Reconciliation' which he describes in his final chapter.

Central to his understanding of forgiveness is his thought about baptism. Disparaging infant baptism on the grounds that it leads to unhelpful understandings of both original and acquired sin he contests that baptism should be seen to be what it really is: a genuine initiation into a new kind of community.

> "Baptism institutes a person into a new set of personal relationships, in a community ordered around the justifying death of Christ... Thus baptism is a way of making concrete the atonement achieved by God through Jesus. It is to enable participation in the justifying action of God. In turn such a doctrine is definitive of the kind of community that the church is. It is the one called to live by the justice of God: accepting for itself the judgement of God in sin, borne on the cross by Jesus, so that it may in turn be the locus of transformed relationships."[55]

That is to say that the community of reconciliation orders itself around the theological ethics of the forgiveness of sins or, to put it another way, the justice of God. This justice, Gunton argues, is transformational rather than punitive or distributive. Justice is done by a transformation in which acknowledged evil becomes the basis of future good. This temporal locus is crucial for an understanding of Gunton's vision of the church.

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[55]Gunton, C. *The Actuality of Atonement* p188

> "God gives time to those who are incorporate in Christ. Forgiveness on such an account is about the free acknowledgement of offences alongside a refusal to allow them to define the future of relationships. On such an understanding, those who share baptism will form a community that lives on such a basis. The form of life shaped by the gospel will then involve the acknowledgement of faults before God and each other alongside confession that the basis for human living is to be found in a common incorporation into the body of Christ. To enter the church is to enter a form of community in which the vicarious suffering of Jesus becomes the basis for a corresponding form of life, one in which the offence of others is borne rather than avenged."[56]

One complication which such a way of connecting forgiveness with ecclesial life throws up is of the relevance of the justice of God beyond the bounds of the church. Gunton argues that there is a more general relevance in that the theology of the church 'contains elements of universal moral truth'. However, his main interest is ecclesial; it is the task of the community of the forgiven to live the life of the age to come in the present. This has implications for the way in which the church engages with political realities: "The primary task is not to organise the world, but to be within it as a particular way of being human, a living reminder of the true basis and end of human life".[57] Gunton's thought about forgiveness is thus caught up in this eschatological perspective in a double way. First, forgiveness is itself eschatological in that it brings in the justice of God, secondly, it is definitive of the eschatological community of the church. The place of forgiveness is to be found in this time between times, in this arena of transformation which is reconciling: "There is reconciliation and justice only through the judgement of God and the cross of Christ that lead to repentance and forgiveness: only through the creative transformation of relationships."[58]

Vernon White's model of atonement is that in the Christ-event God became authorised to forgive by virtue of the experience of living a self-less, sinless life which culminated in the cross and ended in

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[56]Gunton, C. *The Actuality of Atonement* p190
[57]Gunton, C. *The Actuality of Atonement* p193
[58]*ibid.*

resurrection. The source of this moral authority argument is to be found in Brian Hebblethwaite's contribution to the *Myth Of God Incarnate* debate of the 1970s. In his essay on *The Moral and Religious Value of the Incarnation* he makes the point against John Hick, who argues that a universally incarnate God would be authorised to forgive because of being present in every pain, that it is the manner of God's participation in human pain that is crucial. "Only if we can say that God has *himself*, on the cross, 'borne our sorrows' can we find him universally present 'in' the sufferings of others."[59] He believes that only concrete real participation is authorising, and that various forms of compassionate observation count for nothing:

> "This whole dimension of the Christian doctrine of the incarnation, its recognition of the costly nature of God's forgiving love, and its perception that only a suffering God is morally credible, is lost if God's involvement is reduced to a matter of 'awareness' and 'sympathy'."[60]

Hebblethwaite insists that his argument refers to the significance not of the death of Christ but of the incarnation:

> "It needs to be stated quite categorically that God's forgiving love does not depend on the death of Christ, but rather is manifested and enacted in it. It is precisely because the Spirit who converts our hearts and builds up our life in the Spirit is the Spirit of the crucified God and that God's forgiveness and our reconciliation have a profoundly moral quality that has been the real inspiration of Christian piety down the ages, despite its often crude forms of expression."[61]

White discusses what he calls the conditions for real reconciliation at some length. His aim is to test the reaction to evil implicit in his atonement model, that of reconciliation, against the approach of

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[59]Hebblethwaite, B.L. 'The Moral and Religious Value of the Incarnation' in Ed. Goulder, M. *Incarnation and Myth* (London: SCM) 1979 p94

[60]*ibid.*

[61]*ibid.* Hebblethwaite had not changed his mind on this subject when in 1993 he wrote that incarnation "involves a sacrificial self-emptying love that both renders God morally credible and wins our penitence and self-offering" p73 while insisting that: "what is necessary for the salvation is not so much the death of Christ as the incarnation." p73 Hebblethwaite, B.L. 'The Doctrine of the Atonement'

retribution, what he calls 'our moral intuition'.[62] White is against retribution on the grounds that it leads to attenuated notions of reconciliation. Retribution is a reaction against damage wrongfully inflicted which is aimed at restoring the status quo. But as White argues the theory of retribution rests on the assumption that it is good that suffering be equally distributed.[63] Thus, while others have drawn attention to the restoration of harmony or balance which retribution brings about, White draws attention to the fact that it is only a balance of suffering and pain. The only restoration here is of the equivalence of suffering, and while this may seem appropriate it does nothing to restore relationships. In White's view two wrongs not only cannot make a right, but neither do they restore a relationship to its former state.

Instead of aiming to restore that which was spoilt or broken through sin or when an offence was committed, White advocates that there is a need to seek what he calls recreation. "Mere compensation leaves past evil unredeemed, whereas the creation of new goods out of past evil transforms its significance, and therefore 'deals' with it more effectively."[64] To return to the example, it is repentance which is effective, so that what is paid back is, he claims, a new and healing love: "This 'undoes' the offence by creating something new and better out of it; it is the destruction of evil through recreation and redemption, rather than the fantasy and nostalgia of restoration. Reaction to offence is moral, therefore, as the intended catalyst to this kind of event."[65]

In White's view recreative logic actually does more justice than retributive logic because it requires more strenuous action. In addition, recreative logic does not require the opposition of wrath and love but sees them as compatible. Recreative logic also has a place for substitution, as White's model is designed to explicate. The point is that only one who transcends as well as participates in the suffering of the world can effect the transcending of evil.

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[62]White, V. *Incarnation and Atonement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 1991 p87

[63]White, V. *Incarnation and Atonement* pp91 - 98

[64]White, V. *Incarnation and Atonement* p99

[65]*ibid.*

This approach clarifies the need for creativity in redemption: "the only adequate 'undoing' of past disruption involves the attempted recreation of something new."[66] In the case of our redemption by God, White argues the selfless life and the death of Christ fashions a unique relationship. "He is made perfect through suffering and rises with the capacity to make others perfect through theirs... the meaning of justification (right relationship) includes the prospective meaning of sanctification."[67]

Such recreation is not the mere reformation of the offender's will but that of the whole context which was affected by the evil action and intent. In this way he has made an argument which undergirds Hebblethwaite's intuitive support of the need for a particular atoning incarnation.

> "Forgiveness is only finally and fully possible, only morally complete, through a kind of universal providence. And that is just the traditional claim: forgiveness is fully possible only through the Christ figure, both historically particular and 'cosmic'. Specifically, it is made effective through the Christ who, having achieved in his own particular space and time the reshaping of appalling evil into greater good, takes that recreative activity throughout the whole universe."[68]

In addition to arguing for a recreative rather than a retributive approach to offence, White has established that incarnation is necessary to forgiveness. That is because forgiveness is by definition about the restoration of relationships and only the incarnate God can be in relation with material human beings. We cannot relate, that is to say be with and for another, in anyway analogous to the way in which are with and for other people unless that other is in important ways human. We can only relate to those who know what it is like to be like us because their experience is like ours. But similarly we can only relate to those who have had different experiences to ourselves. There is nothing to say to your mirror image. God incarnate, therefore, is necessary to the building

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[66]White, V. *Incarnation and Atonement* p104
[67]*ibid.*
[68]*ibid.*

up of a sense of relationship with God and it is for this reason that God incarnate is necessary to forgiveness. It is only God incarnate who can enter into the creation and re-creation of relationships. God not incarnate can enter into an ordering of creation and can rule it as a judge and as such can function as a pardoner. But God the judge cannot forgive. The model of retribution allows some confusion between God as law-giver, God as judge and God as suffering and incarnate and thereby atoning one. The model of recreation, on the other hand, is based on personal relations, and as such does not allow for the possibility of abstract and distributive justice. It demands that the model be repair of personal relations which, as we have seen, depends on congruity but not identity between persons.

Reflection

Gunton and White stress that forgiveness is an alternative to retribution as a response to offence or injury. They tend not to emphasise cost in the same way as Fiddes and Swinburne because their attention is focused on the logic and not the actions which make forgiveness possible. As we have seen, it is the logic of re-creative justice, that which seeks to move on from injury to something better, which is the ethical engine of acts of forgiveness. What does this have to say to Bruno, Paula and Edward?

To begin with it would seem that Gunton, at least, has little to say to any of these because his concern is so ecclesial. His focus is so clearly on the baptised community that it would seem that he has nothing much more helpful to say to those outside it other than to suggest that they join it. There is more to what Gunton has to say than this. For instance, his affirmation that forgiveness is real is part of the answer to Bruno. But there is more in a negative way too, and that is because according to Gunton the offender has such a significant role in forgiveness. "Forgiveness is about the free acknowledgement of offences," he states. If this were all that there was too it Bruno would have little to worry about. But it is not. Forgiveness only occurs when freely acknowledged offences are freely and generously responded to.

Does Gunton have anything to say to Paula's predicament? Certainly his approach endorses the rightfulness of her desire for complete confession; indeed the pain of the drama lies precisely in the fact that this positive and legitimate desire is not fulfilled by Roberto's response. But there is a deeper tragedy involved because free acknowledgement of offences is not possible for a person who has a gun pointed at his head. We have considered this already however and turn now to the question of whether or not Gunton or White's argument can take us any further along the lines developed in the previous reflection.

The distinction used there was between pro-active and reconciliatory forgiveness. A useful question to raise concerns whether the authority to forgive can be construed similarly in the two cases. White's contribution was to argue that divine forgiveness is a possibility for human beings because of the moral authority which God in Christ gained through incarnation, death and resurrection. The only authoritatively forgiving God, to put it another way, must be the cosmic Christ who is God incarnate. This is clearly an argument about atonement but it is based so closely on the dynamics of human forgiveness that it is worth playing it back, as it were, in the human key. Consider the pro-active forgiveness of the IRA bombers by Gordon Wilson. An obvious question to ask about this is whether or not he is entitled to pronounce forgiveness in this way. The answer to this must be that he is. This is because he is clearly speaking for himself; he says that *he* will bear no grudge. This does not mean that the IRA bombers are to be forgiven by anyone else - the dead daughter or Wilson's wife for instance, or anyone else affected by the explosion. Wilson is clearly authorised to speak for himself. Indeed this is such an obvious point that there has to be some sort of reason for making it. And the reason is that Wilson's words, which are of course a point at which Shaffer's play does reflect reality, did cause a very significant and startled response when they were uttered. It was as if the world did not believe its ears. This too is remarkable. Of course it is not surprising that many wounded people respond with anger and resentment to those who hurt them, even the most ardent supporter of the ethics of forgiveness might expect the vast majority of

people to be quick to anger and then to fall into a bitter resentment. But in the case of Enniskillen and Gordon Wilson one voice in favour of pro-active forgiveness provoked a huge response. Why? Certainly the awful drama of the day added to the power of the words but the power was there without the hype as the subsequent section and refection will make clear.

However a further point needs to be made about this matter. As we have seen, while Gordon Wilson was authorised to say whatever he felt to be true about his own response to the bombers he was not authorised to speak for anyone else. This means that at the end of the day the bombers could not think of themselves as absolved, they could only think of themselves as forgiven by Wilson and he was but one of a multitude of people who were wounded and damaged by what happened. But Wilson's words were more important than those of one man for another reason. They were compelling because of what they said. Had he said in simple but blunt terms that he was angry or shocked or that he wanted justice his words would have died on his lips. But because he spoke of forgiveness his words became authoritative. There is a strange paradox here. For while White argues, rightly and necessarily in a climate where questions of theodicy are easier to coin than those of atonement, of the way in which God in Christ gained the authority to speak and work a gospel of forgiveness, the point which I am making here is that Wilson gained moral authority precisely by speaking of forgiveness.

This is why Edward, in *The Gift of the Gorgon*, was so appalled by the announcement. It was not that one man forgave but that his forgiveness was compelling and authoritative. He did not say that others must forgive. He did not say why he felt that he must forgive. All he did was to utter words of pro-active forgiveness and these were strangely powerful and self-authenticating.

2.iv. Forgiveness, Memory and History A Falconer and C Duquoc

Forgiveness always involves memory. This point is taken for granted so that most writers do little more than suggest that to forgive and to forget are different verbs. But if forgiveness does

not involve forgetting, whatever that is, it certainly does involve a change in memory. The simplest form of this is the notion that an injurious action would be remembered but without the attendant emotion, be it guilt or resentment, which troubles the rememberer. But forgiveness need not be reduced to the emotional cleansing of memories.

Writing in the context of hope for reconciliation in Ireland, Alan Falconer suggests an understanding of forgiveness which illuminates the question of the way in which forgiveness connects with and yet alters the way in which meaning and history is constructed in a situation. Falconer suggests that forgiveness is in essence a new and unpredictable response to a situation of sin which he characterises as, "a broken relationship".[69] Falconer sets his remarks in the context of an understanding of human beings as doomed to the repetitions of history: "The sense of impotence in the face of the past is matched by an equally powerful sense of impotence to fashion the future".[70] But this powerlessness is not engendered so much by history as by memory: "Memories of past injury and pain are carried with us, as they have formed our contemporary stances, postures and identities. They imprison us in relationships fashioned prior to our era, yet sustained and nourished in us by the appropriation of our heritage. Only forgiveness can break the cycle."[71] But if forgiveness is to break the cycle it is itself powerful. It exercises the power of Christ which, "counteracts the destructive modes of exercise of power and releases people to act anew."[72]

Forgiveness is therefore an act of *integrative* power which has as its primary goal the bringing of the other into being.[73] Such forgiveness was, he argues, characteristic of the ministry of Jesus.

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[69]Falconer, A. 'The Reconciling Power of Forgiveness' in Ed. Falconer, A. *Reconciling Memories* (Dublin: Columba) 1988 p91

[70]Falconer, A. 'The Reconciling Power of Forgiveness' p84

[71]Falconer, A. 'The Reconciling Power of Forgiveness' p84

[72]Falconer, A. 'The Reconciling Power of Forgiveness' p92

[73]This idea of integrative power is borrowed from Rollo May, exisitential psychologist and student and biographer of Paul Tillich. He develops the notion in his book *Power and Innocence* in contrast to 'domination power' which is exploitative, manipulative or competitive. See Falconer pp 87 - 89

"It was above all through forgiveness that Jesus of Nazareth seems to have liberated men and women from the burden of their pasts."[74] This theme of ridding the other of the *burden* of the past is central for Falconer's understanding of the power of the act of forgiveness. It does not obliterate the past, nor does it say that the past is no longer important, the point is rather that the past is no longer a burden. But forgiveness does not come alone. Certainly it must be unconditional and it issues in freedom, but this liberty is not to be squandered in the generation of new processes of enslavement to memory of hurt. "Forgiveness involves the acceptance of responsibility for our actions as Christian communities in relation to each other, and for the fracture in our relationships which we perpetuate because of our memories."[75] Forgiveness, then, is an act of assertion, but not of self-assertion so much as an assertion of the importance and the possibility of relationship and future. It is quite undeserved and unexpected and enables growth in relationship. It is needed if people are to be free of the burden of the past.

The Roman Catholic writer Christian Duquoc reflects on the nature and meaning of forgiveness in a way which has similarities to Falconer's approach.[76] Both emphasise the repetitive and cyclic nature of the processes of justice, law, retribution, revenge and so on. In Falconer's case the history of Ireland provides the real background which proves the theory, whereas Duquoc works at a more general level. Both speak of vicious circles, and both are articulate about the need to open the future. "Jesus opposes legal justice because it encloses: it blocks any future... Forgiveness breaks a logic that lies at the heart of human relationships [one which is] subject to a system of justice thought of in terms of equivalence".[77] This does not mean giving up the fight against evil, but it does mean that to engage in certain types of fighting is to concede the battle: "What is required is an attitude that is not determined by what has already been done, an innovative, a creative gesture."[78]

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[74]Falconer, A. 'The Reconciling Power of Forgiveness' p90
[75]Falconer, A. 'The Reconciling Power of Forgiveness' p94
[76]Duquoc, C. 'The Forgiveness of God' in *Concilium* 184 2 1986
[77]Duquoc, C. 'The Forgiveness of God' p40
[78] *ibid.*

This emphasis on creativity connects with Falconer's view that forgiveness must be an unpredictable response to a situation. Forgiveness certainly cannot be predicted by the circular processes of law, and those who seek it are not assured of receiving it. Creativity and vulnerability are integrally related in forgiveness, the seeker and giver can never be sure that it will work out because neither knows what will happen next. "Forgiveness is not a forgetfulness of the past, it is the risk of a future other than the one imposed by the past or by memory. It is an invitation to the imagination".[79] It is also the way of God: "The believer imitates the creative God when he exorcises the demands of legal justice and works at a new relationship with the one he has forgiven. This is the way in which forgiveness transforms human relationships and so possesses a capacity to reveal the original face of God."[80]

Forgiveness is not forgetfulness. On the contrary: "it maintains the offending past in all its concreteness".[81] It is not laxism, because it calls for conversion. But it is not imprisoned by evil events. Rather it seeks, by dint of its own spiritual effort, to transcend such realities. Forgiveness breaks the mindless cycle of offence and vengeance by questioning it from outside. For Duquoc forgiveness is necessary because it allows a future of freedom and uncertainty to be: "Forgiveness is the proclamation of the kingdom".[82]

Reflection

Whether or not Duquoc is consciously following Hannah Arendt is not clear from his text, but it is plain that this is what Falconer is doing. Arendt stresses the fact that forgiveness is a way of interrupting and thereby destroying the vicious circle of injury leading to resentment and further injury. This is of course the view propounded by Roberto when faced by Paula but we have already seen that self-interest makes his speech vain and vacuous.

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[79]Duquoc, C. 'The Forgiveness of God' p41
[80] *ibid.*
[81]Duquoc, C. 'The Forgiveness of God' p42
[82]Duquoc, C. 'The Forgiveness of God' p43

Gordon Wilson's espousal of pro-active forgiveness had a profound impact both in reality and on the narrative of Shaffer's play. This draws appropriate attention to the significance of Falconer's position that forgiveness has a certain power. Falconer affirms that forgiveness is not a form of quietism or passionatelessness and the speech from Shaffer's play where Helen cites her Father's image of passion against passion makes the point that there is passion in forgiveness. For the goad to be removed without taking away passion for justice and interest in the future: that is the goal of forgiveness.

It is the emphasis which Falconer and Duquoc have on memory which connects them and which is the key to this matter of forgiveness not being the end of justice or ethics or passion. As Duquoc has it: 'forgiveness is not a forgetfulness about the past'. No one could accuse Gordon Wilson of willing the past away with his words of forgiveness. It was clear in this case that the past was acknowledged. Similarly in Bruno's story. The past was there, horrible and painful as it was, but his desire for forgiveness was wrongly thwarted if this was done on the grounds that it was his attempt to forget the past. The point of Bruno's pain was, in part, that he was trying to work out how he could live with the past; and some form of reconciliatory forgiveness from his wife before she died seemed, to him, to be an appropriate strategy for this. The idea of putting the past to death is nearer the surface in *Death and the Maiden*. It is the playwright's art which makes the past explode in the faces of the proponents, and that in a most disturbing way for the victim, Paula. This is ever the case. It is the victims who bear the scars of their violators' actions and who seek relief from them. It is Roberto who says in several ways that as far as he is concerned the best thing to do with the past is to forget it. The tension here is between Paula who won't forget it and Roberto who won't acknowledge that it ever happened because, as we have seen, he does not believe in forgiveness.

A final question is whether or not Falconer and Duquoc have any comfort to offer Bruno. The answer to this must be in the negative. Indeed it is impossible to see a way of relieving Bruno's position

precisely because it is so self-absorbed. The only person who could have relieved Bruno from his agony was his wife, but as we have seen his agony is now compounded because he did not avail himself of the final opportunity to gain her forgiveness before she died. Bruno is therefore left in a tragic situation. Does he repent? He does. Is anyone in a position to forgive him? There is his son but as the text makes clear the younger man is not interested in the emotionality of it all. There remain two other possibilities. The first is God, but Bruno does not believe in God although he sees that there would be, if he believed in him, a possibility here. The other alternative is that he might be able to forgive himself, but that is a possibility which Murdoch's text does not entertain.

5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Perhaps the most important aspect of these reflections on the relationship between the questions of contemporary drama and the answers of contemporary atonement theology has been the way in which it has forced us to follow a hint found in the writing of Peter Hinchliff and distinguish clearly between two kinds of forgiveness. On the one hand we have identified *pro-active* forgiveness which is in many ways like pardon except that it comes from one personally involved in a situation who speaks only for himself. On the other hand there is the slightly more familiar and more process-like matter of *reconciliatory* forgiveness. It was noted that it is this second form which most atonement theology attends to, which is interesting given the analysis of Vincent Taylor that the basic meaning of the word forgiveness in the New Testament context is much more akin to the idea of pro-active forgiveness. This distinction is not entirely sustainable in all circumstances, absolution for instance presents a particularly difficult case, but the application of this distinction can clarify some of the confusion which clouds much discussion of forgiveness.

Two of the most important practical questions about forgiveness have been encountered in imaginative if not factual narrative structures in this chapter. This encounter has revealed some of the complexities involved in answering them. Bruno's question was

whether or not forgiveness is real, whether or not the need of forgiveness can actually be met. Paula's predicament is of perceiving that in the face of her violator she is free either to kill him or to forgive him, but that she has no power over her violator which can ensure that he repents. This is tragic because she realises that only the combined acknowledgement of what he has done to her, coupled with a turning of himself from the mentality which allowed him to do it and a sense of responsibility for his actions and sorrow for her suffering, can enable her to live with her experiences. Paula's problem is that as victim she does not have the power to inflict repentance on the one who inflicted injury on her. As both the one who needs to forgive and to be healed she finds no salvation in forgiveness.

Paula's situation is not unlike that of many victims in that some of the emotional and spiritual wounds are deeper than the physical ones. This is because the significance of the injurious or violating actions is not within the control of the victim. Whether they like it or not such injuries and violations are important, they are remembered with pain and distress. One reason for this is that they disrupt the narrative of personal value and dignity on which the person predicated a meaningful biography. In other words they need to be able to forgive the one who has brought them to shame.[83]

This thought can be developed to make it possible to assert that people need to forgive precisely and only if they have been harmed in a way which matters. If it does not matter then they cannot be induced to forgive. In this way offence has its meaning relative to the offended person's sense of self. From the point of view of the offended, then, forgiveness can be seen as a change in the significance of an injuring action. If, for instance, the injurer issues a fulsome apology which is taken as evidence of sincere regret, if, in other words, the offender can establish that they do, in fact, value the injured party in the way in which that party expects to be valued, then the action can become insignificant, and thereby forgiven. In terms of memory, forgiveness occurs when the offence or injury is recontextualised in such a way as to minimise its

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[83]The nature of shame is examined in detail in chapter seven.

significance and thereby reduce its status in the subject's narrative of self.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CRISIS OF CONFESSION IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

Introducing her important and widely read book on the sacrament of penance, *Sign of Reconciliation and Conversion,* Monika Hellwig writes that:

> "There is perhaps no corner of Catholic life and experience more fraught with questions and problems today than the sacrament of penance or reconciliation. The questions were becoming urgent long before the Second Vatican Council and diminishing participation was evident in most western countries even then. The reformed rites that came into existence after Vatican II were a response, at least in part, to the challenge of the contemporary questions and the challenge of the absences from the sacrament. Nevertheless the reformed rites do not seem to have answered the Catholic people's nagging questions and problems because the absences have not grown less but seem rather to have grown to include many even of the devout."[1]

Hellwig's judgement is far from idiosyncratic. It is widely agreed in the Roman Catholic Church that there is a crisis in the sacrament of penance. The problem was first officially acknowledged when the Vatican II *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* limited itself to the following brief statement on penance: "The rite and the formularies for the sacrament of penance are to be revised so that they more clearly express both the nature and the effect of the sacrament."[2] It did, however, as Hellwig notes, develop with the promulgation of the new *Ordo Paenitentiae* in 1974.

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[1]Hellwig, M. *Sign of Reconciliation and Conversion* (Wilmington, DI: Michael Glazier) 1986 p1

[2]*Sacrosanctum Concilium* para 72

The new rites offered three forms of penance. The first was the familiar individual confession and absolution. The second placed this in the liturgical context of an act of worship which included both communal preparation and personal confession, and the third offered no opportunity for individual confession but was a communal celebration of penance and forgiveness involving a general absolution. The promulgation of the new Rite was understood by many to be a victory of the liberal desire to diversify the forms of the sacrament, so that Nathan Mitchell would write that: "The new Rite is a kind of mosaic fashioned out of the many historical ways Christians have sought and received the reconciliation offered by God at work in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus."[3] However, voices from the Vatican were soon making it clear that the possibility of general confession and absolution in the context of a service of penance was not an alternative to auricular confession but a possibility to be used *in extremis*. Paul VI emphasised that general confession and absolution is, "by way of an exception, of necessity, in cases sanctioned by the bishops, and with the continuing obligation of individual accusation of grave sins."[4] The division is between those who consider that auricular confession conducted within the anonymity of the confessional is the normative form of sacramental penance and those who consider that this is a transitory method of appropriating divine forgiveness whose time has past. This division has been the central aspect of the theological crisis. Alongside this has run a pastoral crisis with regard to the sacrament, namely that the practice of confession has reduced significantly.[5]

In 1983 a World Synod of Bishops assembled to consider the sacrament of penance in the light of the reception of *Ordo Paenitentiae*. The bishops were concerned that there was not enough flexibility in the celebration of the sacrament to cover all their

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[3]Mitchell, N. *The Rite of Penance: Commentaries* (Washington: The Liturgical Conference) 1978 p36

[4] Address to a general audience 3 April 1974 *Documents of Liturgy*

[5]James Dallen relates that 38% of American Catholics confessed monthly in 1964 but by 1974 this had declined to 17%. However during the same period the proportion of American Catholics receiving communion weekly had risen from 20% to 80%. Dallen, J. 'Reconciliation, Sacrament of' in Ed Fink, P.E. *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan) 1990 p1060

various circumstances.[6] None the less the bishops did affirm the practice of individual confession and saw in it the acceptance of personal responsibility. They were divided, however, as to whether general absolution and confession to laity are valid practical solutions in problematic situations. The theologians who advised the bishops in synod, on the other hand, were much more concerned with questions of the relation between the theological and anthropological discussion of penance and conversion than the bishops themselves. Approaching the questions more theoretically they stressed the connections between the social and the personal dimensions of sin and forgiveness. The theologians also drew attention to the variety of interpretations of the history of the sacrament, distinguishing between certain historical non-variables and other variables. "The essence of the sacrament is that reconciliation of the sinner takes place by reconciliation with the Church. Both the personal acts of the penitent and the action of the ecclesial community under the direction of the bishops constitute the sacrament."[7]

It was some while after the synod, however, that the Pope gave the Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*. As Dooley remarks, it is quite different in tone from the closing address at the synod, being a contradiction of the view of the theologians that the future of the sacrament was to be found in the exploration of the many varieties of form which had been disclosed by historical and theological scholarship. The exhortation reaffirms both auricular confession as the normative form of the sacrament and participation in the sacrament as normative in Christian life. Far from being focused on the social and ecclesial questions of reconciliation with the Church, attention has returned to the individual who is placed in a 'tribunal of mercy' awaiting a judgement which has a 'medicinal character'. Confession and absolution thus replace penance and reconciliation as the focus of attention. Dooley, like many theologians, is disappointed: "... the document seems to reduce the

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[6]Dooley, C. 'The 1983 Synod of Bishops and the "Crisis of Confession"' *Concilium* 190 2 1987

[7]Dooley, C. 'The 1983 Synod of Bishops and the "Crisis of Confession"' p13

sacrament to the confession of sin and to reinforce a privatised understanding of relationship with God".[8]

1. BEHIND THE CRISIS KARL RAHNER

Before moving on to consider various kinds of response to this crisis it is important to pause, even briefly, to consider the contribution of one of the leading modernist and modernising theologians of the Roman Catholic Church, Karl Rahner.

Rahner was both a historian of penance and also a theologian working out what the sacrament might come to mean in the new conditions of the late twentieth century. In his essay 'Problems Concerning Confession' written and published in the 1960s, however, he articulated many of the anxieties which prefigured the debate regarding confession in particular and penance in general after the promulgation of the new rites in 1973. In this essay he argued that the very considerable amount of change in the nature of the sacrament and the discussion of problems concerning it in the contemporary era were all signs that this sacrament, at least, was alive.

> "What is alive undergoes its changes even though its innermost essential form remains the same. It would be silly to conclude, *eo ipso* from these changes that we might or should bring back an earlier outward form and arrangement in theory and in practice. The historically minded person more and not less than anyone else knows the falsehood of the statement that just because something existed at one time, it can also exist again. But if the Church's institution of penance is alive, it will also change again in the future, without losing its proper nature."[9]

Given not merely the likelihood but also the inevitability of change Rahner goes on to hypothesise about the kind of change which will ensue. "The theory and practice of the sacrament will in future tend towards a theologically fuller and also more personal

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[8]Dooley, C. 'The 1983 Synod of Bishops and the "Crisis of Confession"' p18

[9]Rahner, K. 'Problems Concerning Confession' *Theological Investigations* III (London: Darton, Longman and Todd) 1967 p192

accomplishment of this sacrament."[10] He proceeds to sketch out what this will mean arguing that there will be fewer, more sincere confessions with less attention to the legalistic, mechanical and even magical aspects of confession and absolution than characterised the earliest decades of this century.

In talking about a 'theologically fuller form of the sacrament' Rahner intends to get away from the thought that confession is a means to absolution. Forgiveness is a mystery which can only be entered into to the extent to which the penitent is engaged in open-hearted repentance. It is for this reason that the sacrament must become more liturgical.

While being a prophet of change Rahner does not prophesy the end of the sacrament, even the end of confession and absolution. The focus of the sacrament remains forgiveness of sins:

> "We do not want to be psychotherapists in the confessional. This is not our job and would merely be silly charlatanism. We must simply be priests, and that wholly. We lend historical tangibility to God's effectively forgiving word in a personal happening; we are not applying magical machinery."[11]

Before this forward-looking essay however, Rahner wrote two others which were more conservative: one on 'forgotten truths' and the other on the meaning of 'frequent confession of devotion'. It is important to mention these because they give the lie to the idea that Rahner was any sort of revolutionary in this area. The tone of these essays is deeply conservative and strangely pragmatic. He puts it that despite the diverse forms which the sacrament has taken 'confession' has too long a history to be discarded. The essay entitled 'The Meaning of Frequent Confession of Devotion' is an attempt to explain why this is the case.

In the first part of the essay he considers three reasons which he seems to estimate to be quite good but quite sufficient on their own to justify continuing to keep confession normative. These are that

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[10]Rahner, K. 'Problems Concerning Confession' p193
[11]Rahner, K. 'Problems Concerning Confession' p205

frequent confession can be a place of spiritual direction and the growth of grace as well as the remission of, admittedly minor, sins. A deeper rationale for the retention of habitual confession is to be found in the way in which the baptised penitent relates to the Church as a whole but also as a community. The point is that every member of the church who is in venial sin is a 'spot or wrinkle' on the visible Church[12]. It is for this reason that venial sin is seen as an injustice against the Church which needs to be repaired. He goes on to argue that:

> "This could not happen more meaningfully and impressively than by acknowledging the sin before the priest, who is the representative of the community of Christ's believers, by having it forgiven by him and atoning for it by the penance imposed, in order to make reparation for the injury done to the Body of Christ. To this extent, confession of devotion is not merely continued practice of the love of God but also a unique form of sacramental love of neighbour and a visible turning to the visible Body of Christ which is the Church."[13]

This tendency to see the act of confession in a rich ecclesiological context which is also a human context is one of the characteristics of Rahner's approach, and while it is both provocative in as much as his is a central voice in forcing and shaping the crisis of confession which was to follow, it is certainly not, as we have seen, either revolutionary or programmatic. Indeed his views on the contemporary form of the sacrament were surprisingly conservative. When he published his largest work, the *Foundations of Christian Faith* in the 1970s his understanding of the human being as guilty sinner in need of forgiveness was quite orthodox. Where Rahner differed from traditional Catholic teaching, however, was in his theology of grace, insisting that there was no need to think of extrinsic grace or a different supernatural level. But these ontological considerations did not influence his understanding of the existential of the human being before God. Sin, both original and acquired, are real and while baptism is the remedy for the one, sacramental confession, the current form of the sacrament of

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[12]Rahner, K. 'The Meaning of Frequent Confession of Devotion' *Theological Investigations* III (London: Darton, Longman and Todd) p187 1967
[13]Rahner, K. 'The Meaning of Frequent Confession of Devotion' p188

penance was the necessary corollary of the other. Human guilt before God is terrifying because it is humanly irredeemable. The only valid human response is penitence which opens up the possibility of receiving divine forgiveness.

Forgiveness, to be sure, is articulated in a variety of ways including both baptism and prayer. But as he goes on to clarify:

> "This word of forgiveness continues to live and to be efficacious in the prayer of the Church. In this prayer the Church asks with confidence again and again for God's mercy for itself, the Church of sinners and for every individual. Hence it accompanies for ever new and ever to be deepened conversion of each person which does not reach its fulfilment and its definitive victory until death. This word of forgiveness which always builds upon the word which was spoken in baptism, is addressed again to the individual by the Church in a special way if and when this person, who also remains a sinner after baptism and can fall into new and serious sin, repents and confesses his serious guilt or the poverty of his life to the Church in a special way or if under certain circumstances he brings them before God and his Christ in the common confession of a community. When the word of God's forgiveness is addressed to an individual baptised person upon the confession of his guilt by a representative of the Church who has been expressly designated for this, we call this event of God's word of forgiveness the reception of the sacrament of penance."[14]

Rahner's understanding of the sacrament is theological and holds together many sides of what is certainly a complex sacrament, some of which as we shall see in the course of this chapter, have been drawn apart. But even Rahner's magisterial theological hermeneutics were not enough to prevent the dawning, after Vatican II, of a profound crisis with regard to the sacrament of penance.

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[14]Rahner, K. *Foundations of Christian Faith* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd) 1976 p422

2. THE REACTIVE RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS

2.i. The Nature of 'Confession'

Paul VI described confession as: "the self-accusation made by a person seeking God's pardon of personal sins and the details of their moral and personal circumstances, to a minister authorised to hear and absolve the penitent."[15] This is the core of the idea but confession is not just an aspect of the sacrament, parallel for instance with contrition, because confession is an objective material action which has not only been an annual obligation on Catholics since the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, but has also been the metonymic name by which the sacrament of penance has been most widely known. Moreover, within the Roman Catholic Church confession has been, since the time of Charles Borromeo, the activity and encounter which has occurred within the booth known as the confessional. Thus while it is minimally true that confession is exactly what Paul VI described above, and that it is this when considered within the context of the sacrament as a whole (whether the sacrament be considered to be one of penance or reconciliation) confession is a much broader concept than that. 'Confession' is what goes on in the confessional and the sacrament can be considered to be 'confession' when this aspect of penance is considered to be primary and normative.

Although it is not the concern of this chapter to trace the history of penance but to examine the current crisis it is important to be clear about the most basic parameters of that history. The system of private confession was formed as the Celtic monks engaged with the catechetical challenge of meeting the spiritual needs of those whom James Dallen calls 'scarcely more than baptised pagans'. In the high middle ages the pattern of individual confession coupled with absolution and penance and accompanied by the appropriate interior condition of contrition was canonised by scholastic theology as the sacrament of penance. It was a varied phenomenon with a whole variety of accidental factors attaching themselves to it. As Thomas Tentler has shown: "It was legalistic and evangelical,

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[15]Address to a general audience 5 March 1975 *Documents of Liturgy* p974

Pelagian and Augustinian, laxist and rigorist, magical and rationalistic"[16]

This confusion should not detract us from the central points, however. Confession has come to mean the obligatory self-accusation in the context of a box and in the hearing of a priest who is authorised to assess contrition, give penance and pronounce absolution. It can be referred to as Latin because it has its patristic origins in the writing of Tertullian and is marked by the western developments of Augustine and the scholastics; moreover it became a hall-mark, alongside the use of Latin in liturgy, of the Roman Catholic Church. Finally, it seems to become problematic precisely when the Church decides to introduce the vernacular in liturgy. 'Confession' belongs to a religious and cultural era which ended at the Second Vatican Council.

2.ii. Criticism of 'Confession'

Writing from the point of view typical of the Northern European and American Laity who find 'confession' more of an obstacle than a help in their piety John Harriott listed some of the difficulties with regard to confession which are commonly voiced in his circles.[17] He includes such practical factors as the physical and social awkwardness of the confessional, and what he calls the unreality of the demand of frequent confession (for confessors as well as for penitents); he also refers to more psychological factors such as the impersonality of the confessor and the encouragement of the 'shopping list' approach with the attendant emphasis on what is bad (sin) rather than on what is good and virtuous, as well as to the matter of individual differences, particularly the differences between the difficulties encountered by different penitents, both in sensitivity of conscience and self-consciousness, and also in quality of introspection and ability to produce the required list. In addition he mentions the danger of meeting an unsympathetic or harsh confessor. But he also explains how the *theology* of the confessional

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[16]Tentler, T. *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press) 1977 p364

[17]Harriott, J.F.X. 'Rites of Reconciliation' in *New Blackfriars* Special number on *Sin* November 1989

is antipathetic in many ways so that, for instance, it encourages an understanding of sin as 'isolated acts rather than as a state issuing in particular symptoms' and fails to give scope for a developmental approach to the spiritual life. In all this confession is perceived as promoting the privatisation of what he calls the 'me and God' relationship which is characterised by the emphasis on individual sin at the expense of an appreciation of communal influences on personal sin.

Harriott's perspective is complemented by John Mahoney's analysis of the influence of auricular confession on Roman Catholic moral theology. Mahoney concludes that this aspect of Catholic practice has led to a spirituality which is preoccupied with sin, concentrated on the individual and obsessed with law. A good part of this impression is gleaned from his reading of the penitentials, the 'ready-reckoners' which, while they facilitated a sympathetic realism with the complexity of human fallibility and sinfulness, "also reflects a mentality in which objective morality appears to preponderate over subjective guilt, and which all too easily serves to instil, or increase, a pervasive sense of self-mistrust on the penitent's part."[18] Confession in the spirit of the penitentials is as likely to inculcate anxiety as to alleviate guilt. Another effect of the institution of confession is that it both (almost) trivialises and domesticates sin.[19] When Mahoney notes that it is the ineluctable individualism of the confessional which makes social justice and corporate responsibility so difficult to handle, he is alluding to an issue which is important from the point of view of forgiveness. The means of liturgical forgiveness, in as much as they amount to 'confession', are inadequate to the task of mediating the grace which will heal, restore and forgive anyone other than the committer of discrete, small scale and predictable offences.

In his comments on the way in which the confessional has generated a moral theology obsessed with law he observes that the categories of law are important in both the Old and the New Testaments, but he

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[18]Mahoney, J. *The Making of Moral Theology: A Study of the Roman Catholic Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press) 1985 p30

[19]Mahoney, J. *The Making of Moral Theology* p32

rightly insists that this is only part of the story of the way in which God deals with sinners: "[It] must be asked whether the [legal and forensic] analogy is the most apt to describe what is primarily the Sacrament of God's reconciling forgiveness, rather than a legal apparatus of vindictive justice."[20] Thus he welcomes the extent to which medical and therapeutic models are used to fill out the understanding of forgiveness in ways which the analogy of law is incapable of doing. He finds it necessary, however, to remind that therapeutic medicine is equally only an analogy: "if the sacrament of reconciliation is not to be located forever in the Old Bailey, no more is it now to be found exclusively in Harley Street."[21]

2.iii. 'Confession' Defended

As we have observed, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* is the reaffirmation of the normativity of 'confession' from Pope John Paul II which followed from the Synod of Bishops held in 1983. It is evident that the Pope is committed both to the Church as a sacred institution with a hierarchy, a law and a mission, and also to a view of humanity in which people attain dignity by shouldering their own responsibilities. These two convictions mean that when it comes to penance it is catechesis which is prior, the sacraments in general which are helpful and the sacrament of penance in the form of auricular confession which is the supreme and primary way of dealing with human sin. And human sin, while it has its social dimensions, is always and most importantly individual.

> "Sin, in the proper sense, is always a personal act, since it is an act of freedom on the part of an individual person, and not properly of a group or a community... The human person is free. This truth can not be disregarded, in order to place the blame for individuals' sins on external factors such as structures, systems or other people... there is nothing so personal and untransferable in each individual as merit for virtue or responsibility for sin."[22]

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[20]Mahoney, J. *The Making of Moral Theology* p35
[21]Mahoney, J. *The Making of Moral Theology* p36
[22]*Reconciliatio et Paenitentiae* (London: Catholic Truth Society) 1988 p50

And yet the Pope is clear that it does make sense to speak of social sin. Several distinct meanings are identified: sin which influences harmfully the lives of other people, sin which is directed against other people, and there is precisely *social* sin or evil in the struggles between classes, communities, groups or nations. But that is the end of the matter; what the liberation theologians call social sin does not exist. Sinful situations are real, "but these are the result of the accumulation of many personal sins".[23]

A parallel case against social sin is made by Hans Urs von Balthasar who, in his brief essay on personal confession, asserts that: "there is no collective guilt".[24] He concedes that social and political factors are in themselves the source of great unnecessary suffering and therefore sinful but argues that what is decisive is the way in which the individual responds to his or her knowledge of such factors. It is always possible to refuse to collude with such structures and to work against them. But it is also possible to acquiesce, and while that *is* sinful it is personal not social sin. Individuals are accountable for their negligence as well as for their actions. He does not deny that there is a social dimension to sin, and he stresses something different to John Paul when he suggests that every sin has an immeasurable 'social echo'. This is not to diminish personal responsibility, however, but to increase it. The social echoes of personal sin are the many unknowable ramifications of individual sins, all of which must be included in confession. While Balthasar is against general absolution for allegedly social sins it does not follow that he is in favour of the confession of a list of sins in a box approach to penance. Indeed this same essay concludes with the suggestion that confession be understood to be connected with a conversation about one's entire life situation. He does not, however, spell out what the liturgical implications of this connectedness are.

For John Paul and for Balthasar confession is crucial because it animates the conscience which is the seat of freedom. This sacred

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[23] *Reconciliatio et Paenitentiae* p55

[24] von Balthasar, H.U. 'Personal Confession' in Eds Kehl, M. and Loser, W. *The von Balthasar Reader* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark) 1982

faculty which must not only be maintained but also cleansed, freed from guilt, absolved. This is the reason why the sacrament of penance can be described as a sign of forgiveness, and why it is essential to preserve it in a valid and efficacious form. If humans are free and responsible then they certainly need to be able to avail themselves of whatever saving help might be available. The Pope is sure that:

> "[With] regard to the substance of the Sacrament there has always remained firm and unchanged in the consciousness of the Church *the certainty* that, by the will of Christ, forgiveness is offered to each individual by means of sacramental absolution given by the ministers of penance."[25]

And he stresses that:

> "The *Sacrament of Penance is the ordinary way of obtaining forgiveness*... it would therefore be foolish, as well as presumptuous, to wish arbitrarily to disregard the means of grace and salvation which the Lord has provided and, in the specific case, to claim to receive forgiveness while doing without the sacrament which was instituted by Christ precisely for forgiveness."[26]

His reading of the new Rites, informed of course by Paul VI's gloss that the third form is not normal but a special provision, does not contradict this fundamental.

Pope John Paul's position derives from the conviction that secular thought reduces human beings to religiously insignificant creatures for whom ethics are irrelevant. However, it is of the nature of the doctrine of sin and the practice of confession to entrench and encourage a religious or sacred self-understanding. The human sciences do have their limited uses but errors have been made in evaluating their findings: "on the basis of certain affirmations of psychology, concern to avoid creating feelings of guilt or to place limits on freedom leads to a refusal ever to admit any

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[25] *Reconciliatio et Paenitentiae* p113
[26] *Reconciliatio et Paenitentiae* p115

shortcoming."[27] And the list continues: sociology encourages the view that society is to be blamed, and cultural anthropology sometimes denies the possibility of human action and therefore human sin. Ethics based on historical relativism are a problem too, as norms are dismissed and moral values are overthrown. For John Paul the combined legacies of Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud are utterly corrosive of the human sense of sin and therefore of human dignity, freedom and holiness. It is not that people have developed beyond the need to be disciplined by weekly confession but that forces are actively destabilising the sacramental order.

> "The Sacrament of Confession is indeed being undermined, on the one hand by the obscuring of the moral and religious conscience, the lessening of a sense of sin, the distortion of the concept of repentance, and the lack of effort to live an authentically Christian life. And on the other hand it is being undermined by the sometimes widespread idea that one can obtain forgiveness directly from God, even in an habitual way, without approaching the Sacrament of Reconciliation."[28]

2.iv. Confession as a means of Forgiveness: Two Reflections

Two aspects of confession contribute greatly to the contemporary crisis which surrounds it. First there is the self-accusation which confession demands, particularly with regard to the demands which this places on the linguistic abilities of the penitent and the way in which this constrains the theology of sin which may be seen either to under-gird or to be a product of it. Second there are the issues which derive from the language and place of confession in relation to the language and place of the rest of ecclesial, liturgical and sacramental life.

2.iv.a. Talking about sins

In a special number of *Concilium* entitled 'The Fate of Confession' David Power and Gail Ramshaw Schmidt have offered distinct critiques of the standard form of confession, based as it is on the idea of talking about one's sins. In his editorial comments at the

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[27] *Reconciliatio et Paenitentiae* p67
[28] *Reconciliatio et Paenitentiae* p107

end of the volume, David Power explained that the edition had its origins in a feeling of dissatisfaction with the work of the 1983 Synod of Bishops and described the aim of the volume as: "to isolate this confession from the other acts of conversion, to see what problems arise from its misconception and misuse, to seek out its own inner intentionality and forms, and to discuss its appropriate place in contemporary Christian living".[29] He acknowledges that there are seeds of a narrative, praise-filled and personal approach to confession not only in the writing of Augustine and Cassian but also in the thinking of Paul VI whose thoughts on the nature of penance as *metanoia* or conversion were incorporated in the introduction to *Ordo Paenitentiae*. But the reality does not match up to these high and healthy ideals: "today's penitential practice as prescribed by Church canons and ritual does not adequately serve the naming of sin."[30]

The question of the nature and the naming of sin is of profound importance in any consideration of penance as, or incorporating, confession. Confession always involves the naming of sin and in order to name sin one has to know the language of sin. This is not a natural language. It has to be learnt. Power observes that the old language of sin, although archaic and closely attached to the description of sexual disorders and conduct, remains useful. He notes that these old symbols of stain, deviation and guilt are being applied to new areas such as social disorder or environmental destruction, offering as a specific example the word 'pollution'. He also remarks that there is a renaming of sin going on, so that the sins of, "fatalism, individualism, greed, ambition and exploitation constitute the guilt of a new generation".[31]

What Power fails to observe, however, is that these 'guilts' are not necessarily considered to be sins. Indeed, the very word sin has lost much of its moral credibility. It has followed the English word 'naughty' into semantic and moral triviality only in part because it is the word to describe human responsibility for and involvement

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[29]Power, D. 'Editorial Conclusions' in *Concilium* 190 2 1987 p127
[30]Power, D. 'Editorial Conclusions' p129
[31]Power, D 'Editorial Conclusions' p130

with that which is shameful. Religious critics of confession speak about the trivialisation of sin, but secular critics take it that sin is a trivial term and use it to express moral lightness. The word has lost its gravitas in common coin not only because secular culture assumes an atheistic or agnostic humanism but because the items on the lists of the confessional are perceived to belong, at best, to any other business on the contemporary moral and ethical agenda.[32]

Gail Ramshaw Schmidt's argument is that the language of sin does not have its primary meaning in fault so much as in limit or distance from God:

> "Religion sees God answering the needs occasioned by human limits: because we are creatures we need a god. In the West the dominant image for our creatureliness, the recurring model of human limitation, has been sin. *But sin has not been the sole image for human need,* and presently it is not the existentially operative image for many Christians."[33]

Writing under three headings she draws attention first of all to the inter-relatedness of self-awareness, sin and sins. Her point here is that: "the earliest understanding of sin is actually closer to our word sins".[34] It is this self-consciousness as one who does wrong, who is alienated by specific acts, which makes the self-confessed sinner the paradigm of the western human who would be in communion with God but cannot be precisely because of this difference and limitation. Considering the difficulty of confessing in the face of moral confusion she clarifies the problem of the relationship between sin and sins. "'To confess sin' is to acknowledge one's distance from God, to declare oneself human before God. But 'to confess sins', has come to mean a grovelling under guilt, a listing of infractions, a laundry list of what must be

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[32]There is also a sense in which 'guilt' has had a similar history, so that while it once referred to objective accountability for action, it is now understood as a subjective response to a situation, or at least an existential, for which responsibility is as likely denied as assumed. These are in part shifts in the process of secularisation, but they are part of a widespread ethical revolution which in part defines the crisis of confession.

[33]Ramshaw Schmidt, G. 'Sin: One Image of Human Limitation' in *Concilium* 190 2 1987 p3

[34]Ramshaw Schmidt, G. 'Sin: One Image of Human Limitation' p4

cleansed before one can come to the table."[35] Ramshaw Schmidt's analysis is that the person identifies not merely with what is bad about themselves but with an exaggeration of the bad. The significance of the moral infringements is emphasised to the point that they are perceived as central to self-identity. Her response to this problem is to relativise it. Certainly it is reasonable to use the language of sin to articulate one's sense of self in the presence of God. But this is not the only or even the best language in which to do so. It is equally valid and important to think of oneself as involved in the complexes death/life, injustice/justice, disease/wholeness, chaos/meaning. The point about Christianity, it seems to her, is that it is a religion in which all these symbol systems can operate at different times. They are all facets of the Christ centred story of salvation/liberation/enlightenment/healing.

Her critique is of the way in which a rich and human soteriological language has been narrowed in the liturgical and ethical focus on 'confession' in the Roman Church. She does not despair of the possibility of having liturgies of liberation, of which a sacrament of penance might well be an example, but the stranglehold of the sin/forgiveness image and the praxis of the confessional must be broken.

> "We need articulated Christologies and explications of soteriology which develop these significant images for human existence upon which to base liturgical formulas. For the people need the images true enough to their experience and deep enough in the Christian tradition that they may have the foundational language on which to base their lives."[36]

2.iv.b. Questions of Language and Style

One important but overlooked effect of the change to the liturgical use of the vernacular is that it reduces the difference between the sacrament of penance and the rest of liturgy. There is paradox in this because while at one level it connected penance with the rest of liturgical life, in other ways it seemed to undermine the practice of private confession. For instance 'confession' loses some of its

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[35]Ramshaw Schmidt, G. 'Sin: One Image of Human Limitation' p5
[36]Ramshaw Schmidt, G. 'Sin: One Image of Human Limitation' p10

mystery when the 'I absolve you' replaces *ego absolvo te*. Also it may be that the priest who uses the vernacular in liturgy is easier to relate to but harder to confess to than his Latin-speaking counterpart. 'Confession' is not at one with a spirituality which is liturgically vernacular. An ineluctable strangeness, or exoticism, is associated with the idea of 'confession' and this is connected with the confused desire both to include and to exclude the notion of forgiveness of sins in piety and liturgy. This paradox runs very deep so that while sin is inevitable it is still a matter of guilt and responsibility. It is both needed and shameful. Consequently 'confession' is both incorporated into and alienated from liturgy and piety.

Within a liturgical culture based on Latin the language of sin used in the confessional is not the same as the language of the mass. This discontinuity is part of a collection of strange cultural disjunctions between 'confession' and the rest of the Latin sacramental and liturgical system. The theology of confession is itself both continuous and discontinuous with the rest of sacramental theology being based on the sanctification of quasi-matter rather than actual matter. But the disjointedness is not only at the level of abstract theology. The physical structure of the confessional also shows this pattern.

The practice of having a special booth or church within a church, the confessional box, is a very concrete aspect of the disjointed connectedness of the sacrament. It is off-centre, it belongs within the sacred space but to one side. It is a place of privacy but within a public arena so that it is in a sense public. It is a place of meeting and encounter and yet designed to limit and channel the degree of intimacy and demands a very particular kind of relating. It is a place of professional amnesia in which amateur memories are disclosed. It is a place where people are squeezed into the ecclesial mould to which they are ordained or which is ordained for them. Moreover to enter into the confessional is to declare oneself both a sinner and yet to initiate one's own forgiveness: it is to be a penitent which is simultaneously a source of shame and pride, of guilt and glory.

Gustav Aulen described the theology which underlies this approach as Latin.[37] The primary theory of the atonement here is that of Anselm which is based on the restoration not of relationship or intimacy but of order and honour. The effect of sin is to put things to confusion and the effect of atonement is to put them back to their hierarchical order. It is the restoration of legal order through the pardoning of sins. Coupled with this is the old idea that penance is a kind of payment or tariff, a way of gaining that quantity of merit required to deal with the guilt acquired through the sinful actions of the subject. 'Confession' has the same effect as punishment; it removes guilt. In terms of the distinctions developed in chapter three this leads not so much to a form of forgiveness as a form of pardon. It is not the re-building of relationships but the removal of penalty.

3. THE PROGRESSIVE RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS

3.i. Penance as Ongoing Conversion

Concluding his classic study, *The Origins of Private Penance,* R.C. Mortimer makes some remarks which are of more significance to us because of what they reveal incidentally than because of their surface content. His conclusion is that it was the Irish monks who swept away the rules of unrepeatable penance. "They took the old public penance and adapted it to suit the requirements of a mission field and a half-converted church. And by so doing they restored penance to its proper place as a means of renewing and deepening Christian life."[38]

In referring to the role of penance as 'a means of renewing and deepening Christian life' Mortimer alludes to one of the most important aspects of penance which it was part of the intention of Vatican II to recover. Namely that at base penance is not about confession but about conversion; confession, along with contrition and satisfaction, being necessary but not sufficient or primary parts

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[37]Aulen, G. *Christus Victor* (London: SPCK) 1950 passim

[38]Mortimer, R.C. *Origins of Private Penance* (Oxford: Clarendon) 1939 p189

of the process. This is an idea which has resurfaced in a good deal in post-Vatican II writing. Monika Hellwig, for instance, discerns that for the patristic Church the personal conversion of the sinner was equally as important as the reconciling response of the Church in constituting the efficacious sign of forgiveness.

> "While there is [in the patristic and medieval period] constant explicit reference to the inner conversion of the heart, symbolised by the oft-mentioned 'weeping and lamenting', there is evident conviction that such inner conversion of heart is not attained in a vacuum but in solid and arduous works of penance, under the categories of prayer, fasting and almsdeeds, which should effect a deep and pervasive change in the future character of one's everyday life and conduct in the world."[39]

This emphasis on conversion is, of course, a development of the Biblical concepts of *metanoia* and *teshuva*. Developing the meaning of it for an understanding of the sacrament of penance as pastoral liturgy Mark Searle writes that:

> "The sacrament of penance is no longer seen as an isolated and exclusive means of obtaining forgiveness of one's sins, but as the source and summit of a whole Christian life of conversion, where the one grace of forgiveness, won and mediated by Christ, and operative at many levels, emerges in a clear and manifest way in the celebration of the Church."[40]

Searle stresses the inwardness of penance: "the importance of conversion as a change of heart, rather than just the repudiation of isolated acts".[41] But more than this he appreciates the shared or communal aspects of human life, "of its nature, it is coexistence"[42] and this leads him to suggest that the integration of the social dimension into penance is important.

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[39]Hellwig, M. *Sign of Reconciliation and Conversion* p95

[40]Searle, M. 'Penance' in *Pastoral Liturgy: A Symposium* in Ed. Winstone, H. (London: Collins) 1975 p193

[41]Searle, M. 'Penance' p194

[42]Searle, M. 'Penance' p194

> "The early Church recognised very clearly the social dimensions of sin and conversion, and the revival of penitential services in our own time undoubtedly owes something to modern social consciousness and orientation towards the future - two characteristics shared by the early Church."[43]

Searle's understanding of the sacrament is not based on a negation of the heritage of confession, but on a pastoral relocating of that heritage within the life of conversion in the Church which is itself a 'community of conversion' concerned for welfare and well-being on a broad front, and "to pursue incessantly the path of penance and renewal".[44] Searle sees the priest as a 'leader of the community', a preacher of the Good News, one who *knows* the penitents and who stirs people to repent on the basis not of imminent judgement but on the appreciation of the, "irreversible will-to-reconciliation of God".[45] The Church is, "the sacrament of healing and forgiveness in a world torn and twisted by sin and its consequences" and the sacrament of penance must be, "a confrontation of the believer with the tragedy of human history, and with his own part in it, and at the same time it is his opportunity to break through to a new future with Christ."[46] For reconciliation to take place it is the penitent who must change in order to avail himself of God's permanent offer. And this pious revolution, "makes possible, and necessary, reconciliation with one's fellow men which overflows into family, social and even political life."[47]

Monika Hellwig adds to this account of penance as conversion in her reflections on the efficacy of the contemporary sacrament. She brings a typically modern concern with the subjectivity of participation in the sacrament and the Thomistic conviction which was so positively renewed at Vatican II, that the sign must be inwardly perceived to connect with that which it signifies. "Many

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[43]Searle, M. 'Penance' p194. He is writing in 1975 after the promulgation of the new Rites but before the Apostolic Exhortation and the deepening of the crisis to which we have referred

[44]Searle, M. 'Penance' p198

[45]Searle, M. 'Penance' p199

[46]Searle, M. 'Penance' p199

[47]Searle, M. 'Penance' p200

people", she claims, "reckon the sacrament of penance to be the sign of something which it does not effect"[48] from which she concludes that it is not an efficacious sign and therefore not a true sacrament. This is a failure of tragic dimensions because the need for forgiveness, reconciliation and the blessings of peace which conversion can bring are commonly and deeply felt, she argues. Sin may not be experienced as such but the suffering which results from sin is accessible to consciousness, and liberation from this is urgently sought. People are seeking salvation as, "total personal, even communal, rescue from disorientation, alienation, frustration."[49] Her concern is that the sacrament of penance should, but largely does not, connect with such felt needs. Her programme is that the sacrament should continue to be reformed until it engages with the spiritual needs of the unredeemed baptised.

Although Hellwig suggests that stronger and more satisfying works of penance should be given she does not intend to suggest that forgiveness is dependent upon such action. Indeed, it is on the basis of a theological understanding of the willingness of God to forgive that she is able to place such emphasis on penance as conversion.

> "[It] is clear that the forgiveness of God and the reconciliation of the sinner is not something that happens at a later stage in consequence of the repentance and conversion. To repent is to be forgiven; to turn is to be reconciled because the father has been waiting only for the response that makes the outpouring of his compassion possible within the freedom of the creature which he respects and therefore will not annihilate."[50]

3.ii. Penance as Ecclesial Reconciliation

That reconciliation is the concept most distinctively connected with the revision of the rite of penance in the spirit of Vatican II is most authoritatively expressed in the address given by Paul VI to a general audience on the *Ordo Paenitentiae* in April 1974. It is worth quoting at length because it explains precisely and fully the

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[48]Hellwig, M. *Sign of Reconciliation and Conversion* p106
[49]Hellwig, M. *Sign of Reconciliation and Conversion* p110
[50]Hellwig, M. *Sign of Reconciliation and Conversion* p25

ecclesial and social significance of the idea of penance as reconciliation.

> "[From] now on we will do better to speak of [the sacrament of penance] as the sacrament of reconciliation. By that we mean, first, reconciliation with God; this is something we are familiar with even if it will always be a reason for endless and joyous wonder. We mean also reconciliation with the Church; the sacrament brings us back to the Church from the condition of being sick and dead members to that of being healthy and alive. It is at this point that a new matter for reflection begins... just as every personal failure has its impact on our own vital and personal relationship with God, so too that failure has its impact on our relationship with the community which in an analogous sense is also essential and vital and which binds us to Christ's mystical body, that is with the holy and living Church whose members we are."[51]

Many other writers have presented reconciliation as the normative concept in the sacrament of penance. Among these were the essayists who contributed to the special numbers of the journals *Resonance*[52] and *Concilium*[53]. Many were of the view that while the development of private penance had brought with it the great benefit of being repeatable, its form as confession had eclipsed the social and ecclesial aspects of penance which were so prominent in the practice of the early Church. The texts which were written to explain the new Rites such as the commentaries edited by Nathan Mitchell[54] also sought to expound reconciliation. The most important and substantial text, however, is James Dallen's *The Reconciling Community.*[55]

Dallen is of the view that a renewed understanding of penance as reconciliation is a central aspect of the resolution of the crisis of penance. He believes that the sacrament derives from the very special vocation of the church to be an effective witness to and

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[51] *Documents of Liturgy* p970

[52] *Resonance* No.1 (*Resonance* was a short-lived journal which did not publish the date of its publication on its first number.)

[53] *Concilium* 61 7 1963

[54] Mitchell, N. *The Rite of Penance: Commentaries*

[55] Dallen, J. *The Reconciling Community: The Rite of Penance* (New York: Pueblo)1986

place of moral, humane and gracious living. The real Church, however, is but a poor community of reconciliation.

> "The root difficulty lies in achieving a credible experience of a penitent church, a reconciled and reconciling community that mediates the experience of a merciful, compassionate and loving God. It is safe to say that the majority of Catholics do not perceive their Church as a reconciling community, even though they themselves do celebrate the sacrament of penance with some regularity for various reasons."[56]

He understands the crisis of penance to be one of liturgical variety: "If there is a crisis of penance, it is that an impoverished and limited ritual language, spread so thinly, is still expected to express [he does not say mediate] our experience of the mysterious character of a forgiving God".[57] He notices a trend away from a penitent and towards a Eucharist spirituality but is concerned that this will issue in a limited spiritual life: "there is a nagging fear that the average Catholic may be relying too much on the Mass to fill devotional needs and express all dimensions of prayer and worship."[58] But the answer to the crisis lies not in the reform of individual Catholics, and he notes the nice irony that it is unlikely that things are right if people need to be *converted* to a sacrament which is understood as a crucial means of conversion: "The call, then, is not to individuals to confess more often but to the Church to be converted".[59] Furthermore,

> "The present state of penance is a clear sign of the need for reconciliation within the Church. The need is not simply for more frequent confession and absolution. That has itself been a source of the so-called crisis of penance, as conversion, a process of life in Christian community, was compressed, individualised, and identified with a ritual."[60]

But the problem is wider than that of confession. Sacramental theology itself needs to be reconsidered in the light of the different

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[56]Dallen, J. *The Reconciling Community* p354
[57]Dallen, J. *The Reconciling Community* p352
[58]Dallen, J. *The Reconciling Community* p351
[59]Dallen, J. *The Reconciling Community* p354
[60]Dallen, J. *The Reconciling Community* p396

theological atmosphere generated by the Council. The criteria for contemporary sacraments cannot be uncritically used from the past any more than ancient liturgies can be.[61] Dallen's polemic is that the sacrament of penance has had a varied history and that its present and future should be equally varied. He holds the view that there is a need for distinct rituals of reconciliation and that the penitent aspects of piety should be liturgically expressed and answered, and yet his view is that the essence of the sacrament, that of reconciliation, should also be the essence of the Church. This draws attention to the social, ethical and process aspects of the way in which the Church should live with the legacy of human sin, but Dallen does not get very close to the detail of this encounter. His concern is with a revolution in the spiritual ethos of *ecclesia* rather than the detail of liturgical reconciliation.

3.iii. Conversion and Reconciliation Reconsidered

The foregoing has established the importance of the concepts of conversion and reconciliation in the progressive response to the crisis of confession. It may also have been apparent from that account that the language of conversion and reconciliation is confused in much of the writing in this area. The theology and liturgy of the rites in *Ordo Paenitentiae* is, as M. Francis Mannion puts it, 'systematically disordered'. As Paul De Clerk pointed out the words 'reconciliation' and 'penance' have very little semantic stability in the new rites of penance.[62] Furthermore the words are often used interchangeably so that even when a coherent distinction is suggested, as it is in *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia,* it is not adhered to. Mannion observes that, "at the theological level, we may point to an inadequate differentiation between penance and reconciliation, accounted for in part by lack of stability in these terms themselves."[63] Mannion therefore sets about the task of clarifying and distinguishing these important ideas. In his view reconciliation is the reconciliation of sinners to the communion of the Church. It derives from the earliest forms of the sacrament,

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[61]Dallen, J. *The Reconciling Community* p398

[62]De Clerk, P. 'Celebrating Penance or Reconciliation?' *The Clergy Review* 68 1983

[63]Mannion, M.F. 'Penance and Reconciliation: A Systemic Analysis' in *Worship* 60 1986 p99

particularly canonical penance which aimed at restoring to fellowship those who had to be excluded because their sins (murder, apostasy or adultery) "were like an acid that ate away the very bonds which united believers around the table".[64] Penance, on the other hand, is something more general: it refers to the *metanoia* or internal conversion which has objective effects. The "comprehensive dynamic that involves the whole Church, as well as the individual believer, in building up and ennobling corporate existence in Christ."[65] There can, however, be no reconciliation without penance, and any penitential community must always be in process of reconciling those who have gone outside it.

When it comes to a consideration of the new rites of reconciliation it becomes clear that while a relative minority of the baptised, the serious sinners, need to be reconciled, all need to live penitential lives. The rites are commended to the faithful as valuable in the battle with venial sin. Mannion's worry is that it is too much to ask of even the revised rites to facilitate reconciliation *and* penance. He also articulates a second point which is that while sacramental confession (as he now calls it) is reasonable and helpful and appropriate for reconciliation of serious sinners, the real problem is with confession as a means of penance or conversion. The reason for this to be found in the consciousness and conscience of the modern catholic: "the changing self-image of Catholic Christians severely limits their ability to translate every dynamic of conversion and sanctification into terms of sin and reconciliation".[66] In this sense the catholic who attends mass regularly but only rarely makes a confession has moved, to borrow some terminology of Pannenberg's, "from a piety of guilt consciousness with its intense sense of separation from God to a Eucharist piety which promotes a profound sense of participation within the communion of Christ's body".[67]

The clarity which Mannion has brought to the relationship between penance and reconciliation is fundamental to a meaningful study in

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[64]Mannion, M.F. 'Penance and Reconciliation: A Systemic Analysis' p111, quoting an image used first by Nathan Mitchell
[65]Mannion, M.F. 'Penance and Reconciliation: A Systemic Analysis' p109
[66]Mannion, M.F. 'Penance and Reconciliation: A Systemic Analysis' p115
[67]Mannion, M.F. 'Penance and Reconciliation: A Systemic Analysis' p115

this area. However, there are important questions which he does not raise. First he has nothing to say about the idea and practice of 'confession'. Second he fails to use the language of forgiveness. This, like 'confession' is a concept with different resonances in different contexts. At one moment it might mean absolution, at another time it might mean reconciliation, at another it might refer to what has already happened or is implicit in the sacrament. The limits of this analysis are evident in his statement that confession and absolution present no problem with regard to the reconciliation of serious sinners. To say this is to overlook important questions about the nature of forgiveness which are themselves fundamental to an understanding of the meaning and means of the sacrament of penance.

4. PASTORAL RESPONSES TO THE CRISIS

4.i. An Order of Penitents

Joseph Favazza's study, *An Order of Penitents,* has its origins in the 1983 Synod of Bishops which preceded the publication of *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia.*[68] Arguing for further diversity in the way in which the sacrament was celebrated, as well as finding a form which did more justice to the fact that reconciliation was a process, Cardinal Bernadin of Chicago had suggested the revival of the ancient order of penitents which would parallel the contemporary Rite of the Christian Initiation of Adults. Favazza presents his study as the historical research on which such a revival might be based.

His finding is that there was a form of the order of penitents in the third century which was quite distinct from the harsh and rigorous canonical penance of the following centuries. His case is that the third century order of penitents reflected both a relationship between members of the Church and a status within the Church itself. Penitents would therefore be both within the Church and yet without full status, and this would be reflected in their liturgical

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[68]Favazza, J.A. *The Order of Penitents: Historical Roots and Pastoral Future* (Collegeville, MI: The Liturgical Press) 1988

and sacramental participation. Noting that there are some parishes in the United States which are experimenting with the order of penitents, he proposes that a revised form of the order might be a way of continuing the development of the sacrament initiated at Vatican II. But he is at pains to clarify that his proposal does not amount to a return to canonical penance, which he considers to have been rightly overthrown by a laity who were not prepared to live with its rigours.

> "Let the order of penitents be restored, but let the present Church have the historical acumen to know what is being restored. It must be a transitional order, respecting the exigencies of conversion as it leads a penitent out of the marginalisation resulting from sin, back to the loving embrace of Christ, sacramentally experienced in the Church. It must be an order that allows for the full participation of all the baptised in the ministry of reconciliation. Formed around the nuclei of the liturgy of the Word and the presence of clearly delineated penitential stages, it must be historically grounded in the experience of the Church in the third century."[69]

Favazza argues that there are pastoral advantages which will be achieved not by replacing other forms of penance with this order but by having it as a supplementary form. At the synod Bernadin proposed a four stage process: confession of sins, doing penance, the celebration of the sacrament, and the prolongation of the sacramental experience. As Favazza somewhat inadvertently shows the structure of a process need be no different from that of the first form of the sacrament in the new Rites.[70] The main differences reside in involving the community of the Church more broadly and fully and in dispersing the act over a relatively lengthy, indeed indeterminate, period of time.

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[69]Favazza, J.A. *The Order of Penitents* p256
[70]Favazza, J.A. *The Order of Penitents* pp268-9

> "[The stages proposed by Bernadin] accentuate the role of the community in the ministry of reconciliation and respect the divine initiative of grace in a person's conversion. Finally, the stages model a sacramentology that emphasises not only the sacramental event but the process preceding it and the reflection flowing from it. In this way it becomes possible to relish the full experience of a sacramental encounter."[71]

A restored order of penitents would be a way of developing the experience of both conversion and reconciliation. Like Hellwig, Favazza draws upon the subjective experience of participation in the sacrament as evidence of its appropriateness. He considers conversion to be an ineluctably temporal experience. "Time is necessary to the whole experience [of conversion], in order that a person might be able to experience, interpret and celebrate the entire transition from crisis or change (death) to a new level of existence (life)."[72] This form of penance would be advantageous with regard to canonical or public penance in that it would be repeatable, and yet also have the advantage over private penance or 'confession' that it would not be a momentary episode.

As well as being temporal in a very developed way this form of penance is also ecclesial in a more sophisticated and social way than auricular confession. It would be a very explicit sacrament of reconciliation. But the point is not that the unworthy excommunicate is restored to the fellowship of the sufficiently holy. Rather the order would be based on the understanding, and inculcate the conviction that:

> "The Church is a Church of sinners, who rely on the mercy of God for forgiveness. In the same way, sacramental reconciliation is not just a sign of God's forgiveness of the sinner; it also 'entails reconciliation with our brothers and sisters who remain harmed by our sins' (Rite of Penance No 5)...A restored order of penitents would allow the community to claim the ministry of reconciliation to which they are rightfully called by the new rite itself."[73]

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[71]Favazza, J.A. *The Order of Penitents* p254
[72]Favazza, J.A. *The Order of Penitents* p258
[73]Favazza, J.A. *The Order of Penitents* p265

Favazza makes the links between the theological developments which we have observed which suggest that penance should be a sacrament of conversion and reconciliation and the liturgical practice of the third century Church. He does not claim that this would be an appropriate form of the sacrament for all penitents, and although he does not make this explicit there are hints in his writing that the form would be especially suitable for lapsed or apostate Christians.

The order of penitents on Favazza's third century model is certainly humane and historical, and it has the advantage of making sense of the temporal and ecclesial dimensions of penance as he has shown. One problem, however, is that of introduction. Liturgical formation is responsible for a tremendous proportion of catechesis within the Roman Catholic tradition. This can certainly be effective in the sacrament of penance, so that, given encouragement from the hierarchy, a move to more communal celebrations of the sacrament could easily be brought about. But recruiting for the order of penitents would be problematic. First it is not especially appropriate for those whose sins are in contravention of the law of the land, murderers and others who are in prison, second it is not appropriate for those whose sins are not already in the public domain, third it is hardly appropriate for the lapsed as they will not have had the liturgical formation which will enable them to make sense of it.

But there is a more profound, indeed a basically theological, problem. The method of reconciliation proposed by the introduction of a new order of penitents departs very radically from the spirit of the Lucan narrative of the loving father where the returning son is immediately the focus of an act of celebration (Lk 15). The idea that conversion is a temporally extended phenomenon is not in question here. The question is whether or not the sacrament is the appropriate locus for this extended penance. The assumption of an order of penitents is that absolution and reconciliation should be delayed. One reason for this must be that repentance is construed as necessarily lengthy, that it is by definition a temporally elongated process. The alternative is that repentance alone is not enough to

allow reconciliation with the Church, that some penance or satisfaction is also required. It is this notion which is such a stark contradiction of the parable of the prodigal son and so this is not considered an appropriate form of liturgical forgiveness. That is not to say that there can never be a place for penance or satisfaction or that the ideas that repentance is an extended temporal process can never be admitted. The point is that liturgies of reconciliation must somehow be able to marry the divine intention to be generously and instantly forgiving with the human need to take time to accept that forgiveness. The problem is that the order of penitents as envisaged by Favazza inevitably suggests that the penitent must in some way earn their forgiveness. Liturgies of forgiveness, however, must symbolise the belief that forgiveness is precisely that which is not earned. The difficult thing about divine forgiveness is not to wrest it from a punitive God but to fully accept it and to live with the ethical and spiritual consequences of being a forgiven sinner.

Favazza's promotion of Bernadin's suggestion clarifies a critique of the understanding of penance as conversion and reconciliation which has been the hall-mark of the progressive response to Vatican II and the *Ordo Paenitentiae.* It is that the temporal and social dimensions which are so important in conversion and reconciliation belong not so much to the rite of penance as to the life of the Church. Favazza and others are right in saying that the whole of Christian life is conversion but are wrong in trying to mould the sacrament of penance to fit this fundamental aspect of the life of faith. The reaction of John Paul II and Balthasar is best interpreted not as a desire to reintroduce 'confession' but as an expression of the need to have a discrete, episodic encounter in which contrition is articulated and absolution given. Penance as conversion and reconciliation loses sight of the primary purpose of the sacrament which is to be a particular encounter of the guilty penitent with what Margaret Hebblethwaite has called 'a fountain of tenderness'[74] which is an encounter with that form of divine forgiveness or pardon which is an immediate and generous response to an intimation of contrition, repentance or sorrow. The sacrament of penance needs to be developed in such a way as to bring this meaning to bear and to

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[74]Hebblethwaite, M. *Motherhood and God* (London: Geoffrey Chapman) 1985 p120

mediate precisely this experience. The nature and the effect of the sacrament to which *Sacrosanctum Concilium*[75] referred should be thought of as divine pardon.

4.ii. General Absolution

Many voices have been raised in favour of mediating the sacrament of penance by resort to seasonal use of general absolution. Proponents of this include the American priests Robert Hayter, John Gilbert and Robert Garafalo all of whom have written in support of general absolution in *Worship*.

Hayter's paper paints a picture of the way in which Catholic attitudes with regard to sin and reconciliation are changing. While few people attend 'confession', when people hear that there will be a communal penance service with general (he uses the phrase communal) absolution, "the place is often packed".[76] Gilbert's essay describes a similar observation.[77] As priest at a Church in Minnesota he participated in services of communal penance, following the provision of the third option offered in *Ordo Paenitentiae* during Advent and Lent which over the last decade had been attended by between three and four thousand people in each season. At one level his point is very practical: there is no way in which the two priests could have heard all those confessions. The other point is more important: that had they been offering penance as 'confession' many or even most of the three or four thousand people would not have been there. As he insists this is a genuine pastoral experience and while he would still advocate private confession for serious sinners he argues that such experiences must be treated as a theological source by Church officials. It is not, he insists and *pace* the official reaction from Rome, laziness, but a genuine and significant development in the experience and life of the sacrament which accords well with the way in which it has

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[75]See note 2 above

[76]Hater, R.L. 'Sin and Reconciliation: Changing Attitudes in the Roman Catholic Church' in *Worship* 59 1985

[77]Gilbert, J.R. 'The Reconciliation Service: A Reflection On Pastoral Experience as a Theological Source' in *Worship* 59 1985

developed since Tertullian thought of it as a second plank to save a drowning man.

Hayter puts the development into a more social context, suggesting that the interest in the self and personal healing which is associated with the rise of psychiatry and psychology is important, as is the growing awareness of the significance of relationships and intimacy in communal life of all kinds. In addition to this, factors such as a distancing of many Catholics from the moral teaching of the Church in the sixties had led neither to a lack of concern about the standing of the individual before God, nor to an eclipse of the sense of sin. On the contrary there was, if anything, increasing attention to both the spiritual and the social aspects of forgiveness and reconciliation. Thus: "a growing number of Catholics sought God's forgiveness through personal prayer,"[78] but equally: "serious minded Catholics sensed in a new way that God forgives them if they forgive each other."[79] In short: "The need to be reconciled to God and one another was taking priority over the need to confess sins to the priest."[80] These changes were coupled with theological developments with regard to the way in which priesthood and sacraments were construed. The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers began to come to the fore as did the sense that many actions or experiences can be sacramental in the sense that they mediate the divine mystery. The result, in terms of penance, was that the notion that 'confession' was necessary for salvation lost a great deal of credibility. In other words, as we observed above, the era of 'confession' came to an end with Vatican II. Among the implications of this shift is that there should be: "A reconsideration of granting communal absolution as one liturgical form of reconciliation. Pastoral practice tells us that this is the only form to which people enthusiastically respond."[81]

Garafalo offers an analysis of this pastoral case, and suggests that liturgies of penance leading towards general absolution have a

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[78]Hater, R.L. 'Sin and Reconciliation' p20
[79]Hater, R.L. 'Sin and Reconciliation' p21
[80]Hater, R.L. 'Sin and Reconciliation' p21
[81]Hater, R.L. 'Sin and Reconciliation' p31

legitimate role in the celebration of the penitential seasons. He argues that Advent and Lent have a dynamic of expectation which, because it is eschatological, inevitably creates a tension which manifests itself as a general sense of sin and inadequacy so that in confession penitents do not disclose a desire for forgiveness for specific acts nor yet for reconciliation with the Church. Rather, the need to feel better about themselves and to get in touch with the spirit of the season is uppermost in their minds. His view is that general absolution is the fitting liturgical response to such an existential. This is the pattern which he perceives in the gospels.

> "When Jesus encounters individuals for whom he creates a personal crisis (*kairos*), his typical response to such situations is an immediate and unexpected release of that critical tension, thereby releasing the energy of conversion. The releasing of that tension typically takes the form of announcing freely given forgiveness that constitutes a new reality for the sinner."[82]

Garafalo makes a point which is too often overlooked by those proposing a process approach to penance, and that is that forgiveness is not classically understood as something which takes time, and that the taking of time can be seen as a kind of grudgingness or lack of grace on the part of the forgiver rather than a generous response to the human inability of the forgivee to accept what is immediately offered in all its fullness. His conclusion is that: "the Church must duplicate the ministry of Jesus in a freely given, spontaneous gesture of forgiveness that restores the scriptural link between reconciliation and celebration."[83] Garafalo is right that an emphasis on forgiveness as a process can eclipse this fundamental aspect and inculcate the misunderstanding that it has in some way to be earned. Garafalo's contribution to our enquiry is to make it ever more clear that an engagement between the sacrament of penance and the language of forgiveness is crucial.

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[82]Garafalo, R 'Reconciliation and Celebration: A Pastoral Case for General Absolution' in Worship 63 1989 p451

[83]Garafalo, R. 'Reconciliation and Celebration' p456

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Despite the attempts to reinstate 'confession' as the normative form of the sacrament of penance it continues to be subjected to a complex critique. The view which identifies penance with confession is constructed in such a way that the spirituality is functional, the theology is legal and the liturgical practice is isolating and alienating. The cultural location is best thought of as having the quality of dislocated continuity coupled with an exaggerated self-consciousness. It is marked by profound discontinuities and divisions. It is an analytically structured, juridical and individualising rite which is designed to allow the application of the merit of the sacrifice of the cross to the guilt of the sinful soul.

Alternatives to 'confession' also have their problems. The ideas of reconciliation and penance have been discussed in some detail here. The advantage of these approaches is that they do give due emphasis to the *process* of penance or reconciliation. The disadvantage with this approach is that it can eclipse the reality of a gratuitous and abrupt initiative of forgiveness.

The practical suggestions of an order of penance and general absolution have also been considered. A consideration of the discussion around these approaches has revealed that these two approaches have complimentary merits. The order of penitents is a temporally extended and serious response on behalf of the penitent and the approach of general absolution is a model for the immediacy and generosity of the divine compassion.

CHAPTER SIX

LITURGICAL FORGIVENESS IN ANGLICANISM

While the debate in the Roman Catholic Church about liturgical forgiveness can reasonably be reckoned to be a consideration of the crisis of confession since Vatican II, the comparable debate in the Churches of the Reformation covers a much longer period of history. The first two of Luther's ninety five theses make it clear that one of the focal issues in the Reformation was liturgically mediated forgiveness.

> "1. Our Lord Jesus Christ when he said 'Repent' willed that the whole life of believers should be repentance.
> 2. This word cannot be understood as referring to sacramental penance, that is, confession and satisfaction, which is performed in the ministration of priests."[1]

Luther was, of course, making a complex response to a situation of Penance in the fifteenth century but the issue has remained a matter of controversy ever since.

The understanding and practice of the liturgical forgiveness of sins in the Reformation Churches is not so much in crisis as chronically problematic: the debate and confusion has occurred over several centuries rather than decades. This time scale means that in several ways the situation in the Reformation Churches is more complex than that in the Roman Church. Personal forgiveness is prized and sought and is generally reckoned to be a product of faith. But in addition to this there are in Lutheran and Anglican Churches, as well as in some of the teachings of Calvin, acknowledgements of the value of auricular confession as a means of forgiveness. There are fundamental differences, however, in the way in which confession is located within the religious systems of Protestantism

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[1]McNeil, J.T. *A History of the Cure of Souls* (London: SCM) 1958 p163

and Catholicism. What Protestantism rejected at the practical level was the understanding that auricular confession is necessary for forgiveness. What it rejected at the theological level was the Thomist view that absolution, the product of auricular confession, was itself the cause of contrition which was the basis of forgiveness.[2] Further, Protestantism is traditionally and understandably nervous about the whole notion of penance, fearing the theological and ecclesiastical situation which emerges if the sense that forgiveness is a product of anything which might be thought of as 'works' be allowed to develop. But there are other debates too. Questions about the role of the ordained minister in the hearing of confessions and the particular words which it is appropriate to use in absolution, and the need for confessions to be 'integral' are invariably raised when the non-Roman Western Churches engage in forms of liturgical forgiveness.

It is not possible in the space of one chapter to attempt to cover in detail all the debates about and practice of liturgical forgiveness in the Churches of the Reformation. The focus of this work as a whole is the coherence of the Christian doctrine of forgiveness and to facilitate our exploration of that question the main emphasis will be, as in other chapters, on the contemporary situation. But in this particular area the historical debates have an uncharacteristically great significance because the theological questions are connected not only with questions of the cure of souls but also with larger issues of ecclesiastical identity. This has been particularly the case in our main area of consideration, liturgical forgiveness in the Anglican Church. Here questions of the degree to which the Anglican Church is primarily Reformed or Catholic have to some extent been argued out with reference to the practice of auricular confession. This is of course the case in the English Anglo-Catholicism of the

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[2]See Ross, K. *Hearing Confessions* (London: SPCK) 1974 p14 Ross writes that "On the one hand (Aquinas) believed that contrition won forgiveness from God; on the other hand, he believed that absolution conferred contrition." This teaching is affirmed in the Council of Trent "If the sinner have recourse to the tribunal of penance with a sincere sorrow for his sins, and a firm resolution of avoiding them in future, although he bring not with him that contrition which may be sufficient of itself to obtain the pardon of sin; his sins are forgiven by the minister through the power of the keys." In Tentler, T. *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press) 1977 p379

late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries where as one commentator has put it, the advertisement of times for confession on the Church noticeboard would "leave no doubt that the Church is catholic".[3] Liturgical forgiveness in Anglicanism, then, is a much larger question than that of forgiveness or of liturgy. The questions of liturgical forgiveness in Anglicanism remain controversial and cut to the heart of the theological and pastoral complexes by which that Church understands and identifies itself.

The depth and the strangeness of this controversy ought to be emphasised. On the one hand there are those who argue that penance as in confession is a *sine qua non* of Christian discipleship, as basic as baptism and communion; while on the other there are those who either ignore it altogether or who are equally passionate that confession, or 'shrift in the ear' as Tyndale had it, is a superstitious practice; not so much a sacrament of the Church as Article 25 has it, but one of the 'vain things fondly invented' referred to in Article 22. It is equally important, however, not to over-emphasise the extent to which confession is currently a matter of controversy. Much of the writing on the subject is of course driven by passionate conviction but it is also true that it is those who are passionate who tend to write. A feature of contemporary writing on the subject, by which I mean writing which is concurrent with that marking the 'crisis of confession' in the Roman Catholic Church, is that it is if anything less polemical and more diverse than that of previous generations.

As has already been intimated this chapter will have to have a broader historical compass than the others in the work. The starting point is the teaching of the Book of Common Prayer because the strengths or weaknesses of Anglican complexity derive from the rubrics and formularies of this theologically diverse compilation. Secondly the writing of Richard Hooker in Book VI of his *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* is of considerable importance, reflecting Reformation theology in a particularly Anglican and High Church way. In the Oxford Movement of the nineteenth century there was a revival of many aspects of ecclesiastical and religious seriousness.

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[3]Pickering, W.S.F. *Anglo-Catholicism* (London: Routledge)1989 p32

One of these was the revival of the practice of auricular confession. Although this was first characterised by great hesitancy on the part of the leaders it was to become, as we have seen, a defining aspect of the Anglo-Catholic wing of the Church of England. It is not surprising, then, to find the two most important small books on confession written by Anglicans in the last twenty years to be by a member of a religious community[4] and the former vicar of All Saint's Margaret Street[5] and the only recent book of essays on the subject to be the product of the Church Union Theological Committee[6]. More surprising perhaps were the writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Max Thurian on the question of confession, both of which underlined the view that the reformers were not against confession as such, rather that they were rightly antagonistic to abuse of the confessional and the idea of its necessity.[7] These writings, however, are of very considerable significance in the rediscovery of the personal forgiveness of sins in the Anglican Church. This is partly for political reasons; for while the very Romishness of confession was part of its attraction to some twentieth century Anglo-Catholics this remained a problem for liberal and evangelical Anglicans. It is the rediscovery that confession existed on their side of the Reformation, together with a tendency to pay attention to the fifth chapter of James rather than the sixteenth chapter of Matthew which has opened the door to more relaxed and positive attitudes to the possibility of personal liturgical forgiveness among, for instance, evangelical Anglicans.[8]

The final area which it is relevant to survey is the place which is given to liturgical forgiveness in the revised Prayer Books of the later twentieth century. While the Alternative Service Book (ASB) is devoid of features to match the authority to exercise a ministry of confession and absolution found in its sixteenth and seventeenth century predecessors, the Book of Common Prayer of the Episcopal

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[4]Smith, M. *Reconciliation* (London: Mowbray)1985

[5]Ross, K. *Hearing Confessions*

[6]Eds. Dudley, M. and Rowell, G. *Confession and Absolution* (London: SPCK) 1990

[7]Bonhoeffer, D. *Life Together* (London: SCM) 1954 and *The Cost of Discipleship* (London: SCM) 1948 Thurian, M. *Confession* (London: SCM) 1953

[8]See for instance Foster, R. *Celebration of Discipline* (London: Hodder and Stoughton) 1980 pp125-137

Church of the United States of America (BCPECUSA) has a rich selection of penitential material. Moreover the ASB is not the last word on Anglican liturgy and some of the supplementary materials produced for particular seasons or occasions reaffirm the importance of the distinctly Anglican approach to penance and liturgical forgiveness.

1. The Book of Common Prayer

There are several places in the Book of Common Prayer where there is reference to or provision for the liturgical forgiveness of sins. These are in the orders for Morning and Evening Prayer and in the Order for Communion where there is provision for general confession and absolution, and in the exhortation to communion and the office for the Visitation of the Sick where the possibility of personal confession of particular sins followed by absolution in the indicative case is respectively assumed or provided for. Moreover in the rite for the ordination of priests the Book of Common Prayer is unique in including these words from the gospel of John in the formula of ordination: "whose sins thou dost forgive they are forgiven and whose sins thou dost retain they are retained." These formularies lie at the heart of the meaning of liturgical forgiveness within Anglicanism.

1.i. Exhortation to Communion

All three prayer books of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries carried exhortations to communion which commended any who were not of a quiet conscience to attain the help, attention and absolution either of the parish priest or of 'some other discreet and learned Minister of God's word'. In many ways it is the prayer book of 1549 which is the most powerful and significant text. The first consideration is of those ways in which it marks a change from pre-reformation understandings. There are three points here: first that there was an obligation to come to confession before receiving communion; second that permission is now given to confess to any priest, not just the priest of the parish; and third that no mention is

made of penance. The matter is confession and absolution.[9] A further point touches an irenic note, for in a long section which was deleted from subsequent versions the hearers are admonished not to fall into dissension about the use of personal confession and absolution but to respect the consciences and practices of others.

The 1552 revision deleted some significant words, such as 'sin' from the phrase 'sin and grief', and 'auricular and secret confession' but as that document made clear it was not written in an attempt to replace or change the doctrines of the first book. The 1662 book was a further redaction of the same text the detail of which implied a shift in emphasis with regard to the purpose of the encounter between person and priest which was meant to prepare them for communion. In previous editions the immediate product of the opening of grief (or sin and grief) to the priest was: "to receive such ghostly council, advice and comfort, as his conscience may be relieved" whereas in the 1662 edition it is put that he might receive, "the benefit of absolution". Thus 1662 reverses the order, and implicitly the priority, of advice and absolution. As Carter suggests, these changes are not merely literary but are theological. Moreover in 1552 a second exhortation encouraging the people to be more regular attenders at communion was added prior to that suggesting confession for those of troubled conscience. 1662 reversed the order of these exhortations. The combined effect of these changes was to give confession and absolution a higher priority than before.

1.ii. The Office for the Visitation of the Sick

A similar pattern of development can be seen in the office for the Visitation of the Sick. Whereas the 1549 version took a gentler approach than the Latin office on which it was based, the 1662 version was more positive and urgent about confession and absolution while maintaining that it was neither necessary nor compulsory. The books of Edward VI are very similar in that they both have the same rubric: "Here shall the sick person make a special confession, if he feel his conscience troubled with any

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[9]Carter, T.T. *The Doctrine of Confession* (London: Joseph Masters and Son)1885 p105

weighty matter". This is strengthened in 1662 to read: "Here shall the sick person *be moved to* make a special confession of his sins, if he feel... " It is clear that the writer of the rubric had a higher sense of the importance of the confession than the average visitee. One interesting feature of the 1549 version is that the rubric which applies to the absolution explicitly states that, "this same form of absolution shall be used in all private confessions." This was deleted in subsequent editions and this absence has been used by some as a reason to question the validity of private confession within Anglicanism.

This absolution itself, which was unrevised in 1552 and 1662, is worth noting in full:

> *Our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath left power to his Church to absolve all sinners which truly repent and believe in him, of his great mercy forgive thee thine offences; and by his authority committed to me, I absolve thee from all thy sins, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.*

Whatever questions there may be about the mode and method of confession and absolution within the Anglican Church this one prayer is evidence enough that personal confession followed by indicative absolution, *ego absolvo te*, are part of the Anglican tradition of liturgical forgiveness.

1.iii. Ordination Rite

Writing for those to be ordained priests in the 1970s Archbishop Michael Ramsey wrote: "We are charged to preach a gospel of divine forgiveness and to be ready to hear the confessions of individuals and to give them the 'benefit of absolution'."[10] He adds that the inclusion of the words 'whose sins thou dost forgive they are forgiven and whose sins thou dost retain they are retained' in the formula of ordination "was no doubt intended to emphasise the ministry of reconciliation".[11] As he notes, this emphasis remains

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[10]Ramsey, M *The Christian Priest Today* (London: SPCK) 1972 p43
[11]Ramsey, M. *The Christian Priest Today* p44

regardless of what contemporary scholarship suggests the force of the passage in John to be.

The strange thing about this is that it is peculiarly Anglican to include these words which were introduced to the ordinal in the medieval period in the western church. Carter suggests that the words have a two-fold meaning, the first is a generic understanding of ministry and the second is, "restrictive, as specially denoting those offices which were ordained for the remission of sins, as their characteristic subject".[12] Having recorded the way in which these words have been associated not only with that remission which is in baptism but also with that associated with penance, he goes on to assert that since this was a clear relationship in scholastic writing it follows that the English reformers were not minded to do away with the practice of confession and absolution. "To retain these words in their original position in the ordinal, and at the same time to hope to disconnect them from the ministry of forgiveness of sins, would have been vain."[13]

2. PRIVATE CONFESSION IN RICHARD HOOKER

In the sixth volume of his *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Richard Hooker addresses questions of the nature and practice of penitence. Hooker is known to have made his confession on his death-bed and writes in support of the practice of confession and absolution within the Church of England based on a particular pastoral theological understanding. He conducts a historical argument and survey from which he draws the following conclusions: "we every where find the use of confession, especially public, allowed of and commended by the Fathers; but that extreme and rigorous necessity of auricular and private confession, which is at this day so mightily upheld by the Church of Rome we find not."[14]

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[12]Carter, T.T. *The Doctrine of Confession* p143
[13]Carter, T.T. *The Doctrine of Confession* p146
[14]Keble, J. Ed. *The Works of Mr Richard Hooker* Vol. III (Oxford: Clarendon) 1888 p47

This is perhaps his most substantial emphasis, it is certainly continuous with the understanding of the Church of England formularies of his age which, as we have seen, were slightly strengthened in the subsequent revisions of the seventeenth century. But he also lists particular points at which the Church of Rome holds views which are neither ancient nor traditional but, as he puts it, 'have youth in their countenance'. These include the understanding that 'sacramental penitency' is the only remedy for post-baptismal sin and that confession is an essential aspect of that sacrament. But his main theological argument is that while absolution is a possible and proper form of ministry it does not follow that "God himself cannot now forgive sins without the priest."[15] Hooker is not at all impressed by scholastic arguments about the theological significance of confession in the process of penance, namely that it, and only it, might mediate the grace whereby insufficient attrition becomes sufficient contrition. But he is still less impressed by what he calls the Romish view of absolution which makes all penitence vain unless required and conducted by a priest. In one passage he outlines the differences between the Roman and the Anglican view of repentance:

> "They imply in the name of repentance much more than we do. We stand chiefly upon the true inward conversion of the heart; they more upon works of external show. We teach, above all things, that repentance which is one and the same from the beginning to the world's end; they a sacramental penance of their own devising and shaping. We labour to instruct men in such sort, that every soul which is wounded with sin may learn the way how to cure itself; they, clean contrary, would make all sores seem incurable, unless the priest have a hand in them."[16]

Hooker, however, is positive about absolution. Indeed he can go so far as to write that, "Sin is not helped but by the assurance of pardon."[17] And this is the key to his understanding that the benefit of absolution is not in the making but in the assurance of forgiveness. "I see no cause but that by the rules of our faith and

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[15] *ibid.*

[16] Keble, J. Ed. *The Works of Mr Richard Hooker* Vol. III p73/4

[17] Keble, J. Ed. *The Works of Mr Richard Hooker* Vol. III p73

religion we may rest ourselves very well assured of touching God's most merciful pardon and grace; who, especially for the strengthening of weak, timorous, and fearful minds, hath so far endued his church with power to absolve sinners."[18]

Hooker's argument is that priests are empowered to exercise the power of the keys but that it is a pastoral rather than a judicial authority. It is not in order, as it were, to enable God to forgive so much as to allow the sinner to be forgiven. This is why it is important but not necessary. "To the use and benefit of this help for our better satisfaction in such cases is so natural, that it can be forbidden to no man. But yet not so necessary that all men should be in need of it."[19] Subjectivity and inwardness are naturally, therefore, of primary importance in the matter of forgiveness. As he asserts, quite consistently with the prayer book:

> "That which God doth chiefly respect in men's penitency is their hearts. The heart is that which maketh repentance sincere, sincerity that which findeth favour in God's sight, and the favour of God that which supplieth by gracious acceptation whatsoever may be defective in the faithful, hearty, and true offences of his servants."[20]

3. CONFESSION AND THE OXFORD MOVEMENT

The Book of Common Prayer and the writings of Richard Hooker are not the only Anglican authorities advocating private confession and absolution. In the seventeenth century writers such as Jeremy Taylor, Lancelot Andrewes and others were clearly in favour of the possibility of some form of voluntary use in the pursuit of a quiet conscience and the development of holiness.[21] The nineteenth century saw two revivals, and while that initiated by Simeon in Cambridge did not involve the restoration of this form of liturgical experience, the Oxford Movement was to become, in the eighteen

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[18]Keble, J. Ed. *The Works of Mr Richard Hooker* Vol. III p77

[19]Keble, J. Ed. *The Works of Mr Richard Hooker* Vol. III p106

[20]*ibid.*

[21]See Carter, T.T. *The Doctrine of Confession*, McNeil, J.T. *A History of the Cure of Souls* , and Rowell, G 'The Anglican Tradition from the Reformation to the Oxford Movement' in Eds. Dudley, M. and Rowell, G. *Confession and Absolution* 1990

forties, the occasion for the restoration of the practice of confession and absolution within the Church of England. The central character in this was E.B. Pusey.

3.i. Confession and Seriousness E.B. Pusey

Keith Denison argues that Pusey's interest in confession stemmed from his desire to encourage and enable people to perfection and holiness of living, a desire evident in his first sermon, and from his sense of the gravity of post baptismal sin.[22] As a Tractarian, Pusey disseminated his concerns about this problem and the anxiety which this precipitated which stirred the desire of individuals, as Denison puts it, to make a general confession before a priest. Pusey thus began hearing confessions and granting absolution, presumably with the formula from the Visitation Office noted above. He himself made his confession to Keble shortly after preaching his second University Sermon on the subject in December 1846.[23]

Dennison tells the story of the revival of confession as if its motive force were not the leadership of Pusey but rather something endemic in the spirit of the ideas which he publicised. This is congruent with Pusey's account of his intentions as recorded in Liddon's biography where it is made clear that he was not urging particular individuals to make their confession. This, by and large, and Denison notes some exceptions, is a credible and acceptable narrative but one which does not make Pusey a less central character than had he been overtly pressing people to shrift. It is plain that the character and the preaching of Pusey were of considerable importance in regenerating the practice, even if there was a sense in which it was a revival led by penitents rather than confessors.

The change in spirituality to a seriously penitential one which included confession was obviously not an easy development for the Church to accommodate either on the part of those who were with it or those who were against it. From the point of those who were

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[22]Denison, K. 'Dr Pusey as a Confessor and Spiritual Director' in Ed. Butler, P. *Pusey Rediscovered* (London: SPCK) 1983 p213

[23]See Liddon, H.B. *Life of E.B. Pusey D.D.* (London: Longmans) 1898 Vol. III pp95-100

involved the problem became one of maintaining the value of confession by educating the confessors. From the point of view of those who were not involved in the development the problem became one of coming to terms with what could not seem other than a distinctly Romish practice in the Church of England. One of the ironies of this chapter in Church history is that Pusey's projected answer to one problem was, of course, precisely the thing to aggravate the other. Pusey decided very early on that the best response would be to bring out a translation of abbe Gaume's *Manuel de Confesseurs*. The irony is deep because Pusey was extremely careful to distinguish between the Roman and the English understandings of confession and edited the manual in such a way as to remove, for instance, all references to indulgences and other factors which were not in accord with the understanding which he derived from the Prayer Book and the various Anglican Divines to whom we have already referred.

In Pusey's view the accusation that contemporary practice was Roman in that it involved habitual confession was errant in that it was the penitents who returned and not the confessors who summoned them. He also made the point that: "It is well known that one who has once tasted 'the benefits of absolution' for heavier sins, and found good for his soul in the special counsel of God's ministers, longs mostly to continue to 'open his grief'."[24] The background to this and similar remarks was Pusey's desire to keep people within the Church of England. To this end Pusey was prepared to go as far as possible in adopting aspects of theory and practice from the Roman Church and providing them with a rationale based on the Prayer Book. Denison, at least, expresses approval for this and some sympathy for Pusey as one struggling to lead souls to heaven and yet subject to inhibiting censure and criticism on several sides. "It seemed that Pusey could not win. On the one hand, his critics accused him of 'minuteness of detail'[25]; and on the other hand they

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[24]Pusey, E. 'Entire Absolution of the Penitent' *University Sermons 1843 - 1855* 1891

[25]This is a reference to Bishop Wilberforce's comments on withdrawing Pusey's licence to officiate.

attacked him for not interfering in the private devotions of his penitents."[26]

3.i. Confession and Identity: Anglo-Catholicism

This facilitation of moral and spiritual seriousness by borrowed Roman practices instigated a complex process by which the use of confession became a hall-mark not of the Church of England but of a particular wing of that Church. It was in this that confession lost some of its connection with the forgiveness of sins and gathered associations with being a matter of personal identity as, to use the jargon, 'a real catholic'. For the immediate product of the Oxford movement was not an awakening of the whole Church of England to the benefit of absolution but the establishment within that Church of a party which took from Cranmer and Hooker not so much a distinct understanding of the spiritual value of confession and absolution as a means of forgiveness as a license to practice confession along the lines laid down by the Fourth Lateran Council and affirmed by the Council of Trent.

This aspect of confession in Anglo-Catholicism is identified by W.S.F. Pickering in his sociological study of the movement. His point is that going to confession was, for the Anglo-Catholic missionaries, the equivalent of an emotional conversion experience in the evangelical missions.

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[26]Denison, K. 'Dr Pusey as Confessor and Spiritual Director' p217

"Within Anglo-Catholicism itself the making of confession was often seen as the seal upon one's embracing the ideas of the movement. If anyone made a confession she or he was indeed an Anglo-Catholic! The problem which faced High Churchmen and Anglo-Catholics alike was, of course, the fact that followers had not grown up in a church where it was the custom to go to confession. It was no part of their religio-cultural world. Anglican penitents had to be led into a new country - to something that was lonely, private, and strange. They had to be encouraged to perform an unusual act and to be convinced of its merit in a milieu where it was not practised at all."[27]

As Pickering goes on to say there were plenty of, to use his term, Anglo-Papalists who went much further in urging people to confession than the discrete suggestion that it was a possibility for the particularly burdened conscience.[28] But by the same token the majority of Anglo-Catholics took what he calls a pragmatic approach reflecting the epigram 'some should, all may, none must'. But even if Pickering is right, and his analysis, it will be recalled, is a sociological and not a theological one, it should be stressed that the goal for Pusey and others was to reintegrate personal confession into the liturgical ministry of forgiveness within the Church of England as a whole. To return to Pusey: "Consciences are burdened. There is a provision on the part of God, in His Church, to relieve them. They wish to be, and to know that they are, in a state of grace. God has provided a means, however deeply any have fallen, to replace them in it."[29]

But the matter of ministering to burdened consciences is not simple. Burdened consciences have an ethical and theological context, and in the case of the Oxford Movement this was informed by Pusey's understanding of the gravity of post-baptismal sin. The understanding of confession in the Anglican reformation implied a good deal of subjectivism and freedom on the part of the individual. It was predicated on the assumption that confession would be

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[27]Pickering, W.S.F. *Anglo-Catholicism* p78

[28]Pickering, W.S.F. *Anglo-Catholicism* p79

[29]Pusey, E. 'Entire Absolution of the Penitent' Preface piii in *University Sermons 1843 - 1855*

irregular and in response to some crisis of health or conscience or both. What Pusey helped to establish had its roots not in the more or less untutored griefs of a guilty conscience but quite sophisticated theological ideas. While not being a Romaniser in any sense Pusey's theology did begin in Roman rather than in Anglican presuppositions. It was not just that Gaume was a worthy manual of advice to confessors but that if you construed the need for confession after the model and example of Pusey then you were doing so in a Roman rather than in a Hookerian or Taylorian way. This theology, and the use of this advice, had in it a logic which would lead to the practice and preaching of repeated or habitual confession.

Habitual confession is the product not of receiving the benefits of absolution as envisaged by the Book of Common Prayer but of the theology which stresses the urgency of overcoming post-baptismal sin and which removes not only the priority of the untheologised subjectivity of the individual but also the Reformation emphasis on the over-riding significance of the faith of the individual as the cause of forgiveness. Anglo-Catholicism was informed not only by the inestimable benefit of the rediscovery of a long-since neglected aspect of Anglican liturgical ministry, but also by Pusey's personal spirituality which demanded deep penitence and which included habitual confession.

4. PROTESTANT REAPPROPRIATION

Two writers have had considerable influence on the development of the Anglican practice and use of confession in the twentieth century. Neither wrote in English and neither were Anglicans. However Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *The Cost of Discipleship* and *Life Together* and Max Thurian's *Confession* have had considerable influence on the Anglican practice of and attitudes towards confession. This point is not made to denigrate the scholarly works of people like Kirk, Mortimer or Telfer, nor the more pastoral but not inconsiderable books by Ross or Smith. The point is that until the latter part of this century English Anglicans tended to collude in the fantasy that confession was part of a neo-Ritualist Romance tolerated as an eccentric and esoteric and rather semi-detached area of the Church.

The translation of Bonhoeffer and Thurian into English in the 1950s, however, marked the beginning of the end of this fantasy. Two of the books owe their provenance to Adolf Hitler. *Living Together* was written from and for the seminary of the German 'Confessing Church' at Finkenwalde. Thurian's *Confession* was written when the author was a member of the Community of Reconciliation at Taizé in France. Both, then, are products not only of a Christian response to evil but also of a communal response to evil. For just as Finkenwalde was a sanctuary and place of preparation for those who would oppose Nazism within Germany, so the community at Taizé was a place where refugees from the war would find refuge and hospitality.

4.i. The Power of Absolution M Thurian

The idea of Protestant or ecumenical community being a spiritual resource for the Church of England may never have been possible were it not for the experience of the war. But post-war Europe and post-imperial Britain framed a reasonably overt and obvious spiritual agenda on which questions of reconciliation and forgiveness and community had an important place. In addition there was a less coherent point: that continental Protestants could safely be assumed not to be closet Roman Catholics. This was especially important in the reception of Thurian's work even if it was a rather ironic one given his subsequent joining of that Communion. But the fact that his rather disjointed book begins with Calvin enjoining confession in his *Institutes* and ends with the exhortations to confession from Luther's *Great* and *Little Catechisms* was, as it was intended to be, a challenge to the assumption that confession was a mark of the Roman Catholic Church.

Thurian goes on to present the case for confession based on James 5 and absolution based on Matthew 16 and to show that this is an aspect of the ministry of the Church. He does this without the references to Roman Catholic teaching which characterise much English writing on the subject, and without reference to the Book of Common Prayer. He argues that Calvin's rejection of auricular confession was merely a rejection of the distortions, not of the need

to confess and the power of absolution.[30] And he summarises the Protestant view as one which stresses not penance but forgiveness:

> "The act of 'penance' consists rather in the *absolution* than in the contrition, confession and satisfaction, rather in the promise of God and the faith of the penitent than in works of reparation. Such works are the signs of mercy freely granted, and never a condition of forgiveness. Absolution is sacramental for Lutherans; it is linked with the particular teaching of the Gospel for Calvinists. Contrition is always imperfect and is only a more or less 'hypocritical' sign of our sinful nature, although necessary. Confession is useful but must remain free. There is no satisfaction possible (by prayer, fasting and almsgiving), Christ alone having made satisfaction, once for all; nevertheless it is necessary to make amends for one's sins to those whom one has wronged. The usual minister of confession is the pastor. The effect of 'penitence' is the *remission of sins* and *renewed obedience*."[31]

Thurian's combination of scholarship, psychological awareness and practical suggestion (the book includes a form of confession and suggestions for self-examination) made it a powerful contribution to post-war pastoral theology. The chapter on confession and psycho-analysis made helpful distinctions between the practices and argued that while it might be possible to psychoanalyse the sanctity out of the saints a little madness was a good thing in Christians. This is a tremendously sensitive area and Thurian was correct to venture into it. His meaning was that the goals of psychoanalysis and of holy living were different. Certainly the various schools of psychotherapy have values and among these will be some which are inconsistent with the priorities of the Gospel. But it was unfortunate that this secondary point obscured the much more significant issue that confession and psychoanalysis are compatible in as much as one was dealing with the subject as wounded victim and the other construed the individual as responsible agent.[32]

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[30] Thurian, M. *Confession* p38

[31] Thurian, M. *Confession* p39

[32] Many individuals are, of course, both wounded victim *and* responsible agent.

The tàsk of absolution is to address the sinner as responsible and therefore guilty, and this is the subject of Thurian's most significant contribution to Protestant theology. He argues against the Calvinsistic stress on the preaching of forgiveness on the grounds of an incarnational ecclesiology.

> "The power to forgive, like that of healing, since it is the privilege of the Son of man, is also 'given unto men' in so far as they are united with Christ in the Church. The Church, the Body of Christ, which today means the humanity of Jesus at work in this world, retains this power of absolution. It is not a question only of preaching forgiveness, but of actually granting it. The Church has not only a duty to preach divine mercy in order to arouse faith and the assurance of forgiveness, but also the power effectively to remit sins by the efficacious sign of absolution."[33]

The language reveals that this is for Thurian a sacramental matter, but the sacrament is not of penance, still less of confession, but of absolution.

> "It is not a question of the ministry of preaching only, but of a word and an act which operate what they signify. Christ did not say that their sins would be remitted who by faith appropriated to themselves the promise of forgiveness when it was preached to them. He said: 'Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them'. We have here an example of a sacramental act."[34]

He acknowledges that it is possible to be forgiven by faith in response to the preached word of God: "I can hear a sermon on the infinite mercy of God, and effectually experience forgiveness, if I receive the words of the preacher in true faith and in the spirit of prayer."[35] But this is a weak form of forgiveness. The point about absolution is that it is an invincible forgiveness. "In a sacrament God in a sense compels the faith of the believer, however weak it be,

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[33]Thurian, M. *Confession* p50
[34]Thurian, M. *Confession* p51/52
[35]Thurian, M. *Confession* p53

and accomplishes for him and in him the work signified by the sacrament, far beyond all he can ask or think."[36]

Thurian, then, presents a high sacramental doctrine in Reformation clothes. His understanding is of a piece with that in Luther's *Greater Catechism* which he uses as a conclusion to his book. Christians are free to decide for themselves whether or not to go to confession. But like Luther before him Thurian sought to urge people to be penitents and to receive the grace of absolution. "To sum up, we do not want any compulsion, but whoever does not heed our preaching and does not obey our exhortation, ought not to share in the benefits of the Gospel, and we do not wish to have anything in common with such a man."[37] The words are Luther's but the sentiment is precisely that of Thurian. It is not fair to say that this call was heeded and responded to in the way that either hoped. What happened, however, was that the call was heard and the point that the sacrament of absolution can be part of Reformed Christianity has been registered. There was within it, as we have seen, more stress on the importance of confession, and the assumption that this should be habitual in the life of the Christian than most self-consciously non-Roman Anglican writers would allow themselves, but this is not the central point of impact. The main effect of the book was to advertise confession as a means not of penance but of absolution, that is the assurance of forgiveness.

4.ii. Confession and Community D Bonhoeffer

The Cost of Discipleship was a book which reasserted the importance of individual seriousness and effort in the practice of the Christian religion. In it Bonhoeffer preaches a gospel not of religionless Christianity but of costly grace. It is in the context of this that he makes remarks which sound increasingly unprotestant. "Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession."[38] The confession of sin is crucial because it is the only way of rendering

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[36]Thurian, M. *Confession* p53
[37]Thurian, M. *Confession* p146
[38]Bonhoeffer, D. *The Cost of Discipleship* p36

the individual open and truthful. It is a form of asceticism which inculcates the virtues necessary for fellowship and discipleship.

> "Complete truthfulness is only possible where sin has been uncovered, and forgiven by Jesus. Only those who are in a state of truthfulness through the confession of their sin to Jesus are not ashamed to tell the truth wherever it must be told. The truthfulness which Jesus demands from his followers is the self-abnegation which does not hide sin. Nothing is then hidden, everything is brought forth into the light of day."[39]

That there is no doubt that Bonhoeffer had some form of auricular confession in mind rather than the private penitential response to hearing the word of penance and forgiveness preached is clarified by the following passage which comes in the penultimate chapter of his book. The passage comes from a section where Bonhoeffer is discussing the forgiveness of sins and the need for the Church to be a disciplining community, binding as well as loosing, not in the interests of perfectionism, but "to establish... a community consisting of men who really live under the forgiving mercy of God."[40] Sacramental confession and absolution is seen as integral to this discipline.

> "In addition to examination of the faith, there is also the sacramental confession, wherein the Christian seeks and finds assurance that his sins are forgiven. Confession is the God-given remedy for self-deception and self-indulgence. When we confess our sins before a brother-Christian, we are mortifying the pride of the flesh and delivering it up to shame and death through Christ. Then through the word of absolution we rise as new men, utterly dependent on the mercy of God. Confession is thus a genuine part of the life of the saints, and one of the gifts of grace. But if it is wrongly used, punishment is bound to ensue. In confession, the Christian is conformed to the death of Christ. 'When I admonish men to come to confession, I am simply urging them to be Christians. (Luther, *Great Catechism*)".[41]

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[39]Bonhoeffer, D. *The Cost of Discipleship* p125
[40]Bonhoeffer, D. *The Cost of Discipleship* p260
[41]Bonhoeffer, D. *The Cost of Discipleship* p260/1

Bonhoeffer became convinced of the value of oral confession through a variety of experiences. As Bethge records, he was moved by the spectacle of penitents of all ages making their confessions at Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome on the Monday of Holy week 1924. He recorded in his diary:

> "Children as well as adults confess with a real ardour which it is very moving to see. To many of these people confession is not an externally imposed 'must', but has become an inner need... Also it is not mere pedagogy, but to primitive people it is the only way of talking to God, while to the religiously more far-seeing it is the realisation of the idea of the Church fulfilling itself in confession and absolution."[42]

And in his seminary at Finkenwalde he moved his ordinands in the direction of mutual confession, suggesting that they preach an annual sermon on the value of confession stressing that it, "enabled a person to unload his conscience on to a brother in the place of God. For absolution by a brother in the name of God carried more conviction than absolution after general confession, fraught as this was with the danger of self-deception and self-forgiveness."[43]

These thoughts are followed up in a practical way in Bonhoeffer's little book on life in community. The final chapter 'Confession and Communion' begins with the exhortation in the epistle of James regarding mutual confession. His emphasis is on the social aspects of the practice of confession. It is therefore of a piece with the aim of the book which is to explore the spirituality of communal living. He argues that there is in unconfessed sin an isolation and loneliness to which confession and forgiveness is the only answer.

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[42]Bethge, E. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Fount/Collins: London) 1977 p39
[43]Bethge, E. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer* p384

"In confession the break-through to community takes place. Sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from the community. The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him, and the more deeply he becomes involved in it, the more disastrous is his isolation. Sin wants him to remain unknown. It shuns the light. In the darkness of the unexpressed it poisons the whole being of a person."[44]

But the confession of which he speaks is not to the whole community or congregation. Rather it is to a brother. Bonhoeffer's understanding of the individual in community is already social: "I meet the whole congregation in the one brother to whom I confess my sins and who forgives my sins. In the fellowship I find with this one brother I have already found fellowship with the whole congregation."[45] This confession is a humiliation, it breaks pride which is the root of sin. "In the confession of concrete sins the old man dies a painful, shameful death before the eyes of the brother."[46] In this way, that is to say through the painful shame and humiliation of the confession, the sinner is at one with Christ on the cross. He also links confession with baptism and resurrection to new life: "What happened to us in baptism is bestowed upon us anew in confession. We are delivered out of darkness into the kingdom of Jesus Christ. That is joyful news. Confession is the renewal of the joy of baptism."[47]

Against the tradition that forgiveness can be mediated through faith and personal prayer Bonhoeffer suggests that all too often this confession to God is merely confession to the self followed by self-forgiveness. Confession to God is not easier than confession to a brother, he declares, it is harder because at least the brother knows something about the inwardness of sin. But self-confession leading to self-forgiveness is vain; it can give no certainty. "Our brother breaks the circle of self-deception. A man who confesses his sins in the presence of a brother knows that he is no longer alone with himself; he experiences the presence of God in the reality of the

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[44]Bonhoeffer, D. *Life Together* p87/8
[45]Bonhoeffer, D. *Life Together* p88
[46]Bonhoeffer, D. *Life Together* p89
[47]Bonhoeffer, D. *Life Together* p90

other person".[48] For Bonhoeffer the power of absolution lies in its origin in the voice of another. "As the open confession of my sins to a brother insures me against self-deception, so, too, the assurance of forgiveness becomes fully certain to me only when it is spoken by a brother in the name of God. Mutual brotherly confession is given to us in order that we may be sure of divine forgiveness."[49]

Both Bonhoeffer and Thurian urge confession to a brother in order that absolution may be pronounced and the confessant be assured of forgiveness. Bonhoeffer locates this within the dual dynamic of costly discipleship for the individual in the context of communal life where the Eucharist is celebrated in a spirit of joyful reconciliation. Thurian has a more developmental view, seeing confession as part of the personal sanctification of the Christian involving a growth in grace and virtue of the individual in the presence of the real community of the Church. Both stress the importance of the social and communicative dynamics of the process and both stress that the absolver is a brother. The implicit doctrine of the priesthood in their writing is that of all believers and the power of the keys is deemed to be dispersed rather than given to the caste whose succession is continuous with the Apostle to whom those keys were personally handed. But if they are quite different to Roman Catholic and traditional Anglican teachers in this way they are closer to Rome in that they stress the importance of confession to the point of making it an obligation. Neither goes as far as that and Thurian is at pains to dissociate himself from the tired repetitive compulsory confession which is a consequence, in his view, of the decree of 1215.

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[48]Bonhoeffer, D. *Life Together* p91
[49]Bonhoeffer, D. *Life Together* p91

> "This juridical decree has unfortunately led the faithful to practise only the necessary spiritual minimum (Easter Confession and Communion), with dire results as regards the practice both of confession and communion. When the Church is reduced to fixing a necessary minimum, it is perhaps a sign that she has lost faith in the attraction of the treasures of grace."[50]

Bonhoeffer is equally careful to warn against the making of a pious work of confession.

> "Confession as a pious work is an invention of the devil. It is only God's offer of grace, help and forgiveness that could make us dare to enter the abyss of confession. We can confess solely for the sake of the promise of absolution. Confession as a routine duty is spiritual death; confession in reliance upon the promise is life. The forgiveness of sins is the sole ground and goal of confession."[51]

These two authors have been widely read in the Anglican Church, and the English publication of *Life Together* and *Confession* in the decade before the second Vatican Council mark the beginning of a new phase in the Anglican Church with regard to the practice of personal confession and absolution. They opened the door both for greater flexibility within those parts of the Church where confession was already established and suggested to those parts where confession was regarded with suspicion that there may be more in the tradition of non-obligatory private confession than ultra-montane sacerdotalism.

5. THE CONTEMPORARY SITUATION

5.i. Liturgical Provision

5.i.a. The Church of England

In 1980 the Church of England produced the Alternative Service Book (ASB). This was the culmination of a process which was marked by the establishment of the Liturgical Commission in 1955 and the

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[50]Thurian, M. *Confession* p64

[51]Bonhoeffer, D. *Life Together* p94

measure passed in 1965 which allowed experimentation with new forms of liturgical worship and the subsequent revision or replacement of many services. This process has naturally attracted a great deal of attention, much of which has focused on the question of the theological and cultural significance of various changes of language. One dimension of this process which has not been properly analysed is the extent to which there are profound differences in the way in which ASB handles the question of the liturgical forgiveness of sins.

In the first section of this chapter the significance of the office of the Visitation of the Sick, the exhortation to communion and the words of ordination for the practice of private confession were noted. It is of no small significance that the ASB neither includes nor revises any of this material. At one level this is of no moment since the Book of Common Prayer (BCP) remains, officially, the primary source, and equally officially, the ASB is not reckoned to instigate any theological change. However the absence of modern language versions of these texts is not without theoretical or practical importance.

The fate of this material is not at all different to that of penitential material more generally. The Commination, which was reckoned to be a somewhat pale analogue of early communal penitential practices, was not revised. The invitations to confession at Morning and Evening Prayer were truncated, and that in the communion rite similarly limited. Whereas the BCP had different prayers of confession and absolution in the Office and at the Eucharist ASB had but one standard form of confession and absolution for all occasions; the absolution being of the declaratory form.

These changes have received remarkably little attention given that they are so radical and touch on such a sensitive area of theology and practice. In advance of the publication of the ASB John Gunstone wrote an apologia for the decidedly less penitential nature of Series 3 Communion service. The problem with the prayer book, he argued, was that its Communion service was 'heavily penitential in atmosphere'. "The general confession in particular had been

criticised for being overlong and too grovelling. In Series 2, therefore, the Church of England provided a briefer form; but this, in its turn, was criticised for being too short and for lacking any expression of contrition."[52]

One of the aims of the liturgical revision was to render liturgies which were more transparent and which relied less on exhortations or explanatory rubrics. This, coupled with the tendency to introduce as much direct quotation from the Bible as could be accommodated, led to a removal of some of those very aspects of the BCP which were a contribution to a distinctly Anglican understanding of penance and forgiveness. The clearest example of this is to be found in the way in which the congregation is invited to join in the general confession in the Communion service. In Rite A of the ASB there is a Summary of the Law which is a vestige of the Ten Commandments as found in the BCP followed by the following words:

> *God so loved the world that he gave his only Son Jesus Christ to save us from our sins, to be our advocate in heaven and to bring us to eternal life.*
>
> *Let us confess our sins, in penitence and faith, firmly resolved to keep God's commandments and to live in love and peace with all men.*

The invitation in the BCP is as follows:

> *Ye that do truly and earnestly repent you of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbour, and intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God, and walking from henceforth in his holy ways; Draw near with faith, and take this Holy Sacrament to your comfort; and make your humble confession to Almighty God, meekly kneeling upon your knees.*[53]

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[52]Gunstone, J. 'The Act of Penitence' in Jasper, R.C.D. *The Eucharist Today* (London: SPCK)1974 p80

[53] An adapted form of this, which has some of the words in parentheses indicating that they may be omitted, is one of the several introductions to confession offered in the ASB in Rite B.

While the ASB is more overtly scriptural and eschatological the BCP is more ethical and human. It assumes that there will be real problems, personal and relational, and that these are an occasion for true and earnest repentance and for a humble approach to the throne of grace. The ASB assumes that penitence and faith are states which it is possible to be in and that the being in them is in some way independent of the making of the general confession. The two invitations differ, as well, with regard to the question of the significance of relationships. In the BCP relational repair is the *sine qua non* of the process whereas the ASB assumes that relationships of love and peace will be a product of a resolution which is implicitly being affirmed by the process of confession, absolution and communion.

Close reading reveals many layers of theological difference between the prayers of confession in the ASB and the BCP.[54] The absolution in the ASB, while apparently a simple abbreviation of the BCP form, does in fact express a different understanding of forgiveness or at least its significance. The editing removes the reformation emphasis that forgiveness is based not only on repentance but also on faith. The line 'who forgives all who truly repent' is the most problematic of the new form. Its rhetorical quality depends on a notional difference between repentance and *true* repentance. This is difficult because the rhetoric is neither strong enough, nor is it in the appropriate place, to deepen a sense of repentance. Placed in the absolution it gives the impression of being a condition or a limitation on forgiveness. In the BCP the equivalent sentence may not be concise but it is acceptable because it conforms the prayer to the familiar collect form: 'who of his great mercy hath promised forgiveness to all them that with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto him' is manifestly a description of the *hesed* of God in a way in which 'who forgives all those who truly repent' is not. The redundant word 'truly' can not but draw attention to itself and as it does so it subverts the power of the prayer. Moreover, in the context of the lengthy and syntactically complex confession of the BCP, it is clear that the forthcoming absolution applies to those who have

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[54]Important points on this subject are made by Catherine Pickstock on the basis of linguistic analyses. See her 'The Confession' to appear in *Theology* .

joined in that confession. The less demanding prose of the ASB, however, does not facilitate the experience of contrition to the same degree, and consequently heightens any nascent anxiety.

The Alternative Service Book of the Church of England, then, does not furnish material which is valuable in the liturgical forgiveness of sins. This analysis has necessarily concentrated on the material for general confession and absolution because that is all there is. The gap with regard to a private form of confession and absolution has not, however, gone unnoticed.

Two publications have sought to redress this problem in the course of the 1980s. The Liturgical Commission produced services and prayers for *Lent, Holy Week and Easter* which included three services of penance. The first two were orders for common prayer based on a series of readings and canticles, followed by a litany leading up to corporate confession and absolution and concluding with further prayers. The third was merely a prayer of absolution 'which may be used for the quieting of individual conscience'. In 1988 David Silk[55] in an overt attempt to strengthen the penitential aspect of alternative, that is contemporary, liturgies published a compilation of various materials. As well as several services of penitence and many penitential prayers Silk drew particular attention to the place which the *Kyrie Eleison* has in penitence.

Silk stresses that the *Kyrie* has a range of reference and a tradition of use which is much broader than penitence, and by implication much wider than prayer for forgiveness. He sees it as "[a general] acknowledgement of the human condition and its dependence on the divine mercy."[56] He therefore contends that it is not an alternative to the *Gloria* suitable for Lent but something distinct. His material suggests two uses however. One, and the material of contemporary Roman Catholic provenance is in this category, interleaves the *kyries* themselves with indirect prayers for, or expressions of faith in, the forgiveness of God, and these are met by a brief and precatory absolution: "May Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins,

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[55]Silk, D. *In Penitence and Faith* (London: Mowbray) 1988
[56]Silk, D. *In Penitence and Faith* p10

and bring us to everlasting life. Amen"[57] The other forms, all of which come from Portsmouth Cathedral, tend to weave passages of scripture which are either penitential or seasonal around the *kyries.*[58]

Silk also includes a form for the reconciliation of a penitent. Such a liturgy has yet to appear in a properly authorised Church of England publication, the stumbling block being General Synod's refusal to agree to an indicative form of absolution. Silk overcomes this by suggesting two alternative forms, the second is that from the office for the Visitation of the Sick of the Book of Common Prayer and the first is the absolution found in *Lent, Holy Week and Easter.*

5.i.b. The Episcopal Church of the United States of America.

The American equivalent of the ASB[59] is not an alternative to but an update of the Book of Common Prayer. It is therefore a different kind of document to the ASB as it replaces previous editions. It contains both traditional and contemporary forms of service, collects and so on but whatever it fails to include is no longer a part of the liturgy of the church. As in the ASB the words from the gospel of John in the ordinal are no longer a part of the rite. It retains, however, a form of exhortation in the Eucharist which includes an emphasis not only on the importance of the worthy reception of the sacrament but also a reflection of the BCP's emphasis on the setting in good order of relationships and the suggestion that the counsel and absolution of a priest might meet the needs of a scrupulous or doubtful conscience. By quoting the relevant section in full it becomes clear that this exhortation balances the various elements which make up for the need for

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[57]Silk, D. *In Penitence and Faith* p10ff

[58]Silk, D. *In Penitence and Faith* p15ff For example:
Praise the Lord O my soul, and forget not all his benefits:
Lord have mercy. *Lord have mercy.*
Who forgives all your sin and heals all your infirmities.
Christ have mercy. *Christ have mercy*
Who saves your life from destruction, and crowns you with mercy and loving kindness:
Lord have mercy. *Lord have mercy.*

[59]*The Book of Common Prayer according to the Use of The Episcopal Church* (The Seabury Press)1979 (BCPECUSA)

personal liturgical forgiveness in the way which is both ethical and subjective which we observed to be characteristic of the Anglican approach in the first sections of this chapter.

> *Acknowledge your sins before Almighty God, with full purpose of amendment of life, being ready to make restitution for all injuries and wrongs done by you to others; and also being ready to forgive those who have offended you, in order that you yourselves may be forgiven. And then, being reconciled to one another, come to the banquet of that most heavenly food.*
>
> *And if, in your preparation, you need help and counsel, then go and open yourself to a discreet and understanding priest, and confess your sins, that you may receive the benefit of absolution, and spiritual counsel and advice; to the removal of scruple and doubt, the assurance of pardon, and the strengthening of your faith."*[60]

The Book of Common Prayer of the Episcopal Church of the United States of America does emphasise the need for penitence on the way to the altar and to this end includes two rites of penitence which may be used as preparation for the Eucharist or as separate services. On the other hand there is a rubric in the Eucharistic Rite proper which indicates that the confession may on occasion be omitted. The book also contains an order for the Ministration of the Sick which allows for the possibility of confession and absolution. The introductory rubric is that, 'the priest may suggest the making of a special confession, if the sick person's conscience is troubled'.[61] This is more neutral than some of the early Anglican formularies. The case here is that a conscience should show evidence of being troubled before confession is suggested.

Two forms of Reconciliation of a Penitent which may be used by the healthy as well as the sick are included. The introduction to the rites makes it clear that they may be used by any who desire it and that only bishops and priests might pronounce the absolution. Deacons or lay people may hear confessions provided that they make it clear in advance that the absolution will be a prayer for, rather

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[60]BCPECUSA p317
[61]BCPECUSA p454

than an assurance of, forgiveness.[62] The introduction also states that the priest will give advice, and absolution - in that order, and may then assign a small devotional task as 'a sign of penitence and thanksgiving'.

Twenty years ago it seemed that the Anglican Churches in England and the United States were poles apart with regard to the question of liturgical forgiveness. The anxiety about the overly penitential tone of the BCP coupled with fears about indicative absolution and the desire to replace Cranmerian prose with twentieth century midrash led to the production of a book which seriously underestimated the part which liturgy can play in the forgiveness of sins. Like the writing of Thurian and Bonhoeffer, however, the Book of Common Prayer of the Episcopal Church of the United States of America served as encouragement and stimulation to those who perceived, or who were beginning to perceive, this deficiency. As we have seen, it enshrines the Anglican position with regard to liturgical forgiveness very cogently at the same time as providing forms for personal and corporate penance and forgiveness. In the Church of England the ASB is not the last word in this area, and the two subsequent publications which we have considered have been particularly significant in regenerating the possibility of liturgical forgiveness.

5.ii. Current Practice

The most remarkable thing about the contemporary situation regarding confession and absolution in the Anglican Church is not only the amount of reflection on the practice but also its generally sanguine tone. Even those Anglican writers who report declining numbers of penitents find good reasons for this and also take a positive view with regard to the change in style of confessions which are typically made. For instance, in reporting on contemporary Anglican practice in *Societas Liturgicas* David Holeton makes the following assertion.

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[62]BCPECUSA p446

"The frequency with which priests are being called upon to hear confessions is increasing and the spectrum of individuals seeking this form of reconciliation is broadening. The idea of individual reconciliation would seem to be less foreign to the average Anglican than it was two decades ago and an increasing number of clergy, from a variety of theological traditions within Anglicanism, feel free to suggest to parishioners that penance might be appropriate for them."[63]

Sadly Holeton provides no documentary evidence to support these contentions. This is particularly unfortunate because of the contrast which this suggests between the fates of confession within the Roman and Anglican communions. But he is not alone in reporting such a trend. John Gilling, parish priest of St Mary's Bourne Street, has written in similar vein with regard to his observations on the sacrament of reconciliation over the last two decades. "It is often said that confession is dying out in present day [Anglo] Catholicism. I can only speak from my experience as a parish priest... [That] the use of the sacrament of reconciliation has grown and not diminished in the last fifteen years...."[64]

Whether or not it is possible to confirm these observations with empirical evidence is a moot point. Certainly there are those who would have it otherwise. Introducing a very significant volume of essays entitled *Confession and Absolution*[65], Perry Butler reports on a survey of clerical and lay attitudes with regard to aspects of confession.[66] Limited as the value of these data are they are at least as useful as those provided by Holeton and Gilling. Butler's older friends remark that the number of penitents appears to have declined over the years: "Large queues in central London churches at the major festivals seem a thing of the past."[67] On the other hand, he remarks that it seems to be the case that a wider variety of

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[63]Holeton, D. 'Penance in the Churches of the Anglican Communion' in *Studia Liturgica* 18 1988 p98

[64]Gilling, J. 'Reconciliation' in Eds. Greenhalgh, J. and Russell, E. *Signs of Faith, Hope and Love* (London: St Mary's Bourne Street) 1987 p88

[65]Butler, P. 'Confession Today' in Eds. Dudley, M. and Rowell, G. *Confession and Absolution*

[66]This was not a published survey, rather it was one which Butler conducted himself.

[67]Butler, P. 'Confession Today' p2

priests are hearing confessions now in a wider variety of situations. Consequently the number of people in a queue at St Alban's, Holborn on Maundy Thursday is not a reliable indicator of the more general picture. Indeed this point about the variety of forms and the movement from the old style confession to something less ordered, less pious, less perfunctory and more in pursuit of counsel is a trend that several Anglican confessors remark upon. "Confessions today are often longer and looser than in the past and are sometimes more akin to the pastoral interview."[68] Moreover the impression gleaned from his priest friends was that people, "seemed to find it harder to confess specific sins in a concrete way and often tended to articulate a vaguer (though no less real) sense of 'sinfulness' in their lives and relationships."[69] And in a later section he makes the related comment that, "many confessions today, especially of the particularly articulate, tend to consist more of the 'I am' than the 'I have'."[70]

While based on anecdotal evidence this is a far from trivial point. It suggests that a shift has gone on in the meaning of the idea of confession and absolution. It is clear what is going on when a penitent enumerates a list of guilty sins and asks, in contrition, for divine forgiveness. They are asking to have their conscience cleared, their account settled, their guilt removed. When the confession is in terms of 'I am', or perhaps 'I have become' the matter is not one of specific guilt so much as something more general. One possible meaning of this is that whereas the experience and reality of guilt lies behind the first form of confession it is the experience and reality of shame which lies behind the second. In the following chapter the nature and meaning of guilt and shame will be explored in such a way as to facilitate a consideration of this possibility that there is in contemporary confession not only a disclosure of shame, but also a desire for the relief or healing of shame; and if so, whether or not this relief or healing of shame can be called forgiveness.

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[68]Butler, P. 'Confession Today' p3
[69]Butler, P. 'Confession Today' p3
[70]Butler, P. 'Confession Today' p7

6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter the specifically Anglican approach to liturgical forgiveness has been examined. It has become clear that while auricular confession has not had the same place in ecclesiastical discipline in this communion as it has had in Roman Catholicism it has a high place in the ministry of healing. Its place as something to relieve the burden of the guilty conscience has been established in the liturgical books of the Anglican Church as well as in the writings of the normative theologians and in particular those of Richard Hooker.

Several strands of theology and practice run together in liturgical forgiveness. Primary among them is the element of moral seriousness which we discerned in the approach of Pusey, and this is coupled with the pastoral desire to meet the needs of the penitent: "consciences *are* burdened" he wrote, and for that reason it is appropriate for the Church to allow for their unburdening. On the other hand, as the example of Pusey nicely illustrates, Anglicans who desire to enrich the liturgical or sacramental life of the Church often look to Rome for leadership. But it must not be forgotten that Pusey's translation of Gaume's manual was an edited translation for Anglican use, nor must such looking be taken as evidence that confession and absolution are not theologically and psychologically different in the two contexts.

One issue on which the Anglican approach to confession differs from the Roman Catholic is that of the place of habitual confession. The twentieth century has certainly seen exceptions to this but there is a sense in Anglicanism that the conscience should be left to bring itself to confession rather than be disciplined into it. 'None must' is an important aspect of the Anglican approach although there have been many writers and preachers who have urged that 'more should' and those who do 'should more often'.[71]

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[71] Pusey, for instance writes that "But no amount of voluntary confession involves the restoration of compulsory; the one is the prompting of conscience within, the

But these are exceptions, exceptions of which W.S.F. Pickering makes rather too much in his analysis of Anglo-Catholicism.[72] More important than this is the way in which the practice of confession has a recurrent presence in the Anglican practices of liturgical forgiveness. Needless to say these practices and the accompanying theology have changed and developed over time. Anglicans have been inspired by theologians outside Anglicanism as our study of Bonhoeffer and Thurian have suggested.

Anglican liturgical and pastoral practice is developmental and eclectic. It is not driven by theological or even theoretical considerations in the same way as it is in the Roman Catholic Church. This means that it is more responsive to influences which come from outside the Church. Anglican liturgy has become less penitential not only because new Prayer Books have been authorised but also as more and more of the penitential aspects of the liturgy were routinely deleted. This process applies in the sphere of liturgical forgiveness as well as anywhere else. General confession and absolution in the course of public worship remain central in the Anglican experience of forgiveness, but the mediation of the forgiving grace of God through personal confession has place beside it not only as part of the tradition, but also as a developing and dynamic part of Church life: what Bonhoeffer would call discipleship and life together.

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other the provision of discipline without." Pusey, E. 'Entire Absolution of the Penitent' Preface pxv in *University Sermons 1843 - 1855*

[72]Pickering, W.S.F. *Anglo-Catholicism*

CHAPTER SEVEN

GUILT AND SHAME

1. THE COMPLEXITY OF GUILT

There can be no doubt that guilt is one of the most important concepts in our culture. It is closely connected to the ideals of responsibility and freedom; it has been a major factor in the spirituality of the western Church; it is a corner-stone in jurisprudence, and a central problem for psychoanalytic thought.

A central predicate in psychoanalytic thought is that the affect guilt may be caused in a variety of ways of which the responsible infringement of laws is but a minor example. Its imperative has been the alleviation of neurotic guilt caused, according to Freudian theory, by fear of punishment by the introjected parent as super-ego. Our concern, however, is not with the detail of psychoanalytic theory but with its significance for a general understanding of guilt. The psychological approach (and this is just as true of behaviourism which has focused on the way in which fear is conditioned by experience as it is for psychoanalysis) has encouraged a distancing between the feelings and the moral self, and in particular an alienation between the sense of guilt and that of responsibility.[1] It is psychological theories which lie behind the inclination to 'blame the parents' and while it is right to draw attention to the aetiology of guilt feelings in the innocent, it is ethically negligent to fail to analyse the emotional responses which occur as people reflect on actions which are blameworthy. Psychology has done us a service in suggesting that guilt, or tenderness of conscience, is not a perfectly calibrated ethical thermometer, but it has done us a disservice in suggesting that the relationship between guilt and fault is not important.

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[1]This was the point made by Bieritz in the article considered in the introduction.

It is therefore strangely necessary to say that sometimes people who feel guilty are guilty. But while the feeling is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for guilt to be 'real' it is certainly necessary for forgiveness. (It is not, of course necessary to feel guilt in order to be punished and that the innocent can be punished but not forgiven indicates an important difference between the concepts.) But because guilt may be either neurotic or real it does not follow that its confession will necessarily lead to either punishment or forgiveness. A friend or counsellor who hears a confession of guilt feelings may well enter into a critique of the confession, suggesting more or less directly that the feelings are not entirely appropriate thereby attempting, as one writer put it, to weaken the super-ego.

A similar pattern may also emerge when the confession is made in a religious context. But in this case any denial of the validity of guilt feelings will be meant and experienced differently. This is because the Christian tradition of human guilt and sin predates the twentieth century suspicion about the psychological or moral health of guilt feelings. There is, especially in Christianity with its doctrine of original sin, its rites of penance, its penitential seasons, its general confessions and absolution, its baptismal washing and Eucharistic sacrifice 'for the forgiveness of sins', something approaching a sacralisation of guilt itself. By exhorting individuals to examine their consciences and to repent, Christian spirituality can encourage them to view guilt as the most important emotion. In other words, there is a very considerable clash of style between what we might call neo-Freudian and neo-Augustinian estimation of the nature and significance of guilt. Moreover such is the complexity of the contemporary world that any confession of guilt is likely to incorporate, one way or another, both of these approaches.

The significance of this analysis is that it shows just how complex the apparently simple matter of expressing guilt is. In the late twentieth century it is invariably and inevitably difficult to know how to respond to the confession of guilt. The rhetoric of guilt has become just as tense and confused as the emotion itself. This

congruence is very positive, but it is one of the fundamental problems with which any theology of forgiveness must deal.

Having considered the complexity of real and neurotic, objective and subjective guilt it is important to look more closely at objective, real guilt. Even this is not straightforward, however. There is an important distinction to be made, for instance, between legal and moral guilt. Legal guilt is a technical concept enshrined within a process which defines it. The judgement is made in an authorised and public way and the accused has to come to terms with it as they choose. Moral guilt is different in as much as ethics is distinct from law. Thus any individual may be morally guilty but legally innocent or for that matter morally innocent and legally guilty. The details are not important. Of significance is that while in the contemporary world law is publicly defined to the extent to which circumstances demand clarification, morality, even religious morality often is not.

Thus there are important differences between legal and moral guilt which are in part to do with the privacy which attends to moral reasoning and the subjectivity which attends to theological ethics. Part of this derives from the emphasis which morality, as opposed to law, has on obligations and duties rather than prohibitions. The simplest form of guilt is that which derives from having 'done those things which we ought not to have done'. To break a 'thou shalt not' commandment is to be in the happiest state of real guilt. There is no need for anxiety. Rather the predominant emotion is fear in the face of impending punishment or retribution. This means that the only hope lies in making reparations. The situation of a 'thou shalt' commandment can be much more difficult. To be under an obligation 'to love the Lord thy God' or 'to love thy neighbour as thyself' is to be in a quite different situation. Judging success or failure is a tendentious matter, and yet it is a commandment and as such brings the spectre of judgement onto the horizon. It is this prospect of judgement which is a cause for anxiety. The spiritual nature of the basic and positive Judeo-Christian law means that living within its orbit is a perpetual source of a guilt which is neither neurotic in the sense that it is inappropriate nor real in the sense that it is

objective. This Judeo-Christian emotion, which derives from the central idea that God requires a response of love which it seems both important to meet and impossible to attain, cannot without misleading simplification be simply called guilt. It is more complex than guilt and has about it much which is more commonly thought of as shame.

2. GUILT AND SHAME IN GENESIS

Questions of identity and shame are fundamental in Christian theology. Indeed they are so basic that to call them original is to imply the opposite of novelty; so old and original are they that they can be seen to lie behind the fall narrative in Genesis.

> "And Adam said, I heard the sound of thee in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. And God said, Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" (Genesis 3: 10 & 11)

Judeo-Christian history has always had to choose how to interpret this action in its theologising about the meaning of redemption. If the action of disobedient eating is of the greatest significance then the question is one of guilt. If however the problem is not the action but the inability to live with the cognitive and emotional consequences of seeing and knowing then the matter is one of shame. Loss of innocence can refer either to the acquisition of guilt or of knowledge, and part of the genius of *Genesis* is to confound these categories. But theologies of redemption invariably focus on the problem of guilt. The fall narrative has been read as a story about sin as guilty disobedience and this has made redemption into a story about the removal of the guilt and the costly recovery of obedient order. Whoever wrote Genesis did so in such a way that, in the text, God's concern was with guilt. In the text, God's response prioritises the respective guilts of the different actors. For the serpent the guilt is for action, and for Adam the guilt is for listening to the woman; whereas for the woman it is not clear whether her guilt is for listening or speaking or both. But the shame story, for so long hidden behind aprons of fig, is one which is not only equally

important but also crucial to the plot of a complete redemption narrative.

The fall narrative is also a story about shame as Adam's answer suggests. As von Rad puts it: "they do not react to the loss of their innocence with a spiritual consciousness of guilt; rather they are afraid of their nakedness."[2] The man and woman hide from God because their newly revealed nakedness is a source of fear in the presence of God. But even in the absence of God it is a source of embarrassment, their response to learning that they are naked is to cover it up. When the woman and the man ate of the fruit of the tree their eyes were open to their respective nakedness and their minds to the idea that this was problematic. Genesis does not explain what the problem with nakedness is, it merely states that they saw themselves and each other. The question of why nakedness is a problem is a question about shame. Von Rad asserts that: "Shame always seeks to conceal, it is afraid of 'nakedness'..."[3] but he fails to ask why this is.

For Augustine the pathos of the fall is in the loss of grace caused by the half-openness of their eyes which prevented them from recognising, "what a blessing they were given in the garment of grace, in as much as their members did not know how to rebel against their will."[4] He goes on to explain how the post-lapsarian body is differently responsive to the body graceful so that, "there appeared in the movements of their body a certain novelty, which made nakedness shameful. It made them self-conscious and embarrassed."[5] There is confession in his concern about this 'novelty' which he reckons to be 'insubordination of their flesh'. Augustine writes that, "modesty, from a sense of shame, covered what was excited to disobedience by lust, in defiance of a will which had been condemned for the guilt of disobedience"[6]. He is clearly pleased and relieved when he comes to the observation that, "from then onwards the practice of concealing the pudenda has

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[2]von Rad, G. *Genesis* (London: SCM) 1961 p91
[3]von Rad, G. *Genesis* p91
[4]Augustine *City of God* (London: Penguin) 1972 p578
[5]Augustine *City of God* p578
[6]Augustine *City of God* p579

become a deep rooted habit in all peoples".[7] He reads in the account a justification of keeping the shameful private. But privacy can only hide shame, it can not do away with it: while hiding may be a way of coping, it is not a way of redeeming.

Augustine's account suggests confusion about responsibility and identity. He does not seem to concede, for instance, that the genitals are innocent, believing them to be 'insubordinate', with a life and inclination which is not subject to reason or control. He finds an analogy between God and humanity and the person and their genitals. But genitals, however lively and embarrassing, cannot lose their innocence or gain a responsible, independent identity. They cannot, like the people in the story, become knowing. Augustine believes that the narrative of the fall is saying that God's experience of people is like Augustine's experience of his genitalia. Unlike human beings however, human genitalia do not act, they are not agents. Genitals, like animals, can be neither guilty nor innocent, they can be unpredictable but not insubordinate. Human beings can be responsible and therefore guilty and flawed and therefore ashamed. But the act of making aprons changes nothing.

A more helpful approach to the way in which the fall narrative in Genesis is a story of shame is provided by Jean Paul Sartre's account of shame. In *Being and Nothingness* Sartre proposed that shame was the product of realising that one was subject to the objectifying *look* of the other. "[Shame is] the recognition of the fact that I am indeed that object which the other is looking at and judging."[8] Sartre's view is that shame has little to do with morality but a great deal to do with the way in which subjectivity is relativized.

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[7]Augustine *City of God* p579

[8]Sartre, J.P. *Being and Nothingness* (London: Routledge) 1969 p261

"Pure shame is not a feeling of being this or that guilty object but in general of being *an* object; that is of *recognising myself* in this degraded, fixed, and dependent being which I am for the other. Shame is the feeling of an *original fall*, not because of the fact that I have committed this or that particular fault but simply that I have fallen into the world in the midst of things and that I need the mediation of the Other to be what I am."[9]

On this view, nakedness is only problematic because it is that which reveals identity as difference. If there were no difference there would be no 'Other' and nakedness would not be problematic. It provides a different hermeneutic for reading Genesis 3 than the Augustinian one which implies that the genitals are shameful because insubordinate and guilty. The Sartrean starting point lies in the observation that observed *difference* is a source of shame.

In the fall narrative God's response to guilt is to force different roles onto Adam and the as yet unnamed woman. In as much as this produces work and that the guilty conscience seems to like to work there is some health in it, (if that is, guilt-motivated work is healthy). But the addition of role differences to the already shame-inducing anatomical differences between men and women makes matters worse in terms of the dynamics of shame. The more different man and woman are, the greater the scope for mutual shame and the greater the need for privacy and separation. Attention to difference generates a dynamic of alienation so that over time genital privacy must be more and more carefully guarded and identities more and more firmly predicated on that which is hidden. As a consequence men and women are named differently and the context in which they share genital intimacy becomes a binding and exclusive relationship.

Shame and identity are linked in a way in which guilt and identity are not. Guilt is much more closely linked with responsibility which is only an aspect of identity. We are guilty for actions which are bad and which we responsibly perform. The response of the victims of our actions or the representatives of the collectivity whose morals we offend can be variously punitive or lenient, retributive or

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[9]Sartre, J.P. *Being and Nothingness* p288/9 (emphasis original)

forgiving. Thus although some might go to confession while others go to jail the effect in both cases is to disassociate the guilty actor from his guilt so that life may continue. The only questions which may be put to either prison or penance is whether they work as ways of removing guilt.

The narrative of shame, however, generates different questions. Shame is not a consequence of responsible wrongdoing but the appreciation that there is something wrong with the self. Whether this anxiety is neurotic or real is not especially important at this stage. Whether the shame be that of the wasted anorexic who thinks herself fat or that of the young German visiting Auschwitz the fundamental dynamics are the same. The problem is not with what you have done or thought or decided but with who you are. Certainly guilt will be in the background: the neurotic guilt of the anorexic who has had a sandwich for lunch and the real guilt of the German's forbears, but shame is more fundamental. It will remain after guilt has been dissipated and according to Melanie Klein is found in infants before the onset of guilt. Gabrielle Taylor describes shame as a *disformation* of the self in contrast to guilt which is identified as the beginnings of the growth of an alien self. Whatever the details of the meaning of this the general point that shame and guilt are differently connected to the self is paramount. To think metaphorically, the psychic alienation of guilt means that it is held at arm's length whereas shame is a condition of the heart. Alternatively, while guilt may be thought of as dark spots on an otherwise pure white soul, shame must be thought of as the discolouration of the whole. That is why covering up and hiding away are the classic responses, or attempts to cope, not with guilt but with shame.

But covering up and hiding away are not quite the same thing. Before each other Adam and the woman merely hide their genitalia, their difference. It is only in the presence of God that they hide altogether. This limitation of inter-human shame to the genitals is significant and is the beginning of a transformation of shame into guilt by the taking of responsibility for a limited, if symbolically significant, aspect of the self. Ashamed in each other's company the

enlightened couple do not hide from each other but cover the signs of their difference. When they hear the LORD however their aprons are more relevant than the nakedness which they cover. As the fig leaves cover the innocent genitals they also reveal the shame of the couple who suddenly realise their new exposure. Similarly their nervous hiding reveals shame anxiety manifest as fear of God. The couple are guilty with regard to what they have done but ashamed with regard to what they have seen and know. It is therefore important to reflect more deeply on the nature of shame.

3. THE STUDY OF SHAME

Guilt has received far more attention than shame in twentieth century thought. As Leon Wurmser could write as recently as 1981: "While guilt, anxiety, elation and depression have received abundant attention, I am not aware of much systematic enquiry into shame, with its manifold aspects and related attitudes and feelings."[10] Wurmser is introducing a psychoanalytic study of shame, but similar remarks could be made in ethics, psychology and theology. Looking up shame in either Alastair Campbell's *Dictionary of Pastoral Care*[11] or Rahner and Vorgrimler's Concise Theological Dictionary[12] is a fruitless task. In *The New Dictionary of Christian Ethics* James Childress makes the point that: "In the Jewish and Christian traditions, which emphasise the commands of a personal God, guilt tends to be primary".[13] Moreover anyone consulting *Psychological Abstracts* under the heading shame will find not a list of entries but the note to "see guilt".[14]

A reading of quite diverse late twentieth century moral reflections will however reveal that the concept of shame is if anything of greater importance than that of guilt. A sociologist who has

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[10]Wurmser, L. *The Mask of Shame* (London: John Hopkins) 1981 p16

[11]Campbell, A. *Dictionary of Pastoral Care* (London: SPCK) 1987

[12]Rahner, K. and Vorgrimler, H. *Concise Theological Dictionary* (London: Burns and Oates) 1965

[13]Childress, J. & Macquarrie, J. *A New Dictionary of Christian Ethics* (London: SCM) 1988 p584

[14]This point is made in Tangey, J.P. 'Moral Effect: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly' *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 61 No4 1991 p599

recently drawn attention to the significance of shame is Anthony Giddens in his reflections of the problems of the self in the contemporary era, what he calls Late-Modernity.

> "[Although] the mechanics of guilt have been very widely explored in the literature of psychoanalytic theory... in respect of problems of self-identity, *shame*, which has been less extensively discussed, is more important. The obverse of guilt is reparation; guilt concerns things done or not done... its prime emphasis tends to be on the discrete elements of behaviour and the modes of retribution that they suggest or entail."[15]

Giddens' point is not that questions of self-identity are new but that discourse about them is a particularly significant dimension of the second half of the twentieth century. An example of this is to be found in Primo Levi's analysis of the conscience of Auschwitz survivors. In *The Drowned and the Saved* he offers an analysis of shame which begins in his observation of the Russian soldiers' response to the Lager which they were liberating:

> "They did not greet us or smile; they seemed oppressed, not only by pity but also by confused restraint which sealed their mouths, and kept their eyes fastened on the funereal scene. It was the same shame that we knew so well, which submerged us after the selections, and every time we had to witness or undergo an outrage... [The shame] which a just man experiences when confronted by a crime committed by another, and he feels remorse because of its existence, because of its having been irrevocably introduced into the world of existing things, and because his will has proved non-existent or feeble and was incapable of putting up a good defence."[16]

Levi understands this, roughly, to be 'a feeling of guilt'; but it is not comparable to the guilt of the perpetrators of the crimes. None the less there is, he affirms, something guilty, culpable, something negative with which the self alone cannot deal, about having been impotently present at, or a witness to, certain kinds of crime.

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[15]Giddens, A. *Modernity and Self Identity* (Cambridge: Polity) 1991 p64
[16]Levi, P. *The Drowned and the Saved* (London: Michael Joseph) 1988 p54

Survivor guilt, or shame, is more than this, however. There is something irredeemable about 'having *failed in terms of human* solidarity' those whom one has survived. "Few survivors feel guilty about having deliberately damaged, robbed, or beaten a companion: those who did so... block out the memory; but by contrast almost everybody feels guilty of having omitted to offer help."[17] But such shame was not only known after liberation. Levi sees it as present in the many relatively unexplained and sudden deaths, deaths he attributes not to neurosis or the unnecessary worries of a tender conscience but to an "atavistic anguish, whose echo one hears in the second verse of Genesis".[18]

Shame may also be related to death in another way. Many survivors of Auschwitz and the other camps, including Levi himself, committed suicide. Analysis of individual cases is notoriously problematic but without pretending to make a scientific statement it is justifiable to mention shame and suicide in the same breath. While there are certain crimes for which the death penalty is upheld in some countries, thereby establishing a relation between guilt and death this is clearly a legal link. The link with shame, as Levi's account and the analysis of anorexia which will follow suggest, is much deeper than this. People may be executed because they are, rightly or wrongly, judged guilty of certain crimes, but they do not die of guilt. To die of shame however, has always seemed a possibility.

3.i. The Psychology of Shame

A relatively pioneering study into the nature and significance of shame was made in 1958 by Helen Lynd whose *On Shame and the Search for Identity* offers several arguments and insights the significance of which has only recently become fully apparent.[19] Lynd makes the point that shame has been misunderstood when thought about as the moral emotion of relatively primitive societies and argues that what she calls the guilt axis is insufficient for the

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[17]Levi, P. *The Drowned and the Saved* p59
[18]Levi, P. *The Drowned and the Saved* p65
[19]Lynd, H. *On Shame and the Search for Identity* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul) 1958

interpretation of personality.[20] She goes on to stress, and this is a point to which we will return, that shame is not only a kind of self-consciousness but also that there is in analysing the experience of shame, the potential of revealing a good deal about the self. Indeed that there is something intrinsically revelatory about shame in that it is often precipitated by 'unexpected exposure'. What she has in mind here is not so much the simple exposure of the naked body, which can be of course a source of shame, but more the exposure of a more or less successfully hidden part of the self. Shame is therefore an unwelcome and surprising emotion, one which is about that which it is difficult to accept and which is therefore itself difficult to acknowledge.

Lynd draws attention to the prevalence which shame has over guilt in both testaments of the Bible and in the writing of Shakespeare.[21] This suggests that shame is an emotion of some depth and not, as some of the anthropologists of culture would suggest, a feature of merely heteronomous societies where the individual has no authority to be involved with the generation of ethics or where self-judgement would be impossible. Indeed it is one of the features of shame that a broad range of self-judgements can trigger it. Shame is elicited by incongruities, conceits and vanities in a whole range of areas. Weakness can be shameful, as can clumsiness as well as the revelation of true or deep motives which contradict an impression of being motivated in say, a more altruistic way. We are ashamed when we realise that we have been making decisions on what prove to be false assumptions or erroneous beliefs. "Doubt replacing basic trust in the way of life of one's social group or in one's place in it can undermine the sense of one's own identity. Thus shame, an experience of violation of trust in oneself and in the world, may go deeper than guilt for a simple act."[22]

Another feature of shame is that it involves the whole self. Many authors mention this. Anthony Giddens, for instance finds shame to

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[20]Her analysis of guilt and shame in terms of different explanatory axes is something which Giddens quotes and pursues in his exploration of self-concept in his *Modernity and Self-Identity.*

[21]Lynd, H. *On Shame and the Search for Identity* p25

[22]Lynd, H. *On Shame and the Search for Identity* p47

be a particularly relevant emotion in his analysis of the contemporary predicaments of the self. As he puts it: "shame is essentially anxiety about the adequacy of the narrative by means of which the individual sustains a coherent biography"[23] Lynd shows that this connects with the way in which shame is an unpleasant surprise.

> "One does not, as in guilt, choose to engage in a specific act, a sin. Guilt frequently involves a sort of haggling anxiety, a weighing up of pros and cons prolonged over a period of time. The shameful situation frequently takes one by surprise. But one is overtaken by shame because *one's whole life has been a preparation for putting one in this situation.* One finds oneself in a situation in which hopes and purposes are invested in which anxiety about one's own adequacy may also be felt... it is because of this whole-life involvement that one can speak of an over-all ashamedness."[24] (emphasis mine)

It is this totality of shame which makes it so difficult to overcome. As Lynd puts it, there are mechanisms for dealing with guilt, be they confession, repentance, punishment or whatever, and the whole self can as it were set about the redemption of the part of the self which is guilty. But shame, "is not an isolated act that can be detached from the self ; the thing which is exposed is what I am".[25]

As we have noted shame has a complex relation to responsibility. One aspect of this is that shame can be experienced for non-culpable weakness or blameless, if naive, trust. Another aspect of this is that we can experience shame on behalf of others or through our relationship with them. Lynd draws attention to the shame which parents might experience through their children and children through their parents. But the circle of shame, she argues, is much wider than this and extends to the whole meaning of the universe or the nature of God. Such shame as this is deeply problematic because the individual is not responsible and yet is identified with that which is shamefully revealed. This draws attention to the associations of shame with powerlessness and vulnerability.

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[23]Giddens, A. *Modernity and Self Identity* p65
[24]Lynd, H. *On Shame and the Search for Identity* p49/50
[25]Lynd, H. *On Shame and the Search for Identity* p50

This is a central point in Bernard Williams' exposition of the meaning of shame. Williams argues against the Kantian view that guilt is the more sophisticated and honourable emotion: "In contrast to guilt, there is no need with shame that the viewer [or imagined interlocutor] should be angry or otherwise hostile. All that is necessary is that he should perceive that very situation or characteristic that the subject feels to be an inadequacy, failing or loss of power."[26] It follows that shame is in some ways quite narcissistic. It is the self which is the subject of attention, not, as it might be with guilt, the victim. But the significance of shame lies in its connection with precisely the self-consciousness which makes it possible to be a morally knowing subject. But this moral or self-knowingness is not straightforward. Lynd draws attention to the Biblical associations between shame, confounding and confusion and stresses that shame is difficult if not impossible to communicate. Shame often reveals personal inadequacy and this is difficult to communicate for two reasons. First because it will very likely be assumed that the peers with whom one communicates do not share the experience of having this personal weakness or failure revealed to them; that they are not in shame in this way. Secondly it is because shame is so broad and unlimitable. As has been pointed out already, one is not ashamed so much of a particular action or failure as of the self which was revealed when the action was made. As Lynd points out there is the potential for tragedy in this because incommunicable shame brings us close to precisely the kind of isolation and loneliness which modern analysts, both Marxist and existentialist, have suspected their culture of producing. As Gerhart Piers has argued, "The unconscious, irrational threat implied in shame anxiety is abandonment, and not mutilation (castration) as in guilt."[27] . Moreover, argues Lynd, shame is associated not with hatred or retribution, but with contempt. As Piers has it, the law of the talion applies to guilt but not to shame.[28]

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[26]Williams, B. *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press) 1993 p221

[27]Piers, G. and Singer, M.B. *Shame and Guilt: A Psychoanalytic and Cultural Study* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co.) 1971 Edition p24

[28]*ibid.*

For some writers the narcissistic aspects of shame render it an unattractive emotion. June Tangney calls it 'an ugly feeling' in her report of a psychometric study on the correlations between guilt-proneness, shame-proneness and empathic responsiveness as aspects of personality.[29] The picture which emerges from this is there are significant correlations between guilt-proneness and shame-proneness. But while guilt-proneness is positively correlated with other-oriented empathic responsiveness, shame-proneness has a negative correlation.

It is for this reason that Tangney speaks of finding a new dimension to the ugliness of shame and claims to have rehabilitated guilt. But her point is over-stated. Certainly there is something narcissistic or at least highly self-interested about being prone to shame. But shame is not only experienced by those who are particularly prone to it. Certainly the person who is habitually ashamed must be in a sense highly interested in themselves, or alternatively, that person would find it hard to be interested in the lot of others because so much energy was being consumed by shame. But this is a reflection not on the experience of shame in normal individuals but on the empathy of people who are typically inclined to shame. Tangney is not entitled to conclude that shame is ugly, indeed her study does not look in any particular depth at the phenomenology of normal shame. Her only legitimate conclusion is the somewhat predictable one that an emotionality focused on the self is not an emotionality focused either on the needy or the victimised other: that to be prone to shame is to be narcissistic.

In a review of both theoretical and empirical psychological work on the subject of the moral emotions Helen Lewis surveys recent psychological writing on guilt and shame and acknowledges that the situation is truly confused.[30] Guilt and shame can and do occur together and subjects do not necessarily distinguish reliably between these emotions. Some clear differences can be identified at the psychological level, however:

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[29]Tangey, J.P. 'Moral Effect: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly' p600

[30]Lewis, 'H.B. Some Thoughts on the Moral Emotions of Shame and Guilt' in Eds Crillo et al *Emotions in Ideal Human Development* (London: Lawrence Erlbaum) 1989

"Shame... is likely to be evoked not only by moral transgression but also by the experience of failure... Shame is directly about the whole self. It is the vicarious experience of the other's scorn of the self... Shame can be evoked by being looked at... Shame is contagious... When in a state of shame the self feels helpless, as if paralysed... Because it is only about the self, shame is simultaneously felt as an inappropriate, subjective reaction, which in turn evokes more shame."[31]

Guilt, on the other hand:

> "is about things done or not done in the world... guilt has an objective quality... It involves less disorganisation of the self, more rational ideation, more of a feeling of an intact self that is responsible both for the transgression and for making amends... In guilt the self is compelled to do something in order to undo the wrong... there is some element of moral elevation for the self in being in the state of guilt and in effecting the required reparations."[32]

Lewis' conclusions are good summaries of recent psychological work in this area. But it is not only psychologists who have taken an interest in shame and guilt, and our attention now turns to consider the philosophical analysis of Gabrielle Taylor.

3.ii. The Philosophy of Guilt and Shame Gabrielle Taylor

Gabrielle Taylor's concern in her monograph on the emotions of self-appraisal is to relate not only the emotions mentioned but also humiliation and remorse within the framework of the meaning of personal integrity and a reflection on the ideas of self-esteem and self-respect.[33] Her argument is less important for our purposes than her phenomenology of shame and guilt. Her approach differs from that of the psychologists in that she is neither concerned with empirical data nor with psychotherapy. Nor does she consider the self-assessment of the neurotically guilty, especially as this has

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[31]Lewis, H.B. 'Some Thoughts on the Moral Emotions of Shame and Guilt' p40
[32]Lewis, H.B. 'Some Thoughts on the Moral Emotions of Shame and Guilt' p41
[33]Taylor, G. *Pride, Shame and Guilt* (Oxford: Clarendon Press)1985 All the references to Taylor in this chapter refer to this book

been so important in psychology of all kinds. Her real interest is in the logic of self-assessment rather than the emotionality of the subject. The focus of concern and value is in the precise and lucid handling of concepts of self-understanding and appraisal.

3.ii.a. Shame

There are, she argues, two elements in the simple cases of shame: "There is firstly the self-directed adverse judgement of the person feeling shame... the identificatory belief. Second there is the notion of the audience."[34] Therefore, "it requires a sophisticated type of self-consciousness... one which relies on the concept of another."[35] But it is the self-consciousness, not the audience, which is crucial for shame.

Shame is contrasted with embarrassment.[36] In embarrassment the audience plays an important role, making it difficult for the subject to know how to extricate himself from a particular situation. The audience requires a response and the subject, because embarrassed, does not know how to provide one. In shame the subject is shocked in a moment of exposure whereas in embarrassment the subject is locked in a moment or more of incompetence or impotence.[37] Embarrassment may be dissolved by a change in circumstances, but shame is not so situation specific. Those who know shame do so because they have perceived themselves. Those who have been embarrassed have been caught not by personal failing but awkward circumstances, and so do not have their self-understanding radically challenged. This is not to say, of course that the two are completely independent. Shame and embarrassment can occur simultaneously, and one might believe that one should have been able to respond. But this does not invalidate the distinction.

Taylor resists the idea that shame is only sometimes a moral emotion, the view of Rawls and others, predicated on the understanding that it is only sometimes to do with the failing by

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[34]Taylor, G. p64
[35]Taylor, G. p67
[36]Taylor, G. pp68-76
[37]Taylor, G. p74

specifically moral standards. Her view, which anticipates her conclusions concerning the nature of integrity as to do with wholeness as much as with conscientiousness, is that:

> "there is no reason to deny that shame in all its occurrences is a moral emotion, provided that morality is not thought of just in terms of adhering to or breaking certain moral rules, but is taken to include personal morality, a person's own view of how he ought to live and what he ought to be."[38]

The distinction between self-respect and self-esteem is important here, and a crucial difference between Taylor and Rawls. For Rawls there is no distinction whereas for Taylor they do differ and shame is primarily related to self-respect. Indeed shame and self-respect are fundamentally related.

> "[If] someone has self-respect then under certain specifiable conditions he will be feeling shame. A person has no self-respect if he regards no circumstances as shame producing. Loss of self-respect and loss of the capacity for feeling shame go hand in hand. The close connection between these two makes clear why shame is often thought to be so valuable."[39]

One might think of the despairing rhetorical remark 'have you no shame?' which echoes the words of the prophet Zephaniah, "The unjust knows no shame" (Zephaniah 3:5) and clearly means, 'has no self-respect'.

It is precisely because a person thinks of himself or herself as being of *value* that they experience both shame and self-respect. Self-esteem may drop, and the self's confidence and membership of a group with shared values may be threatened but, "shame is the emotion of self-protection"[40]. In shame the person holds on both to the person he once was and also to the values of the society or culture which he has transgressed or of which he has fallen short. By experiencing shame the potential outcast affirms his own status as a member:

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[38]Taylor, G. p77
[39]Taylor, G. p80
[40]Taylor, G. p81

"Shame can be seen as a moral emotion, then, not because sometimes or even often it is felt when the person believes himself to have done something morally wrong, but rather because the capacity for feeling shame is so closely related to the possession of self-respect and thereby to the agent's values."[41]

3.ii.b. Guilt

Taylor's concern is with what she calls real guilt, that which comes from breaking some kind of law. Indeed she considers guilt to be a 'legal concept'. The concept of authority is important here, in a way which is analogous to the role of audience in shame. Taylor tends towards a rational understanding but she concedes that guilt is an emotion and therefore cannot be reduced to being the consequence of thought-out responses to situations. She notes, for instance that one may continue to feel guilt about transgressing a law after one has discarded the conditions which made the law valid or appropriate; one may feel guilty, for instance about not attending church on Sunday having discarded the religion with which one grew up. Whether this time-lag is merely due to the relative half-life of an emotion as compared to a decision is a matter which she does not discuss. She seems to suppose a bi-partite conscience with a rational and an irrational part, the first making decisions and the second carrying emotional vestiges. But this is psychologically simplistic. Human decision making and emotionality is much more complex and much more profoundly connected than her interpretation at this point suggests.

But the authority, the context of which makes for guilt, need not be external or moral or have the status of a law. One might feel guilty for wasting one's time or abilities. Thus guilt is not necessarily a result of doing something which is of harm to others as some have argued and others assumed. "What is important for guilt is just that some form of action or abstention should present itself as obligatory to the agent".[42] In this way guilt is like shame.

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[41]Taylor, G. p84
[42]Taylor, G. p89

To be guilty is to be liable to punishment. In this way it is different to shame. Also, breaking a law is what Taylor calls 'localised'. "Given that he has at one time broken the law it does not follow that he has also broken others, or that he will go on breaking the law."[43] Thus feelings of guilt can be contrasted with those of shame: guilt is to do with what one has or has not done, whereas shame has to do with who one is. These two differences interact so that while it is possible to make up for what one has done wrong, that for which one feels guilt, by experiencing punishment, no such option is available for those who feel shame: "there is nothing to be done, and it is best to withdraw and not to be seen. This is the typical reaction when feeling shame. Neither punishment nor forgiveness can here perform a function."[44]

3.ii.c. The Self in Shame and Guilt

According to Taylor the self is regarded very differently in guilt and shame: "In shame I see myself all of a piece, what I have just done, I now see, fits only too well what I really am. But when feeling guilty I think of myself as having brought about a forbidden state of affairs and thereby in this respect disfigured a self which otherwise remains the same".[45] Taylor also discusses the relationship between guilt and remorse. Guilt is an emotion of self-assessment, 'I *am* guilty'; whereas remorse is a moral emotion, 'I *feel* remorse'. Guilt concentrates on the agent and remorse on the deed.

Taylor discusses forgiveness in the context of the relation between guilt and remorse. The guilty can seek forgiveness, which she defines as the restoration of relationship with one wronged, but if there is no remorse, no 'change of heart' on the agent's part, then the would-be forgiver does not forgive the offender but condones him. To be forgiven the agent must 'be sincere in wishing the deed undone', and this must involve feeling remorse. Remorse is also important in 'self-forgiveness'. If the agent is to live with himself in the future of a true offence he must have a sense of remorse. So Scheler's view is not completely unhelpful: there must be a genuine

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[43]Taylor, G. p89
[44]Taylor, G p90
[45]Taylor, G. p92

and primary concern for the damage done to the other for forgiveness of self by self and by the other to proceed.

But according to Taylor there are exceptions. There are circumstances in which forgiveness may occur without remorse and yet not be condonation. However, there can be no self-forgiveness which does not include remorse.

According to Taylor shame and guilt are both 'essentially connected' with integrity, though connected in different ways. While in shame the connection is through self-respect, in guilt it is through the disformation of the self. "Guilt is different to shame in that it is not felt at the recognition of the failure of the worthy self, but is felt rather at the recognition of the emergence of a worse self."[46] The relation of shame to failure is crucial:

> "Shame is always felt about some failure [to have or to live up to certain values] and so the self always appears weak and ineffectual. For this reason there is in cases of shame a loss of confidence in either his (the agent's) values or in his capacity to live up to them which is not found in cases of guilt."[47]

4. SHAME AS ENERGY: AN INTERPRETATION OF *ANOREXIA NERVOSA*

The condition *anorexia nervosa* is as Anthony Giddens has argued, "a pathology of reflexive self-control, operating around an axis of self-identity and bodily appearance, in which shame anxiety plays a preponderant role."[48] No thorough analysis of the role of shame in anorexia has been made nor has any attempt been made to enquire more deeply into the nature of shame by a consideration of the phenomenology of anorexia. Both of these tasks are attempted in this section which is an examination of the dynamics of shame which, as we have already seen, are profoundly different to those of guilt.

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[46]Taylor, G. p135
[47]Taylor, G. p136
[48]Giddens, A. *Modernity and Self-Identity* p105

A cultural reading of the significance of anorexia, which involves both psychological and sociological insights is provided in Susie Orbach's book *Hunger Strike*.[49] Orbach's argument is that anorexia is a culturally located pathology which has its origins in the way in which women's bodies are 'commodotised' and women's desires and natural appetites denied. It is in this way that she sees it as 'a metaphor for our times': "The starvation amdist plenty, the denial set against desire, the striving for invisibility versus the wish to be seen - these key features of anorexia - are a metaphor for our age."[50]

Orbach suggests that the typical development of anorexia involves a narrative which begins with an individual who is self-conscious and ashamed but without identifiable reason or responsibility. In response to this the incipient anorexic characteristically begins to pay progressively more and more attention to lifestyle in general and diet and bodily regime in particular. This continues until the process of control becomes, as it were, a subject in its own right. Until, that is, her way of living becomes a parasitic self-system which is nourished and nurtured at the expense of the true, bodily self. Rather than identify with the body the person gets a sense of himself or herself through the control which they exercise over their body so that in the end, and this is why anorexia is a tragically fatal condition, the person is affirmed to the exact extent to which the body is denied.

Orbach presents a case study which exemplifies this process. It is the case of Lisa who had a long history of problematic eating and a sense of being ill at ease with her body. She felt herself to be

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[49]Orbach, S. *Hunger Strike* (London: Faber and Faber) 1986

[50]Orbach, S. *Hunger Strike* p24

Orbach's reading of anorexia is not entirely adequate as a complete account of the condition. The most striking reason being that she offers a feminist analysis of what she perceives as an exclusively women's problem. This is to deny the significance of anorexia as it affects men, and while there are fewer male anorexics the fact that they have a lower survival rate than women makes them disproportionately significant. In using Orbach's analysis I shall not be adopting the detail of the argument as it concerns the relation between women and food and body image but engaging at a slightly less problematic more abstract level.

chaotic inside and 'in a mess'."[51] Lisa's life stabilised when she married an accountant with an orderly if unexciting personality but when she was twenty six that marriage broke up and she 'drifted towards anorexia'.

> "Although she initiated the break up, the effects of it left her devastated. She felt guilt and insecurity at the same time. She began to believe that she was the rejected one and she felt herself flailing about. She was nervous about being single and in the position of looking for a partner. She couldn't bear to feel so exposed and vulnerable.
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> As she began to scrutinise what was wrong with her, she decided it was her body, and that she would be more acceptable and appear less needy if she could resemble the untouchable ladies stalking the pages of *Vogue*. She got slimmer and slimmer and, having a large frame, she looked longer and longer and increasingly remote and untouchable. She developed disdain for food and those who ate, including the part of her that expressed such a basic need. Food and eating, previously experienced as soothing and potentially pleasurable, turned into dangerous and contemptible activities. Because she was really very hungry and used to relating to food in a positive way, she had to work hard to repress her impulses towards food. To this end, she developed a series of rituals, such as only eating one egg a day divided into four sections, each of which had to be eaten with a minimum space of four hours between them...[other rituals mentioned here]."[52]

For Orbach, anorexia has to do with overcoming a sense of alienation from the world. "Anorexia is an attempted solution to being in a world from which at the most profound level one feels excluded, and into which one feels deeply unentitled to enter."[53] But while Orbach does go on to analyse this sense in terms of a missing self-esteem or sense of entitlement she does not take the obvious step of considering anorexia as a shame pathology. Once this step is taken however it becomes clear that there is a significant contrast between the problem of shame which lies behind anorexia and that of guilt with regard to eating which is nearer the surface.

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[51]Orbach, S. *Hunger Strike* p67
[52]Orbach, S. *Hunger Strike* p67/8
[53]Orbach, S. *Hunger Strike* p103

Eating is central to the anorectic process because it changes both the internal state and the external form of the body. This shift of attention from the body in general to the act of eating in particular is a shift from the deep problem of shame to a more superficial problem of guilt. The anorexic's regimes of diet and exercise and interest in food are fuelled by shame. The anorexic will not, however, report the original problem of shame but draw attention to the guilt experienced as a result of transgressing or being tempted to transgress an aspect of the self-imposed asceticism.

Shame, the emotion of being unacceptable, is itself unacceptable. As a consequence the self-conscious subject experiencing shame-anxiety characteristically seeks to transform unacceptable shame into the acceptable emotion of guilt. In the case of the anorexic this may be part of the attempt to gain control over the body and thereby to generate both a sense of responsibility and therefore personhood. But the generation of guilt is also (on Taylor's view) the development a bad alien-self alongside the proper self. This self will carry the guilt associated with eating and exists so long as the true self can be comforted by the way in which the proximate but alien guilty self relativises the shame of the real self.

It is the fuelling of guilt by shame which makes anorexia tragic. The self, perplexed and anxious about being itself, is lost as soon as it attempts to deal with this anxiety by a process of control. This is the way in which anorexia is different to objective dieting. In the latter case the individual would be seeking a body image which, if achieved, would be a source of pride. It can therefore lead to a process of control which, when followed, gives positive feelings while the transgression of which is a source of real but manageable guilt. In anorexia a shame anxiety which attaches to the whole self is transferred to a punitive guilt which attaches to aspects of daily life. The object of the regime is thus punishment and self harm, the motivation self-hatred and the result of transgression is an increase in the rigour of the regime.

The case against coping with shame by transmuting it into guilt is thus very strong. The example of anorexia is sociologically important because of its special relation to the modern condition of the self's responsibility for its own construction being placed in the context of what Giddens calls 'a dazzling plurality of options for the self', but it is theologically important because the control of self through pathological regimes of exercise and eating is a particularly complex form of the idea of justification by works which has its roots in the sub-narratives of Eden.

It is reasonable to see that the dissipation of real guilt through the making of reparations, or apologising or whatever can be positive, that it can involve 'an element of moral elevation'. Gabrielle Taylor also makes the point that guilt can be consistent with, even a source of, pride. But this is not possible in the case of guilt which is focused shame. The actions which this motivates are always going to be interpreted in the worst possible light by the cynical self. Thus the cruel dynamics of perfectionism are set in place. Work leading to failure leading to the demand for more work leading to further failure... But this, tragic as it is, is only a personal or social tragedy. The graver matter is the cultural and religious travesty which lies behind it; that which forces shame to be ashamed of itself and which thereby makes it an engine of guilt. This is the most vicious circle within which a religion or culture can capture itself and is precisely the kind of situation which a gospel of forgiveness must be able to break.

5. SHAME AND THE CONFESSION OF SIN D. BONHOEFFER

I have been arguing that shame is an extremely important emotion of self assessment with the intent of introducing the question of whether or not the Christian rhetoric and rituals of forgiveness are able to meet the reality of the shameful person. Dietrich Bonhoeffer paid considerable attention to shame in his *Ethics* seeing it as the primary moral and ontological category.[54] He understands the fall to have been a change in the focus of human attention. A human being's life is, in knowledge of good and evil, a life of disunion with God.

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[54]Bonhoeffer, D. *Ethics* (London: SCM) 1955

Whereas before his attention was on God, now it is on the self so that divine contemplation is replaced by self-consciousness and self-knowledge. The good and evil which human beings know is not the good and evil which God knows but the good and evil which is known from the point of estrangement with God. It is therefore 'against God'.

Shame is the self-consciousness of fallen person: "Shame is man's ineffaceable recollection of his estrangement from the origin; it is grief for this estrangement, and the powerless longing to return to unity with the origin."[55] There is more ontology than psychology in this, but the logic of the position is clear. "Man is ashamed because he has lost something which is essential to his original character, to himself as a whole; he is ashamed of his nakedness".[56] This is consistent with Taylor's understanding of shame as consciousness of disformation. The emphasis is on self-consciousness gained through awareness of the perception of another who has a different vantage point. For Bonhoeffer the significant thing is that man realises that his point of view is no longer that of God's; for Gabrielle Taylor the point would be that the deity is perceived as audience.

Shame is important for Bonhoeffer. It is, for instance, to be distinguished from remorse: "Man feels remorse when he has been at fault; and he feels shame because he lacks something. Shame is more original than remorse".[57] He interprets the attempt to cover the nakedness with aprons as, "confirmation of the disunion that has occurred"[58]. The fact that disunion is disunion means that a damage has been done which cannot be repaired.

To be covered is not to be hypocritical, however. Bonhoeffer's view is that privacy and modesty are theologically required and spiritually valuable. "Covering is necessary because it keeps awake shame, and with it the memory of disunion with the origin, and also

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[55]Bonhoeffer, D. *Ethics* p6
[56]*ibid.*
[57]*ibid.*
[58]Bonhoeffer, D. *Ethics* p7

because man, disunited as he is, must now withdraw himself and live in concealment."[59] Bonhoeffer reflects on the privacy sought in sexual union and prayer and considers this evidence of the shame perceived not so much in the attempt to overcome disunion as in the fact of the disunion.

"Shame implies both a positive and a negative attitude to man's disunion, and that is why man lives between covering and discovering, between self-concealment and self-revelation, between solitude and fellowship."[60] Bonhoeffer's interpretation of the complicated dialectic between solitude and fellowship is revealed in an editor's footnote which refers to his disapproval of the way in which people express and share their fear after an air-raid.[61] He believes that ontological shame requires of us a reticence in self-disclosure of this kind. It is as if he feels that there must be a confession of disunity in the whole of social life. "The secrecy of shame remains outspread over the creative power of man which comes to him in the self-sought union of the disunited. It is the memory of the disunion from the Creator, and the robbery from the Creator which is here disclosed."[62]

Bonhoeffer's theology of shame thus becomes a theological critique of emotional intimacy as well as a theological justification of privacy. But at this point he goes far beyond the implications of his position into an assertion of a particular understanding of appropriate emotional distance. Bonhoeffer has raised a difficult question: does human shame have any implications for the way in which people should construct and maintain inter-personal distance? And, what is it appropriate for people to reveal to each other in various circumstances? This is also a question about self-knowledge and self-consciousness. Bonhoeffer's suggestion, if it is as weak as that, is that the pursuit of self-understanding is at least questionable.

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[59] *ibid.*
[60] *ibid.*
[61] Bonhoeffer, D. *Ethics* p8
[62] Bonhoeffer, D. *Ethics* p8

A different point concerns the significance of the emotion of shame in a cultural context where the self is not thought of as being a given which it is possible to explore and know, but as a construction. When self-identity is understood to be a construction then the self is responsible in a special way. When the self is not convinced that it has exercised this responsibility well it becomes subject to shame and its pathological legacies.[63] These are, as Helen Lewis has clarified, quite different from the products of guilt. "Shame and self-directed hostility very often occur together (whereas guilt is associated with hostility directed outward)"[64]. Moreover she points out the difference in the susceptibility to shame and guilt and their respective pathologies in men and women. While shame is related to depression, and this makes sense through the idea of the disorganised, demoralised and self-conscious self, guilt is related to the more schizoid conditions. The respective routes which men and women characteristically take to madness are through the failure of the sexes to cope with different contradictions. For women, who are more likely to become depressives:

> "the affectionateness that is their heritage and that they are taught to cultivate is turned to dross by a massive devaluation and sentimentalising of feeling in a warring, male dominated culture. This contradiction can transform shame into depression. For men, the contradiction between their natural affectionateness and the aggressions they are taught to value - the contradiction between being tender and the requirement that they be tough - transforms guilt into an insoluble dilemma of forbidden action that is somehow compellingly required."[65]

This suggests a feminist critique of Bonhoeffer. If women are prone to shame and depression then this is certainly a problem associated with their sense of themselves. But while it might seem that the answer to this is to be found in the Bonhoefferian suggestion of privacy, modesty and social distance this is just an appearance. The reality is that the suggestion is not an answer but a denial of the

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[63]Giddens makes the point that shame is of particular significance in late-modernity as the burden of this responsibility is particularly relevant. Giddens, A. Modernity and Self-Identity

[64]Lewis, H.B. 'Some Thoughts on the Moral Emotions of Shame and Guilt' p41

[65]Lewis, H.B. 'Some Thoughts on the Moral Emotions of Shame and Guilt' p47/48

problem. Self-consciousness leading to shame and depression needs to be redeemed. There is nothing to be gained by men, whose characteristic fault is pride, suggesting that such self-consciousness is misplaced. The challenge to the theology of forgiveness is to open up a healing trajectory for the person who is anxious on account not of what they have done but because of who they are, not on account of blemishes on their soul but on account of what they see in the mirror. It seems profoundly unlikely that this path will be opened up by censuring intimacy or discourse about the self. It is more likely to come about through attentive affirmation and a transformation of the negative feelings associated with the sense of self.

For Bonhoeffer, however, shame is to be overcome only through an experience of judgement which is a restoration of original unity.

> "Shame is overcome only in the enduring act of final shaming, namely the becoming manifest of knowledge before God... Shame is overcome only in the shaming through the forgiveness of sin, that is to say through the restoration of fellowship with God and men. This is accomplished in confession before God and before other men."[66]

Forgiveness for Bonhoeffer is a 'clothing' not with aprons but with, "Christ's blood and righteousness."[67]

Bonhoeffer's convictions about oral confession are surprising not so much because of Bonhoeffer's Lutheran background, as we have seen Martin Luther favoured the practice, but because of his views about conscience. While Roman Catholic theory has a high doctrine of conscience and sees conscience as integral to the practice and pedagogy of confession, Bonhoeffer, as we have seen, takes a low view of it as a self-regarding form of knowledge. In conscience it is man's disunity with himself which is significant. Conscience is negative, it permits all that it does not prohibit. It therefore perpetuates the lie that there can be good in disunity with God. "Conscience pretends to be the voice of God and the standard for the

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[66]Bonhoeffer, D. *Ethics* p9
[67]*ibid.*

relation to other men."[68] Conscience sets a high store on the quality of its understanding of the relation of good and evil. "Bearing within himself the knowledge of good and evil, man has become judge over God and men, just as he is judge over himself."[69] The power of conscience is destructive: "drawing all things into the process of disunion".[70] Conscience is the vanity of a shameful species: "Knowledge now means the establishment of the relationship to oneself; it means the recognition in all things of oneself and of oneself in all things."[71]

This brief description has disclosed an apparent inconsistency in Bonhoeffer's theology and ethics. First, while he stresses shame in his ethics when he comes to talking about the mediation of forgiveness it is confession and absolution which is his favoured model. The paradox is that this is the model based on the idea of sin as guilt, and responsibility as something which is held for discrete actions. The second apparent inconsistency is that while he values confession as a way of dealing with guilt he disavows the significance of conscience which is necessary to confession because it is a form of self-knowledge, which, according to his views on shame, is a sign of irredeemable disunion.

But these inconsistencies are only apparent because there is in Bonhoeffer's approach to these matters an implicit development. To begin with he sees confession not as a matter of dealing with the guilty conscience by itemising all faults on the basis of a well formed and carefully examined conscience. Rather he sees it as an act of shaming which puts an end to shame. This is a helpful insight which is, interestingly, consistent with Rahner's oft-repeated remark that the history of penance is misunderstood if thought to fall into the two eras of public and private penance. The crucial division *is* into two eras, but what distinguishes them is whether or not confession and absolution can be repeated. Rahner's point is that

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[68]Bonhoeffer, D. *Ethics* p10
[69]*ibid.*
[70]*ibid.*
[71]*ibid.*

confession is always in some sense public - and it is for reasons associated with this that we can say that it is always shameful.

But the implications of thinking of confession and absolution, the sacrament of penance in terms of dealing with shame rather than guilt are very considerable and will form the beginnings of our conclusion in which we will bring together the fruits of the arguments in the various aspects of forgiveness considered in the different chapters.

6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has been an examination of the nature and the theological significance of shame and guilt. It has often been argued and assumed that Christianity is a 'guilt religion', in which the moral issue for the human subject has been to live with the consequences of having transgressed objective commandments. Such a view however ignores the significance of the moral and emotional reality of shame.

The differences between shame and guilt have been explored in psychological and philosophical analyses. Among the many points made those which suggest different relations to the self are most relevant to this study. Shame and self-respect co-exist in a mutually reinforcing system which supports an ethic of responsibility and integrity. Guilt, contrary to the assumption of many anthropologists, can reveal an ethical system which is more heteronomous and in which the potential for independence or even individualism is reduced.

Shame is a peculiarly difficult and complex emotion, however, in that it has a strange relationship with itself so that there are ways in which shame, the emotion of being discovered, disclosed or observed is something which it is difficult to acknowledge. The fact that only shame can be ashamed of itself points to the important relationship between shame and the coherence and integrity of the self.

The relationship between shame and guilt can be seen to be pathological when it is observed that unacknowledged shame can fuel guilt. This was observed in the phenomenology of *anorexia nervosa* but can be a feature of any system which allows for guilt and its remission, punishment or forgiveness but where shame is not acknowledged.

Finally there was a consideration of Bonhoeffer's thought about the ethical significance of shame which suggested that it might indeed have an important role in forgiveness. He considered confession as a healing encounter with shame rather than as an act of guilt acknowledgement.

Just as many have assumed that Christianity is a 'guilt religion' so too have many supposed that Christian forgiveness has primarily to do with the removal of guilt. The final chapter of this work shows that when shame is given due weight in human ethics, emotionality and experience a much more coherent picture of the meaning of forgiveness emerges.

CONCLUSION

THE COHERENCE OF FORGIVENESS

This attempt to gain a synoptic overview of the Christian idea of forgiveness has involved the scrutiny of some very diverse sources. In this way the current work is quite different from recent philosophical writing on forgiveness, such as Haber's *Forgiveness*, which was discussed in chapter three, which approaches the subject in a much more idealised and limited way. Haber's driving question concerns the ethics of interpersonal forgiveness. His interest is in the morality of an injured person who offers forgiveness.

This work is dealing with issues which are at once more anthropological and more theological than Haber's. The dominant question here concerns whether the Christian idea of forgiveness makes theological sense. The question has been approached by considering the way in which the word forgiveness features in the gospels and in contemporary theology and ethics. But the work has also involved studies of atonement theology as well as of liturgies of forgiveness.

That differences are found between the way in which forgiveness language is used in these areas should cause no surprise. The interesting question concerns whether or not there are sufficiently meaningful connections between the way in which forgiveness language is used in the different areas as to render it meaningful to talk of the coherence of forgiveness. This is important for Christian theology partly because the word forgiveness is found in such different environments and contexts. The centrality which the idea is estimated to have in Christian theology and ethics adds to the importance of the subject, as does the premium which is placed on connecting the forgiveness of God of an individual with the forgiveness of others by that individual in the teaching of the synoptic gospels.

The purpose of this conclusion is to draw together various of the observations made and conclusions drawn in the foregoing chapters. In order to do this I will discuss the meaning of forgiveness with regard to others, time, God and self.

1. Forgiveness and Others

In the first chapter I argued that Matthew and Luke understood the connection between being forgiven and forgiving others in different ways. The Matthean understanding is that it is necessary to forgive others in order to be forgiven by God. The Lucan understanding is that the experience of forgiveness is the inspiration of further acts of forgiveness. Such differences are neither contradictory nor paradoxical but complementary. Both suggest that forgiveness is not an end in itself but necessarily has its origins and its effects outside the moment or episode in which it occurs. This observation suggests that forgiveness is not so much connected with the rest of life as characteristically embedded within it.

In the third chapter I reviewed the ethical tradition of writing on forgiveness and noted some of its more important distinctions, particularly those between pardon, condonation, excuse and forgiveness. The distinction between pardon and forgiveness was a most helpful analytical tool when it came to interpreting the famous story told by Simon Wiesenthal in *The Sunflower.* The point was not so much that Wiesenthal had not found it in his heart to forgive but that he had been asked to pardon Karl and correctly failed to find himself authorised to do so.

The analysis of forgiveness and similar concepts does not, however, remove the need for a category of exchange which is properly called forgiveness. Two questions about this are important in philosophical ethics, and they are important enough for there to be a range of answers. The first question concerns the nature of forgiveness and the second is the relation between forgiveness and justice.

For Bishop Butler forgiveness was the forswearing of resentment, and this is by far the most important definition in this area. *Various ethicists discuss the grounds of such forswearing and take* up different views on the value and nature of repentance, apology and what is called old time's sake, but which might better be thought of as the relation between the offence and the relationship in which it occurs.

Another approach to forgiveness is the neo-Augustinian notion of hating the sin while loving the sinner. Forgiveness is the attempt to maintain a positive relationship with an offender, or at least the attempt to maintain a sense of that person's objective and inalienable value, while recognising that because they have offended or transgressed the law at the expense of another they must be punished. This is the terminus of an ethics based on retributive or punitive justice. In this context resentment is not forsworn but attached to one limited aspect of the offender's biography.

This approach is helpful in as much as it draws attention to the fact that the person is of greater significance than being merely the agent of offence or injury. Its weakness is that it does little more than allow for the contextualising of the offence in the greater narrative of the offender's personhood. In some cases this may well effect a forgiveness-like response from the offended, but it equally may not. Indeed it is this absence of forgiveness which seems to make it attractive to those who, like Jean Hampton, seek to preserve the claims of justice in the face of forgiveness. But the contextualising of the offence in the autobiography of the offender is in many cases a strategy for excuse. In order for genuine forgiveness to occur the offence must be recontextualised not in the life-story of either offended or offender but in the relationship between the two.

It is partly for this reason that forgiveness can be a legitimate response to apology or to an intimation of repentance, however subtle, on the part of the offender. The value of such intimations and words lies not, *pace* Swinburne and many others who speak of the need for some sacrifice or costliness, in some token of

sincerity, but in the freedom with which the apology or repentance is offered. This is evident from our reading of the tragedy of Paula in *Death and the Maiden.* Her situation is unresolvable, her suffering unredeemable, unless her torturer confesses and repents. But although she has ultimate physical power over him, she has a gun at his head, this reversal of power is not able to precipitate the reversal of her pain and suffering. She knows that she cannot forgive, which would be as much a release for her as for him, unless he repents. For her to pardon or excuse would be to condone and to become, as it were, a complicit partner in her own torture.

2. Forgiveness and Time

The distinction between pro-active and reconciliatory forgiveness made in chapter five is helpful in clarifying a confusion which occurs with regard to the New Testament. Jesus is very often portrayed as a pro-active forgiver, whereas much of the writing of Paul, and indeed of subsequent atonement theology, is concerned with reconciliatory forgiveness.

The problems with pro-active forgiveness are those of any form of pardon: authority and justice. Of these it is only that of authority which is raised in the gospels. This question is clearly central to the evangelical message which concerns the nature of Jesus Christ. 'Who can forgive sins but God alone?' is the primary leading question in the gospels. Of more interest at this stage of our enquiry, however, is the absence of the question of justice. This is partly explained by the fullness of the narrative context in which episodes of pro-active forgiveness occur. As we have seen, in the teaching and action of Jesus forgiveness is not necessarily a response to repentance. This point has been made in two recent books by E.P. Sanders.[1] Sanders' point is that, contrary to more common interpretation, Jesus was not intending to love the sinners, such as Zacchaeus, into repentance, rather that his demand was that they accept and follow him. His forgiveness was pro-active, his seeking

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[1]Sanders, E.P. *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM) 1985; It is noteworthy that such is the resistance to this conclusion in some of his readers that he takes great pains to explain it most clearly in a sequel to his original study: Sanders, E.P. *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London, Allen Lane, The Penguin Press) 1993

after them offensive. Certainly it was the case that Zacchaeus repented, but this was the significance of the event more for Luke and the early Church. For Jesus the significance was that Zacchaeus accepted his pro-active forgiveness.

This question of forgiveness and time can be criticised in the language of either justice or grace, law or love. From the point of view of justice the problem of pro-active forgiveness is that it leaves the offence untouched, there is no repentance. This view might be questioned however as pro-active forgiveness clearly does have an issue, and in the case of Jesus it is in the development of a new relationship and relationships in the community of disciples. If Sanders is right and this is what is most central to Jesus' audacious concern then the main questions are no longer the relationship of the offender to the offended through the offence, but of the offender to the offended through the eschatological community.

Despite Sanders' view about Jesus' own lack of concern about the repentance of those whom he forgives and are accepted as his disciples we can see that the existence of such a community is of great theological and ethical significance. The community of Jesus becomes a theologico-ethical sponge which soaks up past wrongs and which re-orients individuals and relationships towards a future of positive relating and what Vernon White called recreative justice. Alister McFadyen reached a similar conclusion about forgiveness in the gospels in his study of the individual in social relationships.[2] McFadyen observes that:

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[2]McFadyen, A. *The Call to Personhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 1990

> "Jesus found broken, closed and communicatively distorted people in distorted and closed relational networks. The Gospel set people free by placing them firmly in an alternative communication context from which a new identity could be sedimented, even though their social situation might remain materially unchanged. In relating to people as though they were forgiven, as though they were free from the burden of their sins, Jesus intended them as forgiven and justified sinners before others and God in a new way. He pulled the future emancipation into the present and thereby established new possibilities of identity with and for them."[3]

For McFadyen, then, pro-active forgiveness is anticipatory rather than unconditional. In this way he implies that the forgiveness might be withdrawn should there not be reformation and repentance from within the redeeming and reconciling community. The notion of pro-active forgiveness being suggested here is not conditional in this way, however, it is genuine forgiveness which is not interested in the future of the forgiven as a penitent but as a member of the reconciling community, and therefore as a forgiver. In terms of the conclusion from our previous section it is the eschatological community which recontextualises the relationship of offended and offender and which can therefore provide healing for the one and forgiveness for the other.

This theology of forgiveness is consistent with post-Vatican II thinking which sees the Church as the community of reconciliation and the Anglican tradition which emphasises healing and subjectivity with regard to confession and absolution. Moreover, while the process of reconciliation certainly takes time it does not follow that the moment of forgiveness or reintegration into the community should be delayed. For this reason the two contemporary approaches to the revitalisation of penance in the Roman Catholic Church, that based on general or public absolution or that characterised by a re-opening of the Order of Penitents, are contradictory. This argument about forgiveness is very clearly in favour of the gracious and immediate response of general absolution. This is not, of course, pro-active forgiveness; it is a response, but it

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[3] *ibid.* p118

is a prompt action which can open the door to the deep and healing processes which can occur in the context of the reconciling community.

3. Forgiveness and God

In chapter two twentieth century British atonement theology was seen to make considerable use of the concept of forgiveness. This was the case in the writing of R.C. Moberly who sought to understand atonement in categories which were more personal than legal as well as in William Temple and Charles Williams who went on to forge some of the connections between atonement and the remainder of theology and of ethical living. It was only H.R. Mackintosh in our brief survey who did not progress very deeply with the ethical and theological significance of divine forgiveness, and who was more interested in explicating the New Testament theology of justification than developing a genuine theology of forgiveness.

Arthur Lyttleton saw forgiveness as a mystery which transcended the normal laws of justice. Temple and Williams went on to explore this mystery to see what the ethical and theological meanings were. Both showed that there must indeed be ethical connections so that forgiveness did not die on the lips of the forgiver but inspired the forgiven to live for the other in a way which redeemed, so to speak, the generosity which had forgiven them. But both also saw that there must be theological connections.

A recently published study of forgiveness argues that every act of forgiveness is a testimony against radical individualism.[4] This is part of the reason that we found Haber's approach so unsatisfactory; his Kantian presuppositions do not allow for the human and relational space and reality in which forgiveness occurs. But Temple and Williams do not assume a radical or Kantian individualism in their respective theologies of forgiveness and atonement. Their thought is of a social and theological order which is broken by sin and restored by forgiveness. But this restoration is

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[4]Shriver, D.W. *An Ethic for Enemies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 1995

no reconstruction of what was, rather it is the elevation of the human to the level of the unified or co-inherent life of God.

It is this theological and social context which makes their thinking so important for this thesis, and so consistent with its main argument regarding forgiveness. The means whereby forgiveness occurs or the place of sacrifice or expiation or whatever within the process are less important. Williams follows the epistle to the Hebrews in seeing that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. But this is not a mechanistic argument about the necessary conditions for forgiveness. Rather it is a way of articulating the extent to which forgiveness is a matter of fundamental life and health for the theological community of the created order and its relations with the loving and just God who created it for eternal love and happiness. It is an argument about the connections between forgiveness and life made in symbolic language, not a quasi-economic reckoning of the cost of sacrifice.

The question of absolution is also one which needs to be considered under this heading. We have observed that the Roman Catholic and the Anglican traditions with regard to confession and absolution locate them in rather different pastoral-liturgical space, the one being quite objective and juridical, the other more concerned with subjectivity and healing. Another difference between the two traditions concerns the way in which they have been theologised, with the difference between objective and subjective again being important. But the most important difference is that confession and absolution has never been a compulsory aspect of Anglican ecclesiastical life. The personal and autonomous desire to open the heart and to receive absolution has been seen to be central to the Anglican practice here, the contrary position being likened in one manual to sending a policeman to find the prodigal son.[5]

It is for these reasons that absolution is construed differently in the two traditions, the one viewing it more in terms of assurance, the other more as an act of power over sin. The medieval church

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[5]J.F. Briscoe 'The Confessional in Practice' in Ed Hubert Box *The Theory and Practice of Penance* (London: SPCK) 1935 p74

knew a great deal of controversy over the nature and significance of contrition and attrition, and it was in the light of this discussion that the teaching and practice with regard to confession and absolution was seen to make more or less sense. Part of this discussion concerned the locus, as it were, of forgiveness: was it in the contrition, the confession, the absolution or the penance? Such questions are perhaps sufficient evidence that things are not well understood. Equally the distinction between precatory, declaratory and indicative absolution reveals very little about the nature of forgiveness. Indeed the reason that these matters have not been discussed at length is because such a discussion would take us far from our subject to the realms of ecclesiology and the nature of priesthood. Discussions about absolution do not hang on the issues which influence forgiveness but on the often polemical discussion of what priests are for and what they and other ministers can and cannot do. This is an area which is much confused, with, for instance, the argument for indicative absolution with all its apparent objectivity and power being typically made for allegedly pastoral reasons in Anglicanism. In the Roman tradition, it is now customary for the pre-venient forgiveness of God to be emphasised to such an extent that the absolution is effectively a declaration and the matter of confession more to do with furthering the process of reconciliation with the Church than achieving the forgiveness which can get that process started. The argument regarding forgiveness being made here favours a form of absolution which makes it clear that the pardon has been given. This means that on the grounds of the theology of forgiveness either a declaratory or an indicative formula is appropriate. Distinguishing between the two is something which depends more on questions concerning the nature of priesthood than on the nature of forgiveness.

The power and value of absolution lies in the decisive termination of the alienation which was instigated by a sinful episode. Writers vary in the vividness with which they describe this dissolving of sin but agree that it renders the sin something to be forgotten but at the same time assert that it does not deal with the consequences of sin. This is a sound point. Contrite confession that one has mortally harmed another does not bring that other back to health. Nor does it,

of course, restore relations with that other person or even suggest that there is any obligation or even reason why that other should forgive or there be any reconciliation.[6]

In terms of the distinctions made in the third chapter absolution is not properly thought of as an act of forgiveness. It is an act of pardon in which the one who speaks is not drawn into relationship based on the mutual, and to a degree emotional, recognition of the offence. Rather the one who speaks transcends the offence. The absolution is not pronounced on behalf of the Church but is declared on behalf of the God of mercy and compassion. It does not mean that all is well but it proclaims that God is quick to mercy and forgiveness. It is unfortunate that some forms of absolution introduce complicating factors: the American Prayer Book allows for the questioning of the penitent on the matter of whether or not they themselves forgive those who sin against them, and the Alternative Service Book has it that God, 'forgives all those who truly repent'. When absolution is seen as pardon the problem with these intrusions becomes clear. In the context of an act of genuine interpersonal forgiveness such matters would be settled in the subtle dialogue of verbal and non-verbal communication. The situation of pardon, which is by definition the exercise of an authority, is likely to be much more formal. Pardon, and therefore absolution, cannot be equivocal or conditional or relative. It either is or is not pronounced, declared. Liturgical and pastoral considerations should be controlled by this primary theological insight. This is a situation which demands clarity and straightforwardness. The central pastoral necessity is to make a break with a bad past, possibly with bad habits, in the interests of a new more healthy and more ethical future. There is no ethical, theological or psychological place to keep any hostages to fortune. There is no currency in which any price could be paid, for that would be to change the matter from pardon to exchange. Absolution should

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[6]Shriver argues that the development of private confession and absolution had a negative effect on public and civic life, effectively removing forgiveness from the public and political arena. The Church and Christian and post-Christian society are still only slowly managing to liberate the idea of forgiveness from the 'sacramental captivity' to do its civilising work in human social relations. Shriver, D.W. *An Ethic for Enemies* p49ff

be declaratory (and the indicative form is a specific form of declaratory) and decisive. It is not the dialogical development of relationship but the monological dissolving of the chains of the past which would otherwise prevent the development of reconciliatory processes.

Ethically, absolution is a risk. But this is a risk which is now familiar to us in the Christian tradition with regard to forgiveness. It is the same risk as Jesus took with Zacchaeus. The idea is that entry into the eschatological community will provide the forgiven sinner with the conditions and the encouragement which lead to the living of a better life. It may. It may not. But it is a characteristic of the merciful that they are inclined to be quick to admit and slow to remove from this fellowship of redemption and potential redemption.

One question which has not yet been aired in this concluding chapter concerns what it is that needs to be pardoned in absolution. The short answer is, of course, 'sin'; but that is an inadequate statement of the matter. It will be recalled that one of the differences between the relevant rubric in the office for the Visitation of the Sick in the two prayer books of Edward VI was that while in the first the visitee was urged to open his 'sin and grief' in the second he was urged to open his 'grief'. It will further be recalled that the 'benefit' of absolution was asserted to be the quieting of conscience. Thus the basic problem to which forgiveness is the answer indicates that 'grief' and 'unquiet conscience' are the humanly sensible products, the symptoms as it were, of sin. The Anglican tradition recognises that absolution must meet the need of the sinner, it must connect with what was then called grief but which we may now call guilt and shame. For a consideration of this we must pass on to the final section, that of forgiveness and the self.

4. Forgiveness and the Self

In the seventh chapter I argued that contrary to the widely accepted view that Christianity was, along with Judaism, a guilt-religion the

moral emotion of shame was of great, possibly even greater, significance. It is shame which is connected to both pride and self-respect but which is so difficult to live with that it is also connected in deep and important ways to death. Shame is often ashamed of itself and for this reason is often in a very unhealthy partnership with guilt, and we observed the way in which guilt fuelled by shame generated the tragic and helpless dynamics of *anorexia nervosa*.

Shame is also a crucially important emotion when it comes to interpreting the dynamics of forgiveness, not least in the sacrament of penance. The dominant understanding of the history of penance is based on the eras of public and private penance, alternatives in which shame varies despite guilt being constant. But as Karl Rahner has emphasised there is no escaping the public dimension of penance, and as Thomas Tentler has shown shame had an important if paradoxical place in the Medieval theologies of confession. "The penitent is not supposed to be driven to confession by shame, nevertheless he is to be ashamed when he gets there."[7] Moreover, while there is meant to be shame in a good confession such a confession should also be 'strong' so that "nothing is omitted out of fear of getting too harsh a penance, or out of shame"[8]. However,

> "Medieval thinkers lived easily with that kind of paradox, and the shame of the confessional enjoyed just such a position. In one sense it was considered a menace. In another it was held in the highest esteem. But it is important to stress that even when shame is esteemed it never becomes the central element is discipline. Shame before God is more frequently extolled than shame before the priest. And shame before the priest is itself restricted to the secrecy and privacy of the confessional. Shame may reinforce guilt; but shame never displaces guilt."[9]

In this interpretation Tentler confounds shame with embarrassment. Shame can be a personal rather than a social response, it does not

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[7]Tentler, T. *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press) 1977 p108

[8]*ibid.*

[9]Tentler, T. *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* p130

need a physical onlooker as Bernard Williams argues. Indeed, the self can abhor itself. But, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer realised, there is the possibility, in the revelation of shame of the healing of that shame. This observation returns us to the Rogerian notion of acceptance which, as we saw in the introduction, Paul Tillich among many others, estimated to be an appropriate twentieth century alternative to the pre-modern notion of forgiveness.

The argument of this thesis is that forgiveness remains a distinct and valid reality and is not to be replaced by acceptance any more than by pardon or excuse. The difference however is that while excuse mitigates against forgiveness, and pardon is a comparable alternative in different circumstances, acceptance is a necessary aspect of forgiveness. For the shame and guilt of the other must be accepted if there is to be forgiveness. Unless shame and guilt are identified and acknowledged there can be no forgiveness.

In some ways Rogers and Tillich are on solid evangelical ground, in as much as the response of Jesus to sinners seems to have been more of acceptance than forgiveness. But this is not the only response of Jesus, in particular he also forgave those who were sick, or as we would prefer to say as there was no evidence of previous personal relation, he pardoned or absolved them.

It follows from our argument about anorexia that it is not guilt so much as shame which lies behind the sickness and distress of those whom Jesus healed and forgave. Their shame, so difficult to articulate and face, was there for all to see as they suffered or were carried about. In seeing and mercifully responding to that shame Jesus removed it and liberated the person from the bonds of guilt, sin and sickness.

Shame is a difficult and troubling emotion, but it has within it the possibility of healing. The ashamed person knows that they need to be forgiven, and their shame is part of their repentance. What they lack is the assurance of forgiveness and that is something which may well begin in the acceptance of their shame by another who has

the personal skills and talents, the charisma, to perceive the shame and to communicate that it has been accepted.

The foregoing concerns the healing and curing of the ashamed and guilty subject by a third party. In the situation of a face to face encounter between the offended and the offender the situation is different, but shame remains crucial because it is connected with repentance. Had Paula perceived any shame in Roberto her situation and her options would have been quite different. Bruno's problem was his isolation and loneliness. This meant that there was no way of alleviating his shame. For it is an aspect of the condition of isolation that there is no other to accept the shame-filled person. Being ashamed and yet not having the possibility of it being released Bruno rightly questioned the existence of forgiveness. Like Edward Damson in *The Gift of the Gorgon* he suspected that forgiveness was to do with the avoidance of sharp moral issues and situations, avoidance of the claims of justice. But as we have seen, forgiveness is to do with the relation between events in the past and living in the present and for the future. Forgiveness is not antinomian but is the recognition that events have consequences some of which disrupt and harm and even dislocate the self. Forgiveness is based on a recognition of this situation of the self and offers it a new location in an ethical and eschatological relationship or community.

Does this mean that the sinful episode, the destructive habit, the cause of guilt and shame is forgotten? Many writers emphasise that forgiving and forgetting are not corollaries. Their point is that it is only by remembering rather than repressing that guilt and shame can be revealed, forgiveness occur and reconciliation progress. However, it is consistent with the argument of this work that forgetting will be a response both to forgiving and being forgiven.

This point can be made as an implication of the case made in chapter four where it was argued that the act of forgiveness reorders the significance of various events in the subjects narrative of self or autobiography. The cause of shame may, of course, be repressed, in which case a psychoanalytic process may be necessary to reveal it. But once it is recognised and perceived as a proper object for

repentance (provided that there is some real moral responsibility to be answered and that the appropriate response is not excuse) then that item will assume a disproportionate place in the self-narrative. And this in turn causes the anxiety which is shame. This is equally true for those who have offended and those who have been subject to another's offence or violation. Both need to be set free from the shaming and unhealthy influence of this event in the past.

Forgiveness involves the re-signification of injurious events and intentions. It is based on their acknowledgement and identification, but also based on their disproportionate importance to the subject, indeed that subject's bondage to that event or those events. It is by forgiveness that events, episodes and encounters are re-placed in the memory in a way which allows that they might be recalled alongside other interesting experiences. This is not forgetting, but it is likely to reduce the emotional impact and the conscious predominance of the relevant reminiscences. It certainly is a necessary step in the direction of a personal, social and civil life which is oriented towards the future rather than towards the past.

Jesus' practice of forgiveness was audacious and positive and led to the integration of sinners into the eschatological community of disciples. It has been argued that the church's practice of sacramental and liturgical forgiveness should have a similar energy and commitment and that the emphasis on judging contrition, seriousness or completeness is ill-placed; what matters for the sinner is the integration into the reconciling community. The pardon of absolution should therefore be directed at facilitating this potentially saving step.

Forgiveness is a subtle and complex matter, not so much because it has a difficult relation with justice, which has been the basis of much ethical writing, but because the social and psychological dynamics of relating to episodes which induce shame and guilt are so fraught. Forgiveness is not particularly concerned with justice, nor is it simply an alternative to retribution or punishment. The proper location of forgiveness is in the relationship between individuals who are alienated by the actions of themselves or

another. It is mediated by a generous response which would not cover the event entirely but would place it alongside other more positive experiences.

There is an eschatological dimension to all forgiveness. It is anticipatory in that it often involves the purposeful putting to one side of the injurious event or events in the interests of creating the space in which reconciliation might develop through the sharing of non-injurious or even positive experiences. This does not mean that forgiveness is conditional. It means that it is a risk, and as such demands courage from the forgiver.

Forgiveness posits a new beginning for the sake of both the past and the future. It is fundamentally connected to faith because of the courage which it requires. Forgiveness therefore makes theological and eschatological sense; it also makes psychological sense in that it affirms guilt and shame and opens the door to healing. The Christian understanding of forgiveness which I have argued is located in the theological tradition which sees persons as ineluctably social and which would see creation and redemption as movements in a salvific spiral which tends towards co-inherence. It is a complex matter not because it is confused but because it pervades so many different areas of intellectual enquiry. It is an important and central matter within Christian tradition and civilisation because when properly exercised it can create healing for persons and redeem broken relationships.

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