

Forgiveness

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The study of forgiveness has become a growth industry.¹ Debates about forgiveness have arisen in response to the Holocaust, to Apartheid, to genocides, to concentration camps and to domestic violence and abuse in so-called times of peace. How are the people involved – the victims and perpetrators of violence and abuse – to move forward into healed lives and relationships, if that is at all possible? What part does forgiveness play in this process?

For Christians, forgiveness has its own context and meaning that makes it different, at least in part, from that of forgiveness in other faiths, and from its understanding in psychotherapy or philosophy. Although we have much to learn from the wisdom on forgiveness found in these other traditions, it is the purpose of this paper to seek a specifically Christian understanding of forgiveness, and how it relates to child sexual abuse and the church's responses to it.

Because there has been so much written on forgiveness in recent years, the term itself will be discussed first, what it means and what it does not mean. We carry a lot of baggage with us as we come to consider forgiveness, having suffered from its misuse as well as benefited from its grace. It would be wise, therefore, to begin by discerning what forgiveness means in relation to:

1. justice and punishment (does forgiveness mean that perpetrators are not brought to justice?),
2. remembering the past (does forgiveness mean 'forgive and forget'?),
3. cheap grace (when is forgiveness taken too lightly?),
4. repentance (a pre-requisite or a consequence of forgiveness?),
5. the limits of forgiveness (are some things unforgivable?).

The first section of this paper, *Questions on forgiveness*, will consider each of these points in turn, primarily from Christian theological sources although other sources are drawn upon as well. Further, the focus of this paper is the issue of child sexual abuse, which needs to be considered as a special case. In a lot of the literature about forgiveness from Christian sources, reconciliation is the goal, particularly in contexts where a nation has to find a way ahead after an atrocity (for example, in Rwanda), or after years of injustice and abuse (South Africa). Reconciliation is not, however, what is usually sought between a child who has been abused and his or her abuser. Further, we now know that perpetrators of child sexual abuse are highly likely to offend again,² so forgiveness in these circumstances needs to take into account the safety of current victim(s) as well as the protection of future possible victims.

The discussion that takes place in this section will sharpen for us the issues around the thinking and practice of forgiveness from a range of experiences and disciplines. That will enable us to approach a Christian theology of forgiveness in a more informed manner, carrying with us questions to be answered as well as an openness to seeing forgiveness in a whole new way.

The second section will consist of a *Christian theology of forgiveness*. Although most Christian theologians agree that human forgiveness is founded upon and made possible by God's prior gracious forgiveness of humanity, beyond this there are conflicts of interpretations on a number of themes. I will focus on two in particular – the interpretation of the atonement (how the justice and grace

of God is understood as the basis of God's forgiveness), and the interpretation of humanity (our original goodness versus original sin, and the role of God's forgiveness in forming us into a new creation). The discussion of these issues will form the basis of a consideration of forgiveness in the life of the church in relation to child sexual abuse, particularly abuse by clergy or other church leaders.

Questions on forgiveness

1. How does forgiveness relate to justice?

A number of theologians, in response to God's gracious forgiveness of humanity and the gospel demands to forgive the sins of others without limit ('seventy times seven', Matt 18:21-2), counsel forgiveness as a Christian response, even for the worst atrocities. Human forgiveness is founded on God's forgiveness as Christians are urged by the writer of the Letter to the Ephesians, 'Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and slander be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you' (Eph 4:31-32 NRSV).

With such gospel imperatives, Miroslav Volf argues that to forgive means that 'we don't press charges'.³ He maintains that this is not to be soft on justice. In response to violence and abuse, most people want revenge and retribution, an understandable but a morally wrong response. Justice is better than revenge, a public condemnation of the offence and possibly restraint of the perpetrator for the sake of society. However, justice has its limits, especially retributive justice⁴ which calls for punishment on the principle of 'measure for measure'. Volf maintains that

Consistent enforcement of such justice would wreak havoc in a world shot through with transgression. It may rid the world of evil, but at the cost of the world's destruction.⁵

Because of God's graciousness to us, forgiveness is the Christian way. We are called to be instruments and agents of God's forgiveness in the world, enabled by the Holy Spirit.

For Volf, retribution and revenge are morally wrong because they demand, with 'deep human fury', a retaliation that is greater than the original offence, and they repay evil with greater evil. Justice is a good that contains evil, but retributive justice threatens the world with more violence (evil for evil). Forgiveness overcomes evil with good.⁶

A similar argument is put by Christopher Marshall in his chapter entitled, 'Forgiveness as the Consummation of Justice'.⁷ For Marshall, forgiveness does not excuse wrong-doing, rather,

forgiveness requires mutual agreement that the deed was morally wrong, as well as materially and emotionally hurtful ... Forgiveness demands ethical seriousness. It enthrones rather than dethrones justice; it exposes rather than excuses wrong; it challenges rather than condones the actions of the perpetrator; it transforms rather than tolerates evil (Rom 12:21).⁸

Marshall nevertheless maintains that the process of forgiveness operates on a level beyond the legal processes, and can run in parallel to the legal justice system and criminal proceedings. The two are not exclusive.

In maintaining that forgiveness means, 'we don't press charges', Volf is arguing a case that is more in line with what others have called restorative justice. He points out that it is *morally wrong* not to treat, say, a murder, as an offence. Further, like Marshall, he includes in the act of forgiveness the naming of the offence as an offence, which carries with it a sense of blame (though not of punishment as revenge). Forgiveness then releases the perpetrator from condemnation. Release from debt is what God did for us, and we are called to do for others.⁹

Volf does concede that at times the process of forgiveness runs separately from criminal justice proceedings whereby some people need to be jailed for their offences. He gives the example of Mohammed Agca, the man who tried to assassinate Pope John Paul II. The Pope visited Agca in jail two years after the event, and forgave him for the shooting. Agca remained in jail. From this, Volf says that the individual's forgiveness and the state's punishment are compatible. He goes on to say,

But a person cannot forgive while at the same time *wanting* the state to punish the offender, rather than incarcerate him for the sake of reform or restraint. In that case, one and the same agent would both forgive and want punishment exacted, and that's a contradiction. That's why those who forgive will advocate for a penal system not based on retribution.¹⁰

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, in his book *No Future Without Forgiveness*,¹¹ describes the rationale and the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa which offered amnesty from prosecution to perpetrators of violence and abuse under Apartheid if they appeared before the Commission and confessed to their deeds in a public hearing. The victims of their violence were given the opportunity to forgive if they wanted to, but amnesty was independent of whether or not they were forgiven, or showed remorse. Tutu testifies to the remarkable power and grace of the forgiveness that was offered in this process of restorative justice, of finding a way that South Africa may move ahead as a new nation.

His model is not really applicable to cases of child sexual abuse since the perpetrators of violence in South Africa were not likely to offend again. They had been acting under orders in the old regime and the regime had changed. However, those appearing before the Commission who had engaged in atrocities and torture beyond carrying out orders, where it appeared they were satisfying their own violent desires, were sent for trial in the criminal justice system.

From our discussion so far we can discern that forgiveness does not need to preclude justice, but 'justice' itself has different goals, from punishment (motivated by vengeance) to punishment as restraint and time-out, to reconciliation and restoring of relationships.

This means that to speak of forgiveness in relation to child sexual abuse does not mean that perpetrators are exempt from criminal justice proceedings. Put more forcefully, forgiveness does not mean risking one's life and security or that of others, nor should it perpetuate suffering and abuse.¹² Rather, by pursuing justice through the courts, offenders are held responsible for their actions, society upholds

its moral standards and is protected from harm while the offender is in jail. Further, screening processes are enabled because of the offender's criminal record, and the criminal justice system may also offer treatment.¹³ Justice needs to be upheld and safety ensured. Forgiveness in cases of child sexual abuse may be greater than justice, but it cannot be less than justice.

2. Does forgiveness mean 'forgive and forget'?

There are many times in long-term relationships with friends, colleagues or in marriages that relatively minor or trivial offences are forgiven by the one who is offended, and forgotten. The relationship continues, oriented to the present and the future, not the past. In that sense, the offence is forgotten – it is not continually remembered and brought to notice. For major offences, that is, for violent, traumatic and abusive acts, victims will never forget, nor should they.

There are dangers in attempting to forget abuse and to put it in the past. As Parkinson argues, repressing the memory of abuse does not make it go away.

Its effects continue at a subconscious level and may be manifested in sadness, depression, suicidal thoughts, in low self-esteem and many other ways. The process of healing for the abuse survivor involves facing up to the abuse and the emotions associated with it, rather than trying to block it out. She needs to integrate the experience of abuse into her personal history, not find a way of forgetting it.¹⁴

What happens, though, when a person does face the abuse in their past and works through it to a point of forgiving the perpetrator? Is it then appropriate to forget, to live as if the abuse never happened? Miroslav Volf holds the view that after forgiveness, the deeds that are forgiven are consigned to oblivion. He quotes from Luther who repeatedly taught, 'You must forgive and forget, as you would that God should not only forgive you and forget'. Volf however qualifies this. In many cases, he says, 'it would be completely inappropriate and dangerous not to remember. Memory is a shield that protects from future harm...As long as there is potential for harm, we *should* remember the offence'.¹⁵

Desmond Tutu holds a similar view. Forgiveness does not mean forgetting. Rather 'it is important to remember, so that we should not let such atrocities happen again...It means taking what happened seriously and not minimizing it; drawing out the sting in the memory that threatens to poison our entire existence'.¹⁶

To 'forgive and forget' is a somewhat shallow expectation for situations of trauma and abuse, if not actually dangerous. Forgiveness can and should include remembrance. However, remembering is not for the purposes of harbouring vengeance or allowing the abuse to poison one's entire existence. Rather, forgiving in the case of atrocities and abuse entails a creative remembering, for the sake of healing and wellbeing.

3. When is forgiveness 'cheap grace'?

A number of writers on child sexual abuse and forgiveness highlight that past practices of the church have taken the matter far too lightly. Children and adult survivors of abuse have been expected by the church to forgive their perpetrators

as their first and primary response. This is bad enough, but it has been requested of them without any demand that the perpetrator shows remorse, gives apology or makes reparation. The focus has been on the victim's forgiveness of the offender. Churches have failed to acknowledge the moral significance of the sufferer's anger and hatred,¹⁷ and have exacerbated the abuse by teaching the imitation of the suffering of Christ, and the obedience of women and children,¹⁸ while all the while failing to hold offenders responsible for their actions.¹⁹ Even offenders of domestic violence and sexual abuse have testified that the church forgave them immediately without confronting them with their wrongdoing, in all its terrible consequences.²⁰

This is cheap forgiveness, without any idea of the diminishment, humiliation, betrayal of trust and long-term effects of toxic shame and low self-esteem that are the consequences of child sexual abuse. Parkinson refers to the experience of abuse as 'a rape of the child's spirit', and as 'the murder of the soul'.²¹ Forgiveness by victims of abuse or by churches to the perpetrators, has to take into account the enormity of the crime and its long-term consequences. These are made all the worse if the perpetrator is a church leader or clergy. Such people represent God to others. By abusing the power entrusted to them and betraying their victim's trust, they represent a perverse 'God' to these children, distorting the very source from which their victims may regain their life and self-esteem – the love of God, the living water, the author of resurrection life.

In arguing against cheap forgiveness, L. Gregory Jones draws our attention to the moral significance of an abused person's anger, hatred and even vengeance. This is not to say that they should be encouraged to act these out in relation to the perpetrator, but it is to say that anger is a signal that something is wrong, some hurt, betrayal, offence or violence has been experienced. In discussing this he cites Beverly Harrison's essay, 'The Power of Anger in the Work of Love'.²² Acknowledging and legitimating moral outrage is part of the process of healing and forgiveness for victims of abuse. But there are warnings against cheap forgiveness, even in therapeutic settings.

Judith Herman makes the following statement in relation to survivors of trauma and abuse. 'Only through mourning everything that she has lost can the patient discover her indestructible inner life'.²³ She goes on to say that because mourning is so difficult there is often a resistance to facing the grief, and this is most frequently expressed through fantasies of 'magical resolutions': revenge, forgiveness or compensation. The revenge fantasy reverses the role of perpetrator and victim, the victim imagining that this will restore her own sense of power and force the perpetrator to acknowledge the harm he has done. Interesting for our purposes, Herman then describes the forgiveness fantasy.

Revolted by the fantasy of revenge, some survivors attempt to bypass their outrage altogether through a fantasy of forgiveness. This fantasy, like its polar opposite, is an attempt at empowerment. The survivor imagines that she can transcend her rage and erase the impact of the trauma through a willed, defiant act of love. But it is not possible to exorcise the trauma, through either hatred or love.²⁴

Survivors can also get stuck in 'prolonged, fruitless struggles' for compensation from their perpetrators, but Herman returns to the path of mourning as 'the only way to give due honour to loss; there is no adequate compensation'.²⁵

Forgiveness by survivors is costly – it requires a difficult path through the experience of abuse, mourning its effects and forging a new identity. Stephen Pattison, a pastoral theologian, describes his own road to healing from childhood abuse as difficult and costly. Under the heading of ‘Discovering Resurrection’, he claims ‘Coming to life, feeling one’s feelings...is truly frightening. There is a sense in which one is brought to life over one’s dead body!’²⁶

L. Gregory Jones examines the theme of cheap grace throughout his book, *Embodying Forgiveness*, beginning with a study of Bonhoeffer’s writings on the subject.²⁷ Jones makes the helpful distinction between therapeutic forgiveness (within the context of psychotherapy) and theological forgiveness (the way of life that is the calling of the church as the people of the forgiving God). He rejects cheap grace in both. We will revisit this distinction again in our section on the theology of forgiveness.

4. Is repentance a prerequisite for or a result of forgiveness?

There is some tension in the literature between those who argue that repentance by the perpetrator is a prerequisite for forgiveness by the victim, and those who say that forgiveness is unconditional, freely given, and repentance (hopefully) follows.

Judith Herman states the first view categorically. ‘True forgiveness cannot be granted until the perpetrator has sought and earned it through confession, repentance, and restitution.’²⁸ Parkinson also speaks of several steps to be fulfilled as the ethical conditions demanded by forgiveness: the perpetrator must recognise the abuse as a wrong and name it as such; must repent, taking full responsibility for the offence including facing up to court and being willing to undergo therapy; and finally must make reparation in whatever way possible, for example paying for the victim’s counselling sessions. These are the conditions through which we understand that the perpetrator is sincere in seeking forgiveness, and which then enables the survivor more easily to forgive.²⁹ Such conditions emphasise that forgiveness is relational, each person making a costly effort to repair the damage done by the wrongdoing.

What happens, though, if the perpetrator does not repent, or is currently unknown to the sufferer, or has died without these conditions being met? In such cases, there is a limit to the forgiveness that can be offered by the victim in the sense of righting the wrong in the relationship between them. Parkinson suggests that forgiveness can still be given, but he calls this ‘unilateral’ or ‘psychological’ forgiveness, which has to do with the victim’s relationship with God and with themselves, not with the offender. He points out that this may form a very important part of their healing process.³⁰

Parkinson seems to blur the distinction between therapeutic and theological understandings of forgiveness offered by Jones, in that he bases his argument on Christian theology but situates it in therapy. Jones argues that we should be basing our understanding of forgiveness on Christian theology (which has become captive to therapeutic views only), and situating it in a Christian way of life, though he does not discount therapy as part of a person’s healing process.

It was the influence of Christian faith and theology that brought the Truth and Reconciliation Commission into being in South Africa. After all his experience on forgiveness for terrible wrongs, Desmond Tutu has this to say about repentance.

Does the victim depend on the culprit's contrition and confession as the precondition for being able to forgive? There is no question that, of course, such a confession is a very great help to the one who wants to forgive, but it is not absolutely indispensable. Jesus did not wait until those who were nailing him to the cross had asked for forgiveness...If the victim could only forgive when the culprit confesses, then the victim would be locked into the culprit's whim, locked into victimhood, whatever her own attitude or intention. That would be palpably unjust.³¹

Tutu also speaks of forgiveness as a liberating experience for the victim. For him, forgiveness means 'abandoning your right to pay back the perpetrator in his own coin, but it is a loss that liberates the victim'. He continues in the same paragraph with a story of a man who was held as a prisoner of war in Vietnam who states that he will 'never forgive' his captors. His mate replies, 'Then it seems they still have you in prison, don't they?'³²

To insist that repentance on behalf of the perpetrator is a prerequisite for forgiveness can deny victims the chance to be liberated from their victimhood. This point is based on both therapy, the healing of the inner wounds borne by survivors, and theology, that we have a source of life in God that transcends the wounds inflicted in this world – a source that is manifested in Jesus' life. As we develop a Christian theology of forgiveness, below, it will become clear that forgiveness is associated with grace which is freely given. However, even the grace of God calls us and lays demands on us to respond with repentance and a life-long change from an old self into a new self in Christ.

5. Are some things unforgivable?

Human beings are not divine. Although we are called to be Christ-like, most of us are not capable of the kind of abundant grace with which God relates to us, nor should we expect this of each other under situations of trauma and abuse. It is even more the case that we should not expect of children what adults find very difficult to do – forgive the perpetrators who have abused them. Some things, at least for a while, are very difficult, if not impossible, for humans to forgive.

It is instructive to read Simon Wiesenthal's, *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness*.³³ As a Jewish prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp, Wiesenthal is taken to the bedside of a dying Nazi soldier who wants to confess and seek forgiveness. In confessing he tells of terrible deeds he has done to Jewish people. Although the Nazi soldier is still young, only 21, Wiesenthal walks out of the room in silence. He could not forgive him.

After his miraculous survival from the death camps, Wiesenthal wrote of this story and invited responses. 'What would you have done', he asks? *The Sunflower* contains the responses from a variety of people, mainly Jewish but also Christian and Buddhist. All are careful to say that it is presumptuous to assume that one knows how one would respond without having gone through the experience oneself, but there is a noted difference between Jewish responses (most of which agree with Wiesenthal's silence) and the Christian and Buddhist responses which were more strongly on the side of compassion and forgiveness.

This raises the question of whether forgiveness has its limits, not only because it is so difficult to do in such cases, but because by forgiving an atrocity one is acting immorally. The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission

was also accused of being immoral for giving amnesty to perpetrators of violence and abuse. Tutu answers his critics by detailing the terms of amnesty, what it cost perpetrators to appear before the Commission, and that such amnesty was not imposed from above but was a way forward agreed to by many of the victims of Apartheid violence, who also sat on the Commission.³⁴ The opportunity for forgiveness was offered because true forgiveness ‘deals with the past, all of the past, to make the future possible’.³⁵ He is a witness to acts of forgiveness that he never thought or imagined were possible, but were enabled by the approach that was taken with truth-telling and confession by perpetrators in the work of the Commission.

Still, are there some things that are so bad, so horrendous, so evil, that they are unforgivable? Some would say that there are acts which human beings can’t forgive. Perhaps only God can. A number of responses to Simon Wiesenthal were along this line. A more difficult question is raised in relation to God and forgiveness. Emmanuel Levinas asks whether the Christian view of God, as one who offers indiscriminate, unconditional forgiveness, is immoral? He argues that, ‘The world in which pardon is all-powerful becomes inhuman’.³⁶ This is to take moral outrage seriously, and uphold the right of the victim to forgive or to withhold forgiveness, not for anyone else to do so on the victim’s behalf, not even God.

Christian responses to Levinas emphasise the call or demand of God for people to respond in repentance. L. Gregory Jones offers a detailed response to Levinas, examining Christian understandings of forgiveness as they developed from their Jewish context. In relation to an ‘all-powerful’ God, Jones responds with a Christian view of a Trinitarian God whose suffering and costly love, and forgiveness, is embodied in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. He adds to this by maintaining that forgiveness was not in the Jewish or Christian traditions merely given from on high without also entailing obligations on us to enact forgiveness with each other.

Further, Jones responds to Levinas’ accusation that an all-powerful pardon is ‘inhuman’ by suggesting, ‘perhaps the gospel calls for a transformation of what we take to be “human”’.³⁷

These are the two points that I will pursue further in the next section – what is the *theology* of forgiveness (our understanding of God), and what is the *anthropology* involved (our view of humanity implied in this theology)?

On the theology of forgiveness

Stephen Pattison describes how, as a child, his experience of abuse and neglect coloured the way he understood the liturgy and teaching of the church, the so-called ‘good news’ of the gospel. The problem was in part what was being taught and in part how he received it. Pattison discusses this under the heading, ‘Abusive Theology’. His aim is to show how ‘theological ideas might be implicated in sustaining or concealing abuse and the continuing suffering of the victims of abuse’.³⁸ He goes on to say,

Many theological ideas have colluded, mostly unwittingly, to obscure and support abuse and oppression. Children have been encouraged to forsake self, to walk the way of the cross, not to think of their own emotions, to ignore their own needs, to give thanks to God for the

‘blessings’ of their abused lives, and even to forgive their abusers in the name of Christ.³⁹

Central to Pattison’s critique of abusive theology is his criticism of those views of the atonement which see abuse and violence suffered by Christ as desired or needed by God in satisfaction of God’s wrath. Pattison is also concerned with an overbearing doctrine of sin, and with how people, especially children, are made to feel that they are bad and shameful. ‘Bringing down the mighty from their thrones’ is an important aspect of Christian theology, liturgy and teaching, but so is ‘lifting up those of low degree’.⁴⁰ Discernment is needed for which approach is the most appropriate for a given context or audience.

Miroslav Volf holds a penal substitution theory of atonement which may fall under Pattison’s criticism. Volf argues that God’s justice had to be satisfied, human sin was so great that we deserved condemnation, Christ was condemned in our place. Because the price had been paid (death), God forgave human sin and reconciled the world to himself. Volf is aware of the critique of this penal substitution theory - that it holds an abusive view of God who requires the death of his son for ‘satisfaction’. Volf counter-argues that Christ *was* God (not a third person) and so it was God taking upon Godself the penalty for sin, thus freeing us from condemnation.⁴¹

Though Volf is right in pointing out the Trinitarian nature of salvation, the atonement he espouses is still challenged in terms of its theology of forgiveness. For one, the justice of God in this view is retributive justice, not restorative. It requires punishment, no less than the death penalty for all humanity indiscriminately. Retribution pre-supposes vengeance. Although the atonement, in this view, offers salvation we are left with a vengeful God who would kill us all - except that Jesus paid the price.⁴² To convey to children that they belong on death row is abusive theology.

Further, the penal substitution view of the atonement centres on the cross and does not really need the resurrection. The ‘satisfaction’ was completed in Jesus’ death. What this misses out on is an understanding of the resurrection as God’s declaration that God is beyond our death-dealing ways, and that the violence and abuse of the crucifixion are *our* human ways of repression, control, vengeance and retributive justice.⁴³ In raising Christ from the dead, God sides with the one who is the victim of human violence, and against those forces and powers that deal in such ways in this world. God’s forgiveness is offered in compassion for ‘they know not what they do’ (Luke 23:34).

For us to know salvation and atonement, we need to ‘undergo’ its saving power.⁴⁴ It is to know the grace and love of God in such a way that it undoes us, breaks us open, breaks our hearts so that we may receive a bigger self beyond the relations in which we are entangled with their resentments, hurt, violence and abuse. The resurrection is revealing to us the heart of God as the ‘Author of life’ (Acts 3:14-15). As Jones points out, the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost (prodigal) son, all portray God as one who comes to us to save us and bring us, or welcome us, home. There is no need of any sacrificial death to make us acceptable again. Forgiveness, like the father running down the road to meet his prodigal son, flows from God’s abundant love and compassion towards us. God’s judgement does not condemn, but offers new life and a new way of being.⁴⁵

This is not to deny sin or its effects on human life. Jones acknowledges that

we are now the heirs of histories and habits of sin and evil that make it difficult, if not impossible, to break out of the cycles of violence and counterviolence, of diminishing and being diminished.⁴⁶

Jesus lived from a source of life that transcended these. He was not defined by them, and his 'refusal to participate in those cycles of betrayal, vengeance, and violence judges all of humanity in its sin.'⁴⁷

What we are offered in the resurrection is a new way of being human, one in which our identities are not caught up in competitive desires lived at the expense of others, or diminished lives lived at the hands of abusers. Rather, we are offered a way back home where our value and worth are recognised as a God-given dignity, and whenever this dignity is not respected, the powers that abuse or diminish it are measured against God's power and judged to be wrong.

The doctrine of sin can be similarly critiqued when it is used to make people, especially children, ashamed of themselves. It needs to be put into healthy relationship with the doctrine of humanity's creation in the image of God, and the privilege and responsibilities that this entails.

If the church is to repent and seek forgiveness for its past practices in relation to child sexual abuse, especially by clergy and church leaders, it will need to re-think its theology as well. I have hinted at some of the ways this can be done. For victims and survivors of abuse, who know more than most the hurt and damage done by the misuse of power, the way of forgiveness is an invitation home, of being defined by God's image and God's goodness, not by abuse, and thereby receiving an expanded self. The church has a positive role to play in this, embodying a discipleship⁴⁸ in which we are 'summoned to watch, pray and struggle for God's new world of justice and peace, in the company of all who are afflicted and cry for deliverance'.⁴⁹

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Notes

¹ Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, Doubleday, New York, 1999, p. 271.

² Patrick Parkinson, *Child Sexual Abuse and the Churches: Understanding the Issues*, second edition, Aquila Press, Sydney, 2003, pp. 58-9.

³ Miroslav Volf, *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace*, Zondervan, Michigan, 2005, pp. 169, 173.

⁴ Retributive justice sees punishment as the end or goal of justice, that is, justice is satisfied when those who are found guilty are punished accordingly. This form of justice is sometimes contrasted with restorative justice, which aims to restore or repair the damage done by the wrong committed, and tends to work more with mediation between the perpetrator and victim, with a view to confession, forgiveness and reparation. It would be false to contrast these views of justice as opposites, or to cast one as bad and the other good. Rather each can be critiqued

for its limits and strengths. Volf is critiquing an extreme view of retributive justice which is motivated by revenge and which is only satisfied with punishment. For a discussion of retributive and restorative justice see Christopher D. Marshall, *Beyond Retribution: A New Testament Vision for Justice, Crime and Punishment*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2001, pp. 109-135

⁵ Volf, *Free of Charge*, p. 160.

⁶ Volf, *Free of Charge*, p.159, 161.

⁷ Marshall, *Beyond Retribution*, pp. 255-284.

⁸ Marshall, *Beyond Retribution* p. 271.

⁹ Volf, *Free of Charge*, pp. 168-9.

¹⁰ Volf, *Free of Charge*, p. 171.

¹¹ Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*. Doubleday, New York, 1999.

¹² L. Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis*, Eerdmans, Michigan, 1995, p. 3.

¹³ Parkinson, *Child Sexual Abuse*, p. 180.

¹⁴ Parkinson, *Child Sexual Abuse*, p. 178.

¹⁵ Volf, *Free of Charge*, p.176, [emphasis original]. The quote from Luther is from p. 174 and is from *Luther's Works*, Harold J. Grimm (ed.), Vol 45, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1957, p. 283.

¹⁶ Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, p. 271.

¹⁷ Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness*, p. 244.

¹⁸ Stephen Pattison, "'Suffer Little Children': The Challenge of Child Sexual Abuse and Neglect to Theology", in *Theology and Sexuality*, 9,1998, pp.36-58. See in particular his section on 'Abusive Theology', pp. 44-53.

¹⁹ Parkinson, *Child Sexual Abuse*, pp. 58-9, 192-193.

²⁰ Parkinson, *Child Sexual Abuse*, p. 193.

²¹ Parkinson, *Child Sexual Abuse*, pp. 141, 161. See also L. Shengold, *Soul Murder*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1989.

²² Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness*, pp. 243-251, and fn 7, p. 246.

²³ Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*, Pandora: London, 1992, p. 188.

²⁴ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, pp. 189-90.

²⁵ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 190.

²⁶ Pattison, *Suffer Little Children*, p. 44.

²⁷ Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness*, pp. 9-23. The chapter is entitled 'Rejecting Cheap Grace: God's Forgiveness and the Practices of the Christian Community'.

²⁸ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 190.

²⁹ Parkinson, *Child Sexual Abuse*, pp. 182-191.

³⁰ Parkinson, *Child Sexual Abuse*, pp. 193-196.

³¹ Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, p. 272.

³² Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, p. 272.

³³ Simon Wiesenthal, *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness*, revised and expanded edition, Schocken Books, New York, 1997.

³⁴ Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, pp. 49ff.

³⁵ Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, p. 279.

³⁶ Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness*, p. 104.

³⁷ Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness*, p. 104ff.

³⁸ Pattison, *Suffer Little Children*, p. 44.

³⁹ Pattison, *Suffer Little Children*, p. 58.

⁴⁰ References to Mary's Song in Luke 1: 52.

⁴¹ Volf, *Free of Charge*, pp. 144-145.

⁴² See James Alison, 'Unpicking Atonement's Knots', in *On Being Liked*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 2003, pp. 17-31.

⁴³ Alison, 'Unpicking Atonement's Knots', p. 23.

⁴⁴ Alison, 'Unpicking Atonement's Knots', p. 28. See also his next chapter, 'Re-Imagining Forgiveness', pp. 32-46, and James Alison, *Undergoing God: Dispatches from the Scene of a Break-In*, Continuum, New York, 2006.

⁴⁵ Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness*, pp. 102-3.

⁴⁶ Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness*, p. 115.

⁴⁷ Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness*, p. 120.

⁴⁸ This is the thrust of L. Gregory Jones' book, *Embodying Forgiveness*, cited throughout.

⁴⁹ Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, second edition, Eerdmans, Michigan, 2004, p. 137.