FORGIVENESS : HUMAN AND DIVINE Richard Rice-Oxley

ABSTRACT OF ARGUMENT

Human forgiveness is always a personal response to personal wrong. In this it differs from pardon, which is a social activity undertaken only by one qualified to do so. Forgiveness is different from both understanding and tolerance in its response to personal wrong.

True forgiveness always includes the letting go of resentment and results in healing for the one who forgives. Prior to an act of forgiveness, repentance on the part of the wrongdoer is desirable, but not essential. When repentance does take place, forgiveness includes a measure of trust being placed in the one forgiven. Since forgiveness is difficult, there are ways in which it is falsified, knowingly or unknowingly.

Forgiveness is also difficult for the one being forgiven. He should be given the opportunity to make reparation. Many situations involve wrongs on both sides with a consequent need for mutual forgiveness. Sometimes an individual will feel it appropriate to repent of wrongs committed by those whom he is seen to represent. Self-forgiveness, though difficult to understand and open to abuse, is a real and necessary activity.

God's forgiveness is examined from the three-fold perspective of release from debt, justification, and the personal bearing of hurt and renewal of fellowship. Each perspective is found in the teaching of Jesus and Paul, although their emphases differ. From all three perspectives, the Cross is found to be the cost of forgiveness.

Finally, the thesis notes the elements common to human and divine forgiveness. Both are personal, and so involve the feelings. Forgiveness is costly for both man and God. It is risky, for it can be refused or abused. It is a necessity, since both man and God have a deep need to be reconciled to those from whom they are estranged.

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Introduction. The importance of forgiveness.

Forgiveness stands at the heart of Christian faith and life. Jesus taught his disciples both to ask for and to offer forgiveness.[1] Christians, Sunday by Sunday, state their belief in the forgiveness of sins.

The importance of forgiveness has been stressed by Christian writers through the centuries and thoughtful Christians of the twentieth century have affirmed their verdict. The late Bishop Stephen Neill asserts that "Forgiveness is at the heart of the universe."[2] Jean Vanier believes that "Forgiveness is the greatest factor of growth for any human being."[3] Peter Hinchliff adds that "Forgiveness, which is central to Christian faith, is also central to Christian morality ",[4] while H.R. Mackintosh writes: "The certainty of forgiveness in Christ is, if not the sum, at least the secret of Christian religion."[5]

No writer of recent times has expressed the absolutely vital importance of forgiveness, both human and divine, in the work of human affairs more strongly than Charles Williams:

> If there is one thing which is obviously either part of the universe or not - and on knowing whether it is or not our life depends - it is the forgiveness of sins. Our life depends on it in every sense. If there is God, if there is sin, if there is forgiveness, we must know it in order to live to him. If there are men, and if forgiveness is part of the interchanged life of men, then we must know it in order to live to and among them. Forgiveness, if it is at all a principle of that interchanged life, is certainly the deepest of all; if it is not, then the whole principle of interchange is false. If the principle of retributive justice is our only hope we had certainly better know it. Because then, since retributive justice strictly existing everywhere is staringly impossible, all our hopes of interchange and union, of all kinds, are ended at once; and we had better know that. [6]

But what is forgiveness? In a sense, everyone knows what it is to forgive and be forgiven, when it happens.

But the fact is that it does not happen nearly often enough. While paying lip service to its importance, many people find it possible to live vital areas of their lives untouched by it, to the detriment both of themselves and of those around them.

Moreover, forgiveness is often misunderstood. On the one hand it is confused with "pardon", a related but distinct concept. On the other hand, it is confused with tolerance or condonation, a related but different response to personal wrong. Other sources of confusion concern the relationship between forgiveness and repentance, forgiveness and trust, the place of resentment, the connection between forgiving and forgetting, and what it means to forgive oneself. These and other topics form the substance of Part I of this thesis.

The approach in this section has been to draw on insights from several different disciplines, philosophy, psychology and theology, as well as those of novelists, playwrights and poets. Such an approach leads inevitably to the use of a number of quotations. The intention is that these will help the reader to feel the full force of each point being made, rather than distract in any way from the flow of the argument.

In order to "earth" the discussion in lived experience, the writer visited Northern Ireland in October 1984. In Belfast, and at Rostrevor, Co.Down, he met a number of people who had had to forgive at considerable personal cost. Their experience is incorporated in the body of the text. No footnotes are appended to their comments, since all, without exception, were made direct to the writer during the period October 18th to 22nd, 1984.

Many of these Irish stories have a political dimension, as do several other incidents related. The writer is aware that there is a growing interest in the whole subject of the politics of forgiveness, that is, forgiveness as it can manifest itself specifically in the political sphere. Since in this thesis we are looking at human forgiveness primarily, though not exclusively, on a one-to-one basis, this aspect is not discussed

fully in the text. Readers interested in it are referred to the Forgiveness and Politics Study Project.[7]

Just as human forgiveness is often misunderstood, so is divine forgiveness. Again, Christians know in experience the forgiveness of sins. But if they have an imperfect understanding of human forgiveness, the chances are that they will also have an imperfect understanding of divine forgiveness. One of the main reasons for this is that people frequently fail to see any connection at all between the two sorts of forgiveness. The oft-quoted words of the dying Heine: "God will forgive me -- it's his business" express the attitude of many people today, both inside and outside the church. What is for us human beings difficult, costly and at times utterly beyond us, is deemed to be for God as easy as "falling off a log".

Part II of this thesis then will examine divine forgiveness. The approach will be different in that we shall take three parables of Jesus, identify the key thought in them, and show their development in the thinking of Paul. Because of this approach, certain questions have had to be omitted. What place does sacrifice have in divine forgiveness? Is there a place or state of final unforgiveness? Is there any sense in which God needs not only to forgive, but to be forgiven?

Another aspect of God's response to wrong receives only cursory treatment. A distinction is made between pardon and forgiveness, and we note that God both pardons and forgives. The Cross is frequently seen to be the place of God's forgiveness. But the Cross as the place of God's pardon, and the thorny question of substitutionary "punishment", have had to be left on one side.

But this last omission may actually be an advantage. For the aim of this thesis is to concentrate very definitely on the subject of forgiveness, rather than pardon. The work might be seen as an extended commentary on the petition in the Lord's Prayer: "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us". The hope is that our study will result in a clearer understanding

of what it means for us to forgive others, and through that understanding, and also through the teaching of Jesus and Paul, of what it means for God to forgive us.

Our concluding section, then, will summarise the similarities and differences between human and divine forgiveness, and identify what seem to be the most vital characteristics of this most vital of personal activities.

Notes

1. For a full discussion of the teaching of Jesus about human forgiveness, which underlies the comments of many of those quoted in Part I, see Appendix A.

   All quotations from the Bible are taken from The New English Bible OUP/CUP (NT First Edn. 1961), 1970, except where otherwise indicated.

2. S. Neill : A genuinely human existence Constable, 1959, p.211.

3. J. Vanier : Address in Canterbury Cathedral, September 1983. Quoted by E. de Waal Seeking God Collins, Fount Paperbacks in association with Faith Press, 1984, p.133.

4. P. Hinchliff : Holiness and Politics Darton, Longman and Todd, 1982, p.59.

5. H.R. Mackintosh : The Christian Experience of Forgiveness (Nisbet and Co. 1927) Fontana Books, 1961, p.15.

6. C. Williams : He came down from heaven and The forgiveness of sins Faber and Faber, 1950, pp. 107-108. (The forgiveness of sins originally published by Geoffrey Bles. 1942).

7. See for instance their study material in Forgiveness and Politics : Britain and Ireland - a test case Forgiveness and Politics Study Project, 1984.

PART I : HUMAN FORGIVENESS

1. FORGIVENESS AND PARDON

The Oxford English Dictionary defines to forgive as "to remit, let off, or pardon".

Here are two examples from Shakespeare.[1] In the last scene of The Merchant of Venice, Bassanio, tricked into surrendering the ring given him by Portia, pleads with her:

'Portia, forgive me this enforced wrong'(5.1.240)

Seven lines later, he tries again:

> 'Pardon this fault, and by my soul I swear I never more will break an oath with thee.' (5.1.247-8)

In The Winters Tale, Leontes, king of Sicilia, has foolishly misinterpreted the friendship of his wife with Polixenes, king of Bohemia. He comes to believe that Polixenes is the father of his daughter, Perdita. At the end of the play, the king is happily reconciled first with his daughter and his friend Polixenes:

> Third Gent...'Our king, being ready to leap out of himself for joy of his found daughter, as if that joy were now become a loss, cries 'O, thy mother, thy mother!' then asks Bohemia forgiveness;.....'. (5.2.53-57)

Finally he is reunited with his wife, Hermione; he addresses her and Polixenes:

> ...'both your pardons,
> That e'er I put between your holy looks
> My ill suspicion.....'. (5.3.147-9)

This tendency to use the word "pardon" in the sense of personally forgive, has remained standard English. Theologians who write on the subject of forgiveness are thus perfectly within their rights to use "forgiveness" and "pardon" interchangeably, as does, for instance, H.R. Mackintosh in his standard work The Christian Experience of Forgiveness.[2]

However, it is quite obvious that the word "pardon" is used in legal and social contexts which are distinct from the essentially personal world of forgiveness.

Because the two words can on occasion be used synonymously, we sometimes fail to make this important conceptual distinction between personal forgiveness and social pardon.

R.S. Downie in his book Roles and Values draws out this distinction most helpfully. First of all, Downie notes, forgiveness is personal. It relates to an injury inflicted on a person, whereas pardoning relates to an offence, the breaking of rules.

Secondly, forgiveness does not deny that a moral wrong has been committed; it is not condonation. Pardon, however, involves letting a person off the "merited consequences of his actions". Thirdly, forgiveness is open to anyone who has been injured; pardon is open only to one qualified to condone a breach of the rules, such as a monarch or club chairman. From this it follows that "I pardon you" is a performative utterance, the word constitutes the deed. But "I forgive you" may or may not be true - it all depends on the personal attitude of the one speaking.[3]

Shakespeare can furnish us with numerous examples of "pardon" in the sense that Downie describes it. Many of his comedies end in a welter of "pardons", dispensed by a Duke or King, - a necessary device for securing a happy ending after the misdemeanours of the play's characters. At the end of Measure for Measure, for instance, Escalus, Isobel, Claudio, Angelo, Bernadine and Lucio are pardoned by the Duke in quick succession for a variety of offences ranging from the petty to the heinous.

At the conclusion of The Merchant of Venice, Shylock's life is spared by the Duke with the words:

> 'That thou shalt see the difference of our spirits
> I pardon thee thy life before thou ask it.' (4.1. 369-70)

But the pardon is limited, Shylock loses half his property, is instructed to whom he may leave the remainder and is forced to convert to Christianity! (4.1.38.-393). In the same way, Lucio in Measure for Measure is spared

the "whipping and hanging" originally promised by the Duke (5.1.515), but is still compelled to marry Kate Keepdown, the prostitute he has made pregnant.

> Duke: 'Upon mine honour, thou shalt marry her. Thy slanders I forgive: and therewithal remit thy other forfeits. Take him to prison. And see our pleasure herein executed.'
>
> Lucio: 'Marrying a punk, my lord, is pressing to death, whipping and hanging.'
>
> Duke: 'Slandering a prince deserves it.' (5.1.520-26)

Behind the banter lies an interesting question. Is the Duke dealing with pardon or forgiveness? Lucio's slanders were made to him personally while in disguise. Clearly when he "remits Lucio's forfeits", the Duke is in his social role, dispensing pardon. "Thy slanders I forgive" looks like a personal forgiveness. But his final comment makes one wonder - "a prince is a prince when all is said and done!" Perhaps his "forgiveness" is more social than personal after all.

A clearer use of the word "forgive" to describe what is merely "pardon" is to be found in The Tempest. Prospero, the real Duke of Milan, has caught his brother Antonio, who has usurped his kingdom. Twice Prospero says "I forgive" when he appears to mean "I refrain from taking vengeance or exacting any penalty". His accompanying words "unnatural though thou art" and "whom to call brother would even infect my mouth" would seem to rule out that spirit of acceptance and reconciliation which we understand to be an essential part of forgiveness.

Despite these examples of verbal imprecision, Shakespeare does illustrate the basic validity of Downie's conceptual distinction. Pardon is essentially dispensed in a social, rather than personal context. It is from a superior to an inferior. It means the waiving of a legal penalty, although that penalty may simply be commuted rather than remitted altogether. The person issuing the pardon need not have been personally affected by the wrong committed (although he may have been),

and he issues that pardon by virtue of his social standing alone. The feelings of the pardoner to the pardoned are unimportant - what is important is the word of pardon which carries an immediate effect.

How very different is forgiveness. Forgiveness is inescapably personal. This point has been made by many writers. Here is one example:

> Forgiveness is not a transaction which can be taken by itself and stated as it were in terms of arithmetic. It is an attitude of a person to a person. It can only be understood in terms of personality. I cannot forgive a river or a tree. I cannot forgive an animal except just so far as I do (rightly or wrongly) recognise in it the attributes of a rational soul; if I forgive a man, it is in relation to that man's personality - its complex present, its immense possible future - that all which I do in the act of forgiving finds at once its justification and explanation.[4]

Our greatest poet once again provides us with striking examples, although some of the most moving ones do not mention the word. Thus in Cymbeline, Imogen, whose husband Posthumus has wrongly doubted her fidelity, forgives him with a jest that is wry, yet full of pathos:

> 'Why did you throw your wedded lady from you?
> Think that you are upon a rock ; and now
> Throw me again.' (Embracing him.)

It is the embrace which makes clear her forgiveness, rather than the words she uses, and Posthumus' reply is immediate:

> 'Hang there like fruit, my soul,
> Till the tree die.' (5.5.262-6)

The renewing and inspiring character of real forgiveness and reconciliation is beautifully illustrated later in the scene, when Cymbeline, Imogen's father, comments:

> ....'See,
> Posthumus anchors upon Imogen,
> And she, like harmless lightning, throws her eye,
> On him, her brothers, me, her master, hitting
> Each object with a joy: the counterchange
> Is severally in all.' (5.5.393-8)

Romeo and Juliet is a play about the destructive character of a family feud. The play ends in the mutual forgiveness of the heads of the two familes:

Prince: 'Where be these enemies? -Capulet! Montague!
See what a scourge is laid upon your hate,
That heaven finds means to kill your joys
with love,
And, I for winking at your discords too,
Have lost a brace of kinsmen: all are
punished.'

Capulet: 'O brother Montague! give me thy hand:
This is my daughter's jointure, for no more
Can I demand.'

Montague: '...But I can give thee more;
For I will raise her statue in pure gold;...

Capulet: 'As rich shall Romeo by his lady lie;
Poor sacrifices of our enmity!' (5.3.291-304)

Here the enmity between the two families is so deep that nothing less than the deaths of their children can break through the vendetta mentality. It is interesting that Shakespeare uses the word "sacrifice", thus underlining that this forgiveness and reconciliation is won at the price of the two young lovers' lives. The tragedy of their deaths is thus somewhat alleviated when we discover what they have achieved.

To these examples we may add the concluding scenes of The Winters Tale quoted above, and of Measure for Measure, which will be discussed in a later section.

Of course, the fact that pardoning and forgiving belong to a different logical order does not mean that they cannot be combined in one person. What we need to distinguish is the different activities involved in the one action. We have already seen the ambiguous nature of the Duke's decision as regards Lucio in Measure for Measure. In another play, Cymbeline, Shakespeare neatly distinguishes social pardon (of a victory over his foe) from personal forgiveness. Posthumus says to Iachimo:

'The power that I have on you is to spare you;
The malice towards you to forgive you.' (5.5.419-20)

It would have been quite possible, and logical, for Posthumus to have spared the life of Iachimo (pardon) and yet continued to bear malice against him, i.e. not forgive him. Downie gives us an example of the opposite combination. A schoolteacher who has been attacked by a pupil may administer punishment of the offence, and yet

as a person forgive the injury inflicted upon him.[5]

Harry McCann, from Antrim, Northern Ireland, had both his legs blown off in a car bomb. He had no hesitation in saying he completely forgave his assailants in his heart. But he added that, if they were ever caught, they ought to suffer the full rigour of the law for the crime they had committed.

Pardon and forgiveness combined in a striking way in the meeting of Pope John Paul II (Karol Wojtyla) with his would-be assassin, Mehmet Ali Agca, on December 27th, 1983. This is how the Pope described it to reporters, after emerging from Agca's prison cell in Rome:

> This will remain as an historic day in my life as a man and a Christian. I was able to meet the person whose name you all know: Ali Agca, who made an attempt on my life.
>
> But providence took things into its own hands in a way I would call exceptional, even marvellous. Today, after more than two years, I was able to meet my assailant and repeat the pardon which I granted immediately to him and which I later expressed from my hospital bed as soon as it was possible.
>
> The Lord allowed us to meet as men and as brothers because all the events of our lives must confirm that God our Father and all of us are his children in Jesus Christ. Thus we are all brothers."[6]

A close examination of this statement shows how a person in high office can both accept and transcend that office. Paragraph 2 shows the Pope, as supreme pontiff, issuing a pardon to an offender. It is the sort of thing we would expect from one who is the official head of the (Roman Catholic) Church.[7] But in the final paragraph, we have a different picture. The Pope comes down from his position of superiority and meets his attacker as a brother. Although the word "forgiveness" is not used, forgiveness there must have been, since there is no way he could have referred to Ali Agca as his brother and retained either a cold superiority or an inner attitude

of resentment. The Pope, as Pope, pardoned. Karol Wojtyla, as a man, forgave. The combination of the two is utterly compelling.

Notes

1. All quotations from Shakespeare are taken from the Oxford Standard Authors edition of Shakespeare's works, ed. W. Craig, O.U.P., 1905.

2. H.R. Mackintosh : throughout. For instance, on p.33 he writes: "Jesus once described pardon, as it ought to be, as the forgiving of brethren 'from our hearts'".

3. R.J. Downie : Roles and Values Methuen, 1971, pp. 151-153.

4. R.C. Moberly : Atonement and Personality John Murray, 1909, pp.54-55.

5. R.S. Downie: pp.154-155.

6. Pope John-Paul II : quoted in "The Daily Telegraph" December 28th, 1983.

7. Of course, unlike the Dukes and Kings of Shakespeare's plays, the Pope does not have the power to remit Ali Agca's punishment. He remains in jail. To that extent, the Pope's pardon lacks "bite". But we can still envisage a cold "official" pardon which lacked the warmth of personal forgiveness; the distinction remains valid despite the limited scope of the pardon.

2. FORGIVENESS, UNDERSTANDING AND TOLERANCE

Forgiveness then, unlike pardon, is totally and inescapably personal. From now on, we shall be dealing with this realm of personal relationships. But before we seek to examine the nature of forgiveness itself it is important to distinguish it from other personal activities, which resemble it, but are in some important way different.

Understanding

"Tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner."

This French aphorism suggests that total understanding leads inevitably to total forgiveness. If we could fully understand the moods, pressures and motives that have resulted in someone hurting us, we would be bound to forgive him. This viewpoint is taken by Brand Blanshard, a determinist philosopher. While wanting to maintain a judgement against the hurtful act, he says that we must forgive the man who does the act "with the compassion of one who knows that with the inner and outer forces working upon him at the moment of decision, he could have done no other."[1]

The same sort of position is taken by psychiatrist R.C.A. Hunter. In one of his case studies he describes a young woman who understands the former attitudes and actions of her parents in a new light after talks with her analyst. She also comes to understand her own faults in a new way. As a result, she stops blaming her parents for their supposed wrongs to her, and thus "forgives" them. Hunter states: "What forgiving undoes is the notion or belief that an unjust injury or mischief has been done to oneself, or was intended, which has caused suffering or harm."[2]

The key to the position described by Blanshard, the philosopher, and Hunter, the psychiatrist, is that understanding leads to the removal of blame from the offending person. It is interesting that earlier in his article Hunter actually calls forgiveness "the opposite of blaming."[3]

But to identify understanding and forgiveness in this way is unacceptable. Very often a full understanding of the situation leads to the inescapable conclusion that the wrongdoer was fully responsible for his actions and very much to blame. What Blanshard and Hunter have been describing is excusing, the removal of blame, which thus makes forgiveness unnecessary. C.S. Lewis expresses the point forcefully.

> There is all the difference in the world between forgiving and excusing. Forgiveness says:- 'Yes, you have done this thing, but I accept your apology, I will never hold it against you and everything between us two will be exactly as it was before.' But excusing says:- 'I see that you couldn't help it, or didn't mean it, you weren't really to blame.' If one was not really to blame then there is nothing to forgive. In that sense forgiveness and excusing are almost opposites.[4]

It seems that Lewis is right to make this distinction between forgiving and excusing, as against Hunter and Blanshard. But in life the distinction sometimes becomes rather blurred. One such case is that of Mary Sandys, whose 17 year old son was knocked off his bike, and killed, by a lorry. It was a complete accident - if anything the lad was to blame. Yet the lorry driver still felt the need to ask Mary to forgive him, and she still felt it appropriate to say "I forgive you", not "I excuse you - it was an accident." Both the driver and the mother accepted that, as he was in charge of the vehicle, he was in some sense responsible for the death. And Mary's forgiveness did not mean "ceasing to blame" but rather "letting go of resentment". We shall look at the whole question of resentment later on.

So understanding, excusing and forgiving are not to be identified as the same thing. However, we must allow that understanding often plays an important part in enabling a person to forgive. As Williams says, "To forgive another involves, sooner or later, so full an understanding of the injury, and of its cause, that in

some sense we have committed the injury; we and that which injures ourselves."[5] This sounds very similar to what Blanshard is saying, but there is an important difference. Blanshard posits a situation where the injured party understands that his injurer could do no other than hurt him. Williams seems to be talking about an understanding which sympathetically enters into the the weakness which led to the injury, but which does not thereby seek to exonerate the injurer.

To illustrate further the distinction between understanding and forgiveness let us take another example from Shakespeare. In Measure for Measure, Isabella has been wronged by Angelo. He has not only tried to seduce her, bargaining her chastity against her brother's life, he has also (she believes) had her brother executed, contrary to his promise not to do so. In the early part of the play, Isabella is filled with hatred for Angelo and the desire for revenge. But Isabella's friend, Mariana, is in love with Angelo, and wants him as her husband despite his intended infidelity. After Angelo's scheming is uncovered, she pleads with the Duke for pardon, and calls on her friend to join her. After some hesitation Isabella agrees. In a dramatic transformation she pleads for Angelo's life:

> 'Most bounteous sir,
> Look, if it please you, on this man condemn'd,
> As if my brother lived. I partly think
> A due sincerity govern'd his deeds,
> Till he did look on me...' (5.1.444-448)

Isabella is willing to give Angelo the benefit of the doubt, to try and understand his moral crusade and the justice of his case against her brother. This contrasts strikingly with her previous wholesale condemnation, and arises from a willingness to see Angelo from the point of view of her friend, Mariana. But we notice that Isabella's understanding falls short of Blanshard's determinist position. She does not say; "Given the circumstances, Angelo could not help acting the way he did towards me". She does not attempt to excuse his

attempted seduction of her.

It is not clear whether this speech demonstrates Isabella's forgiveness of Angelo for his wrongs against her, or whether she merely pleads for his life to help her friend, and reserves her private feelings of resentment. It is arguable that she does forgive him. If so, her new understanding of Angelo, her willingness to see things from his point of view, will doubtless have contributed to that forgiveness. But there are still wrongs to be forgiven, not only Angelo's dishonourable intention, but also the (supposed) execution of her brother, contrary to his promise of pardon. Understanding puts Isabella in the way of forgiveness, but it does not itself constitute that forgiveness. For that an extra "grace" is needed.

Another example of understanding which leads to forgiveness comes in the short story "A Bar of Shadow", by Laurens van der Post.[6] This concerns the relationship between Hara, a Japanese officer in a prisoner-of-war camp and Lawrence, a British officer, who suffered terrible beatings at his hands. There is never any question that Hara was guilty of these and many other offences, including murder. But Lawrence understands that they were committed from a genuine desire to do what was right according to the morality to which Hara adhered. Basically Hara thought that to be taken alive was a shocking "crime", and that his brutality was therefore fully justified, even required, to correct the "wrong-thinking" of his enemies. Because of his deep understanding of this Japanese morality, Lawrence does not blame Hara for his actions. Even while he was suffering he felt sorry for him, and after the war, at the war trial, he pleaded for Hara's life. "It seemed to me just as wrong for us now to condemn Hara under a law which had never been his, of which he had never even heard, as he and his masters had been to punish and kill us for transgressions of the code of Japan that was not ours."[7] We note that Lawrence does not excuse Hara completely. He says he was wrong

to try and impose [illegible] morality on the British. But Lawrence's understanding of an alien morality is such that he refuses to feel malice against the man who hurt him or accept that the death penalty is suitable for one who was only doing right by his own lights. Hara and Lawrence meet face to face and are reconciled in Hara's prison cell on the night before he is hanged. There is an ironic twist at the end of the story. Lawrence feels the need for personal forgiveness in European terms, whereas it is clear that Hara is quite content with the rather formal encounter between the two men. Lawrence's deep understanding of their different views of wrong does not seem to be matched by a corresponding insight into their different understandings of forgiveness.[8]

Lawrence's attitude to the terrible atrocities of Hara might be interpreted by some as tolerance of wrong, and to this response to wrong we now turn.

Tolerance refuses to judge or condemn the hurt from the outset, accepting it as if it were not wrong. Such a reaction to minor faults is often the most practical solution. "A soft answer turns away wrath" is an example of how a tolerant response to provocation may defuse a potentially damaging dispute. Tolerance, however, has its limitations, as John Wisdom points out.[9]

For one thing, such tolerance may be false. A man may deceive others, and even himself, into thinking that he has not taken offence, but in fact underneath he may be nursing resentment. This sort of tolerance seems akin to the sort of forgiveness described by Hunter as a "reaction formation", a defence against vengeful aggression. Here the tolerance/forgiveness is the psyche's way of dealing with vengeful feelings which the hurt person is not willing to express.

Tolerance may be foolish. No good can come in the long term from pretending that a hurtful act was not really so wrong after all. If not quite as bad as calling "evil good", it blurs an essential moral distinction upon

which the health of society depends.

Tolerance of a hurt to oneself may involve others, and result in hurting them. Thus a host's tolerance of a boorish member of his dinner-party may ruin the evening for the remainder of his guests. Perhaps the older brother in the parable of the Prodigal Son mistook his Father's forgiveness for tolerance, an easy acceptance of the younger son's misdemeanours. If so, he was right to protest. (There were, of course, other less creditable reasons for his outburst.)

The most damaging indictment of tolerance is that it often indicates a refusal to respond to what has happened in a fully personal way. As Wisdom points out, a tolerant attitude to the hurts inflicted on him may indicate that a man has too little regard for himself. Thus in ancient Greece a slave might tolerate appalling hurt and injury simply because he did not value himself highly enough to resent them. Or today, racial minorities may tolerate racial prejudice because deep down they do not feel they deserve anything else.

Tolerance of wrong may also indicate that a person has too little regard for the one who has hurt them. "Even a remorseful sinner who has screwed up the courage to apologise is not looking for tolerance", writes Helen Oppenheimer. "The calm acknowledgement that one just is that sort of person may be less alarming than bitter reproaches, but is not really sustaining."[10] There is a good example of this in Iris Murdoch's novel <u>The Red and the Green</u> which is set in Ireland in 1916. Barney has decided to confess two "wrongs" which he has been committing against his wife:

> 'Kathleen.....'
> 'Barney, I'm so worried...'
> 'Listen, Kathleen, I must tell you something. I've got to tell you now and it'll make everything all right again between us. I know it'll upset you, but it's right to tell the truth isn't it and won't you forgive me for it? It's about Millie, well it's about me really, but there are two things and one of them is about Millie, that I've been going to see Millie still. You didn't know that, did you? Well, for ages now

I've been going to see her at her house, just to talk like, but it was very wrong and I'm very sorry and I won't go there any more at all. And the other thing is about Saint Brigid, I mean about the early church that I'm supposed to be writing. I haven't been writing it at all but I've been writing another thing a sort of autobiography thing about you and me in a way I shouldn't but I'll stop doing that too and - '
'Saint Brigid?' said Kathleen. Perhaps she could not hear very well in the crowded echoing shelter.
'I say I'm not writing about Saint Brigid but about you and me in a sort of Memoir like I shouldn't have been. But did you hear what I said about Millie?'
'Don't talk so loudly. I can hear you quite well. You mustn't talk like that here.'
'But did you hear?'
'Yes. I knew you went to see Millie.'
'Oh. Well, and wasn't it wrong of me to?'
'I still don't understand what it has to do with Saint Brigid.'
'That's another thing. I'm doing two wrong things but they're connected, forget about Saint Brigid, it's just that all the time I've been at the National Library I've been writing that thing about you and me, and - '
'Sure, why shouldn't you?'
Barney had often imagined himself making this confession to Kathleen, but it had been in a scene quite unlike this one. He had pictured himself shaken by emotion the words rent from his breast. He had pictured Kathleen's stricken face, perhaps her tears, her bitter reproaches, and then the great reconciliation. But this was as random and senseless as the sea roaring through the rocks.
'Barney, I'm so worried - .' [11]

There is more than one reason for the failure of Barney's confession. He has chosen the wrong time, with his wife preoccupied with her son's likely involvement in the Easter rising, and the wrong place, a crowded bus shelter lacking the necessary privacy. This gives the scene a hilarious quality out of keeping with the seriousness of Barney's purpose, but all of a piece with his bumbling, ineffective personality.

However, the main reason for Barney's failure is his wife's tolerance of his faults. Barney saw his

visits to Millie as an act of unfaithfulness, Kathleen did not. Barney saw his derogatory remarks about her in his diary, together with the deception about St. Brigid, as wrong, Kathleen did not.

Kathleen's reaction shows the poor quality of her relationship with her husband. Had she expected more of it, she might have been hurt. Had she been hurt, the confession might have seemed appropriate and forgiveness possible. Because she did not really care what her husband did, no offence was taken and Barney was left deeply confused. In fact a refusal to forgive might have been better for him than such a clear demonstration of his wife's failure to be related to him as a wife to a husband. So mere tolerance can be even worse than unforgiveness.

Forgiveness, then, goes beyond both understanding and tolerance. It looks hurt squarely in the face, and acknowledges it to be wrong, and the agent responsible. As Lewis says, "Real forgiveness means looking steadily at the sin, the sin that is left over without any excuse, after all allowances have been made, and seeing it in all its horror, dirt, meanness and malice, and nevertheless being wholly reconciled to the man who has done it."[12] But is reconciliation in these circumstances morally justifiable?

Notes

1. B. Blanshard : "Reply to Elizabeth L. Beardsley", The Philosophy of Brand Blanshard ed. P. Schlipp, Library of Living Philosophers, Open Court, p.263. 1980

2. R.C.A Hunter : "Forgiveness, retaliation and paranoid reactions", Canadian Psychiatry Association Journal Vol.23 (1978) pp.168-169.
The quotation is from p.169.

3. R.C.A. Hunter : p.167.

4. C.S. Lewis : "On forgiveness", Fern-seeds and elephants ed. W. Hooper Collins, Fount paperbacks 1975, p.40.

5. C. Williams : p.189.

6. L. van der Post : "A Bar of Shadow", The seed and the Sower (The Hogarth Press 1963) Penguin edition, 1966, pp.7-38.

7. L. van der Post : The Seed and the Sower, p.34.

8. See L. van der Post : The Seed and the Sower, pp.36-38. For a description and discussion of this remarkable short story, see Appendix B.

9. J. Wisdom : "Tolerance", Paradox and Discovery Blackwell 1965, pp.139-147.

10. H. Oppenheimer : The hope of happiness SCM, 1983, p.119.

11. I. Murdoch : The Red and the Green (1965) Triad/ Panther, 1978, pp.197-198.

12. C.S. Lewis : p.42.

3. THE MORAL JUSTIFICATION OF FORGIVENESS.

"Forgiveness", said Bernard Shaw, "is a beggar's refuge; we must all pay our debts".[1] Shaw was expressing in his usual pungent way what many believe - that forgiveness as defined at the end of our last section is basically immoral. If a man has wilfully and knowingly committed a wrong against another, surely the unconditional forgiveness of the wrong is really condonation of it - the wolf of tolerance dressed in the sheep's clothing of forgiveness?

Perhaps the most stringent expression of this view is by the philosopher Elizabeth Beardsley. She argues that the only good reason for forgiving a wrongdoer his act is "favourable moral appraisal", that is, the understanding that the agent acted from a morally good desire, or motive, however the act itself appeared. Later she adds that she believes that there is no "duty of forgiveness", not even a prima facie duty. Forgiveness is a response which is, or is not, deserved, an attitude the adoption of which in a given case has (or lacks) a good reason. The only justification is whether X had a morally good motive in performing A.[2]

This is an extreme position, not widely held among philosophers, but it arises from a genuine desire not to compromise with evil. Is forgiveness morally defensible? For answer let us turn first to another philosopher, Hannah Arendt. She points out that the consequence of following the Beardsley viewpoint is the death of human relationships. "Trespassing" is an everyday occurrence inevitable in the course of human action and needs forgiving and dismissing so that life can go on. Revenge is the natural response to trespass. But it is a re-acting to the original action which keeps everyone bound to the consequences of the first misdeed and the consequent chain reaction. By contrast, the act of forgiving cannot be predicted and thus retains something of the freedom of the original action. It "acts anew and unexpectedly, unconditioned by the act which provoked it and therefore

freeing from its consequences both the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven."[3]

Theologian H.R. Mackintosh also remarks on the creative and renewing nature of forgiveness, which proves that it is morally justifiable. "It (forgiveness) cannot be immoral, for it calls out a new and victorious goodness. The difficulty of understanding it lies in the fact that it is creative."[4]

Stephen Neill agrees, asserting that "Forgiveness is always creative; it brings into being a totally new situation; it is hardly an exaggeration to say that it brings into being a new world."[5]

The second moral justification of forgiveness was first hinted at by Joseph Butler in his sermon "Upon forgiveness of injuries". He points out that anger or hatred tend to make us condemn the whole of a man's character rather than just the aspect which has offended us.[6] Neill draws out the implication of these words when he observes that "The offender has done wrong, about this there can be no pretence. But that is not the whole truth about him. He is still of infinite value as a person....".[7] This is a very important point. It is a person who has to be forgiven, a person who is very much more than the offence he has committed, however terrible it may have been. To refuse to forgive is tantamount to rejecting the person entirely. In a telling phrase, Arendt speaks of forgiving the "what" for the "who". "Forgiving", she writes, "is always an eminently personal affair in which what was done is forgiven for the sake of who did it."[8] Love is concerned with who the loved person is, rather than what the person has or has not done. Thus it is sometimes thought that only love has the power to forgive. But in the wider sphere of human affairs, respect should ensure forgiveness, because it is offered to people irrespective of qualities or achievements we may approve of.[9]

The place of repentance

But surely one vital factor in the moral justifica-

tion of forgiveness has been omitted - repentance on the part of the wrongdoer? If he acknowledges that what he has done is wrong and seeks to make amends, then forgiveness is justified. But if he does not repent, if he continues on his way oblivious to his wrong, or even worse, callously indifferent to it, then surely to forgive must be to condone.

Moberley expresses this view forcefully: "Forgiveness, then,....if it is to be that real forgiveness which is the spontaneous action of righteousness, and not that indifference to sin which is itself a new sin; is strictly and absolutely correlative to what may be called the 'forgiveableness' of the person forgiven." Later he adds, "Either he is forgiveable, or he is not. So far as he is not I ought not to forgive. .....One for whom I am responsible, defies all right and exults in his defiance. And I, refusing to punish, receive him with open arms as righteous and good. Then, in still more directness of sense, the sin, without ceasing to be on his side, has come over to mine. I have but identified myself with his wickedness."[10] "We may", says J.R. Lucas, "urge a man who has been wronged by another not to keep thinking about it, because although it was a grievous wrong, there are many other better things to think about, and he ought not to dwell unnecessarily on unprofitable topics. But we cannot urge him to forgive him so long as he has not disowned his action and sought forgiveness."[11]

These statements seem such obvious good sense, that it might appear foolhardy to question them, but question them we must, and on two counts. First of all, the position of Moberley and Lucas seems to rule out the possibility of forgiving the (unrepentant) dead. Yet it is the experience of many people that they do genuinely come to forgive people who have hurt them, after they have died. Such forgiveness is obviously not in any way related to their repentance. The same thing applies to those who forgive unknown assailants. In the

mid-seventies Joseph Parker, a Belfast minister, lost his fourteen year old son in a bomb blast. The only way he could identify his son's body was by his watch. Yet the next day Joseph Parker published the following message to his son's murderers in a Belfast newspaper: "Whoever you are, I forgive you." Such a response to heinous crime is by no means uncommon in Ireland. Are we to call it immoral?

Secondly the insistence that forgiveness must always be preceded by repentance rules out the possibility of forgiveness inducing repentance. Here is a very moving true story from Russia, part of a sermon preached by Father Dimitri Dudko, an Orthodox priest, recounting the experience of a prisoner:

> There was another person in my cell, a Baptist, who prayed a great deal and would always cross himself before meals. Many people - including me - mocked him for this. Out of boredom I more or less dragged him into a dispute over religion.
>
> At first I just let my words run away with me, interspersing facetious comments about how old women just invented God. He answered every one of my flippant arguments seriously. His unshakable conviction that he was correct began to irritate me. Soon, just for the fun of it, I began defending atheism seriously, proving by any means at my disposal that God could not exist.
>
> I really could not have cared less about either God or atheism. I just wanted to break his confidence - that was the main thing. Arrogance pushed me on. And I achieved what I wanted. My cell-mate stopped talking. After a silence he began to cry, praying that his faith would be strengthened.
>
> I felt no satisfaction in my victory. A horrible weight fell upon me. I felt sick, as though I had done something mean to someone. And he just kept on praying, but more calmly now.
>
> Suddenly he looked at me and smiled. I was amazed at his face: there was something joyous about it, pure, as though it had just been washed clean. <u>The weight immediately fell from my soul</u>. <u>I understood that he had forgiven me</u>. (my italics)
>
> And then a light of some sort penetrated me, and I understood that God existed. It was not

> even so much that I understood, but rather I sensed it with my whole being. He is everywhere. He is our Father! We are his children, brothers one to another. I forgot that I was in prison and felt only one thing - a great joy and thankfulness to the Lord who had revealed himself to me, who was unworthy.[12]

Of course, we recognise that there is a balance to be struck. Forgiveness which actually precludes repentance is foolish, if not immoral. The repentance of the wrongdoer, if that is possible, must always be sought by the forgiver, for without it the true end of forgiveness, personal reconciliation, is impossible.

Aurel Kolnai wrestles with this problem, and makes some good points. He sees forgiveness as a "generous venture of trust", morally wrong only if there is no prospect whatever of the wrongdoer repenting. He argues that the situation which makes forgiveness legitimate and virtuous is that in which Fred (the forgiver) has some reason to hope for a change of heart by Ralph (the wrongdoer). The fact that his hope may be disappointed does not invalidate his forgiveness. It expresses the attitude of trust which may increase the trustworthiness of the recipient. This involves a "risk". His "gamble" may be wise, dubious, or frankly unwise (where malice takes advantage of the good-natured approach). On some occasions we may disapprove of Fred's forgiveness, without denying that it is genuine forgiveness, or condemning it as condonation. [13]

As Kolnai indicates, such a "generous venture of trust" can be exploited by the morally unscrupulous. In The Marriage of Figaro the lascivious Count Almaviva constantly deceives his wife, and takes advantage of her good nature.

> The Count: But will you confirm that you forgive me?
>
> The Countess: Did I ever say that I would, Suzie?
>
> Suzanne: I didn't hear it, Your Ladyship.
>
> The Count: Ah, then - won't you say it now?

The Countess: Do you deserve it, ungrateful man?

The Count: Has my repentance not earned it?

Suzanne: Imagining there was a man in Her Ladyship's dressing-room!

The Count: She has punished me severely!

Suzanne: Not believing her when she said it was her maid!

The Count: Are you really implacable, Rosine?

The Countess: Ah, Suzie! How weak I am! What an example I set you. (Giving the Count her hand) No one will believe in a woman's resentment anymore.

Suzanne: Well! Don't we always have to come to this with them in the end?[14]

There is an irony here, of course. There was a man in her Ladyship's bedroom, and the Countess has managed to conceal the fact! But the youthful Cherubin is no real rival to her husband and the general point remains - the Count constantly exploits his wife's forgiving nature. Suzanne's last remark indicates that the problem was not confined to the Almaviva household!

A more serious example, and a true one, is given by psychiatrist Paul Tournier in his first book The Healing of Persons. A woman whom he calls Cécile had tried to commit suicide following years of matrimonial problems. After several long conversations, Cécile accepted God and also her unsatisfactory marriage. "But," says Tournier, "the matrimonial situation was no better. The contrary, in fact, was the case. The husband seemed to find it very convenient to have a wife who was ready to put up with everything and accept everything without ceasing to love him. His attitude toward her reminded me of a cat playing with a mouse. He would leave her and then come back to her without a word of regret, take advantage of what she had earned, and then leave her again. Despite her communion with God, the poor woman had more sorrow than joy."[15]

This particular story had a happy ending. The husband eventually came to his senses and the marriage was reborn. But what of those whose forgiving love meets no answering response? Should they continue to forgive? Would not resentment be a more natural, even more moral, attitude in the circumstances?

Notes

1. Quoted by H.R. Mackintosh: p.184.

2. E.L. Beardsley : "Understanding and forgiveness", The Philosophy of Brand Blanshard ed. P. Schlipp, pp.251-254.

3. H. Arendt : The Human Condition University of Chicago Press, 1958, pp.240-241. The quotation is from p.241. The writer is not suggesting that Beardsley is advocating revenge. But the failure to forgive any sort of intentional wrongs, which she advocates, would have similar "binding" effects on human relationships. Arendt herself seems not to appreciate the full scope of forgiveness, limiting it to ignorant guilt, and excluding "crime and willed evil", the forgiving of which is particularly liberating and creative. See H. Arendt: pp.290-40.

4. H.R. Mackintosh: p.184.

5. S. Neill: p.213.

6. J. Butler : "Upon Forgiveness of Injuries", pp.80-89 of Butler's Fifteen Sermons ed. T.A. Roberts, SPCK, 1970. Para.23.

7. S. Neill: p.210.

8. H. Arendt: p.241. A similar point is made by H.A. Williams : "Theology and self-awareness", Soundings ed. A.R. Vidler, Cambridge, 1962, p.98.

9. H. Arendt: pp.242-243.

10. R.C. Moberly: p.56 and p.57.

11. J.R. Lucas : "Forgiveness", Freedom and Grace, SPCK, 1976, p.83.

12. M. Bourdeaux : Risen Indeed Darton, Longman & Todd / St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1983, pp.89-90.

13. A. Kolnai : "Forgiveness", Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society 79, New Series 1973-4, pp.89-90.

14. Beaumarchais : The Marriage of Figaro (trans.

J. Wood), Penguin edition, 1964, p.147.

15. P. Tournier : The Healing of Persons (trans. E. Hudson), Collins, 1966, pp.90-92.

4. RESENTMENT

Bishop Joseph Butler's discussion of resentment in Sermon's 8 and 9 provide a useful starting point for our consideration of the subject.

In Sermon 8, "Upon Resentment", he makes the point that resentment, (by which he evidently means moral indignation), against a wrong act is justified as an appropriate response to what has happened. It is the abuses of resentment that are morally wrong, e.g. malice and revenge (§2) or resentment against an imagined injury (§10). And it is not only "sudden" anger, the instinctive response to injury which is justifiable. "Deliberate" resentment is also justified when its purpose is to prevent and remedy injury (§7).

In Sermon 9, "Upon Forgiveness of Injuries", Butler maintains that the precepts to "forgive" and to "love our enemies" cannot forbid the justifiable indignation we feel at injury, but only the excess and abuse of this natural feeling (§3). Resentment, he goes on, is not inconsistent with goodwill: we may love our enemy and yet have resentment against him for the injuries he has done us (§13). A man should love his enemies not with any kind of affection, but feeling towards them as "a just and impartial spectator would feel". So forgiving enemies is neither impracticable nor unreasonable.

Stephen Sykes, in his sermon "Forgiveness and Resentment" accepts Butler's position:

> If we agree with Butler, and I do, we do not say first to those with ample cause to hate their enemies, that they ought to forgive, bless and love them; but rather that there is a proper role for resentment, as indignation against injury and wickedness - that to experience such indignation is not in the least regrettable and that it is natural and right to experience it in proportion to the degree of evil, designed or premeditated.

He continues: What then is forgiveness?....It

> cannot, if resentment is proper and justified, be the elaborate pretence that one is not resentful. It must, therefore, refer to a willingness to allow resentment only within the bounds of a conception of a common good;

> a steady desire that some good for the whole community be brought out of evil, even out of great wickedness.[1]

Butler and Sykes then see resentment and forgiveness as in some way compatible. Other philosophers regard them as mutually exclusive. For example Downie agrees that resentment is a natural response to injury but adds that it ought to be "replaced by forgiveness".[2] Beardsley describes forgiveness as "the withdrawal of resentment".[3] Stephen Neill castigates resentment as one of the three great "enemies" of the human race. "(Resentment) is the most toxic of all the ills that can assail the human spirit. In many cases it is possible to see the venom that it distils and to trace its harmful effects on every part of the inner constitution of man. .... Clean wounds heal quickly, the festering wound never heals. The festering wound is the symbol of that injury that has been met with resentful indignation."[4]

Here we appear to have a serious clash of views, but the conflict is more apparent than real. The word "resentment" itself is partly to blame. As used by Butler and Sykes it refers primarily to the moral indignation felt as the initial reaction to an injury. But Neill is using the word to refer to a settled attitude of antipathy towards someone, resulting from some injury, which continues over a long period, damaging their own psychological and spiritual well-being.

A metaphor used by Helen Oppenheimer may help here. "Snow", she says, "is a good analogy for grievance..... Newly fallen snow is insubstantial stuff, melting as it lands when the ground is warm ..... But when it has settled and been trodden down it is solid and dangerous and can break bones.".[5] In other words, we accept the validity of initial resentment, but we must beware of that resentful attitude lingering for too long. It can be highly damaging.

Esther de Waal agrees: "It is only too easy to keep up an internal conversation by which I chew over that hurting remark, or that undeserved happening, or

I refuse to forget some slight, or I go on saying 'It isn't fair' over and over again to myself. Then what began as quite a small grudge or resentment has been nursed into a great brooding cloud that smothers all my inner landscape, or has become a cancer eating up more and more of my inner self."[6]

This reference to cancer is interesting, since it was echoed by a number of the people met with in Ireland last October. David Hamilton for instance, a former member of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), spoke of his hatred as "a cancerous growth" in him. A woman we shall call Bridget had had a long-standing feud with her brother. Two years of legal battles to gain her rightful share of the family home took their toll and she was left with a deep-seated hatred of her brother, which she said was, "eating away at me like a cancer". So obsessive was her hatred that she felt she had lost her personality. "I felt I didn't exist as a person".

Cecil Kerr is the Director of the Christian Renewal Centre in Rostrevor, Co. Down, border town in Northern Ireland. He meets many people who are grappling with the problem of resentment. One was a policeman who had been ambushed by the IRA and injured. Several of his friends had been killed. He knew who the men were, and he was determined to get them. But his resentment was affecting him physically; it was, said Cecil, "eating him up". Another woman he knew was bitterly resentful towards her in-laws. He warned her that if she continued to hold that resentment she might suffer from arthritis. This woman actually visited the centre during our stay and Cecil Kerr confirmed that arthritis was beginning to set in. The drying up of the bones was the body's response to the drying up of the spirit caused by deep-seated resentment.

So are resentment and forgiveness in any way compatible? Arguably not. Both are valid responses to injury. But forgiveness means the withdrawal of

resentment. It is not enough for resentment to be contained - it must be removed completely. Forgiveness must follow resentment. If it does not, the injured person is simply adding a self-inflicted wound to the one they have already received from another.

Notes

1. S. Sykes : "Forgiveness and Resentment", Sermon preached in Durham Cathedral, 1981, p.2 and p.3.

2. R.S. Downie : p.150.

3. E. Beardsley : p.252.

4. S. Neill : pp.207-208.

5. H. Oppenheimer : "Grievances", University Sermon, preached on Sunday, May 1st, 1983, at Great St. Mary's Church, Cambridge, p.5.

6. E. de Waal : p.133.

5. FORGIVENESS AND HEALING

Resentment, however justified, when permitted to persist, is detrimental to a person's mental, spiritual and even physical well-being. Forgiveness, the "letting-go" of this resentment, often means a profound healing, always psychologically, and sometimes physically as well.

As Neill writes, "If resentment is the most toxic of the ills the flesh is heir to, forgiveness, the act of forgiving, the willingness to forgive, is the most potent, the most rapid, the most efficacious in its working of all known remedies."[1]

Forgiveness, as a healing power, is borne out by doctors and those involved in spiritual healing. Francis Macnutt, a Roman Catholic priest who is an authority on spiritual healing, writes of an occasion when, at a communal penance service, he spoke of the need to forgive enemies and then gave his listeners time to respond. This was followed by a prayer for inner healing, but physical healing was not mentioned. Yet, after the service, a man who had just forgiven his boss found that the pain in his chest resulting from open-heart surgery had been completely removed.

Later Macnutt gives another example:

> I remember being asked by a woman to pray for an inner healing. When we talked about her childhood, she indicated that her deepest problem, an unreasoning hatred of men, including her husband, went back to harsh treatment and derision that her brothers had heaped upon her as a little girl. Before praying for that healing, I asked her to forgive her brothers. This she refused to do. I told her that this would block any healing. She still refused. When I asked her why she hung on to her resentment, even if she was being destroyed by it, she thought for a while and then replied that, if she forgave her brothers, it would take away her last excuse for being the kind of person she was (she could no longer blame them). After praying a short time more she realised how contrary this was to her Christian commitment and to her professional desire to be whole. With tears she forgave her brothers as best she could. She then received the deep healing she was seeking.[2]

Mitchell and Anderson, in their book about the experience of loss, refer to the tendency to hang on to resentment after divorce. "In order to keep alive the resentment that legitimates the divorce, positive memories may be excluded altogether. The one who holds tight to the posture of victim can only remember what is negative or painful about the marriage in order to preserve the myth of having been victimised. Such selective remembering also precludes the possibility of forgiveness that can bring healing to those memories."

Mitchell and Anderson then quote the story of Megan, who was seeing a counsellor following her divorce. For more than six months, Megan slated her husband as a psychopath, a liar, a cruel man. The counsellor asked her for a picture of her husband. Eventually a photo album was produced. It showed the love between Megan and her former husband, and her obvious dependence on him. The counsellor remarked: "It must be difficult to hold in your mind the image of a strong, dependable, psychopathic bully." Megan began to laugh, and laughed till she cried. Then she saw both sides of her husband - it was the beginning of healing.[3]

Corrie ten Boom writes of the aftermath of World War 2. "Since the end of the war I had had a home in Holland for victims of Nazi brutality. Those who were able to forgive their former enemies were able also to return to the outside world and rebuild their lives, no matter what the physical scars. Those who nursed their bitterness remained invalids. It was as simple and as horrible as that."[4]

In The Healing of Persons, psychiatrist Paul Tournier gives a number of examples of the importance both of forgiving and of being forgiven in the process of healing. At the moment we are concentrating on the former, and an interesting example is the case of "Gilberte". She had had a broken engagement, due to the infidelity of her fiancé, and the resentment she felt against him carried over into her relationship with her husband,

whom she constantly accused of infidelity, which he stoutly denied. She was actually the victim of a "paranoid obsession". "Gilberte's intuitive and sensitive nature, overexcited by her unresolved complexes, had made her too quick to see the tiniest gradation in her husband's affective behaviour. She had reached the point of being able to perceive infidelities hidden in his unconscious, of which he, being a simple, straightforward type, was unaware. And so she spoke of facts that were obvious to her, but which he denied simply because he could not see them. Argument only accentuated the two opposing attitudes.....". An experience of Christ on Easter Day cut the Gordian knot. "When she came back to see me we prayed together. When she got to her feet she told me that she felt as if all her bitterness was falling away from her like a chain... She completely forgave, not only her husband, but also the fiancé who had been unfaithful to her in the past....Her face shone."[5]

This sense of release was vividly described by Bridget, mentioned above. She was eaten up by a (justifiable) resentment against her brother for his callous treatment of her. The cure took several years. Bridget was a Roman Catholic. At Mass the priest would say: "Ask God to help you to forgive - you can't do it on your own." This gave her a glimmer of hope. Then she said that while she was out walking, God would tell her to pray for her brother. She did not like the idea at all, but the same thought came to her as she was receiving Communion. Eventually she did start to pray for him. After that, she began to feel guilty about the breach between them and decided to get in touch. But there were stormy scenes and no reconciliation.

The breakthrough came at a Healing Service at the Renewal Centre. Cecil Kerr told people to bring to mind people they could not forgive, to bring them in their hands and release them to God. She brought her brother in her hands, saying "Lord, I want to forgive my brother,

but I can't. I want to forgive him completely and forget the past." The result was staggering. "Before the end of the service I started to cry and cry. I hadn't cried for 15 years. I felt as if the tears were coming up from the tips of my toes. There was a great release, all my burdens were lifted, and I could smile and laugh again." She wrote to her brother, a warm, loving letter telling of her concern. She received a warm and loving letter back. At the time of the interview she had not yet managed a meeting but she said that all the bitterness was gone. She felt a great joy in her heart, and a complete renewal as a person. Where before the hatred and resentment had obliterated her personality, the fact of the love of God - "that the Lord takes delight in me" - had led to a self-acceptance totally absent before.

For David Hamilton, the former UVF man, the healing came more suddenly, but was just as effective. Challenged by a portion of Scripture left in his cell bed by a mate (to annoy him!) he prayed: "God, if you are real, you come in and change me and take away this hatred." Half-an-hour later he went straight up to the prison warder he was planning to kill and told him that he forgave him completely. Five years later David is a quietly-spoken, well-adjusted young man. The man who spoke of his former hatred as "a cancerous growth in me" now says that "there isn't an ounce of hatred left in my body."

Notes

1. S. Neill : p.211.

2. F. Macnutt : Healing Ave Maria Press, 1974, pp. 171-2 and p.176.

3. K. Mitchell and H. Anderson : All our losses, all our griefs Westminster Press, 1983 pp.129-130.

4. C. ten Boom : Tramp for the Lord Hodder and Stoughton and Christian Literature Crusade (1974) 1975 edition, p.57.

5. P. Tournier : The Healing of Persons, pp.253-255.

6. FORGIVENESS - A HARD TASK

Despite our last example, nearly all writers agree that forgiveness is usually a very difficult undertaking. In a passage which follows shortly after the quotation at the beginning of the last section, Neill maintains that "No one who has ever had occasion to forgive a really grievous wrong is likely to doubt that forgiveness is an extremely costly medicine, or that most men find it difficult to make up their minds to pay the necessary price."[1] Tournier agrees : "One has to be a psychotherapist to know how rare the forgiveness of others is."[2]

In fact the writer has come across only one author who maintains the opposite, Laurens van der Post. "I have often noticed", he writes, "that the suffering which is most difficult, if not impossible to forgive, is unreal, imagined suffering... Persons who have really suffered at the hands of others do not find it difficult to forgive nor even to understand the people who caused their suffering. They do not find it difficult to forgive because out of suffering and sorrow comes an instinctive sense of privilege. Recognition of the creative truth comes in a flash; forgiveness for others, as for ourselves, for we know not what we do."[3]

While this may be true in a few exceptional cases, as that of David Hamilton, usually forgiveness is an "extremely costly medicine". Occasionally, as we have seen, forgiveness does come dramatically, and suddenly, but that is by no means to allege that it is easy. Here are two examples of acts of forgiveness which although prompt and unpremeditated, were nonetheless costly for the forgiver.

The first (true) story comes from the period following the Second World War. Corrie ten Boom, a Dutch woman, had been imprisoned by the Germans in Ravensbruck Concentration Camp. Her sister had died in the camp. After the war, Corrie ten Boom went round Germany preaching to Germans that God forgives. In Munich she

was approached by one of the most cruel guards in the camp.

> Now he was in front of me, hand thrust out: 'A fine message, Fraulein! How good it is to know that, as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea!'
>
> And I, who had spoken so glibly of forgiveness, fumbled in my pocketbook rather than take that hand. He would not remember me, of course - how could he remember one prisoner among those thousands of women? But I remembered him and the leather crop swinging from his belt. I was face-to-face with one of my captors and my blood seemed to freeze.
>
> 'You mentioned Ravensbruck in your talk,' he was saying. 'I was a guard there.' No, he did not remember me. 'But since that time,' he went on, 'I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. Fraulein,' - again the hand came out - 'will you forgive me?'
>
> And I stood there - I whose sins had again and again to be forgiven - and could not forgive. Betsie had died in that place - could he erase her slow terrible death simply for the asking? It could not have been many seconds that he stood there - hand held out - but to me it seemed hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I had ever had to do. For I had to do it - I knew that. The message that God forgives has a prior condition: that we forgive those who have injured us.... And still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. But forgiveness is not an emotion - I knew that too. Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart. 'Jesus, help me!' I prayed silently. 'I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling.'
>
> And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.
>
> 'I forgive you, brother!' I cried. 'With all my heart.'[4]

More recently, a similar situation faced Mary Sandys, an Irish woman from Newry. Her 17-year-old son was knocked off his bicycle and killed by a lorry. The lorry driver came to the wake before the funeral, walked straight up to her and said: "Will you forgive me?" Mary said it was "as if a bucket of cold water had been thrown over me". "And then", she went on, "in a voice alien to myself I said 'I forgive you', and a warm glow came over me, filling my whole body. There are no words to describe it, it was the peace that passes understanding."

More often forgiveness of deep wounds takes time. We have already seen that for Bridget there was a slow process of forgiveness. Where injuries are deep, and more important, resentment has been allowed to settle, it may take years. Liam McCluskey, the hunger-striker, had been praying for 18 months for the ability to forgive his enemies. Only after the hunger strike was over, and he had made his peace with God, was he given the "grace" to forgive.

Sometimes help is needed. Pearl Mckeown, whose 20-year-old daughter Karen was shot in a tit-for-tat murder in Belfast, was taught to forgive by her daughter herself before she died. Karen said she felt only pity for the lad who did it. Once her mother was at her bedside, looking very dejected. "Mam", said Karen, "you go home and think about <u>his</u> Mam." Later Pearl confirmed that she had no feelings of bitterness towards the lad. "How do you feel about him?" she was asked. "More than sorry", was her reply, "I pray daily that he will repent."

Sometimes people have too much to cope with to be able to afford the extra burden of resentment. Harry McCann, the man whose legs were blown off in a car bomb, prayed in the ambulance: "May God forgive the people who have done this. I'm going to die." From then on he was too preoccupied with making his peace with God, and recovering from his physical injuries, to

give time to resentment. "There was never any question of my not forgiving" he said. But he admitted that his wife found it a lot harder to forgive than he did.

Most of us do not experience dramatic traumas of this nature. We live in a world of little hurts. But such little hurts are not always easy to forgive, especially when they are repeated. "It is perhaps not so hard to forgive a single great injury," writes Lewis, "but to forgive the incessant provocations of daily life - to keep on forgiving the bossy mother-in-law, the bullying husband, the nagging wife, the selfish daughter, the deceitful son - how can we do it?"[5] Such forgiveness will be less spectacular than that of a single great wrong, but it may actually demand more strength of character. Failure at this mundane level has led to many a broken marriage, and many an unhappy home. However difficult the repeated forgiveness of the "incessant provocations of daily life", it must be acknowledged to be absolutely essential to harmonious personal relationships.

Notes

1. S. Neill : p.213.

2. P. Tournier : Guilt and Grace (trans. A. Heathcote) Hodder and Stoughton, 1962, p.191.

3. L. van der Post : Venture to the Interior. Quoted in E. Urch : Ladders up to Heaven Part 2: Friendship Arthur James Ltd., 1980, p.29.

4. C. ten Boom : pp.56-57.

5. C.S. Lewis : p.43.

7. FORGIVE AND FORGET

"Forgetting wrong is an almost invariable accompaniment of forgiving, forgiving leads to forgetting and the forgiving process is not complete unless forgetting (not repressing) results."[1]

If forgiving is hard, forgiving and forgetting is even harder. It sometimes requires a definite act of the will. There is a story told of Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross. "A friend once reminded her of an especially cruel thing that someone had done to her years before. But Miss Barton seemed not to recall it. 'Don't you remember it?' her friend asked. 'No' came the reply, 'I distinctly remember forgetting it.' "[2]

Sometimes the subconscious is not so responsive. It may be necessary to repeat the original act of forgiveness when the memory of it is stirred. "To forgive for the moment is not difficult," says Lewis, "but to go on forgiving, to forgive the same offence again every time it recurs to the memory - there's the real bussle."[3]

Several writers refer to the danger of the line, "I will forgive, but not forget". The forgiver may feel that the offender remains in debt to him. Williams points out that "We may in fact have forgiven - say, half-forgiven; and the pardon is thought to free the pardoner to every claim and compel the pardoned to every obedience." The forgiver can easily expect special consideration from his injurer, whereas true forgiveness does not expect anything beyond what the injurer freely wishes to bestow.[4]

Michael Cassidy warns of the danger of not forgiving "from the heart". "The trouble is that unless forgiveness is from the heart, it is like burying the hatchet but leaving the handle exposed so one can seize it again for further use at a later stage."[5]

H.R. Mackintosh puts it like this:

> Those people who say that they can forgive but not forget betray the fact, unconsciously for the most part, that their 'forgiveness' has

> been accompanied by reservations and qualifications which, morally, are fatal. It is of course true that the offending sin is remembered in the sense that we are still aware of it; ... But what has taken, changed for us is the value or personal significance. Before, it was a fact of a disturbed and unbalanced entanglement; now, if pardon is real, the injured man has wholly ceased to regard that past event as determinative of his personal relationships to the offender. Self and neighbour are now at peace. In this sense all true forgiveness forgets the guilt which it pardons.[6]

J.R. Lucas, on the other hand, warns against the danger of forgetting too easily. "We cannot easily forget, nor should we. (my italics) That which a man has done once he may do again. We do not go on punishing the peculator - but we do not employ him again in a position where he can handle money. Even if a man seems sincere in his determination to turn over a new leaf, we retain a residual doubt which constitutes a formidable barrier to his being again admitted to complete intimacy."[7] Lucas has here raised a very important question - to what extent is it right and prudent to trust again one guilty of a serious breach of trust?

Notes

1. D. Atkinson : "The importance of forgiveness" Third Way, Vol.5 No.10, October, 1982, p.7.

2. A.L. McGinnes : The Friendship Factor. Quoted in Family, May, 1983, p.23.

3. C.S. Lewis : Letters to Malcolm : Chiefly on Prayer (Geoffrey Bles.1964) Fontana edition, 1966, pp. 29-30.

4. C. Williams : p.169.

5. M. Cassidy: Bursting the Wineskins Hodder and Stoughton, 1983, pp.14-15.

6. H.R. Mackintosh : pp.33-34.

7. J.R. Lucas : p.82.

8. FORGIVENESS AND TRUST

There is a story told of Thomas Edison, the inventor of the electric light bulb. After years of experiment Edison produced the first working bulb and handed it to his assistant, who promptly dropped it on the floor! After many hours more work, Edison produced light bulb number 2 - and handed it straight to his assistant. Edison's trust showed that he had forgiven him for his earlier carelessness.[1]

Trust and forgiveness do seem to go together. In St. John's Gospel, the forgiven Peter is given a job to do: "Feed my sheep", Jesus tells him. (John chapter 21 verse 17). An up-to-date experience of this kind is recounted by a correspondent, J.E. Saunders. "At this time", she writes, "I found it very difficult to 'be quiet' but for some reason I went upstairs to my bedroom... and just sat on my bed looking at a crucifix I had hung on the wall. ... I think my mind was more or less blank when a voice beside me said, oh so clearly, 'You are forgiven my child, I have work for you to do.'"[2]

These examples, however, do not really answer Lucas's point. In the case of Edison, the mistake was an accident. Of course there was an element of risk in entrusting the second light bulb to his assistant, but it was not the same as trusting someone whose fault was deliberate. In the other two examples, trust is placed in those who are penitent, and whose sincerity is not in doubt.

Lucas is talking about a situation in which the sincerity of the repentance <u>is</u> in doubt. This difficulty becomes greater when the offender has failed repeatedly despite being the object both of forgiveness and renewed trust. There may come a point at which trust becomes foolish.

However, let us go back to the example that Lucas gives. Presumably the peculator is a "first offender". Is not the writer's attitude a little harsh? Could not

a "generous venture of trust" be extended to one who does seem sincere in his repentance? For if he is not trusted fully, how is he to demonstrate fully that his repentance is real?

An illustration from another sphere may help us here. Kenneth Preston is talking about the restoration of the marriage relationship after an act of infidelity.

> A relationship which has been shattered by deeds can seldom be put right by words. Words will be needed, but without deeds they will not be believed. Usually it takes a deed to undo a deed. A trust that has been destroyed can only be restored gradually.

Supposing the husband is at fault. He must be encouraged to wait patiently until he has given his wife grounds for trusting him.

> It is sometimes difficult, even for the best of wives, to feel entire confidence in a husband once her confidence in him has been destroyed. But if he is prepared to be patient and to work hard to give her back her trust in him, then she in turn can make herself trust him accordingly.[3]

So although forgiveness should lead to renewed trust, it may not happen overnight. On the other hand, a complete renewal of trust and friendship should be the aim of forgiveness and the situation of wariness, described by Lucas, kept to as short a time as is reasonable. In the case of the peculator, then, he would not be immediately entrusted with large sums of money. But opportunity should be taken to give him some responsibility in the area in which he had failed. Otherwise he might well question the reality of the forgiveness which it is claimed he has been offered. He might become discouraged, being denied the opportunity to make amends. Above all, he might bitterly regret the loss of an important friendship and his own impotence to do anything to restore it to its previous status.

Notes

1. From Further Stories for the Junior Assembly Ed. D.M. Prescott, Blandford Press Ltd., 1974. The writer is indebted to the Rev. George R. Pike for this example.

2. Private letter to the writer, December 16th, 1983.

3. K. Preston : Marriage Counselling Library of Pastoral Care SPCK 1968, p.71.

9. FALSE FORGIVENESS

We have already seen how difficult it is to forgive. Not surprisingly, then, there are many people who appear to forgive, but who actually fail. As Tournier writes; "One has to be a psychotherapist to know how rare the forgiveness of others is, and how aggressiveness can be repressed behind false forgiveness. For what false love, what false forgiveness between men -- and particularly in the Churches and in religious families -- and for what anxieties these repressions are responsible, anxieties of which we are the secret witnesses!"[1]

Psychiatrist R.C.A. Hunter explains this further:

> The second form of forgiveness is a reaction formation, a defence against vengeful aggression. Thus 'I could kill you for what you have done' (retaliation) becomes 'I will love you and pretend I don't feel aggrieved over you'. Symptoms of this pseudo-forgiveness are:- (a) an 'obtrusive and onerous quality' to the forgiving so that one feels the need for protection against such righteousness. (b) the 'forgetting' aspect is missing - the patient seems to nurture memories of the past. (c) there is a quality of smug virtue, masking a latent hostility.[2]

As an example of (a) and (c) we may take a passage from one of the novels of P.G. Wodehouse.

> It is a good rule in life never to apologise. The right sort of people do not want apologies and the wrong sort take a mean advantage of them. Sellers belonged to the latter class. When Annette, meek, penitent, with all her claws sheathed came to him and grovelled, he forgave her with a repulsive magnanimity which in a less subdued mood would have stung her to renewed pugnacity. As it was, she allowed herself to be forgiven and retired with a dismal conviction that from now on he would be more insufferable than ever.[3]

We have already noted the dangers of (b), forgiving without forgetting. There is a good example of this in Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen. The Rev. Mr. Collins writes to Mr. Bennett(Lydia's father):

> I am truly rejoiced that my cousin Lydia's sad business has been so well

> hushed up, and am only concerned that their living together before the marriage took place should be so generally known. I must not, however, neglect the duties of my station, or refrain from declaring my amazement, at hearing you received the young couple into your house as soon as they were married. It was an encouragement of vice; and had I been the rector of Longbourn, I should have very strenuously opposed it. You ought certainly to forgive them as a Christian; but never to admit them in your sight, or allow their names to be mentioned in your hearing.
> 'That is his notion of Christian forgiveness,' comments Mr. Bennett wrily.[4]

Again, in Dickens' Martin Chuzzlewit John Westlock asks forgiveness of Mr. Pecksniff for giving offence. Mr. Pecksniff agrees, but refuses to shake hands. John says that he refuses forgiveness on these terms. Mr. Pecksniff insists that he does forgive and John must accept it. He later says that his heart is still grieved and wounded and yet at the same time he forgives.[5]

Mackintosh has some scathing words on this so-called "forgiveness":

> In our resentment at injury we will not strike back; we dislike the customs of the secular, whose frankly avowed maxim is to give as good as they get, and in addition the command of Jesus keeps down our hands; but in the private world of feeling we are our own masters and may please ourselves. We have a long memory, and, once wronged, we intend to show the spared offender very plainly that he can never again be the same to us. Grievance, too, has a taste of luxury which lies as a sweet morsel under the tongue.....
> To call this forgiveness would be absurd.[6]

Sometimes false forgiveness means an attempt to "forget" a hurt before forgiveness has taken place. In this case the forgetting aspect is not missing, but prematurely present, and repression of the hurt results. John Knox has some wise words on this subject.

> A wrong, done or suffered, ceases to be divisive and destructive, not when it is

> forgotten by each person separately, but when it is remembered by both persons together. When two persons, the wronged and the wrongdoer, can remember the wrong together in the same way and as a shared experience, then, and only then, is it truly forgiven ... Forgiveness is not a closing of one's eyes. Such indulgence ... is weakness and illusion; forgiveness is always strength and truth.[7]

So false forgiveness is common and takes many forms. It is almost invariably damaging, a deception perpetrated knowingly or unknowingly, which lacks the "strength and truth" of the real thing. It may lead to the patching up of a relationship, but never to its renewal. For real forgiveness often results not merely in a return to the status quo ante, but to a new quality of friendship, forged in the fire of a hurt that is first acknowledged and then forgiven. This is why we must agree with Helen Oppenheimer's pithy comment: "A real forgiveness to come is better than a sham forgiveness imagined."[8]

Notes

1. P. Tournier : Guilt and Grace, p.191.

2. R.C.A. Hunter : p.171.

3. Quoted by F.W. Dillistone : The Christian Understanding of Atonement SCM (1968) 1984 reissue, p. 296.

4. J. Austen : Pride and Prejudice Macmillan, 1902, pp.328-329.

5. Quoted by R.J. O'Shaughnessy : "Forgiveness", Philosophy, Vol.42 No.162, October, 1967, pp.351-352.

6. H.R. Mackintosh, p.34.

7. J. Knox : Chapters in a Life of Paul A & C Black, 1954, p.147.

8. H. Oppenheimer : The Hope of Happiness SCM, 1983 p.130.

10. BEING FORGIVEN

So far we have looked at forgiveness mainly from the point of view of the forgiver. It is now time to turn our attention to the experience of being forgiven.

To be forgiven is often to have a burden lifted. The lorry driver who killed Mary Sandys' son described her forgiveness of him in these terms. In the story from Russia, quoted above, a weight fell from the prisoner's soul as he realised that the Baptist had forgiven him.

Sometimes, as with the act of forgiving, being forgiven leads to a physical release. Tournier tells the story of a woman with a drink problem. It came to light eventually that the problem lay in her relationship with her mother. She had left home and gone to be a governess in America, but that had not solved the problem, which arose from a sense of resentment at the saintliness of her mother. She told Tournier : "Over there in America the Atlantic Ocean was not enough to separate me from my mother, and unconsciously I dug a moral ditch between her and me by means of drink... When I got home today I threw my arms around my mother's neck and asked her to forgive me for all this, and I have been set free from my passion for port."[1]

The story in St. Luke's Gospel (chapter 7 verses 35-50) of the woman who was a sinner shows the emotional as well as the spiritual release that comes from being forgiven. As Mackintosh comments, "To know oneself forgiven is to have the spring of love unsealed."[2]

Yet this is not to say that the experience of being forgiven is an easy one, as several writers point out. Thus Williams writes that "It is not easy to be forgiven; certainly not to continue in the knowledge of being forgiven."[3] C.F. Moule adds that ".... the process of responding to it (God's forgiveness) is itself infinitely costly."[4] And what is true of being forgiven by God is also true of being forgiven by one's fellow human being.

The costliness of being forgiven arises first from the humiliation of accepting and admitting one's responsibility for wrong. So, in the Old Testament, we find the brothers of Joseph gradually brought to repent of their cowardly act in betraying him. Only when they are "brought to their knees" does Joseph reveal himself and forgive them. (Genesis chapters 44-45).

We have already mentioned the story of the restoration of Peter by Jesus. That restoration was costly. Rowan Williams draws out the subtlety of St. John's description of the scene:

> After the meal, Jesus' threefold interrogation of Peter recapitulates Peter's threefold denial. As on his first appearance before Jesus in the Gospel (1:42), he is addressed as 'Simon, son of John': but he is at the same moment being reminded that he is no longer simply 'Simon, son of John'. He is Peter the apostle; the failed apostle. Some have noted that the 'charcoal fire' (anthrakia) burning on the shore echoes the mention of the anthrakia burning in the High Priest's courtyard on another chilly morning (18:18), the fire at which Peter warms himself as he denies his Lord. ....Simon has to recognise himself as betrayer: that is part of the past that makes him who he is. If he is to be called again, if he can again become a true apostle, the 'Peter' that he is in the purpose of Jesus rather than the Simon who runs back into the cosy obscurity of ordinary life, his failure must be assimilated, lived through again and brought to good and not to destructive issue.[5]

Being forgiven is certainly not the same thing as being "let-off" - a common misconception. The woman taken in adultery was forgiven. She was also pardoned - the punishment due to her was not exacted. But she was not "let off", in the sense that the reality of her wrong was denied. Jesus said: "You may go; do not sin again." (John chapter 8 verse 11).

In fact, the usual effect of being forgiven is to be bound more closely to the one forgiving, that is, if the forgiveness is real and offered with love and understanding. This feeling of being in debt to the forgiver

often results in a desire to make amends, to do something which will in some way "make up for" the wrong done. Reparation, then, is the second part of the costliness of being forgiven. Perhaps the most striking example from the Gospels is that of Zacchaeus (Luke chapter 19 verses 1-10). Having been forgiven and accepted by Christ, he sets about making amends in a big way. He offers to give away half of his possessions: 20% was the recognised figure among the rabbis (SB iv:1,546-551). He also promises to repay those whom he has cheated four-fold. This was the figure required of a man compelled to make restitution for an act of destructive robbery (Exodus chapter 22 verse 1 and 2 Samuel chapter 12 verse 6). When the offender confessed and made voluntary restitution, the whole amount stolen plus one fifth was deemed sufficient. (Numbers chapter 5 verse 7 and Leviticus chapter 6 verse 5).

The importance of being able to make reparation, and its link with a person's self-worth, is stressed by psychiatrist Jack Dominian in his paper "Forgiveness and Personality". Talking about the parent-child relationship he points out that "The price for forgiveness must not be the demise, dismissal or humiliation of the aggressor." The parent must be able to accept reparation without diminishing the worth or the identity of the accused. Reparation is important - it allows the child to grow from his experience, and to learn from it in such a way that he will not want to hurt his parent in the same way again ... "Forgiveness must be based so far as it is possible on the essential need to endow the growing child with a continuous and enlarging sense of its own good identity, rather than burden it with a bad identity which expresses more the limitations of the parents than the child's failure to overcome its own."[6] Moberley talks about the forgiveness of a parent for his child as the loving response to the child's first move towards penitence. "Such forgiveness", he says, "is the sunshine

in which character grows."[7]

Psychologist Melanie Klein also stresses the importance of reparation if the child is to counter what she calls the "depressive position", the stage reached at about 6 months when the infant discovers that his hatred and frustration is directed against the one he loves. The drive to reparation helps to restore the relationship and enables growth in maturity, and in later life social concern and creativity.[8] Atkinson, who builds on the work of Klein, stresses the corresponding need for forgiveness on the part of the adult. He argues that if the child is to progress through the "depressive position" there is the need for a "facilitating environment" in which forgiveness is offered. If the child receives only destructive responses to his destructive impulses he will be anxious and tend to fear that others will treat him badly. He may thus "get stuck" at the retaliatory stage. But if he finds he is "forgiven", i.e. receives love in response to his destructive acts, then he is enabled to mature. [9]

So the experiences of childhood in the realm of forgiveness are vital. As Dominian says, "The essential of forgiveness implies patterns which are acquired in childhood and which have an enduring impression on all subsequent intimate relationships between human beings, and between man and God."[10]

Notes

1. P. Tournier : The Healing of Persons, pp.106-107.

2. H.R. Mackintosh : p.87.

3. C. Williams : p.171.

4. C. Moule : "The Christian Understanding of Forgiveness", Theology, Vol.71 No.580, October, 1968, p.441.

5. R. Williams : Resurrection Darton, Longman and Todd, 1982, p.34.

6. J. Dominian : "Forgiveness and Personality", Theology, Vol.71 No.581, November, 1968, pp.499-500.

7. R.C. Moberly : p.66.

8. See M. Klein : Love, Hate and Reparation Hogarth, 1953, pp.65ff, Envy and Gratitude and other works Hogarth, 1975, p.279, Love, Guilt and Reparation Hogarth, 1975, p.293.
Discussed by D. Atkinson : "Forgiveness and Personality Development", Third Way, Vol.5. No.11, November, 1982, pp.18-19.

9. D. Atkinson : "Forgiveness and Personality Development", p.20.

10. J. Dominian : p.500.

11. MUTUAL FORGIVENESS

In many situations when forgiveness is the remedy, both parties are at fault. Here there is a need for mutual forgiveness, a recognition that the blame for what has happened cannot be placed wholly on the shoulders of one person.

This is frequently true in marital disputes, which can often be resolved by mutual forgiveness. As William Cowper says:

> The humblest and the happiest pair
> Will find occasion to forbear
> And something, every day they live
> To pity, and perhaps forgive![1]

A delightful example of mutual forgiveness in marriage comes to us from Festo Kivengere, an African Bishop.

> It was after midnight and I was still awake. My wife was peacefully sleeping. In my thoughts I was taking her to court and accusing her. I said, 'Yes, Lord, she is really wrong this time.' 'But she is soundly asleep,' the Lord said to me, 'and you are still in court. Do you mean that it is the holy people that don't sleep? You are wrong. Won't you accept it?' In the end I had to say, 'Yes, Lord, I was wrong, but what shall I do?' 'Early in the morning ask her forgiveness for your attitude.' I said, 'What if she doesn't accept it?' He said, 'You leave that to me, just do your part.' So early in the morning I woke her up. Hesitantly, I said, 'I'm sorry about the hardness of last night...' At first she wondered if I meant business, but then I said, 'Please forgive me.' She did forgive me, bless her. Immediately the Lord removed the barrier. 'I'm sorry too,' she said. 'I was rather fussy about the thing.' And I said, 'No, it wasn't your fault.' Laughing, she said, 'No it wasn't your fault either.' And we were in each others arms, forgiven by each other and the Lord.[2]

Poet William Blake wrote again and again about mutual forgiveness, as in the following instances.

> Mutual forgiveness of each vice
> Such are the Gates of Paradise. (The Gates of Paradise)

> And throughout all eternity
> I forgive you, you forgive me.

As our dear Redeemer said:
'This the Wine and this the Bread'. (Untitled poem)

O point of mutual forgiveness between enemies!
Birthplace of the lamb of God incomprehensible.
(Jerusalem)

This is Jerusalem in every man
A Tent and Tabernacle of Mutual forgiveness.
(Jerusalem). [3]

Sometimes "Jerusalem" is a lost city because people are prepared to forgive, but see nothing in their behaviour that requires the forgiveness of the other. As Williams wisely comments, "Many reconciliations have unfortunately broken down because both parties have come prepared to forgive and unprepared to be forgiven."[4]

However, when both parties do acknowledge their faults the effect can be dramatic. This was the case with Ken, a young Japanese sent by his church to Papua New Guinea.

> It was a project of reconciliation. Resentment and bad feeling against Japan has rankled in Papua since the war. This was a deliberate attempt on the part of the Japanese church to extend the right hand of fellowship and to show the love of Christ. The practical aim was for our team to co-operate with the Papuans in building a mission house. The house was built, and a large measure of reconciliation achieved...
>
> Wonderful as this encounter with the Papuans was, the turning point for me was my encounter with an Australian doctor. He had been through the war as a young military doctor and has worked in Papua ever since. His greeting when we met was like a slap in the face: 'You needn't worry, I don't hold anything against you Japs personally. But the Papuans can never forget what you did in the war.' What had I got to do with the war? I wasn't even born then! Anyway, the fault wasn't only on the Japenese side. Excuses and retorts piled up in my mind. However, I suppressed them, and said nothing. But over the next few days I had to work with this Australian, and time and time again the conversation kept coming back to the war. I got more and more angry. We Japanese are taught to control our feelings, and so I put up with it. But all the time resentment against him was

boiling inside me. Why did he have to keep harping on the war? And why did I have to work with him anyway? We had come to work with the Papuans, not with the whites!

And then we came to the miracle cross. This is a famous sightseeing spot. During the war, a Papuan church was shelled and destroyed by Japanese naval gunnery. But by a seeming miracle the tower and the cross stood firm - and are still standing today. The proud relic is a symbol of the undefeated spirit of the Papuan people. It is known as the miracle cross. The doctor took me to see this famous landmark. As I am a keen photo-grapher, I got someone to take a photograph of us in front of the miracle cross. We even linked arms. And then it happened.

Up to that point I still felt this supressed rage. I couldn't say anything kind or loving or humble. But an impulse to speak over-whelmed me, an almost physical stimulus coming from the cross behind me. I had to speak. I blurted out :'The war was terrible. And we were to blame. Forgive us!'

And all at once he was clinging to me, weeping and saying 'No, no, it's for you to forgive me!' I could hardly believe it. This tough, seasoned Aussie in tears! All the resentment that had been building up inside me evaporated. Hate, jealousy, rage, melted away. It was a moment of total reconciliation, in front of the miracle cross. I shall never forget that moment.[5]

Notes

1. Quoted by D. and V. Mace : Love and Anger in Marriage (Zondervan Corporation 1982) Pickering and Inglis, 1983, p.71.

2. F. Kivengere : "King of our Home", African Enterprise Outlook, December, 1983, p.1.

3. All quotations from V. Gollancz : From Darkness to Light (Abridged edition), V. Gollancz Ltd., 1964, pp.310-311.

4. C. Williams, p.193.

5. K. Hatano : Report on the Japan-Papua New Guinea Work Project, February, 1979.

12. VICARIOUS REPENTANCE

The story at the end of our last section introduces us to a question that we must face before our review of human forgiveness is complete. How far can one person represent a nation, repent of its evils and so receive forgiveness for something he has not done? Ken was not responsible for his compatriots' offence against the Papuans. As he pointed out, he was not even born when they took place, yet in the end he felt it right and proper to represent his forbears and to seek forgiveness on their behalf.

The same sort of thing happened to David Gillett, an English clergyman who worked for several years in Northern Ireland. Once Gillett was attending an ecumenical service at which a Roman Catholic spoke of the release that would come to his people if the English were to repent of the oppression felt to have been inflicted by British rule. Gillett responded by leading the handful of English people present in an act of repentance for what was wrong in their fellow-countrymen's past and present attitude to the Irish. Although there was no immediate reaction, several individuals told him later how helpful that act of repentance had been to them.[3]

Simon Barrington-Ward records two instances from the Middle East, pointing to "The Jewish woman who, after the killing of the three Arab students at the Hebron Arab University, went straight there the next day, braving any hostility she might well meet, to tell the students that she was ashamed and that all Jews were not like this." He also mentions the story of a young Israeli Christian who at a service stood with an Arab member of the congregation, his arm round him, and asked forgiveness for his own feelings of resentment when his car was stoned by Arab boys, but also for the injustice meted out by his people to the Arabs.[2]

We have a moving and searching exposition of this theme of vicarious repentance from Bishop Lakshman Wickremesinghe of Sri Lanka. It comes in his last pastoral

letter, written a few weeks before his death from a heart attack at the age of 56.

> What happened at the end of July 1983? There are theories and there are facts. The facts however cannot be denied. Thousands of Tamils old and young, and even little children, were assaulted, robbed, killed, bereaved, and made refugees. They saw their homes, possessions, vehicles, shops and factories plundered, burnt or destroyed. These people were humiliated, made to live in fear and rendered helpless. The people responsible for all this violence and destruction and suffering were mostly Sinhalese. And according to available evidence, the police and armed forces were seen in different places to be either inactive spectators or active supporters of these mobs who attacked the lives and properties of Tamils.
>
> The massive retaliation mainly by Sinhalese against defenceless Tamils in July 1983, cannot be justified on moral grounds. We must admit this and acknowledge our shame. We must be ashamed because what took place was a moral crime. We are ashamed as Sinhalese for the moral crime other Sinhalese committed. We must not only acknowledge our shame. We must also make our apology to those Tamils who were unjustified victims of this massive retaliation. An apology must be made for three reasons. First, as Sinhalese we share in the total life of our people. We share in all that is good and great in our Sinhala heritage. In the same way, when a section of the Sinhalese do what is morally wrong or bad, we share in it. As members of the whole group we share in the evil they have done. Secondly, it is a mark of moral maturity to acknowledge a moral crime on behalf of those closely knit to us, who do not realise that they have done wrong. And an apology is made on their behalf. Thirdly, there is the example of Jesus in the midst of brutality and suffering. He shared in the guilt of all those who were involved in the moral crime of bringing about his unjust death....
>
> To admit the wrong, to make the apology and to change past attitudes may awaken a new moral sense among a section of the Tamils. They may come to acknowledge the moral wrong of condoning violence, especially the seeking of revenge, among their own people, The main point, however, is that the true basis of reconciliation is admission of wrong done and an appeal for forgiveness. When forgiveness

> is given or a mutual apology is evoked, reconciliation begins to take effect, slowly but surely. Hardened attitudes begin to change.[3]

So far we have considered those who could in no reasonable sense be held responsible for the wrongs which they are confessing, except in so far as they belong to the same race or nation. But there are other cases in which a person feels guilty, (and hence presumably the need to ask forgiveness of those injured) because of a failure to oppose the evil act of another despite its being in some sense within their power to do so. Karl Jaspers reflects on the ways that Germans opposed to Hitler rationalised their acceptance of his regime. Some, for instance, identified the regime with the Fatherland and so justified their acceptance of it as patriotism. Others argued that there was some "good in it" or that it was best to go along with it until the right time arrived to overthrow it. But Jaspers clearly is not willing for any of his fellow-countrymen to be able to exculpate themselves in this way. He and they were guilty of "impotent submission". "Blindness for the misfortune of others, lack of imagination of the heart, inner indifference towards the witnessed evil - that is moral guilt."[4]

Later on in the same paper Jaspers refers to another sort of guilt, the guilt incurred by remaining alive when other lives have been unjustly taken. This is an example of what Jaspers calls "metaphysical guilt", a guilt before oneself, rather than a guilt before others. In such cases, there may be no rupture of relationships with others. Other people may not feel let down by the agent's failure to act as a hero, and may not be seeking forgiveness. Yet the agent feels guilty.[5]

What forgiveness then is needed, if any? The answer may be "none". The person may need to see that his feeling of guilt is irrational, since no one feels aggrieved at his action or, more probably, inaction. But sometimes reason cannot conquer emotion. The man feels guilty, and he needs to be forgiven. The answer then is this: he must learn to forgive himself.

Notes

1. D. Gillett : The Darkness where God is Kingsway Publications, 1983, pp.140-141.

2. S. Barrington-Ward : Church Missionary Society Newsletter, April, 1984.

3. L. Wickremesinghe : "A cry from the heart", Church Missionary Society YES, April-June, 1984, pp.4-5.

4. K. Jaspers : "Differentiation of German Guilt", Guilt and Shame ed. H. Morris, Wadsworth, 1971, pp.42-45. The quotation is from p.45.

5. K. Jaspers : pp.46-47.

13 FORGIVING ONESELF

At first sight there may seem something odd about the whole concept of self-forgiveness. We have seen that forgiveness is essentially an inter-personal activity, involving the letting go of resentment against another person, and the attempt, where possible, to establish a renewed relationship.

We have also seen that the act of forgiving need not, and sometimes cannot, involve the re-establishment of a severed relationship. The only thing that is essential is a change of attitude and action on the part of the forgiver. For this reason it would be wrong to rule out self-forgiveness as a logical impossibility, on the grounds that only one person is involved.

Arendt maintains that logically we cannot forgive ourselves because we do not perceive ourselves with the distinctness that others do, and so we are not in a position to forgive the "what" for the "who".[1] However, although we see ourselves differently from others, we do not necessarily see ourselves less distinctly. They see things in us that we miss, true, but we know things about ourselves which others do not know. In fact, when we forgive ourselves, precisely the same process described by Arendt happens - we forgive the horrid "what" for the valued "who" we know ourselves to be.

O'Shaughnessy points to two reasons why a man may feel it impossible to forgive himself. One is that he has committed a crime so horrible that it would generally be regarded as unforgiveable, for example, the extermination of Jews in Belsen. The other reason is that he is not ready for forgiveness, because he has not yet fully repented of the wrongful deed.[2]

In both these instances, the person concerned is taking forgiveness seriously. In the first case, the man is presumably penitent, and so needs to be told that even the most heinous crimes can be forgiven when the perpetrator repents. In the second case, the man needs to see the necessity of full repentance which will result

in self-forgiveness.

By contrast with these examples, we may excuse and so "forgive" ourselves too easily. As Kolnai remarks, "In most of us a tendency to self-exculpation is operative and needs careful watching."[3] Lewis agrees, pointing out that "there usually is some amount of excuse, some 'extenuating circumstances.' We are so very anxious to point these out to God (and to ourselves) that we are apt to forget the really important thing; that is the bit left over, the bit which the excuses don't cover..."[4]

The danger then is that we excuse ourselves, rather than face the costliness of forgiving ourselves, with all that this involves in squarely facing up to the wrong we have committed. Perhaps it is for this reason that some theologians have suggested that we should not forgive ourselves. Thus Newman wrote: "A true penitent never forgives himself"[5] and Mackintosh that "it is more than doubtful whether in any real sense a Christian can ever 'forgive himself' for wrongdoing."[6]

Donald Baillie strongly disagrees - it is the "moralist" not the Christian who cannot forgive himself. "A moralist, as such can never forgive himself ... The poor moralist is too proud to forgive himself, and so self-righteousness and self-despair meet together and are one ... A moral law cannot forgive, and the moral consciousness cannot forgive itself."[7]

Baillie goes on to point out that the key to self-forgiveness is to accept the forgiveness of God, and quotes F.W. Robertson: "it is the beauty of the penitence which is according to God, that at last the sinner, realising God's forgiveness, does learn to forgive himself...."[8]

The point can be widened. The key to self-forgiveness is usually the experience of being forgiven. As Neill says, "(True forgiveness) means that the one who has been wronged recognises to the full the wrong that has been done and the injury that it has caused him; and then creates an entirely new situation by accepting

the wrongdoer as a friend setting himself beside him to help him to make a fresh start. ... In such a situation, even the man who feels that he 'cannot forgive himself' may feel that there is hope for him after all."[9]

Even so, the tender conscience, having committed a great wrong, may find it difficult to forget. The remedy here is the remembrance of that forgiveness which has been offered, by God or another human being, and which is the truly important present fact, whatever the wrongdoer's feelings about the past. As Søren Kierkegaard once wrote, "I must have faith that God in forgiving has forgotten what guilt there is .... in thinking of God I must think that he has forgotten it, and so learn to dare to forget it myself in forgiveness."[10]

Notes

1. H. Arendt : p.243.
2. R.J. O'Shaughnessy : pp.349-350.
3. A. Kolnai : p.106.
4. C.S. Lewis : "On Forgiveness", Fern-seeds and Elephants, pp.40-41.
5. Quoted by D.M. Baillie : God was in Christ Faber and Faber (1956) Paperback edition, 1961, p.165.
6. H.R. Mackintosh : p.71.
7. D.M. Baillie : pp.164-165.
8. D.M. Baillie : p.165.
9. S. Neill : p.117.
10. Quoted by C. Williams : p.186.

14. SUMMARY

Our enquiry into human forgiveness has shown us that it is always, without exception, a personal response to personal wrong. In this it differs from pardon, which is a social activity undertaken only by one qualified to do so. Forgiveness is different from both understanding and tolerance in its response to personal wrong. True forgiveness always involves the letting go of resentment and results in healing for the one who forgives. Prior to an act of forgiveness repentance on the part of the wrongdoer is desirable but not essential. When such repentance takes place forgiveness includes a measure of trust being placed in the one forgiven. Since forgiveness is one of the most difficult of human activities, we find that there are ways in which it is falsified, knowingly or unknowingly.

Forgiveness is not easy for the one being forgiven either. Counter-balancing the humiliation of repentance, there needs to be the possibility of reparation by the wrongdoer, so that his self-confidence can be restored. Many situation involve wrongs on both sides, with a consequent need for mutual forgiveness. There are also occasions when it is appropriate for an individual to repent of wrongs committed not by himself, but by those whom he is seen to represent.

Finally, we have noted that self-forgiveness, although difficult to understand and open to abuse, is a real and necessary activity for a wrongdoer who has sincerely repented.

In Part II we turn to God's forgiveness. The distinction between pardon and forgiveness proves as useful as it did in considering human forgiveness. Thereafter we follow a different course from that taken in Part I. However, the essentially personal character of forgiveness is not lost sight of, despite the appearance of more social perspectives such as release from debt and just-

ification. To conclude Part II we focus on the heart of forgiveness when we consider the parable of the Prodigal Son and Paul's teaching on reconciliation.

PART II : GOD'S FORGIVENESS

Introduction

The Bible has much to say about the pardon and forgiveness of God. Because God is the Creator of man, and because he is the Creator of the moral order to which man is subject, God is someone who can rightly punish or pardon, in the social sense we explored in Part I. Because God is Father, because he has made man in his own image, because he stands in a personal relationship with his creatures, God can also be hurt, and can offer or withhold personal forgiveness.

An attempt to go through the Bible, book by book, trying to distinguish whether in any given text the writer is talking about God's pardon or God's forgiveness, is certainly beyond the scope of this thesis. It is probably also pointless, for the writers of the Bible probably did not have the distinction in their minds as they wrote. However, this is not to say that to make the distinction as we think about God's activity in regard to man's wrongdoing is pointless. On the contrary, failure to keep it in mind can lead to faulty theology. For instance, the doctrine of the impassibility of God, the idea that God being God cannot suffer, is tenable only if we postulate a God who merely pardons mankind from above. But in the light of all that we have learnt about forgiveness, it is frankly impossible to propose that a personal God can forgive without suffering, or if we do we have immediately lost contact with forgiveness as we understand it in human experience.

Further, we have lost contact with what the Bible actually tells us about the suffering of God in forgiveness. Particularly in some of the prophets, we find a God whose heart is touched time and again by the faithlessness of his people. The message of the prophet Hosea, for instance, is a nonsense if we try to find God pardoning Israel with the cool impassive air of the Duke in The Merchant of Venice or Measure for Measure.

For Hosea, Israel is God's bride : (1 v 2; 2 v 7; 2 v 16; 2 v 19; 3 v 1). Hosea sees in his own wife's sexual infidelity a picture of Israel's infidelity to a love-match, initiated by God, and sustained at great personal cost despite that infidelity (2 v 14-17, etc.) In chapter 11 he presents us with another picture: Israel is a darling son, whom he has rescued from Egypt and then taught to walk. He had held him in his arms and fed him (11 v 3-4). But the son is rebellious and goes to Egypt (of all nations!) and Assyria for help. Even so, God will not abandon the son who has abandoned him. In one of the most moving passages in the whole of the Old Testament he cries out:

> How can I give you up, Ephraim,
> how can I surrender you, Israel?
> How can I make you like Admah
> or treat you as Zeboyim?
> My heart is changed within me,
> My remorse kindles already.
> I will not let loose my fury,
> I will not turn round and destroy Ephraim;
> for I am God and not a man,
> the Holy One in your midst,
> I will not come with threats like a roaring lion.
> (11 v 8-10a).

This passage is not only moving, it also shows how helpful it is to make the distinction between pardon and forgiveness. First of all, it is taken for granted that God has the right to destroy Israel as a punishment for her sin, just as he has destroyed Admah and Zeboyim for their sin. God has the right to punish or pardon. Secondly, the writer assumes that any man, being in the position of God, would inflict the punishment. God does not do that, says Hosea, because his heart is changed within him, in other words, the personal nature of his relationship with Israel leads to an act of forgiveness which also of course constitutes an act of pardon. Lastly God proclaims himself to be "the Holy one". In most of the Old Testament the holiness of God and his consequent abhorrence of sin leads to the inevitable punishment of sin, as a vindication of his holiness. Here the prophet reaches out to a new understanding of

holiness which includes forgiveness. A man, says Hosea, being in God's position, would undoubtedly withhold both pardon and forgiveness, yet God, being holy and therefore loving, accepts the slight upon his holiness, because his heart is moved, i.e. personal forgiveness is more important than social punishment.

In most of the Old Testament writers, the pardon and forgiveness of God are scarcely distinguishable. However, some later Jews at least did understand the distinction for it is incorporated in the sixth petition of the eighteen Benedictions:

> Forgive us, o Father, for we have sinned.
> Pardon us, o our king, for we have transgressed;
> for thou dost pardon and forgive!

In the New Testament, we find pardon and forgiveness closely interlocking, both in the teaching of Jesus and the apostles. In order to gain an (albeit partial) understanding of God's activity in this sphere, it is proposed to take three Biblical models. Each finds expression first in a parable of Jesus, and is developed to a greater or lesser degree in the writing of Paul. The first model is forgiveness/pardon as release from debt, the second forgiveness/pardon as justification of the guilty, the third is forgiveness (not pardon) as the restoration of the personally estranged.

1. RELEASE FROM DEBT

Then Peter came up and asked him, 'Lord, how often am I to forgive my brother if he goes on wronging me? As many as seven times?' Jesus replied, 'I do not say seven times; I say seventy times seven.

'The kingdom of Heaven, therefore, should be thought of in this way: There was once a king who decided to settle accounts with the men who served him. At the outset there appeared before him a man whose debt ran into millions. Since he had no means of paying, his master ordered him to be sold to meet the debt, with his wife, his children, and everything he had. The man fell prostrate at his master's feet. "Be patient with me," he said, "and I will pay in full"; and the master was so moved with pity that he let the man go and remitted the debt. But no sooner had the man gone out than he met a fellow-servant who owed him a few pounds; and catching hold of him he gripped him by the throat and said, "Pay me what you owe." The man fell at his fellow-servant's feet, and begged him, "Be patient with me, and I will pay you"; but he refused, and had him jailed until he should pay the debt. The other servants were deeply distressed when they saw what had happened, and they went to their master and told him the whole story. He accordingly sent for the man. "You scoundrel!" he said to him; "I remitted the whole of your debt when you appealed to me; were you not bound to show your fellow-servant the same pity as I showed to you?" And so angry was the master that he condemned the man to torture until he should pay the debt in full. And that is how my heavenly Father will deal with you, unless you each forgive your brother from your hearts.'

(Matthew 18 v 21-35)

a) <u>The background to the teaching of Jesus</u>.

The Greek verb used by Peter in v 21, translated "forgive", and by Jesus in v 27 and v 32, translated "remit" is <u>ἀφιημι</u>. It is a word with an interesting history.[1]

In <u>Classical Greek</u> it has the basic meaning of to "let go". The legal use frequently attested in the papyri is to denote the release of someone from a legal obligation, whether of office, marriage, obligation or

debt. It is also found in the sense of "pardon" in Plato, Plutarch and Herodotus. The noun ἄφεσις is also used in the legal sense of release from some obligation, including that of debt. It is interesting to note that neither word is ever used in a religious sense, i.e. of the gods' dealings with men.

In the Septuagint ἀφιημι is used to denote a whole series of Hebrew verbs, one group related to "release", or "leaving" someone, the other in a specifically religious context of God's forgiveness (eg. Gen. 4 v 13; Lev. 4 v 20; Is. 22 v 14). The legal Greek word here translates words which have a cultic background, related to the expiation of sins. ἄφεσις means "release" in Is. 58 v 6 and 61 v 1, where it is used of eschatological liberation. Only in Lev. 16 v 26 does it mean forgiveness.

In the New Testament ἀφιημι again is often used in the Classical Greek sense of "letting go" or "leaving behind". But it is frequently used of "remitting" or "forgiving", either absolutely or with a wide range of words denoting sin, eg. ἁμαρτια, παραπτωμα.

The noun ἄφεσις almost always means God's forgiveness, usually with the genitive ἁμαρτιων. Even where it is used to mean "liberation" (twice in Lk. 4 v 18, quoting Is. 58 v 6 and Is. 61 v 1), this at least includes the thought of forgiveness.

b) The teaching of Jesus

The parable of the unmerciful servant is a parable about money. It teaches quite simply that forgiveness, in the case of both God and man, is rather like releasing a person from a financial debt. As if to reinforce the importance of this way of looking at forgiveness in the thinking of Jesus, we find exactly the same comparison made (although here without the human dimension) in the parable of the two debtors (Lk. 7 vv 41-42).

Let us look at the parable now to see what it teaches about God's forgiveness.

v 23 Here Jesus sets the scene: a king is settling accounts (λογον) with his subjects. (δουλων)

v 24 One debtor (ὀφειλετης) is brought in who owes ten thousand talents. This is a deliberately outrageous sum - the annual income of Herod the Great was not more than 900 talents!

v 25 The man cannot pay, and so is ordered to be sold with his wife and children, so that some part of the debt can be met.

v 26 The servant begs for more time, claiming that in due course he will repay everything. Clearly an empty promise!

v 27 The king (now called ὁ κυριος, the Lord) is moved with compassion - σπλαγχνισθεις. He releases the man and cancels (ἀφηκεν) the debt.

The next part of the story (vv 28-31) concerns the same man's refusal to remit a paltry debt owed by a fellow-subject, and the horrified reaction of his fellow-servants.

vv 32-33 The Lord is angry. He rebukes the servant, claiming that he should have had pity (ἐλεησαι) on his fellow-servant as he, the king, had had pity on him.

v 34 In his anger, he hands the man over to be tortured, until he can pay the original debt in full - i.e. eternal punishment.

v 35 The teaching of the parable: my heavenly Father will do the same to you, unless you forgive (ἀφητε) your brother from your hearts. (ἀπο των καρδιων ὑμων).

Before we look more closely at what Jesus is teaching we must enter one caveat. The details of the story show that an oriental despot is in mind.

v 25 Jewish law allowed an Israelite to be sold only in the case of theft, and the sale of a wife was absolutely forbidden.

v 34 Punishment by torture was not allowed in Israel.

However it is probably still valid to draw some basic parallels between the king, (or lord) and God, because of the beginning: "The kingdom of heaven is like"

(v 23) and the conclusion : "So will my heavenly Father do to you", although clearly in view of our belief that "God is love" we should not insist that actual prolonged physical torture is in Jesus' mind.

What Jesus does seem to be teaching is that

i. Mankind is in debt to God (v 24). It is a debt which none of us can pay, for our sins are too many to be paid off by our own efforts (v 25).

ii. Only an act of release by God can set us free (v 27).

iii. Such an act of pardon/forgiveness arises out of compassion (v 27 σπλαγχνισθεις).

iv. A man is foolish if he does not forgive his brother, for this leads to a reversal of God's earlier decision to pardon and forgive.

ἀφιημι is the verb used in both Matthew and Luke's versions of the Lord's prayer. "Forgive us .... as we forgive". Matthew (6 v 12) has "Forgive us our debts" and commentators agree that this is the earlier version. So this petition of the Lord's Prayer is directly linked in both thought and expression with the parable of the unmerciful servant.

In his book on the Lord's Prayer, Ernst Lohmeyer has a long and detailed section on "Forgive us our debts" which helps to illuminate the teaching of Jesus further.

The use of the word "debt", Lohmeyer points out, defines sin in a certain way, as an omission, rather than a commission, a failure to give God his due. Man owes everything to God - his life, health, family, physical, mental and spiritual well being. God expects total allegiance in return. "You shall love the Lord your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength."

Other parables stress the idea of loan, that God entrusts us with loans which represent gifts and responsibilities, which we can discharge well or badly. Thus the parable of the talents (Matt. 24 v 14-30) ends with the commendation of two servants, and the castigation of the third. The relationship of debtor does not cease,

although it may pass over into the concept of a permanent duty, arising out of the permanence of our relationship with God.

So, Lohmeyer notes, the picture of "debt" begins to outgrow its legal presuppositions, and indicates a deeper and more permanent relationship. For this relationship, unlike the legal one, is not dissolved if a man pays his debts, still less is it dissolved if God remits his debts: in either case he is only bound the more deeply to God.

(On the other hand, the use of the word "debt" does alleviate the gravity of sin, in that a "debt", unlike sin in its Pauline usage, is clearly distinguishable from a man himself.)

Thus forgiveness comes to man when he recognises that he is in debt to God, and that he cannot pay that debt himself. When God forgives, he removes the debt, but does not legally remit it, since that would be to destroy the relationship, not restore it. The outcome of forgiveness, as opposed to remission (or pardon), is that the believer is not only set free from the debts which hold him like fetters, he is also restored to his true place as a child of God.

Thus Lohmeyer sees a link with the fourth petition "Give us this day our daily bread". The same poverty and need which there oppress a man's body here plague his heart. Just as it is natural for a child to ask his father for bread, so it is natural for a child of God to ask his Father for forgiveness.[2]

The forgiveness of God, as release from debt, is costly, for there is a price to be paid. Jesus indicates this himself in the famous words of Mark 10 v 45 "The Son of Man came ..... to give up his life as a ransom (λυτρον) for many".

λυτρον. In Classical Greek the usual meaning of the word is "the price of release". In the Septuagint the word occurs eighteen times, always to mean "the payment which releases a man from a debt or obligation." For

instance, if an Israelite sold himself to a wealthy foreigner, a rich relative could buy him out, by a λυτρον. (Lev. 25 v 47-51) In the contemporary Greek of the New Testament times, the word was often used to mean the purchase price paid for the liberation of a slave. A Greek papyrus reads: "I have given Helene her liberty and I have received ὑπερ λυτρον αὐτης, the purchase price for her, the sum of ....".[3] So in Mark 10 v 45 Jesus is saying that the debts which enslave a man can be cancelled only at a price, the price of his death.

c) The teaching of Paul.

When we turn to the Pauline writings, forgiveness, as release from debt, does not appear as prominently as some of Paul's other themes. However, we find him using the verb λογιζομαι in both Romans and 2 Corinthians in connection with sin. λογιζομαι is first of all an accountant's word, meaning to "count, reckon, calculate, or compute".[4] In Romans it appears most prominently to indicate the "credit" side of the ledger: Rom. 4 v 22 ... "Abraham's faith was 'counted' (ἐλογισθη) to him for righteousness." In 2 Cor. 5 v 19 we have an interesting interpolation of the "accounting" concept in the context of reconciliation. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer holding (μη λογιζομενος) men's misdeeds against them". Here the picture is definitely of man "in debt" to God, with God wiping the debit slate clean through the death of Christ.

St. Paul does not use the word λυτρον in connection with Christ's death. However in 1 Timothy 2 v 6 we find an even stronger word ἀντιλυτρον : ... "the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as an ἀντιλυτρον on behalf of all" (my translation).[5]

In several other places Paul uses the word ἀπολυτρωσις. This has a wider meaning than λυτρον, and is used in an eschatological context in Rom. 8 v 23 and Lk. 21 v 38. However the noun is related to the verb ἀπολυτροω which means to "release on payment of ransom", and this aspect is surely present in Ephesians 1 v 7 and

Colossians 1 v 14 where its meaning is explained as την ἄφεσιν των ἁμαρτιων, the forgiveness of sins. Of particular interest is Col. 1 v 13-14 where the implied ransom is in the context of a release from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of God's Son.

The clearest exposition of the atonement in "debt" terminology comes in Col. 2 v 13b-14, "For he has forgiven us all our sins; he has cancelled the bond which pledged us to the decrees of the law. It stood against us, but he has set it aside, nailing it to the cross." The Greek reads: χαρισαμενος ἡμιν παντα τα παραπτωματα ἐξαλειψας το καθ' ἡμων χειρογραφον τοις δογμασιν ὁ ἦν ὑπεναντιον ἡμιν, και αὐτο ἠρκεν ἐκ του μεσου, προσηλωσας αὐτο τῳ σταυρῳ. χαρισαμενος - literally : "made a present of", a word regularly used of cancelling a debt. For instance it is found in the parable of the two debtors to indicate the cancellation of the two debts (Lk. 7 v 42).

ἐξαλειψας το καθ' ἡμων χειρογραφον : ἐξαλειφω means to "wipe out" or "erase". On χειρογραφον Lightfoot writes : "The word χειρογραφον which properly means an autograph of any kind, is used almost exclusively for a note of hand, a bond or obligation, as having the 'sign-manual' of the debtor or contractor."[6]

τοις δογμασιν - for the Jews the Mosaic law; for the Gentiles the moral law against which they have offended.

προσηλωσας - the verb means to "nail" or "pin up". Lightfoot comments : "By προσηλωσας is meant that the law of ordinances was nailed to the cross, rent with Christ's body, and destroyed by His death ....".[7] Here then is a graphic picture of release from debt. We are "made a present of" our sins. The slate is wiped clean, and the list of offences is pinned up and run through with a nail to demonstrate its abolition. In these verses Paul piles image upon image to demonstrate that mankind is no longer "in debt to God", but utterly and completely free through Christ's death on the cross.

Notes

1. The writer is indebted to R. Bultmann's article on ἀφίημι and ἄφεσις in Kittel's Theological Dictionary of the New Testament Vol I (trans. G.W. Bromiley), Eerdmans, 1964, pp.509-512.

2. E. Lohmeyer : The Lord's Prayer (trans. J. Bowden), Collins, 1965, pp.160-180.

3. W. Barclay : A New Testament Wordbook SCM Press, 1955, p.78.

4. Liddell and Scott : Greek-English Lexicon (abridged), Oxford, 1871, p.416.

5. The author realises that doubts have been expressed about the authenticity of Ephesians, Colossians and the Pastoral Epistles. However, all are in line with Pauline thinking and for the purpose of this study are being treated as part of the Pauline corpus.

6. J.B. Lightfoot : St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon Macmillan and Co., 1880, p.187.

7. J.B. Lightfoot : p.189.

2. JUSTIFICATION

> And here is another parable that he told. It was aimed at those who were sure of their own goodness and looked down on everyone else. 'Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax-gatherer. The Pharisee stood up and prayed thus: "I thank thee, O God, that I am not like the rest of men, greedy, dishonest, adulterous; or, for that matter, like this tax-gatherer. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes on all that I get." But the other kept his distance and would not not even raise his eyes to heaven, but beat on his breast, saying, "O God, have mercy on me, sinner that I am." It was this man, I tell you, and not the other, who went home acquitted of his sins. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled; and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.'
>
> (Luke 18 v 9-14)

a) The teaching of Jesus

Unlike the concept of forgiveness as release from debt, the concept of forgiveness as justification appears but once in the teaching of Jesus. This is in this parable of the Pharisee and the Publican (Lk. 18 v 9-14), where we are told that the latter went home δεδικαιωμενος (v 14).

Let us look at the parable in detail. First of all, Luke tells us that the parable was told to those πεποιθοτας ἐφ' ἑαυτοις ὅτι εἰσιν δικαιοι (v 9). This is taken by Manson[1] and Jeremias[2] to mean "trusted in themselves rather than God." (Compare 2 Cor. 1 v 9). ὅτι then means "because" not "that", and Jesus is telling his parable against those who trust in themselves because of their achievements, moral and spiritual. These folk were δικαιοι, as were Zechariah and Elizabeth (Lk. 1 v 6), " δικαιοι....has the sense of practising conduct that makes one acceptable to God." (Marshall).[3]

ἐξουθενουντας τους λοιπους means to "make nothing of", to "treat with contempt", and τους λοιπους refer to those who did not keep the Law in the strict way the δικαιοι did. It would be wrong to identify this group with the Pharisees as a whole. Rabbi Hillel (c. 20 B.C.) used to say: (Aboth. 2[5]): "Keep not aloof from the congregation and trust

not in thyself until the day of thy death, and judge not thy fellow until thou art come to his place."[4]

v 10 The two men represent the two extremes of Jewish religious life - the most successful and the miserable failure.

v 11 Manson, Jeremias and Marshall all prefer the variant rending σταθεις προς ἑαυτον ταυτα προσηυχετο. The point is not that the Pharisee prayed "privately" or "to himself", but rather that he stood apart from others, thus demonstrating his aloofness. (Standing was the regular posture in prayer so that does not in itself betoken pride.)

v 12 The point here is that the Pharisee names matters in which he exceeds the requirements of the law.

v 13 The publican is overwhelmed by his sense of sin. The breast (το στηθος) was regarded as the seat of sin, and the act is therefore one of repentance. ἱλασθητι - a cultic word. The publican asks to "be propitiated" to God.

v 14 δεδικαιωμενος = "as one whom God has justified" (Jeremias). παρ' ἐκεινον - "rather than the other".

Jeremias observes that to its first hearers, the parable must have appeared "shocking" and "inconceivable".[5] Linnemann calls the conclusion "an outrageous paradox".[6] The Pharisee is a genuinely good man, the publican a wretch. The Pharisee thanks God for his blessed state, the publican appeals for mercy without appearing to have fulfilled the conditions required - giving up his job and making restitution to those he has cheated. Yet, says Jesus, this man went home "in the right with God", rather than the Pharisee. Marshall comments: "It is true that the tax collector does not show 'works of repentance', e.g. in restoring his ill-gotten wealth, and therefore the Pharisees would have disagreed with Jesus that he was justified by God (S.B. II 247-9), but Jesus' lesson is precisely that the attitude of heart is ultimately what matters, and justification depends on the mercy of God to

the penitent rather than upon works which might be thought to earn God's favour; when Zaccheus restores his ill-gotten gains - a responsibility from which he is not excused! - this follows his acceptance by Jesus and does not precede it."[7]

Thus the parable has the same concern as the Sermon on the Mount - to re-evaluate the concept of righteousness. Righteousness, according to the Law, says Jesus, even when practised successfully, can be a spiritual snare. It can replace dependence on God with dependence on one's own righteous achievements. Only when one accepts the futility of this enterprise can one be open to being made or counted righteous (note the force of the passive participle δεδικαιωμενος) by the gracious act of a merciful God. The fruits of repentance, righteous works, then flow from God's gracious gift, and can never be proudly catalogued or used to compare oneself favourably with others.

Where, one may ask, does forgiveness fit into all this? Obviously, the publican goes home a forgiven man, (note the NEB translation "acquitted of his sins"), but Jesus's use of the word δεδικαιωμενος seems to indicate something more. What is the relationship between justification and forgiveness? The answer becomes clearer when we look at the writings of Paul.

b) <u>The teaching of Paul</u>

It has often been remarked how infrequently Paul uses the terms of forgiveness in describing God's gracious act towards man through the Cross of Christ. ἀφιημι appears but once (Rom. 4 v 7, and that in a quotation from the Old Testament), ἀφεσις twice (Eph. 1 v 7; Col. 1 v 14), and χαριζομαι just once (Col. s v 13), - although the verb does appear several times with reference to human forgiveness (e.g. 2 Cor. 2 v 7 and 10; 2 Cor. 12 v 13). By contrast the concept of "justification" appears very frequently, δικαιοω being used 25 times,

δικαιος 14 times, δικαιωσις twice, δικαιωμα 5 times, and δικαιοσυνη 52 times.[8]

John Knox points out just how surprising is Paul's deliberate avoidance of the language of forgiveness, an omission so startling it has even led some scholars to conclude that Paul was not a pupil of the rabbis, so common is it in the teaching of the Old Testament.[9] Further, says Knox, how do we account for Paul's apparent disregard of what is undoubtedly "the most characteristic, constant and pervasive feature of Jesus' own teaching?"[10] It is not that Paul lacks the experience of forgiveness - this is quite clear from his conversion and the substance of his writing. No, he deliberately chooses to replace the language of forgiveness (ἀφιημι, ἀφεσις, ἁμαρτιων) with another set of concepts.

Knox goes on to assert that what replaces the language of "forgiveness" are two words - "justification" and "reconciliation". "Justification", he says, "is essentially a legal term and means 'acquittal', 'reconciliation' essentially a personal term and means restoration of community".[11] He sees "justification" and "reconciliation" as two distinct phases in God's dealing with men. "We must be acquitted: only so can the Holy God enter into fellowship with us." Thus, says Knox, Paul has made a "division" in the meaning of forgiveness: justification represents God's justice, reconciliation his mercy. But in fact, no such division exists - in Christ, we see "a mercy that is just and a justice that is merciful." Further the division in forgiveness suggests a division in God - the just Judge and the merciful Father, - whereas in fact God is one, both just and merciful.

Knox uses this critique of Paul's view of forgiveness to launch an attack on his understanding of atonement. Appealing to the human experience of forgiveness, which is entirely valid as long as the wrongdoer is penitent, he asserts that "there is no moral contradiction in forgiveness which has to be resolved by some theory of compensat-

ing or appeasing or justifying atonement".[12] Appealing to the parable of the prodigal Son, he maintains that God forgives as did the father in the parable, without requiring compensation or the imposition of a penalty. There is "a justice which belongs to the family", rather than the law court and this is the justice of God's dealing with men. So "we do not have to be 'acquitted' before the Judge in order to be reconciled to the Father. The Father, as such, forgives; and all he asks is what a true Father must always ask - penitence and trust."[13] In fact, avers Knox, although Paul is wanting to talk about forgiveness as Jesus does, his legal terminology takes him out of the realm of the personal. "A just judge may acquit if the demands of justice have been satisfied, but he cannot forgive, and any amount of penitence on a culprit's part is quite irrelevant in a courtroom."[14]

Knox's essay is stimulating, provocative, and perceptive in regard to the human experience of forgiveness. But as a critique of Paul's doctrine of justification it lacks the attention to detail necessary to sustain so challenging an assertion.

First of all, it simply will not do to assert blithely that justification is a legal term meaning "acquittal" and reconciliation is a personal term meaning "restoration of fellowship", and then put them together to make forgiveness. As we shall see, the background to "justification" is personal and ethical, as well as legal, and "reconciliation" is for Paul a near equivalent to "justification", not a distinct phase following it. (This is clear from the way the two terms are used in parallel in Rom. 5 v 9 and 10.)

Secondly, Paul does not make any division in forgiveness, as Knox suggests. In justification Paul sees a demonstration of God's justice and mercy together. Indeed it is the marriage of the two (through the Cross) which Paul saw as solving the classic dilemma of Judaism - how can God show both justice and mercy? (See Schrenk : p.44).[15]

Thirdly, the parable of the Prodigal Son is a supreme example of human forgiveness, and a parable of God's forgiveness of man, but it cannot be used to invalidate Paul's conception of God as judge. The teaching of Jesus contains many references to judgement - those who are accepted and those who are condemned. Further, despite Knox's disclaimer, to use the parable of the Prodigal Son as the norma normans of divine forgiveness, where the Father's loving acceptance and the sinner's penitent acceptance are all in all, is actually to render the Cross redundant as in any sense the means of reconciling God to man. (This point will be considered further in section 3.)

Before we try to understand more deeply what Paul means by justification, we should look at the background of the concept in Greek and Hebraic thought. According to Hill, both δικαιοσυνη and its Hebrew equivalent "sedeqar" have as their original idea "behaviour conforming to social norms". Thus when Judah says of Tamar "She is more righteous than I", he is not referring to ethical conduct, but conformity to the levirate marriage law (Gen. 38 v 26).[16]

When applied to the Covenant, "sedeqar" is correct behaviour, whereby Israel upholds God's law, the Torah. From this it was a short step for the prophets to extend the term to ethically right behaviour, and castigate Israel for her oppression, corruption and sexual excess.

Of course, one of the attributes of God is righteousness. This righteousness often had to be demonstrated in judgement - the vindication of the poor and oppressed, and condemnation of the wicked - see Psalm 7 v 7-11. As God's representative the king was thought to fulfil the same function, particularly the vindication of the oppressed (Ps. 72 v 1-2: 12-14). In "declaring in the right" the one who had a just cause God (and the king) were effectively the deliverer of the downtrodden.

Thus the concept of God as Judge naturally merges into the concept of God as Saviour, for without an act of restoration the judgement in favour of the exploited is empty. In Deutero-Isaiah, we see a further development - God will not merely judge rightly, not merely intervene to make his judgement real, he will even vindicate the unfaithful, coming to his people as Saviour, and clothing them in his righteousness. The progression is seen clearly in chapters 59-61. In chapter 59 v 2 we are told that "your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God".[17] In verse 14 we see righteousness personified. "Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands afar off". The separation between man and God is spoken of as a separation between man and one of God's key attributes, his righteousness. But in verse 17 we see God going into action. "He put on righteousness as a breastplate and a helmet of salvation upon his head". Righteousness is paralleled with salvation, a means of bridging the gap between God and man, and so (v 20), "He will come to Zion as Redeemer of those who repent." At the beginning of chapter 60 God's righteousness is described as light shining upon the people. As a result the people are righteous (v 21), but it is not a righteousness of their own, it is, says God, "a work of my own hands to bring me glory". Finally in chapter 61 we find that Israel is described as possessing a righteousness from God: v 10:

> he (God) has clothed me with the garments of salvation
> he has covered me with the robe of righteousness
> As a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
> And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

This sort of righteousness is a witness to the nations 61 v 11; 62 v 2. It is also the prerequisite for a restoration of the Covenant relationship in all its glory, chapter 62 v 4-5. Here the marriage imagery is reminiscent of Hosea 2 v 19, and speaks powerfully of a people once more established in the most intimate relationship with their God.

We must not conclude that this progression formed the popular conception of "righteousness" amongst the rabbinic teaching of Paul's day. Such exalted vision was generally obscured by the practical question facing the individual Jew - how can I be right with God, and receive his approbation on Judgement Day? Hill tells us that the rabbis taught that a man is judged according to the dominant character of his intentions and deeds. If the majority of these are righteous then he is accounted a "righteous" man.[18] Righteousness could only come from obedience to God's will, as revealed in the Torah, written, oral and the halachic tradition (practical applications). As a result, the whole of life could be seen as a fulfilment of law. Although the rabbis taught that such fulfilment won "merit" with God, there was a great emphasis on right intention, obedience to the law because it was the will of God (Ps. 24 v 1, "he who has clean hands and a pure heart").[19]

The common factor uniting Greek, Old Testament and Rabbinic teaching is the ethical aspect of righteousness. It seems to be a commonplace of modern scholarship to say that Paul's intention was to overthrow this ethical content at the moment of justification, and replace it with the relational (or forensic) concept. Thus Bultmann attested that "(Righteousness) does not mean the ethical quality of a person. It does not mean any quality at all, but a relationship."[20] This is quoted with approval by Hill, and Robinson seems to accept a similar viewpoint. (Of course it is conceded that δικαιος and δικαιοσυνη are used in an ethical or qualitative sense, but it is alleged that this is a secondary usage.) Thus is it thought to cut the Gordian knot of dispute between the Catholic view of "imparted righteousness" and the Protestant view of "imputed righteousness". Robinson says that "righteousness is not 'imparted' by some magical injection of grace or 'imputed' by some dubious legal fiction....The metaphor is indeed forensic .... but its meaning for Paul can really only be understood in terms of completely personal

relationships."[21]

Note how Robinson downgrades both the ethical and forensic views of justification by his use of the pejorative terms "magical" and "fiction". He does not seem able to admit that both thought-worlds might have something very important to contribute to the total understanding of the concept.

We cannot readily abandon the ethical element in justification. True, it is not particularly prominent in Romans, but 2 Cor. 5 v 21 seems inescapably ethical, with its contrast between Christ becoming sin and us becoming the righteousness of God in him - all in the context of the Cross. In 1 Cor. 6 v 11 "justified" is paralleled with being "washed" and "sanctified", neither of them relational or forensic terms. The ethical aspect is accepted by Schrenk: "The believer is pronounced righteous and given a new character in the sight of God ",[22] and Vincent Taylor (p.64ff). Such righteousness is not a work, but a gift of God, the "robe of righteousness" of Isaiah 61. So in Philippians 3 v 9 Paul talks of having a righteousness "not his own".

To the ethical aspect we must add the forensic and the relational. Behind Paul's writing in Romans is the dominating concept of the judgement of God. Man is guilty before the bar of that judgement, and no amount of good works will save him. The forensic aspect finds prominence in Cranfield's discussion of justification. He is clear that the verb δικαιοω means to "acquit, confer a righteous status on", and that the phrase δικαιοσυνη θεου means "the righteous status which is given by God".[23] That Paul sees justification as a reversal of the verdict of "guilty" appears quite clearly in a passage such as Rom. 5 v 16-19, where the disobedience of Adam, the verdict of guilty and the sentence of death, is contrasted so strongly with the obedience of Christ, the verdict of "not guilty" and the free gift of life. It is at this point that the charge of a legal fiction seems to have greatest weight. It can

only be answered by referring to Rom. 6 in which it is clear that although Christ "carries the can" for us, we too must pass through the guilty verdict with him on our way to life.

As for the relational aspect of justification, no clearer example can be found than that in Rom. 5 v 10-11 where the progression from "sin" to justification is explained in terms of the progression from enmity to reconciliation. In v 1 of the same chapter Paul says that justification means "peace" with God. It means access to the grace in which they stand (v 2). In later chapters he talks about the relationship in terms of Father and Son (chapter 8).

Sometimes the "forensic" and "relational" aspects of justification are identified as if they were one and the same. But there is an important distinction. The judge may acquit, but that does not in itself make him a father who forgives. As Knox puts it: "A just judge may acquit if the demands of justice have been satisfied, but he cannot forgive"[24] (i.e. in personal terms). Several scholars complain that the language of the law-court fails to do justice to the personal character of God's dealing with his creatures, (e.g. Mackintosh) - "When Paul describes the position of the sinful man who .... trusts God by saying that he is 'declared righteous', we may feel that we desiderate a more purely personal mode of denoting simple, loving, forgiveness."[25] And Robinson: "The difficulty about Paul's language and what makes it so much more obscure than that of Jesus is that despite the fact that he says legal categories fail he goes on using legal categories, which inevitably do less than justice to and depersonalize the relationship he is trying to express."[26]

Here we come back to a point similar to that of Knox mentioned at the beginning of this section. Why did Paul use the terminology he did? The answer perhaps is that only the "righteousness" terminology was sufficiently

comprehensive to cover all that he had to say about God's stupendous salvation in Christ. For Paul was not merely saying that through the Cross God the Father forgave man, or that through the Cross God the Judge acquitted man, or that through the Cross God the righteous gave man a share in his righteousness - he wanted to say all three!

As we have seen the Hebraic background of δικαιοσυνη and its cognates has connotations which cover all three aspects in a way that no other word-group does. However, it still remains to be asked which of the three aspects is the most important, since behind the implied criticism of Knox, Robinson, and Mackintosh is the belief that to remain with a "legal" word-group is to "depersonalize" (in Robinson's words) what is primarily a personal or relational concept.

If we are to find a key verse which sums up Paul's doctrine then perhaps it is Rom. 3 v 25-26. Paul is wanting to demonstrate that God is both "just and justifies any man who puts his faith in Jesus." Justification, then, is not simply the justification of men - it is the justification of God. Paul believes in a just God - yet the Old Testament repeatedly teaches that he will by no means "clear the guilty" (Exodus 34 v 7). Paul's language of "justification" is used because his task is to vindicate the (ethical) righteousness of God in apparently "clearing the guilty". In order to establish that righteousness, he has also to establish the real righteousness of man, otherwise God has simply engaged in a legal fiction of "counting innocent" someone who is really guilty.

Yet the real righteousness of man is quite clearly an impossibility. As Vincent Taylor puts it, "the righteousness must be our own, but we cannot create it; it must be of God, but he cannot confer it, it must be ours and of Him, at one and the same time."[27] The only answer is of course the atoning death of Christ, by which

man becomes the "righteousness of God in him". The ethical aspect of "justification", so far from being an embarrassment, is essential for the doctrine to work at all. Only if man is truly righteous can he be fairly acquitted, or hope to stand in any sort of relationship with a just and righteous God.

Exactly what this righteousness apart from the law consists of is hard to say. Vincent Taylor talks of the justified man being "righteous in mind, although not yet in achievement."[28] For the justified man has a will and heart in conformity with the will and heart of God. At the moment of justification this righteousness will have nothing to show for itself, but like the seed sown in the ground, it is a seed of goodness sown in the heart of man which will bring "forth its fruit in due season". (Phil. 1 v 11 καρπον δικαιοσυνης.) So J. Knox writes, "Not only is the believer forgiven; he is given a new righteousness. This righteousness is not his own. He can claim no credit for it; indeed he will not know it as righteousness at all. He will only be aware of God's goodness towards him, not of the working of that goodness in and through him. But others will see it, will thank God, and will take courage.[29]

This is well said, and the first sentence points us to one of the differences between forgiveness and justification. Forgiveness is primarily a relational term, and this is why Jesus can use it of man with man, and man with God relationships. "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who trespass against us." We also find Jesus teaching: "Acquit, and you will be acquitted." (Lk. 6 v 37) There are distinct parallels between human and divine forgiveness. But justification with its primarily ethical relevance cannot be predicated of man. Nowhere do we find Paul urging his readers to "justify" their brethren, for no man can bestow righteousness on another.

Secondly, in the New Testament "forgiveness of sins" is a repeatable act. It refers to the removal of

the barrier to fellowship between man and God, and has an ongoing meaning for the believer as he continues to repent of his sin. Yet for Paul "justification" is a once-for-all action resulting from the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ, at the moment of its appropriation by the believer through faith.

Thirdly, "forgiveness" or "forgiveness of sins", though it certainly implies renewed fellowship with God, does not at all make clear the radically transformed status (and character) of the justified man. The "forgiveness of sins" merely clears up the past; it does not in itself imply a transformed personality. Of course this lack is supplied in the Apostolic teaching by the promise of the Spirit. But Paul's teaching seems to be that "the forgiveness of sins" and the "renewal of the Spirit" are one and the same action. "If anyone is in Christ (and a man is in Christ at the moment of justification) there is a new creation." (2 Cor. 5 v 17).

Thus so far from creating a "division" in the meaning of forgiveness, Paul has sought to widen its application. Of course, we must concede that the personal loses some prominence, especially in the early chapters of Romans, because of Paul's overriding ethical (and forensic) concern. But this is amply made up for in Rom. 8 and 2 Cor. 5. The very breadth of Paul's thinking has made the doctrine of justification a bone of contention for many years. It is time that we recognised it as spanning the ethical, the forensic, and the relational, a rich perspective on the rich mercy of God.

Notes

1. T.W. Manson : p.309.

2. J. Jeremias : The Parables of Jesus (trans. S. Hooke), SCM Press, 1954, p.111.

3. I.H. Marshall : The Gospel of Luke Paternoster, 1978, p.679. E.P. Sanders : Jesus and Judaism SCM, 1985, does not accept that Jesus was particularly concerned about self-righteousness (p.281), nor does he think we should give credence to "polemical" statements, such as those of v 9 (p.338). However v 9 seems a perfectly reasonable explanation of the parable, which, contrary to Sanders (p.175), the writer takes to be a genuine parable of Jesus. We should beware, of course, of drawing the conclusion that all Pharisees were self-righteous.

4. Quoted by T.W. Manson : p.309.

5. J. Jeremias : p.113.

6. E. Linnemann : The Parables of Jesus (trans. J. Sturdy), SPCK, 1966, p.144.

7. I.H. Marshall : p.681. E.P. Sanders : Jesus and Judaism, while rejecting the traditional picture of the Pharisees, accepts that Jesus may well have caused offence by accepting sinners without insisting on "restitution, sacrifice and obedience to the law" (p.207). Thus Sanders implicitly endorses the verdict of Jeremias and Linnemann on the likely reaction to the parable.

8. See V. Taylor : Forgiveness and Reconciliation Macmillan, 1941, p.34.

9. For the ensuing paragraphs see J. Knox : Chapters in a Life of Paul A & C Black, 1954, pp.142-155.

10. J. Knox : p.143.

11. J. Knox : p.146.

12. J. Knox : p.148.

13. J. Knox : p.150.

14. J. Knox : p.152.

15. G. Schrenk : Righteousness, Kittel Bible Key Words, A & C Black, 1951.

16. D. Hill : Greek words and Hebrew meanings Cambridge, 1967, p.84. The following paragraphs are based mainly on D. Hill : pp.85-96.

17. All the quotations from Isaiah are taken from the Revised Standard Version O.U.P., 1952.

18. D. Hill : p.117.

19. See D. Hill : pp.117-120.

20. R. Bultmann : Theology of the New Testament (trans. K. Grobel), Vol.I, p.272. Quoted by D. Hill : p.160.

21. J.A.T. Robinson : Wrestling with Romans SCM, 1979, p.43.

22. G. Schrenk : p.44.

23. C.E.B. Cranfield : A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (I.C.C. Commentary), Vol.I, T & T Clark, 1975, pp.95 and 98. Cranfield does not believe that justification in itself carries any ethical content. However, he is alive to its ethical implications, quoting with approval (p.95) Calvin's statement that "we cannot receive righteousness in Christ without at the same time laying hold on sanctification." (J. Calvin : The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians (trans. R. Mackenzie) p.8.)

24. J. Knox : p.152.

25. A.R. Mackintosh : p.106.

26. J.A.T. Robinson : p.43.

27. V. Taylor : p.81.

28. V. Taylor : p.81.

29. J. Knox : p.157.

3. PERSONAL BEARING OF HURT AND RENEWAL OF FELLOWSHIP

Again he said : 'There was once a man who had two sons; and the younger said to his father, "Father, give me my share of the property." So he divided his estate between them. A few days later the younger son turned the whole of his share into cash and left home for a distant country, where he squandered it in reckless living. He had spent it all, when a severe famine fell upon that country and he began to feel the pinch. So he went and attached himself to one of the local land-owners, who sent him on to his farm to mind the pigs. He would have been glad to fill his belly with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. Then he came to his senses and said, "How many of my father's paid servants have more food than they can eat, and here am I, starving to death! I will set off and go to my father, and say to him, 'Father, I have sinned, against God and against you; I am no longer fit to be called your son; treat me as one of your paid servants.'" So he set out for his father's house. But while he was still a long way off his father saw him, and his heart went out to him. He ran to meet him, flung his arms round him, and kissed him. The son said, "Father, I have sinned, against God and against you; I am no longer fit to be called your son." But the father said to his servants, "Quick! fetch a robe, my best one, and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet. Bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us have a feast to celebrate the day. For this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found." And the festivities began.

Now the elder son was out on the farm; and on his way back, as he approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked what it meant. The servant told him, "Your brother has come home, and your father has killed the fatted calf because he has him back safe and sound." But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and pleaded with him; but he retorted, "You know how I have slaved for you all these years; I never once disobeyed your orders; and you never gave me so much as a kid, for a feast with my friends. But now that this son of yours turns up, after running through your money with his women, you kill the fatted calf for him." "My boy," said the father, "you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. How could

we help celebrating this happy day?
Your brother here was dead and has come
back to life, was lost and is found."

(Luke 15 v 11-32)

a) The teaching of Jesus

Important as is the concept of justification, which includes that of forgiveness, its wide-ranging application has the effect of losing that simplicity which is the hallmark of personal forgiveness.

Moreover, as we have seen, justification is something that God alone can do, whereas forgiveness is an activity shared by God and man. Because of this, forgiveness is a much easier concept for the "man in the street" to grasp.

The parable of the Prodigal Son speaks of forgiveness at a personal level with a powerful directness that hardly requires commentary. It is personal from start to finish, and of all the parables the most clearly and unequivocally a parable of forgiveness. Yet the word forgiveness is never mentioned! According to Vincent Taylor, this is because Jesus was in this parable reaching forward to our modern understanding of forgiveness, and the vocabulary of the time, (linked as we have seen primarily to the concept of debt), was inadequate to express it.[1] Probably Vincent Taylor is right here. The depth of feeling expressed in the parable goes far beyond our other two parables, and the picture of the waiting, suffering, forbearing Father shows us a God of infinite sensitivity, vulnerability and love.

When we allege that the parable of the Prodigal Son hardly requires a commentary, we mean that its essential meaning is staringly obvious, not that we cannot gain from a detailed examination of the text.

In The Cross and the Prodigal Kenneth E. Bailey sets out to do just that. Drawing on many years experience working in the Middle East, he highlights nuances in the parable which are usually overlooked by Western readers.[2] For instance, in telling the story to middle Eastern peasants, Bailey found that it was unthinkable

for any son to request his portion of the family wealth while his father still lived. This was because such a request was tantamount to wanting his father to die. "Of course", says Bailey, "we have no conclusive evidence that a first-century peasant reacted like a modern peasant. Yet the universality of this ingrained concept leads us to assume that the attitude is of great antiquity. All across the Middle East, from Algeria to Iran and from the Sudan to Syria the answer is the same."[3]

If we accept this view, we see how thoroughgoing is the younger son's rebellion. And what of the elder son? He is silent, but he should not be! "In the village", says Bailey, "when I come to this point in the sermon I always ask, 'who must be the reconciler?' The villagers always answer from their pews 'His brother, of course.'"[4] It seems that the brothers were already at odds, for the older brother makes no attempt to prevent his younger brother leaving. The father, too, acts out of character. No village father would grant such a request. "The expected reaction is refusal and punishment."[5] In granting the request the father does not sever relationships with his son, but still holds out from his side the "hope of reconciliation".

When the younger son "comes to himself", Bailey believes his repentance is not insincere, but "shallow". In deciding to ask to be a "hired servant" (μισθιος), he is certainly degrading himself, for "hired servants" as opposed to family servants (δουλοι) were not trusted and could be dismissed at any time. However, it is possible that the son thinks that by working for hire he will be able to repay his debt to his father. In thinking of a servant-master relationship with his father, he fails to accept the reality of sonship. He has not really faced up to the fact that he has broken his father's heart, and that things will not be right until true personal reconciliation takes place.[6] It may be that

Bailey is being rather hard on the younger son here. His repentance appears to be very deep indeed. It is not that he is refusing to face up to the responsibility of sonship, but rather that he believes that by his actions he has forfeited any right to be considered a son again.

When the younger son returns, the story takes on a new poignancy, for nothing that follows bears any resemblance to the usual procedure in these circumstances. "The village knows the boy is in disgrace. Everyone expects the father to remain aloof while the boy makes his way through the village.... The son should then be obliged to sit for some time outside the gate, while the doorman asks if his father will let him in. After considerable time has passed he would be summoned. Punishment of some kind would be inevitable."[7]

But the father seeing his son from afar is moved with compassion (ἐσπλαγχνίσθη), and races (δραμων) to meet him. "A man of his age and position always walks in a slow and dignified fashion.... No villager over the age of 30 ever runs. But now the father races down the road. To do so, he must take the front edge of his robes in his hand like a teenager. When he does this, his undergarments show. All of this is frightfully shameful for him. The gang in the street will be distracted from tormenting the prodigal. Instead they will run after the father, amazed at seeing this old man shaming himself publicly. It is the very 'compassion' mentioned in the text that leads the father to race out to his son. He knows what his son will face in the village. He takes upon himself the shame and humiliation due to the prodigal."[8] κατεφιλησεν : the father kisses his son "again and again" to demonstrate his forgiveness.

When the son speaks, he offers only the first part of his prepared address. Did his father cut him off? Bailey thinks not. In view of what has happened the idea of becoming a hired servant, to repay the money,

seems "blasphemous".[8]

The father's subsequent actions all reinforce his total forgiveness and the re-instatement of his son as son. The servants are to dress him, thus expressing their acceptance of him. The best robe will be one of the father's own, and the ring is probably the family signet ring. Both denote a restoration of authority. In Genesis 41 v 41-42 Pharaoh gives Joseph a signet ring as a symbol of newly conferred authority in Egypt. The shoes denote sonship. Slaves to barefoot. "The fatted calf is a grain-fed animal with high quality meat. Meat is a rare delicacy in the village. The highest honour that can be shown to any guest is to butcher a calf."[9] All this is done because the dead is "alive" and the lost "found". The joy of this leads to total acceptance and restoration.

Not so with the elder son, of course. When he hears what has happened, he is angry and refuses to come in. One of this reasons for this is that it was the duty of the elder son to serve at table during a banquet. He would have had to offer the choice pieces of meat to his vagabond brother! But to refuse to come in was a personal insult to his father and his guests. His father is thus once again shamed publicly.

Again the father's response is unexpected. Normally the son would be punished immediately or ignored and beaten later. Instead the father once again endures shame to plead with his son. Bailey points out the significance of the word Luke uses here. In verse 26 the older son summons (προσκαλεσαμενος) a youth to ask what is going on. We might expect the father to "summon" his son. Instead he "appeals", "entreats" (παρεκαλει) his older son, standing alongside (παρα) him in an attempt to win him over.[10]

The older son's speech in verses 29-30 show that he too is a rebel. He omits the title "O my father", thus administering another insult. His reference to service

(δουλευω σοι) shows that he sees his relationship as that of servant to master, not of son to father. Because of his "loyalty" he expects a reward, and is bitter that he has not been given it, whereas his younger brother has. He refers to "this son of yours", thus disowning his own relationship with his brother, and by implication refusing any sort of forgiveness. He is even willing to think the worst of his brother. He could not have known that he had spent his money on prostitutes - it is merely an expression of bitterness and envy.

The father's reply is a model of courtesy and affection. The word he uses for son, τεκνον, is a word of special tenderness and love. Gently he reminds his son that the prodigal is "your brother", and repeats the point that rejoicing is in order when the lost are found.[11]

Here the story ends. We do not know how the son responds. Perhaps, suggests Bailey, it ends here because the Cross has not yet happened, and there is still time for the religious bigots to repent. But in a play based on the parable, Bailey has the elder son beat his father, claiming that he has besmirched the family name in accepting the prodigal back without punishment.[12] "Is not the end of the story the cross?" asks Bailey.[13]

Bailey calls his book <u>The Cross and the Prodigal.</u> It was written to try and answer the familiar Muslim criticism that this parable shows that the cross is not essential for God to forgive sinners. "Islam claims that in this story the boy is saved without a savior. The prodigal returns. The father forgives him. There is no cross, no suffering and no savior. If man seeks forgiveness, says Islam, God is merciful and will forgive. The incarnation, the cross, and the resurrection are all quite unnecessary. If God is truly great, He can forgive without these things. The story of the prodigal son is for them proof that Christians have sadly

perverted Christ's own message."[14] Some "Christian" theologians have taken the same view. Paul Wernle of Basel says: "How miserably all those finely constructed theories of sacrifice and vicarious atonement crumble to pieces before this faith in the love of God our Father, who so gladly pardons! The one parable of the Prodigal Son wipes them all off the slate."[15]

Bailey contests this position. He maintains that the cross <u>is</u> present in the parable for those with eyes to see.

> The cross and incarnation are implicitly yet dramatically present in the story. More than this, the going out of the father and his visible demonstration of suffering are the climax of the parable.
>
> The suffering of the cross was not primarily the physical torture but rather the agony of rejected love. In this parable the father endures this agony all through the estrangement. The very possibility of reconciliation is built on it. The father could have severed his relationship and put his heart at rest by forgetting that he ever had a son. His suffering would have gradually stopped, but at the same time the possibility of return would have vanished. ....
>
> The father's suffering from the beginning of their estrangement has no effect on the prodigal. He is not even aware of it. There must be a demonstration of his suffering visible to the son. Without this the son in his callousness will never discover the suffering of his father and will never understand that he is its cause. Without this physical demonstration the prodigal would return to the house as a servant. Quite likely he would gradually take on more and more of the characteristics of the older son. This physical demonstration of self-emptying love in suffering is essential. Without it there can be no reconciliation. Is not this the story of the way of God with man on Golgotha?"[16]

This point about the "physical demonstration of self-emptying love" is amplified by Mackintosh.

> A forgiving disposition obtains no result as long as it is silent, quiescent, inactive,

> it bears fruit only when the message of reconciliation has been sent and delivered ... the hand grasped. The point is that such acts are both declaratory and effective; they reveal what already exists, but also by the enacted revelation they call into being what is new and original. So the cross not merely disclosed the father's eternal attitude of willingness to pardon but produced in addition a new relationship.[17]

Later Mackintosh gives an even fuller answer to those who use the Prodigal Son to allege that forgiveness has no vital connexion with the death of Christ. First of all, he points out the cross is a moral necessity in its condemnation of sin. Secondly he points to the need for a visible demonstration of the pain of God in forgiveness. "The electric current that pervades the whole wire flashes into light at its sensitive point; so the timeless pain of God over human evil becomes visible in Christ's passion." Thirdly, we need the cross to induce penitence, and an earnest desire to be done with sin.[18]

This last point is also important. Moberly portrays the death of Christ as an act of "perfect penitence", the penitence mankind could not achieve.[19] But surely penitence is the one thing that God in Christ cannot do on our behalf. In our story, the prodigal was penitent but the older son was not. The father could plead, but he could not force that penitence. The cross induces penitence powerfully, decisively in a way that even a matchless story like the Prodigal Son cannot do unaided.

One further point needs to be made. Luke chapter 15 contains three parables. The first two, the parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin, describe another aspect of the human condition. Neither the sheep nor the coin could "come to themselves", and make their own way home. <u>They either had to be found or they were lost forever</u>. The cross is also the fulfilment of this insight, of mankind hopelessly lost, and found by the Saviour who paid the ultimate price for his rescue mission.

b) The teaching of Paul

The parable of the Prodigal Son expresses for us the epitome of God's forgiveness leading to personal reconciliation. Yet Jesus uses neither the word "forgiveness", nor the word "reconciliation". Paul uses a word-group to express God's forgiveness and reconciliation in a purely personal way - the ἀλλασσω word-group.[20] ἀλλασσω - the simple verb means to "change", both in Classical and New Testament Greek. καταλλασσω- in secular Greek, the verb started as a monetary term, of exchanging something for money, and then more widely of exchanging one thing for another. Gradually its primary usage came to mean to "change from enmity to friendship". So we find Euripides, Sophocles, Xenophon and Thucidydes using the word in this sense. F.W. Dillistone notes that "the word is normally used in connection with breaches between those previously on terms of close intimacy and friendship." In a footnote, he adds that the force of the word is to "down the otherness".[21]

The word-group only appears twice in the New Testament apart from Paul. In Matthew 5 v 24 Jesus tells his disciple to be reconciled (διαλλαγηθι) to his brother before offering his gift at the altar, and in Acts 7 v 26 Stephen uses συναλλασσω of Moses's attempt to reconcile the two Jews who were fighting. Only once does Paul use the verb in a purely human context. In 1 Cor. 7 v 11 he urges a woman to remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband (καταλλαγητω).

For Paul καταλλασσω and its stronger form ἀποκαταλλασσω express primarily God's act of personal forgiveness and reconciliation with sinful man through the Cross of Christ. So, for instance, in Romans, although the thrust of Paul's message is expressed mainly in the language of justification, we find the purely personal terminology of reconciliation coming through from time to time.

Chapter 5 v 10-11, "For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son; how much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life! But that is not all: we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus, through whom we have now been granted reconciliation (καταλλαγην). In Romans 11 v 5, the vision widens: "For if their (the Jews') rejection has meant the reconciliation of the world (καταλλαγην κοσμου), what will their acceptance mean?"

In 2 Cor. 5 v 18-20 Paul talks of reconciling us to himself (v 18), and also "the world" to himself (v 19). As in Romans God is the reconciler, man the reconciled. However, as F. Büchsel points out, man is not merely passive in reconciliation - he is active in his acceptance of the gift. In allowing man the freedom to accept or reject the reconciliation offered, God affirms that man is a person, whose co-operation is essential if reconciliation is to be complete.[22] R.P. Martin points to a difference between reconciliation and justification. "Reconciliation" he writes "is more fragile than justification, since the Corinthians can turn their back on the former and need to be re-reconciled. (v 20). Paul never contemplates a reversal of justification or the overturning of either legal acquittal or royal amnesty."[23]

Lastly Paul here points out that God has given us (Christians) the ministry (διακονια) v 18, or message (λογος) v 19, of reconciliation. The Cross in itself, uninterpreted and unproclaimed, does not necessarily convey that message of personal forgiveness and reconciliation which is its primary purpose. Reconciliation is God's act, but God needs man to bring it home to the hearts of men.

In his later writings, Paul widens the conception of reconciliation, and uses an ever stronger form of the word-group - ἀποκαταλλασσειν.

So in Ephesians 2 v 14-16 Paul sees the reconciliation between man and God through the Cross as simultaneously achieving reconciliation between Jew and Gentile. The barrier of hostility, symbolised by the dividing wall in the temple, has been broken down by Christ, as Jew and Gentile now approach God on an equal footing. His language could not be more forceful: v 16, "This was his purpose to reconcile (ἀποκαταλλαξη) both (Jew and Gentile) in a single body to God through the Cross, on which he killed the enmity." Thus divine and human forgiveness and reconciliation go hand in hand and cannot be separated. (Are there not echoes here of the parable of the Unmerciful Servant?)

In Colossians 1 v 20 the scope of reconciliation widens again, as Paul sees cosmic harmony achieved through the Cross. "Through him God chose to reconcile the whole universe to himself, making peace through the shedding of his blood upon the cross - to reconcile all things, whether on earth or in heaven, through him alone."

At the conclusion of his discussion of reconciliation in Paul's theology, Martin claims that the thought-world of "reconciliation" gradually took over in Paul's mind from that of "justification" as he moved out to address Gentile audiences. He maintains that the categories of justification by faith, which were useful to express the rationale of new life in salvation to Jewish audiences, carried less weight with the cultured hellenistic world. Here the affirmation of personal reconciliation with God and of the defeat of cosmic powers were what was needed to bring peace to troubled spirits.[24]

There is no need to enter the argument between Martin and Käsemann over the relative importance of the concepts of "justification" and "reconciliation". Quite clearly both are of vital significance to Paul. Where we may unequivocally side with Martin is when he traces a clear line between the teaching of Jesus and that of Paul in the matter of reconciliation. Martin's summary of this

point is worth quoting.

> Paul's proclamation aims to call men and women into a network of personal relationships with God and with one another that may be described under the single rubric of reconciliation. Even if Jesus' reported teaching used the word 'reconcile' only once (Matthew 5:24), it may be said that his announcement of life under the rule of God as his children, formerly outcasts but now reclaimed and restored to God's family, is exactly expressible in terms of a personal relationship to God as Father and King. Both Jesus and Paul are at one most clearly and cogently in their insistence on the human predicament and what God has accomplished to welcome truant children from their disgrace into a new relationship with himself that then becomes the paradigm and model for life in society, whether such model is called the Kingdom of God or the church. This single observation, we may claim, is what really binds Jesus and Paul together, and provides a justification for our study of reconciliation shown to be the shared ingredient in both Jesus' and Paul's ministry.[26]

One may add this: the aim of Part II has been to show that there is more than one "shared ingredient" in the teaching of Jesus and Paul on the subject of forgiveness. Although there is a great divergence in the prominence given to the key word-groups ἀφιημι, δικαιοω and καταλλασσω, their thinking about forgiveness overlaps significantly. For Jesus the "release from debt" terminology is prominent compared with that of Paul. The reverse is true of the "justification" terminology. With regard to our last category, there is no linguistic overlap at all, since Jesus never uses the καταλλασσω group of God's forgiveness. However, there is a clear connection between the Parable of the Prodigal Son and Paul's writing about reconciliation. Both focus unequivocally on a personal God, personally hurt by sin, personally bearing that hurt and winning men back to himself at personal cost. Both the parable and Paul's writing about reconciliation show a vulnerability on the part of God which is far less evident than in the

other two categories. It is interesting to note that in 2 Cor. 5 v 20 Paul says: "It is as if God were appealing to you through us: in Christ's name we implore you, be reconciled to God!" The word Paul uses for "appealing" παρακαλουντες is exactly the same that Jesus used of the father appealing to the older son to come into the banquet. (Lk. 15 v 28)

The love of God makes its appeal through the Cross. But it cannot compel a response. Forgiveness is offered, but it cannot become reconciliation until it is welcomed and received. Jesus and Paul were one both in their deep conviction of the reality of God's forgiveness for all mankind, but also in their sad recognition that it can be refused.

Notes

1. V. Taylor : p.23.

2. The following paragraphs are based on K.E. Bailey : The Cross and the Prodigal Concordia, 1973, pp.27-61.

3. K.E. Bailey : p.31.

4. K.E. Bailey : p.34.

5. K.E. Bailey : p.35.

6. K.E. Bailey : pp.46-50.

7. K.E. Bailey : p.54.

8. K.E. Bailey : pp.54-55.

9. K.E. Bailey : pp.58-60.

10. K.E. Bailey : p.70.

11. K.E. Bailey : pp.71-73.

12. K.E. Bailey : p.128.

13. K.E. Bailey : p.73.

14. K.E. Bailey : p.56.

15. P. Wernle : The Beginnings of Christianity (Eng. trans.) vol. I, p.109, quoted by D. Baillie : p.172.

16. K.E. Bailey : pp.56-57.

17. H.R. Mackintosh : pp.184-185.

18. H.R. Mackintosh : p.187.

19. R. Moberly : pp.129-130.

20. The following paragraphs are based mainly on W. Barclay : More New Testament Words SCM Press, 1958, pp.102-106.

21. F.W. Dillistone : The Christian Understanding of Atonement SCM, (1968) 1984 Reissue, p.277.

22. F. Büchsel : Article on "ἁλλαασσω" and its cognates in Kittel's Theological Dictionary of the New Testament Vol. I, (trans. G.W. Bromiley) Eerdmans, 1964, pp.251-259.

23. R.P. Martin : Reconciliation : a Study of Paul's Theology Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1981, p.153.

24. R.P. Martin : pp.153-154.

25. See R.P. Martin : pp.71-79. He is discussing E. Käsemann : "Some thoughts on the theme 'The Doctrine of Reconciliation in the New Testament' " in The Future of our Religious Past (ed. J.M. Robinson) pp.49-64.

26. R.P. Martin : p.224.

CONCLUSION

We must now try to draw together our discoveries about the nature of human and divine forgiveness, and distinguish their differences and similarities.

God, being righteous and good, never deceives himself. So false forgiveness, as we described it in human life, is not part of his experience. Nor does he confuse understanding or tolerance with forgiveness. God is infinitely understanding and patient - "long-suffering" is the biblical phrase - but his forgiveness is demanding. God never lets us go, but he never lets us off. The forgiveness of God also lacks some of the ambiguity of human forgiveness, where mutual forgiveness is so often required and the rights and wrongs of the situation are often by no means clear.

On the other hand, we can see that the insights gained from philosophy, psychology and literature into human forgiveness shed light upon characteristics of forgiveness that we hold in common with God.

Firstly, we affirm categorically that forgiveness is from first to last a personal activity. Only a personal being in a personal relationship with another person can be truly said to forgive. It follows that we can only talk of God's forgiveness at all if we maintain that God is Father of all mankind, from the outset, and does not become Father by virtue of the Cross of Christ. Likewise we can only talk of human forgiveness in the context of a personal relationship which has been severed by a personal wrong.

Secondly, forgiveness has to do with feelings. Of course words and actions are usually involved as well, but without a feeling of forgiveness, there is no forgiveness "from the heart". In two of our three parables, those of the unmerciful servant and the prodigal son, the point of forgiveness is expressed by the same Greek word σπλαγχνιζομαι (Matthew 18 v 27 and Lk. 15 v 20). This is a graphic word, for the σπλαγχνα are the "inner parts,

especially the hearts, lungs and liver"[2] thought by the ancients to be the seat of feelings. So in our modern parlance, the king (in the Matthew parable) and the father (in the Lucan parable) are hit by a "gut" reaction. There is no real forgiveness of major wrongs either for God or man, unless the emotions are deeply stirred.

The next point follows on. Forgiveness is costly. Just as there is no cheap grace, there is no cheap forgiveness. We have seen the costliness of forgiveness in the lives of human beings. The Cross shows us the costliness of forgiveness in the life of God. The pain which comes from first confronting and then forgiving a really deep injury is dramatically portrayed on Calvary. Although we humans will not have anything of that magnitude to endure, we cannot expect to be spared the pain involved in a genuine act of forgiveness.

Further forgiveness is risky. It cannot be equated with reconciliation, which is its proper end, for it may be refused, or abused. The unmerciful servant forfeited his forgiveness because he misunderstood its meaning. The Pharisee in the parable felt no need to ask for forgiveness. The elder brother (perhaps) refused his father's appeal, thinking himself wronged, whereas he was himself in the wrong. Forgiveness reaches out to the wrong-doer with an appeal of love, but that love may be rejected. The Cross is God's appeal for penitence, but the risk of rejection is as real as was the actual rejection exemplified by the crucifixion of the Son of God.

Finally, forgiveness is a <u>necessity</u>, both for God and man. We have seen that human beings have a psychological and spiritual need to forgive and to be forgiven at a purely human level. In our relationship with God, we need to be forgiven. Without forgiveness, man is forever in debt to God; without forgiveness, mankind is

forever unrighteous; without forgiveness, man is forever unreconciled. There is no hope of a filial relationship without the continual experience of the forgiveness of sins.

By the same token, to forgive is a necessity for God. He created mankind "in his image", to enjoy a relationship of love and sonship. Man has marred that relationship through sin. Mere pardon will not restore it, any more than the younger son becoming a "hired servant" would have restored the relationship with his father. Only the deeply personal, infinitely painful and ultimately risky act of forgiveness achieved for all time on Calvary's tree could satisfy God's need to be restored to perfect harmony with the pinnacle of his creation.

Note

1. Liddell and Scott : Greek-English Lexicon (abridged), Oxford, 1871, p.646.

APPENDIX A

THE TEACHING OF JESUS ON HUMAN FORGIVENESS

The teaching of Jesus about forgiveness as such concerns relationships between brothers, that is, family, friends and associates. Jesus is not recorded as having instructed his disciples specifically to forgive their enemies. But we should not conclude from this that forgiveness of enemies was not part of his plan for his disciples. On the contrary, his instructions concerning enemies show that forgiveness of injuries is included as part of an attitude of unconquerable benevolence towards them. Matthew 6 v 39 reads, "Do not set yourself against the man who wrongs you." This command is followed by the injunction to turn the other cheek, to give coat as well as shirt, and to "go the extra mile" for the hated Roman who unjustly requisitions the disciple's services (Mt. 6 v 39-42).

Next comes the striking statement: "Love your enemies and pray for your persecutors." (v 44) The Lucan version adds: "Do good to those who hate you; bless those who curse you" (6 v 28). We note the thoroughgoing nature of Christ's command. It includes a response of love that is in thought (pray), word (bless) and deed (do good). Such action is not to wait upon repentance, but is to issue immediately in response to those who injure by thought (hate), word (curse) and deed (persecute). This thoroughgoing benevolence surely embodies the concept of forgiveness as we have outlined it in preceding sections.

The absence of any requirement of repentance, which might appear questionable, is made good when we turn to the teaching of Jesus about forgiveness between brethren. However, what strikes us again most forcibly is the very high priority that Jesus places upon the act of forgiveness. Matt. 5 v 23-24: "If when you are bringing your gift to the alter, you suddenly remember that your brother has a grievance against you, leave

your gift where it is before the altar. First go and make your peace with your brother, and only then come back and offer your gift." T.W. Manson comments: "The Jewish rule, where a man has begun to carry out one religious obligation and remembers another, is that the more important duty takes precedence. So to a Jew, Jesus is saying that reconciliation is more important than sacrifice." In saying this Jesus was actually endorsing Jewish teaching. "For transgressions that are between man and God the day of Atonement effects atonement, but for transgressions that are between a man and his fellow the Day of Atonement affects atonement only if he has appeased his fellow." (Yoma 8:9)[1]

Again Jesus tells those who are praying to forgive anyone they have a grievance against (Mark 11 v 25). If we take the two passages together we conclude that an approach to God in sacrifice or prayer should be preceded by human reconciliation, either actual (Matthew) or in the mind of the one praying (Mark). It is interesting that in the first case Jesus is addressing the wrongdoer, in the second, the one who has been wronged, but his injunction is the same - "Be reconciled".

Such reconciliation, where brethren are involved, is a two-way transaction. The brother in the wrong must repent. This is brought out clearly in Lk. 17 v 3 "If your brother wrongs you, reprove him; and if he repents, forgive him." In Matthew 18 v 15-17 we have a more detailed account: "If your brother commits a sin, go and take the matter up with him, strictly between yourselves, and if he listens to you, you have won your brother over. If he will not listen, take one or two others with you, so that all facts may be established on the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, report the matter to the congregation; and if he will not listen even to the congregation, you must then treat him as you would a pagan or tax-gatherer."

Most manuscripts add εἰς σε "against you", thus making clear that this is a private dispute between two individuals. Although this interpretation is not certain, if it is correct, it shows the care and attention needed within the Christian community to correct a dislocated relationship, and the importance Jesus attached to communal harmony.

Jesus is equally clear about the need for perseverance in forgiveness. In Matthew 18 v 21-22 we have Peter asking: "Lord, how often am I to forgive my brother if he goes on wronging me? As many as seven times?" Jesus replied: "I do not say seven times, I say seventy times seven." In Luke 17 v 4 he tells his disciples: "Even if (your brother) wrongs you seven times in a day and comes back to you saying 'I am sorry', you are to forgive him."

By far the most prominent theme of Jesus' teaching about human forgiveness is its intimate relationship with divine forgiveness. The only part of the Lord's prayer which is amplified at its conclusion is the petition: "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matt. 6 v 12 RSV). Matthew 6 v 14-15 read "For if you forgive others the wrongs they have done, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, then the wrongs you have done will not be forgiven by your Father." Mark 11 v 25: "And when you stand praying, if you have a grievance against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you the wrongs you have done." Luke 6 v 37-38 provides a variant on the same theme: "Pass no judgement and you will not be judged; do not condemn and you will not be condemned, acquit and you will be acquitted." So also Matthew 5 v 7 "How blest are those who show mercy; mercy shall be shown to them."

Again the reason for loving enemies and praying for persecutors is that it mirrors the love of God. Matt. 5 v 44-45 reads "But what I tell you is this: Love your

enemies and pray for your persecutors; only so can you be children of your heavenly Father, who makes his sun rise on good and bad alike, and sends the rain on the honest and the dishonest."

The most explicit and thoroughgoing exposition of the inalienable link between human and divine forgiveness comes in Matt. 18 v 23-35. It is the parable of the Unmerciful Servant. What it teaches about human forgiveness is that it is not an option - it is a "must". A man who will not forgive his brother a wrong, however large it may seem to him, will not be forgiven the far larger wrongs he has committed against God. And that forgiveness must not simply be a matter of words. Jesus commands his followers to forgive: "from your hearts." (v 35)

So human forgiveness, which we are seeking to understand, in all its complexity, heartache, costliness and, at times, baffling ambiguity, is an essential for human beings. We cannot enjoy God's forgiveness unless we are prepared to forgive everyone everything. Even if we feel that we cannot, we know we must try.

God does not make our forgiveness of others a pre-condition of his forgiveness. In the story, the king forgives first. So God's forgiveness is conditional only in the sense that we recognise the obligation to forgive others as part of its meaning. A failure to forgive shows that we have not understood the difference between "being forgiven" and "being let off". Forgiving others is thus a post-condition of God's forgiveness, a necessity if we are to continue within the sphere of God's grace.

Note

1. T.W. Manson : The Sayings of Jesus SCM Press, 1949, p.156.

APPENDIX B

"A bar of Shadow" from The Seed and the Sower by Laurens van der Post.

"A bar of Shadow" is a short story about the relationship between two men, Hara, an officer in a Japanese prisoner of war camp, and Lawrence, a British prisoner.

The first part of the story concerns their relationship during the war. Hara was callous and brutal, frequently administering summary execution or prolonged beatings. Lawrence was often beaten savagely by him.

One night he was taken from his cell, where he was kept in solitary confinement, into the presence of the dreaded Hara. But instead of a beating, Lawrence was released into the company of his compatriots. (p.19) "Tonight I am Fazeru Kurīsumasu!" It was Christmas, and Hara had somehow heard of Father Christmas and wanted to show an act of generosity at Christmastime. After the war, Lawrence discovered that this act saved his life as he was due to be executed on December 27th.

After the war, Hara was put on trial for war crimes. One of the survivors of the camp, an RAF officer called Hicksley-Ellis was "truly, implacably bitter and vengeful" and "gave his evidence with such a malign relish and fury that Hara never had a hope of a mitigated sentence, let alone acquittal."

Lawrence on the other hand spoke up for Hara, pointing out that he had saved his life, but to no avail. Hara made no effort to defend himself, except to say that he had tried never to do more nor less than his duty. Later he explained to Lawrence what he meant. "I have punished you and killed your people, but I punished you and killed you no more than I would have done if you were Japanese in my charge who had behaved in the same way. I was kinder to you, in fact, than I would have been to my own people, kinder to you all than

many others."

His meaning is illuminated by a conversation he had had with Lawrence once in the prison: "Why Rorensu," he exclaimed fiercely at last. "Why are you alive! I would like you better if you were dead. How could an officer of your rank ever have allowed himself to fall alive in our hands? How can you bear the disgrace? Why don't you kill yourself?"

Lawrence explains to Hara that to the British to be taken a prisoner had to be accepted and that suicide was a cowardly way out. Hara cannot understand this - he regards himself as already dead, having dedicated his spirits to his ancestors before joining the war.

So when the death sentence was pronounced, Hara accepts it gladly, raising his hands above his head as a sign of victory. Lawrence explains:

> He had always felt even when he was in Japan that the Japanese were a people in a profound, inverse, reverse, or if I preferred it, even perverse sense, more in love with death than living. As a nation they romanticized death and self-destruction as no other people. The romantic fulfilment of the national ideal, of the heroic thug of tradition, was often a noble and stylized self-destruction in a selfless cause. It was as if the individual at the start, at birth even, rejected the claims of his own individuality. Henceforth he was inspired not by individual human precept and example so much as by his inborn sense of the behaviour of the corpuscles in his own blood dying every split second in millions in defence of the corporate whole. As a result they were socially not unlike a more complex extension of the great insect societies in life. In fact in the days when he lived in Japan, much as he liked the people and country, his mind always returned involuntarily to this basic comparison: the just parallel was not an animal one, was not even the most tight and fanatical horde, but an insect one: collectively they were a sort of super-society of bees with the Emperor as a male queen-bee at the centre. He did not want to exaggerate these things but he knew of no other way of making me

> realise how strangely, almost cosmically, propelled like an eccentric and dying comet on an archaic, anti-clockwise and fore-doomed course, Hara's people had been. They were so committed, blindly and mindlessly entangled in their real and imagined past that their view of life was not synchronised to our urgent time. Above all they could not respond to the desperate twentieth-century call for greater and more precise individual differentiation.

Lawrence, then, understands the cultural divide. Even in prison he felt sorry for Hara. "He was born in a cage, a prisoner in an oubliette of mythology, chained to bars welded by a great blacksmith of the ancient gods themselves." The Japanese were "a people whose spiritual and mental umbilical cord with the past was uncut."

After the trial Lawrence is summoned by Hara to his cell. He arrives on the night before his execution. Because of his perception of life, and his belief that the brutality of his war-time behaviour was fully justified, Hara does not accept the reason for his death. Could Lawrence explain? But Lawrence is at a loss.

> 'I didn't know what to say.' Lawrence turned to me with a gesture of despair. 'He was only asking me what I had asked myself ever since these damned war-trials began. I honestly did not understand myself. I never saw the good of them. It seemed to me just as wrong for us now to condemn Hara under a law which had never been his, of which he had never even heard, as he and his masters had been to punish and kill us for transgressions of the code of Japan that was not ours. It was not as if he had sinned against his own lights: if ever a person had been true to himself and the twilight glimmer in him, it was this terrible little man. He may have done wrong for the right reasons but how could it be squared by us now doing right in the wrong way. No punishment I could think of could restore the past, could be more futile and more calculated even to give the discredited

> past a new lease of life in the present than this sort of uncomprehending and uncomprehended vengeance! I didn't know what the hell to say!'

Lawrence shows his own understanding and forgiveness by saying that if he had his way he would let him out and send him straight back to his family. But Hara needs more. "So what am I to do?" (Hara said).

> Lawrence could only say: 'You can try to think only with all your heart, Hara-san, that unfair and unjust as this thing which my people are doing seems to you, that it is done only to try and stop the kind of things that happened between us in the war from ever happening again. You can say to yourself as I used to say to my despairing men in prison under you: "There is a way of winning by losing, a way of victory in defeat which we are going to discover." Perhaps that too must be your way to understanding and victory now.'
> 'That, Rorensu-san,' he said, with the quick intake of breath of a Japanese when truly moved, 'is a very Japanese thought.'

Finally Hara refers to his release of Lawrence. "I gave you a good Kurīsumasu once didn't I?" Lawrence agrees. "Can I take it with me all the way ? ...Is it good enough to go even where I am going?" "Yes: much as circumstances seem to belie it", Lawrence answered, "it is good enough to take all the way and beyond." Hara is satisfied. He calls out "Merry Kurīsumasu", and his face and eyes display a man who has found peace.

But this expression makes Lawrence want to go back. "Half of himself, a deep, instinctive, natural, impulsive half, wanted to go back, clasp Hara in his arms, kiss him goodbye on the forehead and say:

> We may not be able to stop and undo the hard old wrongs of the great world outside, but through you and me no evil shall come either in the unknown where you are going, or in this imperfect and haunted dimension of awareness through which I move. Thus between us,

> we shall cancel out all private and personal evil, thus arrest private and personal consequences to blind action and reaction, thus prevent specifically the general incomprehension and misunderstanding, hatred and revenge of our time from spreading further.

But the words would not be uttered and half of him, the conscious half of the officer at the door with a critical, alert sentry at his side held him powerless on the threshold. So for the last time the door shut on Hara and his golden grin.

> But all the way back to town that last expression on Hara's face travelled at Lawrence's side. He was filled with regret that he had not gone back. What was this ignoble half that had stopped him? If only he had gone back he felt now he might have changed the whole course of history. For was not that how great things began in the tiny seed of the small change in the troubled individual heart? One single, lonely inexperienced heart had to change first and all the rest would follow? One true change in one humble, obedient and contrite individual heart humble enough to accept without intellectual question the first faint stirring of the natural spirit seeking flesh and blood to express it, humble enough to live the new meaning before thinking it, and all the rest would have followed as day the night, and one more archaic cycle of hurt, hurt avenged and vengeance revenged would have been cut for ever. He felt he had failed the future and his heart went to dim and black on him that abruptly he pulled up the car by a palm-grove on the edge of the sea.

Lawrence hears a cock crow and feels like Peter, the betrayer of Jesus. "He felt he had betrayed the sum of all the Christmases." He turns the car round and goes back to the prison, but it is too late. Dawn has broken and Hara is already hanged. The story ends with the poignant question "Must we always be too late?"

This is a fascinating story. It shows the meeting

of two cultures, and the effort of the representative of one to enter into the experience of the other. It shows how understanding of motive can lead to forgiveness of terrible wrong.

We see the contrast between the uncomprehending vengefulness of Hicksley-Ellis and the compassionate understanding of Lawrence. We see a questioning of war trials as "uncomprehending and uncomprehended vengeance". As such the sentence on Hara is "unfair and unjust". Both Lawrence and Hara grapple with its meaning, and finally Lawrence's answer brings understanding and peace to Hara, but Lawrence himself feels that he has betrayed the man he came to help.

The final scene between Lawrence and Hara is superb. It is full of surprises, for both men fail to act in the way we might expect.

First of all, we have been given to believe that Hara is completely convinced that his brutalities were no less than the British deserved. He had done his duty, and by his own lights his conduct was unexceptionable. Yet his allusion to "giving Lawrence a good Christmas" indicates a different morality entirely. For this morality is that of compassion rather than duty, of respect for an enemy rather than contempt. More than that, it is this un-Japanese behaviour which Hara wants to take with him as a deed of honour into the life beyond! So Hara does in fact begin to transcend the morality of his forbears, and give the lie to Lawrence's belief that he was "chained to bars welded by a great blacksmith of the ancient gods themselves."

Secondly, Lawrence does not seem to be content with Hara's new-found peace. He longs for bodily contact, a more personalised reconciliation which will seal his forgiveness, and in some way counteract the misunderstanding so clearly demonstrated by the war trials. Because he cannot bring himself to make this physical gesture he feels he has betrayed his "friend".

But this viewpoint has its irony. Lawrence is supposed to understand Japanese culture. Yet we learn early in the story how references to "kiss" and "kissing" were an abomination to Hara (p.12). This is confirmed in a later story when Colliers, the South African, insults Yonoi, the Japanese, by kissing him on both cheeks in front of his men. So if Lawrence had kissed Hara on the forehead, as he wanted to, he might have destroyed the very harmony of spirit which he had enabled Hara to find.

Finally, Lawrence saw his proposed action as symbolic of reconciliation between two alien peoples and alien cultures. He felt that such a gesture might "change the course of history". Now one should not underestimate the value of symbolic gestures, or the seed that can be sown by them. But it is hard to believe that the embrace of one Briton and one Japanese in a lonely prison cell could have done much except for the two people involved. Lawrence is magnifying the importance of the occasion and hence his sense of betrayal. For Hara, there is no betrayal and no failure. He is not only at peace with Lawrence, but with himself. Sometimes, as in this case, to be "too late" is exactly what is required.

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