Breaking the Cycle of Violence

How religion can support forgiveness in intractable political conflict:
Northern Ireland and South Africa

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In the current geopolitical landscape, the role of religion in society and international affairs has garnered increasing amounts of scholarly and media attention as well as a growing amount of criticism and blame. Rising aggression from extremists, periodic cycles of violence between Israelis and Palestinians, and bloody genocide in Sudan are three of the most visible and well-reported intractable conflicts in the world that appear to have little hope, at least in the near future, of a peaceful resolution. The intimate involvement of religion in these conflicts not only intensifies but also complicates, exponentially, their intractability as religion is deeply connected with both individual and group self-identity and morality. What is more, through the judgmental eyes of the outside world, religion is, often, blamed, disdained and condemned as both the source and perpetuator of violence and a roadblock to peace. While, on the surface, this view may appear to be justified and well supported, to accept it as unalterable truth is to close oneself to the possibility of engaging religion as a vehicle for peace and reconciliation. The purpose of this paper is to explore that possibility as evidence in both historical and practical application.

Religious leaders, and the institutions that they represent, exercise a tremendous amount of power in the world. While the abuse or misuse of this power has certainly been a factor in many modern conflicts, the potential power for healing or peacebuilding within these institutions can be just as great. When used appropriately, and as part of a larger reconciliation initiative, religion can be an effective means for supporting the resolution of conflict and promoting peace. However skeptical we may be of religion's ability to aid in this resolution, if we are truly committed to confronting and diffusing

intractable conflicts around the world, we must embrace and utilize every available resource.

One of these resources, especially powerful in intra-state intractable conflicts where whole communities are continually reminded of their suffering at the hands of their neighbors or government, is the process of forgiveness. While many sufferers and victims might, justifiably, balk at the notion of extending forgiveness to those responsible for their deep suffering and loss, it has become increasingly clear in many situations of escalating, devastating conflict that, without forgiveness, cycles of fear, violence and vengeance can never be broken.

This article explores the role that forgiveness has, and continues, to play in interrupting the escalation of intractable conflicts in general and specifically in the cases of Northern Ireland and South Africa. It focuses on the ethical concept of political forgiveness (described more fully in the following section), which borrows forgiveness from the realm of interpersonal relationships, and relocates it into the field of public discourse (Helass, 2004). The motivation underpinning this inquiry is to assess the role that religion and religious figures might play in fostering political forgiveness in countries divided by intractable conflict. Two compatible hypotheses are put forth in this study; first, that efforts to promote political forgiveness in intractable conflict is most successful when religious leaders are intimately involved and visible in the public sphere, demonstrating for, and encouraging, their communities to extend and embrace forgiveness; and, second, that even in conflicts where religious institutions are implicated in the violence or perpetuation of inequality, individuals with strong religious affiliation or identity are more likely, and able, to seek and grant forgiveness.

The first section of the paper provides a basic overview of the characteristics of intractable conflict, the history of forgiveness in both religion and social scientific enquiry, the nature of political forgiveness, and examines how religion, specifically Christianity, can support and empower this forgiveness. The next section includes case studies of Northern Ireland and South Africa, emphasizing the history of the conflict, institutional efforts to mitigate the conflict, analysis of religious leaders' roles in that process, and the impact of individual expressions of repentance and forgiveness in the de-escalation or containment of violence.

Background of Forgiveness & Intractable Conflict

Before beginning an exploration into the nature of forgiveness in intractable conflict, it is necessary to establish a clear understanding of what is meant by the terms "intractable" and "forgiveness." First, the term "intractable" as it will be applied in this article, indicates a conflict where violence has been sustained or escalated for a protracted period of time. The case studies selected have been chosen specifically because of their intractability. Suffice it to say, intractable conflicts—violent clashes like those witnessed in Northern Ireland, South Africa and too many others—hold one major characteristic in common: "they involve interests or values that the disputants regard as critical to their survival" (Maiese 2003**).** Intractable conflicts, then, seemingly lack any possibility for "win-win" situations; if one party has their values, needs, and demands met, the values, needs, and demands of the opposing party are necessarily sacrificed or, at the very least, deeply threatened (Maiese 2003). Contention between groups over intolerable moral differences, experiences of injustice, rights-based grievances, unmet basic human needs,

threats to self or group identity, and issues of high-stake distribution (such as land or valuable resources) for example, are some of the central underlying causes of intractable conflicts (Maiese 2003). Clearly, negotiation or compromise in these situations is difficult and often unsuccessful. The widespread distrust and cycles of vengeance and revenge make political attempts to disrupt the escalation of violence extremely difficult, as neither side is willing to cooperate with, or initiate, a joint effort. It is in this capacity and at this moment of intractability that forgiveness, both personal and political, can potentially play an important healing role.

Forgiveness in Religion and Social Science

Forgiveness is a concept deeply imbued with religious meaning and significance. Major world religions have recognized the spiritual and emotionally transformative power of forgiveness for centuries, and promoted it as a method for self and community healing and moving towards a closer relationship with the divine. (Rye, Pargament, & Thorensen 2000, p.17). In the Christian tradition especially, "forgiveness of sins… is unlimited and unconditional, based solely on the divine promise of God's unqualified grace expressed by the life of Jesus and fulfilled in his atonement…. Christians understand forgiveness as the release from bondage, guilt, and punishment arising from moral wrongdoing (Amstutz 2005, p.46). However, Christian doctrine makes clear that "Christian forgiveness also entails transactions among human beings—between perpetrators and victims. Since human beings are called to follow their Heavenly Father in being merciful and compassionate, believers are admonished to express love and mercy toward others by

forgiving those who commit offenses (Amstutz 2005, p.47). In essence, then, forgiveness

can been seen as a tool for fostering "relational healing both horizontally (within

community) and vertically (with God)" (Meek 2001).

Despite, or, perhaps, because of, the historical theological connotation and strong

religious grounding of forgiveness, secular social scientists and theologians have not,

until recent decades, explored the potential role for forgiveness in political and large-

scale conflicts. As political theorist Hannah Arendt notes in her 1959 book, The Human

Condition: A Study of the Central Conditions Facing Modern Man, however,

> The discoverer of the role of forgiveness in the realm of human affairs was Jesus of
> Nazareth. The fact that he made this discovery in a religious context and articulated it in
> religious language is no reason to take it any less seriously in a strictly secular sense. It
> has been in the nature of the tradition of political thought... to be highly selective and to
> exclude from articulate conceptualization a great variety of authentic political
> experiences, among which we need not be surprised to find some of an elementary
> nature. Certain aspects of the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth which are not primarily
> related to the Christian religious message but sprang from experiences in the small and
> closely knit community of his followers, bent on challenging the public authorities in
> Israel, certainly belong among them, even though they have been neglected because of
> their allegedly exclusively religious nature....
>
> It is decisive in our context that Jesus maintains against the "scribes and pharisees" first
> that it is not true that only God has the power to forgive, and second that this power does
> not derive from God ... but on the contrary must be mobilized by men toward each other
> before they can hope to be forgiven by God also.
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> <div align="right">pp. 214-215, quoted in Shriver 1998, p. 239</div>

Since the end of the Cold War, social scientific and academic study has increasingly

adopted this view of forgiveness, and focused on its potential to transform or heal

intractable conflicts through a political, rather than uniquely religious or purely

interpersonal, process (McCullough, Pargament & Thoresen 2000, Minow 1998, Bole,

Christiansen & Hennemeyer 2004, Abu-Nimer 2001, Tutu 1999, Worthington 1998[1]). As

concepts of forgiveness are theorized and articulated, it is becoming clear that, "in the

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[1] Worthington's book, Dimensions of Forgiveness: Psychological Research and Theological Perspectives,
is particularly relevant and innovative. It includes thorough examination of many different theories and
models of forgiveness, devoting an entire section to religious concepts of forgiveness.

present-day discourse, forgiveness is viewed as a societal event, whereby whole peoples

or nations forgive others or receive forgiveness from others" (da Silva quoted in Helmick

& Peterson 2001, p. 303). As noted by Rodney Peterson in, "A Theology of

Forgiveness," "Many in the public policy community in North America now believe that

the term *forgiveness* will be central to working with the political order of the twenty-first

century" (in Helmick & Peterson 2001, p.3).[2] Peterson notes as well that, "Forgiveness,

long irrelevant to public and foreign policy, of littler direct concern in health, and reduced

to the confessional in the church, is now an aspect of public policy discourse and

psychological analysis" (2001, p.6).

Indeed, there appears to be growing agreement between social scientists, theorists,

healthcare practitioners, and theologians that, "Through forgiveness, we can renounce

resentment, and avoid the self-destructive effects of holding on to pain, grudges, and

victimhood. The act of forgiving can reconnect the offender and the victim and establish

or renew a relationship; it can heal grief; forge new, constructive alliances; and break

cycles of violence" (Minow 1998, p.14). Croat theologian Miroslav Volf highlights an

additional benefit, noting that "[forgiveness]… empowers victims and disempowers

oppressors. It 'humanizes the victims precisely by protecting them from either mimicking

or dehumanizing the oppressors" (Quoted in Appleby 2000, p.195).

Political Forgiveness

The process of political forgiveness (hereafter "forgiveness") is unique from

interpersonal or religious concepts of forgiveness in that it "is a public response to a

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[2] See Johnston, Douglas and Sampson, Cynthia, Eds. (1994). Religion: The Missing Dimension of Statecraft for further discussion on the role of religion in international conflicts.

collective offense" (Amstutz 2005, 224). In much the same way that interpersonal

forgiveness typically culminates in reconciliation and the reaffirmation of a positive

relationship, "The goal of [political] forgiveness is to provide an alternative response to

wrongdoing so that the moral reconstruction of communal relationships can occur"

(Amstutz 2005, p.224). As Mark Amstutz notes in The Healing of Nations: The Promises

and Limits of Political Forgiveness, "If collective forgiveness is to occur, legitimate

leaders must acknowledge their members' collective offences, publicly apologize for

them, and authenticate remorse through symbolic or tangible reparations. In turn, leaders

of victim communities must acknowledge the contrition, refrain from retaliation, and

express empathy and compassion toward former enemies…. In effect, collective

forgiveness helps to undo the past by fostering individual healing and communal

reconstruction" (2005, pp.224-225).

In order for forgiveness to be implemented as a collective, political tool, however,

it must be more clearly defined. While no consensus has been reached on what

forgiveness *is*, McCullough, Pargament & Thoresen put forward a basic conception of

what forgiveness is *not*, noting,

> It appears that most theorists and researchers now agree… that forgiveness should be
> differentiated from "pardoning" (which is a legal term), "condoning" (which implies a
> justification of the offense), "excusing" (which implies that the offender had a good
> reason for committing the offense), "forgetting" (which implies that the memory of the
> offense has simply decayed or slipped out of conscious awareness), and "denying"
> (which implies simply an unwillingness to perceive the harmful injuries that one has
> incurred). Most seem to agree that forgiveness is distinct from "reconciliation" (which
> implies the restoration of a relationship)
>
>   2000, p.8

Certain of these "*nots*" deserve further discussion as they arise most frequently in

criticisms of the viability of political forgiveness. First, forgiveness is not forgetting,

condoning or excusing injustices perpetrated against oneself or one's community. While

this process can be supported on a large scale, it is inherently personal, requiring that individuals engage in a bipartisan act of seeking, and granting, forgiveness. According to Shriver, forgiveness requires a four-step process that must begin with "memory suffused with moral judgment" (the process of remembering, actively engaging with, and reaching a consensus on the injustice or wrong committed) (1995, p.7, Wells 1999, p.41). In stark contrast to the popular conception of forgiveness as "forgive and forget," Shriver insists that,

> 'Remember and forgive' would be a more accurate slogan. Forgiveness begins with a remembering and a moral judgment of wrong, injustice, and injury. For this very reason wrongdoers are wary of being told that someone "forgives" them. Immediately they sense that they are being subjected to some moral assessment, and they may not consent to it. Absent a preliminary agreement between two or more parties that there is something from the past to *be* forgiven, forgiveness stalls at the starting gate.
>
> Shriver 1995, p.7

It is only after this agreement has been reached, according to Shriver's model, that the following steps; forbearance and "the abandonment of vengeance;" "empathy for the enemy's humanity;" and efforts aimed at "the renewal of a human relationship" can be promoted (1995, pp.7-9).

Second, forgiveness is not synonymous with reconciliation. In conceptualizing the place of forgiveness in creating a peaceful, reconciled world, it might be helpful to imagine a staircase where forgiveness is the bottommost step, forming the base upon which all other steps are taken, and reconciliation lies at the very top. While forgiving depends only on "one person's moral response to another's injustice," reconciliation demands that "two parties [come] together in mutual respect" (About forgiveness). In essence, forgiveness can be seen as the necessary first step to restoring or establishing trust and beginning the process of reconciliation between individuals or groups. Still, reconciliation is not always the final outcome of extending, or requesting, forgiveness. In

some particularly challenging situations, "people may want to apologize or extend forgiveness without seeking to build or restore a relationship" (Exline & Baumeister cited in McCullough, Pargament & Thoresen 2000, p.136).

Finally, it is important to remember that political forgiveness still, at its core, "represents an extension of interpersonal forgiveness to the actions of collectives" (Amstutz 2005, p.224). The goal of the following sections is to show that collective political forgiveness is most successfully achieved when it is supported and promoted by religious leaders and individuals.

Why Northern Ireland and South Africa?

Before transitioning to a study of specific instances of forgiveness, it is important to establish why these cases were chosen from the many others that might easily demonstrate the role of religion and religious identity in fostering forgiveness in an equally compelling way.

As should be clear from the above sections, this study is not intended to provide a comparison of the political policies or compromises (in particular the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland and the establishment of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Committee) associated with the de-escalation and containment of these conflicts. Such a comparison, based on widely different models of nation and government building practices, would likely yield very little useful information. What is examined, however, is the response to, and involvement of, Christian leaders and believers in the

process of forgiveness and reconciliation that was the ultimate goal of both political institutions.

The restriction of case studies to specifically Christian conflicts was intentionally done in order to provide a fuller and more striking illustration of the diverse ways in which religion can support the process of forgiveness. The two case studies examined below were chosen, however, not only because of their differences and diversity, but also because of their similarities. These similarities include the confinement of the conflict within the Christian community and the role of religion in the areas' social and communal life as well as its historical significance in the conflict. The widespread examples of the Churches' complicity in the perpetuation and justification of violence is certainly a feature that figures prominently in the history of both conflicts, and highlights the symbolic significance of religious leaders' public apologies and extensions of forgiveness.

In terms of the political framework implemented to deal with management of the conflict and actions taken towards supporting its resolution, Northern Ireland and South Africa are vastly different. In Northern Ireland, forgiveness was intentionally excluded from the Good Friday Agreement as it was thought that the steps required for forgiveness, including a consensus on harms committed and remembering the past, would continue to divide rather than unite the country. The Good Friday Agreement was based on the understanding that "… the only way forward is to seek to de-emphasize the record of past crimes and injustices and to focus on the present challenges of generating consensus about political goals and procedures and cultivating moral norms that are conducive to a humane communal life" (Amstutz 2005, p.184).

The peacekeeping structure established by the Good Friday Agreement created a "framework for public order" that helped to diffuse the violence but deprived "both victims and offenders the possibility of working toward authentic reconciliation" by "neglecting accountability for past political offenses" (Amstutz 2005, p.184). In essence, the Good Friday Agreement can be credited with "fostering a negative peace… by failing to address culpability and injustices the accord impedes the development of a positive peace rooted in the restoration of humane communal ties" (Amstutz 2005, p.184). While some critics, like Amstutz, argue that this negative peace, characterized by a lack of violence but no real efforts to move past co-existence to friendship or mutual understanding, is all that has been achieved in Northern Ireland, the stories and accounts of religious leaders and exceptional individuals (described below) working outside of the political sphere to model forgiveness for their followers and communities, points towards a much more positive, if not yet universal, peace.

In the case of South Africa, forgiveness was deeply imbedded in the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), an institution called for in the Promotion of National Unity Act passed in 1995 by the South African Parliament (Amstutz 2005, p.193). The very name of this institution, as well as the act that created it, suggests that the desired outcome varies greatly from that of the Good Friday Agreement. The inclusion of the terms "unity," "truth" and "reconciliation" in the act and commission's name implies that a commitment to a process of forgiveness, culminating in reconciliation, was the ultimate goal of the TRC. In contrast with Northern Ireland, the TRC was developed specifically for the dual purposes of "coming to terms simultaneously with the history of past crimes and injustices and the promise of a more

peaceful, democratic society (Amstutz 2005, p.189). In fact, as stated in the preamble to the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, the commission worked "to promote national unity and reconciliation in a spirit of understanding which transcends the conflict and decisions of the past" (cited in Helmick & Petersen 2001, p.249). Finally, unique from Northern Ireland as well was the significant role that religious leaders, most notably Archbishop Desmond Tutu, played in the administering and shaping the work of the TRC.

Northern Ireland and The Troubles

The history of "the Troubles" in Ireland is long and complex. Historians have traced the roots of the conflict lack to 1916, 1690, or even 1172 with the first arrival of England's Henry II and his army in Ireland (Wells 1999, p.10). Throughout the centuries of conflict that have plagued Ireland, the fundamental question lying at the heart of each new violent eruption is one of national identity. As Amstutz notes, "This issue – frequently defined as "The Irish Question" – is basically this: To whom does Northern Ireland belong, Britain or Ireland? ... Are the people Irish or British? The issue is politically intractable because national identity, unlike most other political problems, cannot be resolved through compromise, since one is a citizen [at least emotionally and self-identifiably] of either one country or another, but not both" (2005, p.165).

While the conflict is clearly of a political nature, religion became deeply involved in the conflict beginning in 1560 when Elizabeth I forced the Irish to accept Protestantism. Rather than adopting this alien form of worship, the Irish continued to "practice their own religion under the guidance of Jesuit priests… these priests developed strong personal ties

with their parishioners and exercised great influence at the local level" (Wells 1999, p.14). Wells notes as well that, "this ability to identify with and influence people locally still characterizes priests [in Ireland] today" (1999, p.14). Thus, the actual result of Elizabeth's forced Protestantism was to cause "the native and Anglo-Irish populations to work together to such an extent that… national sentiment became associated with Catholicism" (Wells 1999, p.14). Although the conflict in Ireland has always been about political power and control, the solidification of the Irish Catholic Identity in rejection to English Protestantism served to inextricably link religion and politics in the centuries to come.

Elizabeth also furthered tensions, and began the process of the North/South divide in Ireland through her policy of "plantation" in which English and Scottish loyalists to the British crown were "planted" on lands confiscated from local communities (Well 1999, p.15). As Ronald A. Wells summarizes in his book <u>People Behind The Peace: Community and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland,</u>

> England, by right of conquest, exercised authority in Ireland. Yet by its extortionist policies, its harsh laws against the native Catholics and their religion, and its promotion of a Protestant ruling class, whose major qualification was its compliance with English views, England forfeited any right to be considered equitable, progressive, or humane. The bitterness engendered by the Reformation, the plantations, Cromwell, and the Battle of Boyne grew during this period of relative calm in Irish affairs to form an indestructible and enduring core of resentment…
>
> Wells 1999, p.19

By the first half of the 19th century, this core of resentment burst open, as increasing poverty fostered a growth in sectarian conflict. Around 1830, "Members of the Orange Order[3] became more intolerant, especially after passage of the Catholic Emancipation Act

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[3] The Orange Order was established as an Anti-Catholic organization to honor William of Orange who defeated the Catholic James II in the Battle of the Boyne on July 1, 1690 (Wells 1999, p.18).

of 1829, and Protestant-Catholic animosity was encouraged on both sides by clerical and lay fanatics" (Wells 1999, p.21).

In response to the violence, newly elected British Prime Minister William Gladstone formally declared that "it was his government's intention to 'pacify' Ireland by granting 'home rule'–political autonomy in domestic affairs (Amstutz 2005, p.167). This declaration was sharply opposed by Ulster Protestants, who feared that home rule would allow the majority Catholics to institute politically and religiously oppressive policies against them (Amstutz 2005, p. 167). In effect, Gladstone's efforts to "pacify" Ireland resulted in an increasingly politicized division between North and South that culminated in 1920 with the British government's formal partitioning of Ireland with the Government of Ireland Act[4] (Amstutz 2005 p.167).

This formal division, however, was contentious from the start, especially with Irish Nationalists who "believed that only Ireland was entitled to full political independence but that the country should remain unified as a single state" (Amstutz 2005, p.168). Although many citizens were content with the partition arrangement and various leaders from both sides attempted to cooperate and establish a positive relationship, peaceful coexistence was never fully achieved between, or within, North or South Ireland (Wells 1999, p.30). Amstutz, summarizing the root causes of the conflict that continue to preoccupy Ireland today notes that,

> In effect, the Protestants of Ulster have opposed becoming a part of a united Ireland because they fear the consequences of minority status in a united Catholic Ireland. At the same time, the Protestant majority in Northern Ireland, fearful of being absorbed by a united Irish Republic, has sought to maintain political control over public and private

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[4] The act provided for two parliaments: one in Belfast serving Ulster and Northern Ireland and one in Dublin representing the rest of the country (Wells 1999, p.18).

affairs in the north—a quest that has resulted in discriminatory policies against the Catholic minority…

<div align="center">2005, p.169</div>

On August 14th, 1969, riots broke out in the town of Derry between extremists from both sides of the conflict (Wells 1999, p.33). This violent confrontation sparked violence clashes and began the period in Irish history known as The Troubles. The following 30 years of conflict was characterized by widespread violence that resulted in over 3,200 deaths and more than 30,000 injuries before the Good Friday Peace Agreement was formally ratified in 1998 (Wells 1999, p.27, Amstutz 2005, p.165).

This agreement, a major political breakthrough in the conflict that was endorsed by voters on both sides of the conflict, was comprised of a number of mutually agreeable elements and provisions. Some of these elements included the affirmation that Northern Ireland would remain part of the United Kingdom, that a North-South Ministerial Council would be established "to promote socioeconomic cooperation," and that "periodic British-Irish Intergovernmental Conferences were to be help in order to promote bilateral cooperation between Britain and Ireland in such areas as transport, agriculture, environment, culture, health and education" (Amstutz 2005, p.177). Furthermore, the agreement ensured that prisoners adhering to their "cease-fire pledge" would be allowed to obtain early release, and called for "the establishment of an independent commission on decommissioning to ensure the disarmament of all paramilitary groups" (Amstutz 2005, p.177).

Forgiveness in Northern Ireland

By the time the Good Friday Agreement was signed in 1998, generations of Irish children had grown up surrounded by conflict and the constant threat of violence. Wells illustrates the effects of the dark years of the Troubles, noting, "The number of Ulster' citizens maimed and killed can be documented, but another way of stating the reality is this: statistically, nearly every adult in Northern Ireland knew someone – from family neighborhoods or workplaces – who had been a victim of sectarian violence" (1999, p.34). Healing the pain and confronting the suffering endured on both sides clearly was, and continues to be, of critical importance. The relative stability and ability to coexist in Northern Ireland today suggests that the process of forgiveness, at some level, has been successfully initiated. Our purpose, then, for the remainder of this section is to explore and identify where and in what capacity forgiveness has been practiced, by first examining the Good Friday Agreement and other attempts to bring a political end to violence in Northern Ireland and second, by exploring particular, individual acts of forgiveness. Finally, we will conclude by paying particular attention to the involvement of religion or religious actors in supporting and validating this forgiveness.

First, the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) itself should be examined and evaluated to determine how its structure and implications might help, or hinder, the initiation of a process of forgiveness. According to Amstutz, The goal [of the GFA] was not to achieve justice but to create peace through the creation of a governmental structure that allowed Nationalists and Unionists, Republicans and Loyalists, to pursue their respective political objectives without violence. In effect, the aim was to encourage antagonists to learn to live 'in disagreement but in dialog with each other'…" (2005, p.177). Furthermore, Amstutz openly acknowledges that, "the major goal has not been political or communal

reconstruction… Rather, the aim has been to construct a decision-making structure that is acceptable to all major political actors and that fosters public order (2005, p. 179). The GFA, unlike the South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which we will discuss shortly, was established for the sole purpose of establishing political stability and agreement from both sides to commit to a mutually acceptable power-sharing structure. The challenge of initiating forgiveness, communal rebuilding and reconciliation, however, was left for a separate program or initiative.

Individual Acts of Forgiveness

Fortunately, in the case of Northern Ireland, a remarkable group of individuals, "from political representatives to civil society mediators to ordinary people thrust onto the stage of forgiveness by virtue of victimization" as well as religious leaders, have stepped forward to initiate this process (Bole, Christiansen & Hennemeyer 2004, p.62). It is important here to remind ourselves of the definition of political forgiveness as "an extension of interpersonal forgiveness…" (Amstutz 2005, p.224). In speaking of the possibility for political forgiveness, we must bear in mind that "the first agents of forgiveness are victims and sufferers… who should decide whether the political crime against them or their loved ones merits forgiveness on the personal level" (Bole, Christiansen & Hennemeyer 2004, p.63). Our purpose in this study is to discover the impact, if any exists, of individuals' personal religious identity or beliefs on their willingness to extend forgiveness to individuals and institutions.

Two particularly striking examples of ordinary individuals with strong religious convictions, both victims of tragic losses, who stepped forward to initiate forgiveness, are Gordon Wilson and the family of Michael McGoldrick. In both of these examples, rather than turning to vengeance or retaliation, the victims transformed their grief into "a solitary act of public forgiveness that [served] as an occasion of transcendence in an otherwise brutal moment (Bole, Christiansen & Hennemeyer 2004, p.62).

In 1990, Methodist layman and legislator Gordon Wilson was attending a Remembrance Day event at the Enniskillen War Memorial with his 20-year old daughter, Marie, when an Irish Republican Army (IRA) bomb exploded, burying them both under rubble and debris and fatally wounding Marie (Bole, Christiansen & Hennemeyer 2004, p. 63). Rather than joining the Loyalist Paramilitaries anxious to avenge her death, Gordon Wilson halted them in their quest with "simple words of forbearance and forgiveness: 'I have lost my daughter but I bear no ill will. I bear no grudge'" In addition, Wilson also stated that he would pray for those responsible for his daughter's death (Amstutz 2005, p.182). Wilson's gesture "made a profound impression on both Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland, and in his subsequent tours around Ireland Wilson "sent a message of hope to communities in other parts of the world" (Bole, Christiansen & Hennemeyer 2004, p.64).

Another of the many inspiring stories of forgiveness in Northern Ireland is that of the McGoldrick family. In 1996, Protestant loyalist gunmen shot and killed Michael McGoldrick, "a recent university graduate and young family man near Portadown 'for no other reason than that he was a Catholic and an easy target'" (Bole, Christiansen & Hennemeyer 2004, p.65). His parents, in the midst of their own grief, publicly

acknowledged that, "they were praying for his killers and had forgiven them. They have continued to speak, at both Catholic and Protestant gatherings, about the need for political dialogue and an end to violence" (Bole, Christiansen & Hennemeyer 2004, p.65). The McGoldrick's openly acknowledge their belief that they "received special Grace from God, because they [believe that they] could not have made it on their own" (Bole, Christiansen & Hennemeyer 2004, p.95).

Religious Leaders' Contributions to Forgiveness

Although these acts of forbearance are certainly inspiring, it is easy to see how each discrete act of forgiveness might be swallowed up by the countless other acts of horror being perpetrated or remembered in a war torn and insecure country. It is in this capacity that religious communities and leaders have had the most profound healing impact. Before engaging in a discussion of religion's positive role in fostering forgiveness in Northern Ireland, it is important to recognize religion's historic complicity in propagating and promoting sectarian strife. This recognition is not intended to undermine or discount the critical role that particular religious leaders and communities have had on the peacebuilding process in Northern Ireland, but, rather, to highlight the inherent complexity and context-specific challenges that arise in the process of rebuilding societies in the wake of intractable conflicts. Amstutz outlines this challenge, saying,

> Despite the prevalence of Christian values in Ireland, political groups have been reluctant to apply Christian virtues such as compassion, contrition, repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation to the political process. Several factors account for this: To begin with, churches have historically been part of the problem in Northern Ireland. It is important to stress that while the Christian religion provides important moral resources to sustain community and to overcome wrongdoing, churches have also exacerbated social and political divisions within society. To be sure, Roman Catholics and Protestants share many core religious beliefs on such theological topics as salvation, redemption, human

sin, and divine forgiveness. Nevertheless, significant social, cultural, political, and institutional differences have helped to sustain deep distrust between the two religious groups. Since Protestants and Catholics have tended to live in segregated, self-contained communities, each with its own schools, churches, and political organizations, sectarianism has thrived and intensified social differences and distrust. As a result, religious beliefs about grace, compassion, forgiveness, and reconciliation are rarely incorporated into social and political discourse…

<div align="right">2005, p.183</div>

Noting the unfortunate historical accuracy of this view, let us turn our attention to examples of how religious individuals and leaders have, and continue to, reverse this divisive trend and inspire forgiveness in their communities. The cases of Gordon Wilson and Michael McGoldrick illustrate beautifully the significant role that personal religious affiliation can play in inspiring victims to extend forgiveness to their perpetrators rather than continue the spiral of violence through calls for vengeance and retribution. In each case, the grieving party demonstrated an understanding of, and commitment to, bearing witness to "Christianity's emphasis on compassion and forgiveness" (Amstutz 2005, p.180).

While these personal expressions of faith are, again, inspiring and moving, statistically they are fairly insignificant, breaking rather than establishing the norm. The promotion of a more widespread process of asking for, and granting, forgiveness in a society divided by deeply held "exclusionary cultural norms" requires that examples of forgiveness take place at a higher, more politically visible or socially accountable level (Amstutz 2005, p.180). In Northern Ireland, high-level religious leaders were the primary vehicles for initiating this more public forgiveness process.

Perhaps the most important example of this process occurred in 1994, when then Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, demonstrated "the important role of Church leaders' remorse. In a sermon in Dublin he said: "As an English Churchman, I am aware of just how much we English need to ask forgiveness for our often brutal domination and

crass insensitivity in the eight hundred years of history of our relationships with Ireland" (cited in Amstutz 2005, p.181). Significantly, he also noted "Repentance must go far beyond verbal formulae. Apology means much more than personal change. Communal change, political changes are also required. Political relationships must be changed if forgiveness is to be politically effective and lead to conflict resolution (cited in Bole, Christiansen & Hennemeyer 2004, p.71). Cardinal Daly of Northern Ireland highlighted the significance of establishing a bilateral process of forgiveness one year later when he accepted an invitation to deliver a homily in Canterbury Cathedral. During his address he echoed Archbishop Carey's public apology, saying, "… I wish to ask forgiveness from the people of this land for the wrongs and hurts inflicted by Irish people on the people of this country on many occasions during our shared history, and particularly in the past 25 years. I believe that this reciprocal recognition of the need to forgive and to be forgiven is a necessary condition for proper Christian and human and indeed political relationships between our two islands in the future" (cited in Amstutz 2005, p.181).

While these acts are recognized and widely lauded, they also bring to light some of the critical questions surrounding the capacity for political and religious leaders, in other words "corporate agents," to extend apologies or forgiveness on behalf of their communities. For instance, "On the most basic level, questions arise over "who can apologize? Who can forgive? Who can speak for the community?" (Bole, Christiansen & Hennemeyer 2004). In support of Shriver's argument, Daley and Carey's comments were certainly not met with universal approval, as they presumed to apologize on behalf of communities that had not reached a "consensus on the wrongs that each may have inflicted on the other" (Shriver 1995, p.7). It is important to point out as well that,

although these public apologies were major developments in the process of forgiveness in Northern Ireland, the political landscape was not miraculously transformed by their utterance. Rather, as Cardinal Daley noted, "Their [the public apologies] effectiveness is not dramatic, but I think it helps to gradually build up a climate of readiness for listening to what the other side is saying… It is one of the things that I think helps to alleviate some of the mistrust and helps us to gradually reduce some of the myth-making on both sides…" (cited in Bole, Christiansen & Hennemeyer 2004, p.73).

It is inherently difficult to measure or quantify the impact of these acts on the political process, and Daley is wise to note that their immediate effect was not dramatic. However, it is interesting to observe the wave of unprecedented public apologies and acts of contrition that occurred in the months and years following the Carey-Daley exchange. A particularly significant apology, issued by the IRA, came in mid-2002. On the thirtieth anniversary of the "Bloody Friday" terror attack in Belfast, "the IRA offered 'its sincere apologies and condolences'" to families of the noncombatant innocents who had been killed as part of the IRA's military strategy (Amstutz 2005, p.182). Even more significantly, "the IRA declaration also noted that 'the future will not be found in denying collective failures and mistakes or closing minds and hearts to the plight of those who have been hurt.' Instead, calling attention to the need for 'equal acknowledgment of the grief and loss of others,' the statement observed, 'on this anniversary, we are endeavoring to fulfill this responsibility to those we have hurt'" (The IRA says sorry 2002).

Towards Reconciliation: Ecumenism and Integrated Education

22

The significant individual acts of forgiveness granted by religiously minded citizens such as Gordon Wilson and the McGoldrick family, or the widely inspiring and very public displays of repentance and forgiveness from religious leaders such as Archbishop Carey and Cardinal Daley, were not the only examples of religion and religious individuals fostering forgiveness. While these acts did have significant impact on the people of Ireland, a particular set of peacemakers in this conflict have yet to be introduced: they are the residents of three residential ecumenical communities, The Corrymeela community, the Christian Renewal Society and The Columbanus Community of Reconciliation.[5]

These three communities were established in Northern Ireland between 1965 and 1983, and, while each operates in a slightly different way, the ultimate goal and commitment of the residents is the same in each. According to Wells, these communities "are first among the long-term peacemakers" (1999, p.56). "In the first place," notes Wells, "the mere fact that such ecumenical residential communities exist in a divided society is already a statement for peace… These busy places might, in any given month, conduct a series of lectures about forgiveness in politics, sponsor a weekend retreat for teenagers brought from both Catholic and Protestant schools, and hold an interreligious prayer vigil. Behind the scenes they also use their credibility to bring together for talks political people who would not, or could not, acknowledge each other in public… In short, these three communities have a deep and broad impact in Ulster society" (1999, p.56).

Although 1998 certainly did not mark the end of conflict in Northern Ireland, there has been an almost total end to violent encounters. While the country remains

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[5] An excellent and detailed discussion of these communities can be found in Ronald Wells' <u>People Behind the Peace: Community and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland</u> (see References for bibliographic information).

politically insecure and tensions continue to bubble under the surface of coexistent living, the relative peace and security in Northern Ireland today has allowed for more voices of repentance and forgiveness to emerge, and for new steps to be taken to promote reconciliation. For example, even before the Good Friday Agreement, integrated schools were beginning to appear in Northern Ireland, committed to "bringing children up to live as adults in a pluralist society, recognizing what they hold in common as well as what separates them, and accepting both" (IE Movement). Given Northern Ireland's totally segregated, religiously-based educational system, the fact that integrated schools teach a curriculum of religious education "that has been agreed upon by the four main Churches,"[6] provides some indication of the social changes that have been supported by the historically powerfully divisive institutions (Hayes, McAllister & Dowds 2007, p.456, What is Integrated Education?).

The fact that, in 2007, the applications of over 700 students to attend one of the 61 integrated schools in Northern Ireland were denied due to lack of space certainly illustrates the transformation in Northern Ireland since The Troubles. That so many families, both Protestant and Catholic, would openly encourage their children to seek integration and contact with "the other" indicates a strong social movement not only towards tolerance and "negative peace," but also towards active, positive coexistence, plurality and desire to face and forgive the past. In fact, according to a survey of public opinions prepared for Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education in 2000 and 2001, 81% of parents and grandparents (two generations who grew up in deeply segregated and hostile communities) consider Integrated Education to be important to

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[6] These include the Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Church of Ireland, and Methodist Churches (Coward & Smith 2004, p.261)

peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland (Public Opinion Survey 2003, Figure 4.3 p.8). This cultural and moral reformation in Northern Ireland, supported by Christian tradition, appears, even in the face of continued political instability, to be successfully operating.

History of Apartheid in South Africa

The South African history of apartheid, although primarily centered on issues of race and the colonial legacy of black disempowerment, was born in the churches of South Africa. The missionary policy of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) and discussions in the synods in the early 19th century (1824, 1826, 1829, 1834, & 1837) focused heavily on the issue of indigenous (black) Christians and their place within the Church community (Coward & Smith 2004, p. 245). The "desirability choice," made in 1857 at the ninth synod, "established the institutional framework and the official pattern by which the social features of racial separation and the policy of separate development would unfold in the church" (Coward & Smith 2004, p. 245). This "choice;" to support white members of a primarily black DRC congregation's petition for "separate celebration of Holy Communion," is an early example of the deeply seated racism that would soon become institutionalized within the Church. In 1935, the DRC formalized its missionary policy, solidifying its support for segregation and apartheid so fully that, by 1948, the "official mouthpiece of the DRC could proclaim proudly… 'As a church we have always worked purposefully for the separation of the races'" (Coward & Smith 2004, p. 245).

At the same time as the DRC was formalizing its institutional framework for segregation within the church, racial inequality was becoming a major issue in national

politics. In 1948, the political party of the Afrikaner (white Dutch descendant) population, the National Party (NP), gained control of parliament, and, mirroring the Church, "established the political framework of the apartheid regime" (Coward & Smith, 2004, p.245). The new government's policy of apartheid or separate development was, according to Amstutz, "the most extreme form of racial engineering ever practiced in the modern world" (2005 p. 191). In addition to forced migration and relocation of black Africans into the all-black and precariously overpopulated Bantu homelands (by 1980 the population density had reached nearly 24 people per square kilometer versus 9 people per square kilometer in the white areas), black Africans faced increasing legal restrictions and statutes (Amstutz 2005, p.190). From the early 1950s, restrictions included legislation such as "the Group Areas Act [1950] whereby people could live, go to school, and be buried only in geographical areas designated for the racial group of their legal classification…. Controls were established to monitor the movement of black people, manipulate their education, restrict their access to work and opportunities, alienate them from their land, and prohibit marriages across the color line" (Coward & Smith 2004, p.245).

It was as a result of these oppressive measures that violence and protesting erupted in South Africa. A particularly contentious form of control was the "pass laws," (which had been first introduced in the 1920's but were increasingly tightly enforced from the early 1940s to 1960), that required each citizen to carry an identity-book to be signed employers and anyone providing accommodation to them in "an area not designated for their race classification" (Coward & Smith 2004, pp.245-246). The identity-books not only further humiliated and marginalized non-white Africans from

society, but also determined their very mortality rate, as "access to social security and welfare were selectively allocated according to racial categories" (Coward & Smith 2004, p.246). Frustrated and angered by the repression against them, on March 2nd, 1960 a group of people in the town of Sharpeville peacefully demonstrated against the apartheid regime by burning their pass-books. In a swift and brutal response, the regime police opened fire on the crowd, killing 69 black protestors (Tutu 1999, p.17). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, in tribute to the "Sharpeville massacre," would later establish March 1st as the first day for its investigations (Coward & Smith 2004, p.146). The Sharpeville massacre can be seen as the flame that sparked the cycle of oppression, resistance, and widespread violence that would characterize South Africa for decades to come.

Organized opposition to the apartheid regime initially came from two black political organizations, the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC). The government eventually banned both organizations, and many of their leaders, including post-apartheid president, Nelson Mandela, were imprisoned or exiled during the early 1960s (van der Merwe 1989, p.30). In response to the apartheid regime's increasingly repressive policies and actions, domestic and international political pressure and resistance continued to increase during the 1970s and 1980s. By the early 1980s, the newly formed United Democratic Front, comprised of "religious organizations, civic bodies, nongovernmental, and organizations [united] in their anti-apartheid activism" were situated at the forefront of the organized domestic opposition (Coward & Smith 2004, p.246). In 1984, in response to the United Democratic Front's international diplomatic pressure, the UN General Assembly declared apartheid "a crime

against humanity" (Coward & Smith 2004, p.246). Again, as the opposition movement continued to grow and gain international support, the government implemented increasingly repressive measures, culminating in 1985 with a government imposed "state of emergency that gave security forces increased authority to detain political opponents and to use force against those threatening public order" (Amstutz 2005, p. 191). The opposition—repression—opposition cycle that characterized the next decade is, according to ordained DRC Minister and TRC Commissioner and coordinator of TRC Faith Hearings, Piet Meiring, quantifiable and stark: "from 1960 to 1989 about seven thousand people were killed in political conflicts, whereas in the four years preceding the establishment of multiracial democracy (1990 to 1994) more than fourteen thousand died as a result of political violence" (cited in Amstutz 2005, p.191).

In 1990, facing "vast economic and military weaknesses," regime president F.W. de Klerk was forced to lift the ban on the ANC and release Mandela and other opposition leaders from their lifetime prison sentences (Amstutz 2005, p.192 & Coward & Smith 2004, p.246). During the next two years the country's "political elites" (especially the National Party and the newly reinvigorated Africa National Congress) still headed by Mandela worked together to negotiate a new constitution and democratic government structure that would be acceptable to both the white minority and black majority. An Interim Constitution was signed in 1993, establishing the framework for a "transitional Government of National Unity" charged with drafting a permanent constitution and "creating the preconditions for national unity" (Amstutz 2005, p.192). This Interim Constitution set the tone for the establishment of the TRC as a body committed to

fostering national unity and reconciliation through truth telling and restorative justice.[7]

Indeed, the Constitution's postamble declares, "a need for understanding but not

vengeance, a need for reparation but not for retaliation, a need for *ubuntu*[8] but not for

victimization" (cited in Amstutz 2005, p.193).

The TRC—A Bold Innovation

In 1995, immediately following the adoption of the Interim Constitution, the South

African Parliament passed the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act,

formally calling for the establishment of the TRC (Amstutz 2005, p.193). It is

worthwhile to spend some time outlining the particular structure of the TRC as it

represents a unique break from Truth Commissions of the past. Although there have been

over a dozen Truth commissions set up throughout the world, only two, South Africa's

Truth and Reconciliation Committee and Chile's National Commission on Truth and

Reconciliation have been "given a mandate to go beyond truth finding to promote

reconciliation as well" (Helmick & Petersen, 2001 p.249). South Africa's TRC was

further distinguished from other Truth Commissions through its empowerment to grant

amnesty and reparations to individual perpetrators and victims (Helmick & Petersen

2001, p.250).

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[7]Restorative justice focuses on rebuilding community in the wake of violence or conflict. Restorative justice is deeply embedded in the Christian narrative as it relates closely to the Christian concept of reconciliation and the process of confession, guilt, and forgiveness that accompanies it (Coward & Smith 2004, pp.250-251)

[8] Desmond Tutu, in his book No Future Without Forgiveness, eloquently describes *Ubuntu* as the African concept that "My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours" (1999, p.31). In other words, *ubuntu* describes the African emphasis on the collective over the individual, group harmony over personal gains.

The TRC was made up of seventeen commissioners, selected by President Mandela, with Desmond Tutu appointed as the Commission's Chairman. Three distinct committees were created; each authorized to carry out a particular function. The largest committee, overseen directly by Tutu, was the Committee on Human Rights Violations. This committee was responsible for hearing victim testimony regarding gross human rights violations that they had endured. Three judges and two commissioners were appointed to oversee the Committee on Amnesty. This committee was responsible for granting amnesty to offenders who offered up full and detailed disclosure of their offenses. Finally, five commissioners were assigned to the Committee on Reparation and Rehabilitation, and were responsible for "making recommendations to the state on how to assist victims of gross human rights violations and to offer policy recommendations that would promote national healing" (Amstutz 2005, p.194, Schimmel 2002, p.221).

Why a Truth and Reconciliation Commission?

While each committee was empowered with certain rights and duties, the overarching theme and purpose of the Commission, as implied in its very name, was to uncover the truth and to "make the past present, so to speak, and to privilege the excruciating memories of a people on the long road to reconciliation" (Bole, Christiansen & Hennemeyer 2004, p.103). The commission was established, in fact, "in the belief that exposure of the truths about the sufferings that had been endured during the years of apartheid was a necessary process in moving forward toward national healing and reconciliation, and that revenge or legal justice were not the best avenues to those goals"

(Schimmel 2002, p.221). Desmond Tutu explains the decision to forego a system of trials and revenge thusly, "no negotiated settlement, no peaceful transition to multiracial democracy, would have been possible if black leaders had insisted on bringing white abusers to trial. They could only have had justice, and a South Africa 'lying in ashes—a truly Pyrric victory if there ever was one'"(cited in Bole, Christiansen & Hennemeyer 2004, p.33). The TRC's focus on truth telling and restorative, rather than retributive, justice, argues John Carr, Director of the Department of Social Development and World Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, was a necessary step in South Africa's process of reconciliation and peaceful transition into a multiracial democracy. As Carr notes, "You can't get to reconciliation or forgiveness until you have a description of the reality that people don't fight about… You cannot begin to talk about reconciliation until you have the truth. Then there has to be an effort to get people to face the truth" (Bole, Christiansen & Hennemeyer 2004, p.46).

If we return, for a moment, to an earlier section of this study, we will remember that truth telling and the creation of a shared and agreed upon history is a necessary condition for forgiveness. While in Northern Ireland we saw this process promoted by high-level church leaders and remarkable individuals operating outside of the political realm, in South Africa forgiveness was actually nurtured, albeit implicitly, as part of the goal the TRC. In other words, within the TRC's mission to promote national unity lies an (unstated) emphasis on the process of political forgiveness: the establishment of an agreed upon history, forbearance from vengeance, empathy for the enemy's humanity, and an effort to renew and restore human relationships (Shriver 1995, pp.7-9). It is important to note that forgiveness, although certainly encouraged by the Commissioners,

"was not an explicit element of the TRC model. Whereas truth, reparations, and reconciliation were viewed as indispensable to individual and collective reckoning with past wrongs, forgiveness was considered a personal, discretionary act. Nevertheless, the TRC made room for, if not directly encouraged, individual and collective forgiveness through confession, empathy, and amnesty" (Amstutz 2005, pp.201-202). In keeping with the purpose of this study, and to gain a more accurate understanding of the TRC's actual implementation and operational process, the following sections will focus explicitly on the role that religious leadership and symbolism played in the process of encouraging forgiveness in the TRC.

Christian Leadership, Narrative, and Identity in the TRC

It is ironic that, unlike in Northern Ireland where religious leaders and believers exerted their influence and demonstrated forgiveness outside of the political system, the South African TRC was seen as, and often criticized for, "portraying itself too much as a Christian initiative" (Coward & Smith 2004, p.253). Indeed, from its inception, the TRC and its leadership embraced an unapologetically Christian framework, especially in terms of the language and symbolism employed. In an article entitled "The Ambiguous Role of Religion in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission," authors Megan Shore and Scott Kline describe the ceremony performed to convene the Human Rights Violations Committee (HRVC) hearings that "set the tone for the rest of the committee's work:"

> Archbishop Tutu opened the proceedings by lighting a candle in memory of those who had
> died under the apartheid regime—Tutu's lighting was accompanied by a recitation of these

names. Everyone attending the hearing joined in singing the Xhosa hymn "*Lizalis' indinga lakho*" ("Let your will be done"). Then Tutu prayed:

> *Oh God of justice, mercy and peace, we long to put behind us all the pain and division of apartheid together with all the violence which ravaged our communities in its name. And we ask you to bless this Truth and Reconciliation Commission with your wisdom and guidance as it commences its important work of redressing the many wrongs done both here and throughout our land ... We ask that the Holy Spirit pour out its gifts of justice, mercy and compassion upon the Commissioners and their colleagues in every sphere, that the truth may be recognized and brought to light during the hearings; and that the end may bring about that reconciliation and love for our neighbor which our Lord himself commended. We ask this in the holy name of Jesus Christ our Savior.*

Tutu's prayer for the Holy Spirit to help South Africa reach the truth was not an American-style act of civil religion—that is, a discourse in which God's name is invoked ceremonially in the public sphere, but is then generally excluded from political debate. Rather, Tutu's prayer was a political act that validated religious discourse as a legitimate mode of truthtelling.

<div align="right">2006, p.314</div>

Shore and Kline's article provides much insight into the power and scope of religious framing in the TRC's proceedings, as well as important commentary on the role of religious discourse and religious narrative played in the presentation of victims' testimony. The article notes that, "Their [the victims] stories were personalized cameos of lives shaped by faith, forgiveness, and hope derived from the gospel but lived out amidst the social and political traumas of our time" (Shore & Kline 2006, p.315). Amstutz explains that,

> Tutu's repeated use of spiritual language had a powerful impact on the TRC process. His repeated emphasis on personal healing and social rehabilitation through the acknowledgement of suffering, confession of wrongdoing, remorse, and empathy contributed significantly to making room for the ethic of individual and collective forgiveness…. There can be little doubt that the numerous expressions of offenders' remorse and victims' forgiveness in TRC hearings were a direct result of the moral discourse cultivated by Tutu and his fellow commissioners"

<div align="right">2005, p.202</div>

This validation of religious discourse as a legitimate form of truth telling must, certainly, impact the willingness, and ability, of these victims to extend forgiveness. By expressing their stories through religious-redemptive Christian narratives, victims located

themselves and their own experiences in the spiritual context. As Amstutz notes, in the Christian tradition, "…human beings are called to follow their Heavenly Father in being merciful and compassionate, believers are admonished to express love and mercy toward others by forgiving those who commit offenses" (2005, p.47). When believers can situate and express their experiences in a Christian motif, as mothers of murdered sons, for instance, the moral and spiritual imperative to forgive is extremely powerful (Shore & Kline 2006, p.316).

Religious discourse has also been demonstrated in the TRC through the authentic apologies and acts of repentance articulated by perpetrators or complacent beneficiaries of the apartheid system. One such apology, submitted by 47-year-old white South African Lesley Morgan to the TRC following a public workshop, came in the form of a lengthy letter. In her letter, Lesley writes,

> …I cannot imagine what it must be to bear your [the black community] pain and suffering so openly and publicly. I can imagine what it must feel like to stretch out your hand in an attempt to forgive and reconcile and have no one there to grasp it. The hurt must be enormous and there must be anger and frustration too.
> […]
> I have been thinking about what I would submit today. I thought about saying how apartheid had violated us all, as it has, but in the face of the submissions that have preceded mine, and the millions that have not been heard, what could I say to them? I thought I could say 'I'm sorry' and that would somehow make it all right. But God kept nudging me, pulling at my arm. I was at a loss to explain how I feel, and how our past has somehow diminished me…. I am a Christian. How do I reconcile what I believe with what I practiced?
> […]
> For the first time in my life I truly heard the voice of Christ. In all the years I ignored the oppressed, I ignored him. In my dear and concern for my own safety, like Peter before me, I denied my Lord. Like Peter, the realization of that denial has filled me with unbearable sorrow. The realization that my faith is so small, so selfish, so empty, has broken me. It has made me understand why I feel such shame. I profess to be a follower of Christ, but have been unwilling to go where He has led me.
> […]
> Finally, I need to say one last thing… the hardest part is at the end. It is so hopelessly inadequate to make right what has happened, so puny in the face of so much suffering… but it is all I have to give—I'm sorry.
>
> Cited in Cochrane, de Grouchy & Martin, 1999, pp.179-180.

A further submission, especially relevant to a discussion of political and collective

forgiveness, was "An open letter to all pastors in South African," and was, at the time of

submission, signed by over 400 pastors. The letter states,

> …how was it possible that those who intentionally committed murders and sabotages
> against fellow citizens could have been, as is now becoming evident, members of our
> churches and even regular churchgoers?
>
> Was there nothing in our preaching, liturgies and sacraments that disturbed the conscience
> of those who were directly involved in all the evil deeds committed?
>
> Therefore we have indeed more than enough reason to feel deeply guilty for having
> spiritualized and even gagged the gospel to such an extent that those in government and
> those responsible to execute government policy didn't feel confronted by our preaching.
>
> …we want to confess publicly that we as preachers were co-responsible for what
> happened in South Africa. In fact our guilt should be considered as more serious than that
> of any other person or institution.
>
> …We first acknowledge and confess that for many of us, especially those in the white
> community, life was very convenient and comfortable under Nationalist Party rule….
>
> Cited in Cochrane, de Grouchy & Martin, 1999, pp.181-182.

 While these powerful statements and assertions certainly suggest that the religious

individuals coming before the TRC have successfully and single-handedly promoted the

kind of willingness and desire to repent and forgive that is described so movingly above,

it must be strongly noted that these testimonies represent a digression from the norm.

Very few white South Africans were ever in favor of the TRC, and even fewer, during its

ongoing public hearings and after its conclusion, acknowledge that they "had been

beneficiaries of the apartheid order" (Helmick & Petersen 2001, p.264). To avoid

providing an unrealistic understanding of the effectiveness and impact of the TRC, it

should be made clear that the TRC was, and continues to be, a highly contentious and

contested initiative. From the centrality of religious discourse in committee proceedings

to the controversial nature of the amnesty provision, the TRC was never universally

supported or respected, by whites or blacks, in South Africa (Helmick & Petersen 2001,

p.259).

It would be impossible, from the data and information available, to quantify or statistically analyze the relationship between religiosity and forgiveness (or repentance) within the TRC process. Further compounding this lack of quantifiable data is the cultural factor of African *ubuntu*. Much of the TRC's acknowledged success, most notably the "absence of vengeance" and eagerness of victims to "forgive offenders who acknowledged their culpability…" tends to be credited to the African cultural value of social harmony (Helmick &Petersen 2004, p.258, Chapman & Spong 2003, p.287). Tutu, in No Future Without Forgiveness, eloquently describes *ubuntu* as such: "…Social harmony is for us the *summum bonum*—the greatest good. Anything that subverts, that undermines this sought-after good, is to be avoided like the plague. Anger, resentment, lust for revenge, even success through aggressive competitiveness, are corrosive of this good. To forgive is not just to be altruistic. It is the best form of self-interest. What dehumanizes you inexorably dehumanizes me" (1999, p.31). *Ubuntu*, in other words, is synonymous with restorative justice (Amstutz 2005, p.99).

The compatibility of African *ubuntu* with the requirements of Christianity at once account for the "readiness of the majority of Africans to become Christians," and also poses a challenge to attempts to isolate religion as a factor in forgiveness. However, as shown above, explicit examples of religion being called upon and utilized as a source of legitimization and motivation for forgiveness can be found in the vast wealth of narrative (qualitative) information gathered by the TRC. While quantitative measures, as discussed, would be impossible to establish, a limited, but powerful, illustration of the relationship between individuals' religious identity and propensity towards repentance

and forgiveness, can be found in the stories and testimonies that were delivered in front of the TRC committees.

Comparison and Discussion of Case Studies: Author's Comments

Throughout this study, I have endeavored to provide a truthful representation of historical reality. As I have explored these conflicts through the lens of religion and religious impact, I have become acutely aware of their intricacy and complexity. In both Northern Ireland and South Africa, religion served as fuel for violent conflicts fundamentally rooted in issues of politics, geography, race, and, perhaps most critically, identity. As the cases above illustrate, religious institutions in both countries have been heavily involved in the perpetuation and justification of this violence. However, also illustrated above, are examples of religious leaders and believers from these same communities demonstrating remarkable acts of compassion and forgiveness. Just how important are these religiously grounded acts of forgiveness in bringing peace to these intractable situations? Author Douglas Johnston of the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy in Washington DC, answers this question directly, stating, "Certainly no diplomatic or military solution will ever break the cycle of revenge. Unless one can introduce a spiritual component that gets to the business of forgiveness and reconciliation, the same drumbeat is likely to repeat itself…" (cited in Bole, Christiansen & Hennemeyer 2004, pp.34-35).

In assessing the particular impact of religious leaders and believers in this process of introducing and fostering forgiveness, however, we inevitably are faced with questions of methodology and measurement. For instance, how can we isolate, without statistical

analysis or sophisticated primary research, religion as a distinct factor influencing the behavior and choices of individuals struggling to forgive their enemies and create a more peaceful society? Further, how can we ever know, categorically and with uncontestable certainty that religious leaders and believers have contributed in measurable ways to the process of peacebuilding in their countries? In short, we can't. It would be impossible, regardless of time or resources, to show that Gordon Wilson's statement of forgiveness towards the IRA directly inspired 2, 5, or twenty other victims to forbear from seeking vengeance and extend forgiveness to their enemies. Likewise, there is no way to know how many victims or perpetrators came forward, or refused, to testify before the TRC because of its strong Christian ethic. While these limitations may be fully acknowledged, they do not preclude further exploration and evaluation of those factors that are "known."

This thesis has explored, qualitatively, through in-depth case studies of Northern Ireland and South Africa, the role that religion can play in fostering forgiveness and reconciliation in areas of intractable conflict. Each of the two proposed hypotheses has been examined and substantiated through these studies. First, the active involvement of religious leaders, in very different ways in both Northern Ireland and South Africa, has effectively promoted and furthered political forgiveness. This engagement was seen, for example, in Northern Ireland in the exchanges and apologies offered by both Archbishop Carey and Cardinal Daley. Their acknowledgment and condemnation of past wrong-actions committed by their communities validated individual and institutional desires to transcend the violent past and move towards a safer and more peaceful pluralistic society. In the South African TRC, Desmond Tutu's powerful role and the religious atmosphere of the proceedings, although highly contentious, certainly contributed to the willingness

of many perpetrators and victims to go beyond the TRC's requirement of truth telling and testimony to actual expressions of repentance and forgiveness. Second, in both conflicts, many of the individuals whose stories of forgiveness or public testimony have had the most powerful and long-lasting global impact (as measured by inclusion in books and articles, for example), explicitly expressed their religious identities and strong Christian faith during those moving events or encounters.

Clearly, it would be inaccurate to claim that, today, the populations of Northern Ireland and South Africa compassionately and lovingly coexist, living in perfect equality, harmony, and peace. As discussed above, we cannot quantitatively measure the impact that religious leaders and believers have had on establishing and maintaining that balance. However, we can, from our case studies, conclude that, when used appropriately and as part of a larger reconciliation initiative, religion can certainly support and give strength to individuals struggling to repent their indiscretions, forgive their oppressors, and break cycles of violence in their communities.

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