



13 forgiveness

forgiveness and politics

haddon willmer



introducing the series

This paper is the thirteenth in a series of 15 papers to be produced over a two year period as part of the *Embodying Forgiveness* project run by the Centre for Contemporary Christianity in Ireland (CCCI). Drawing on a broad range of contributors, from a broad range of backgrounds, the papers aim to explore the meaning of forgiveness in the Bible and in different Christian traditions, and to ask about the implications of the practice of forgiveness for our society. It is worth saying at the outset that we have not insisted on a particular definition or understanding of forgiveness among those who will be contributing to the series. Rather, our hope is that through this series of papers we will come to a fuller and more authentic understanding of forgiveness and its implications for church and society.

politics, forgiving and forgivable

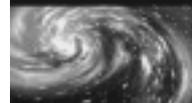
Politics and forgiving! Forgiving in politics! Politics as forgiveness! Are not such ideas laughable, evidence of ignorant amateurism? Some resign themselves to sad realism: regretfully, they accept that forgiving and politics do not mix. Yet, despite its plausibility, this conclusion is wrong. The human task, the calling to live well, requires being *at once* honest and hopeful about human being. Truth without hope is like rocks falling on us, hope without truth is like building on sand. But being simultaneously truthful and hopeful about humanity makes forgiveness possible. The duty of politics is to serve human well-being realistically. There has to be truth and hope so as to practise, foster and value the forgiving that sustains humanity. Whenever we say 'politics' we are talking of human beings, individuals and groups, and not about something that happens over their heads. Human beings are inescapably political, passively and actively. So to speak of the relation of forgiving and politics is to be concerned with what human beings *as political creatures* do, suffer and think.

Any argument for the mixing of forgiveness and politics faces two sorts of objection, one coming from religious, and the other from more political sources.

the religious objection

First, many who cultivate a positive valuation of forgiveness do not expect to find it in politics. They rarely draw images, examples and specifications of forgiveness from politics, but look for it in interpersonal relations, in families and liturgy. Though forgiving is everyday *human* practice, it is too often treated as a religious, and even a peculiarly Christian, perspective.¹ Some conclude that since forgiving is religious, it is to be kept out of politics, which is healthy in proportion to its secularity. Others may search for forgiveness in politics, looking for processes patterned on the forms of confession, absolution and reconciliation developed over centuries in the churches. Those who, like Desmond Tutu, interpret truth and reconciliation in South Africa as involving forgiveness tend to model it on examples derived from church tradition and culture.² But day-to-day politics does not fit easily into ecclesiastical patterns. Does that mean forgiving is absent? A serious quest for forgiveness in politics needs to be open to discovering forgiveness in unexpected forms and appearances. Christian faith does not so much prescribe what forms forgiveness must take, as inspire us with a forgiving spirit enabling us to venture new, surprising ways of forgiveness appropriate to the reality of the situations we are faced with.

From churchly points of view, politics is often seen as a rough and ready business, incapable of achieving more than a loose approximation to the revelation of God, if indeed it rises above being a deceptive parody. What is achieved in politics is not the reality of the Kingdom of God. If forgiveness belongs to God, as His trade, some conclude that it cannot be truly realised *in and through* politics. Look-alikes are not the real thing. Even when forgiving and politics are not parceled out between the Two Kingdoms, their meeting is inhibited – they do not quite embrace each other (Psalms 85:10). Bonhoeffer, for example, in a magnificent section of his *Ethics*, concluded that after conflict between nations no more than a 'shadow' of God's forgiveness could be achieved, a mere "healing of the wound, a cicatrisation of guilt."³ For him, the forgiveness of sins was instantaneous and completely realised by the Word of God, whereas, in politics, achievement takes time and even then is partial. That is plain in his text. Is it equally plain that, if it is by God's grace that the shadow of forgiveness is realised in politics, the shadow is a real gift of God, to be valued, and not an empty appearance?



In another way, the mixing of forgiveness and politics may be religiously inhibited. Commonly, God is seen as forgiving, while human beings and their activities are seen as forgiven (or as denied forgiveness). Politics, being human, is thus treated as an *object* of forgiving. Politics is put into a passive stance when the question of forgiveness is raised. Religious feeling and thinking often contemplates the human in this way – God, the creator, who is distinct from His creation, has His people or the whole world in His hands.⁴ The world depends ultimately on how God sees it and what He wills for it. But treating politics as the recipient of forgiveness is not the easiest of entry points for anyone who is more politically minded. Politics, in the view of the most engaged people, is responsible, purposeful *action*. Politics is world encompassing human activity, shaping humanity through social means. It is intrinsic to politics to ask: What must we *do*? Politics is a complex work by which we decide again and again who ‘we’ are, as we deal with questions of who we want to be, and who we have some chance to be. It is the activity in which communities carry on discussion about the situation they are in and what action should be taken. So if mixing forgiveness with politics is to be promoted, it would be helpful to think of politics as an active agency of forgiving. Politics has to include, but is not centred around, passive questions, like, what is happening to us? Are we in our politics forgiven, released from our guilt and enabled for life? The question whether we should forgive, and, if so, how, is a properly political question because it is about action.

Taking active human forgiving as the key to relating forgiveness and politics is not alien to biblical Christian faith. Authority to forgive *on earth* is committed to the *Son of Man* (Mark 2:6-10). Human beings are directed to pray to be forgiven, *as they forgive* (Matthew 6:12, 18:23-35). Forgiving is God’s action *in and through* human beings, who are called to be God’s partners and representatives. Forgiveness is not simply a divine gift to helpless, purely receptive human beings. Human beings *both* receive and give forgiveness – the real forgiveness of God. They receive it by and in giving it, passing it on and sharing it communally. To give forgiveness actively is not merely a *condition* for receiving it, but is to be seen, explored and experimented as the *substance* of receiving it. If it is seen as a condition of forgiveness, forgiving becomes a qualification for being forgiven. At its crudest, it pays the price and buys the ticket for admission to forgiveness. Where forgiving is no more than the condition of being forgiven, the oneness of forgiving and being forgiven may be hidden, because there need be no likeness between a payment (cash) and what it buys (sweets). When, however, active forgiving is seen as the substance of being forgiven, the two become one, expressing and creating community. We forgive, as those forgiven by God. Our being forgivers *is* the gift and service that God’s forgiving opens to us: what it means to be forgiven is to become and to be a forgiver. So God and human being are found together as one in actively forgiving. Both live in the same Spirit, reaching out in a community-building generosity, which is not brought to a halt when confronted by wrong done by others. It rather has the capacity to include the wrongdoer, to maintain the momentum of community making (a better term here perhaps than reconciliation) by putting up with the wrong, rather than being put off by it.

Being forgiven is, in a fully Christian view, not a mere setting free *from* the guilt and punishment of sin. It is not a letting off. It is a liberation *for* – something better. Freedom from sin is realised in the freedom *for* and in God, a real calling and capacity to serve God in partnership. Freedom for God is actualised not only in spiritual experience, in religious and inward blessings but also, and primarily, it is historically incarnate, in fellowship with Jesus who did God’s will on earth, in forgiving sin, building community by accepting tax collectors and sinners, not into some religious circle,

but at tables in ordinary houses. It is thus that Jesus and the Gospel give us a vision of forgiveness that can mix with politics. In this way politics becomes theologically accessible, instead of being theologically out of bounds.

the objection from politics

It can, then, be argued that we are called by the Christian Gospel to engage in politics with an intelligent will to forgive. But if theology and religion can be persuaded to accept the invitation to the dance, politics may go on refusing. Knowing their own business better than dreaming believers, political professionals resist sentimental direction and modestly restrict themselves to the art of the possible. Forgiving politics, they often say, belongs to the impossible. Forgivers in politics are merely crucified.

The forgiver will not easily give up on politics or be intimidated by Machiavelli. How then is the conversation between politics and forgiving to be carried forward? One way is to explore the relation between politics and war.

politics is so much like war

War, wrote Clausewitz, “is nothing but the continuation of politics with the admixture of other means.” His careful statement preserves the vital distinction between war and politics. At the same time, he reminds us that politics can be continued by war, so it is not surprising that war is often regarded as an ordinary instrument of politics and even of its essence.

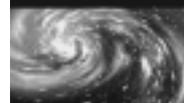
Politics may be war by proxy – it both uses war and tries to conceal its own responsibility for it. Politics is deeply compromised with misjudgement and destructiveness – which is why many think it is unforgivable. Politics is not impeccable; it might indeed be morally worse than war, inasmuch as it is dishonest, pretending friendship, while using hidden, non-lethal daggers: at least war lets us live in the clear truth that we have enemies.

Politics is easily confused with war because it is involved inescapably with quests for, and the exercise of, power, through competition, ambition, anxiety, exclusion and dominance. It is always handling dangerous material and even when it wants power without violent division and battle, it is seduced in that direction. Politics mobilises the passions that are the impulses of war, and exploits tactics and analysis similar to those used in war. It aims to disempower opponents, though with political annihilation rather than physical killing. Party conflicts take rhetoric – and sometimes more – from war. War is a powerful metaphor and mover of politics.

war squeezes forgiving

One reason for supposing that forgiving and politics do not mix is that war tends to squeeze forgiving out of the analysis, spirit and practice of human relationships. War depends on having an enemy, that is, one whom we cannot afford to forgive. The enemy will take advantage of any generosity, such as forgiveness. He will not forgive in return. War subverts forgiving as a political method, because war punishes weakness and vulnerability. War is not a game; it is rather the kind of conflict one cannot afford to lose: “in war there is no second prize for the runner up” (Omar Bradley).

An active enemy, who intends, or is doing, ill, cannot be ignored, but has to be stopped. An enemy must be denied any free room, the space and time to be and do what he will. When this cannot be done otherwise, it is



done by battle, and by killing, with or without the personalised intention of murderous hate. Where life is cut off, there is no forgiving, which opens up the chance of life, and is realised in a new, better future. Squeezing forgiveness is the natural law and dynamic of war, which systematically blocks forgiving and makes it seem foolish and dangerous.

War is obviously and crudely characterised by the preparation and training for large-scale intentional killing, and for the destruction of organised communities, their territory, structures and cultures. These are the outward procedures by which the enemy will be deprived of freedom, dignity and hope. Engaging in war, and trusting it to solve problems, engrosses people in inhuman necessities, not allowing them to choose their own space and way of life. It acts on fear and suspicion, because it cannot trust the other to use any space and freedom without threatening neighbours. War justifies itself by recounting and escalating grievance: the wrong the other has done means they cannot be trusted with space or with power over the future. They are refused as negotiating partners – they will be allowed to live, if at all, only on conditions set by those who have conquered them. The enemy must not merely lose, but must pay the costs of the victors' triumph.

War in its actual execution excites people – killing can be a pleasure, destruction a delight, action glorified as heroic, death as saving sacrifice. These pleasures are not confined to a pathological minority. They are accessible to many decent people, who are morally sensitive in their loyalty to their own side. Moral sense does not always argue against war: it may teach us that it is right for the enemy to get back much more hurt than they have given. So war, once embarked on, may well intensify the enmity and undergird it with justice, which itself is honed by commitment to war.

War restricts forgiving. It often enlarges the number of people counted as enemies, and offers them no space or second chances. War tends to change the fellow human being who is an enemy into a monster, invented by propaganda out of fear, contempt and hate and so deserving of extermination.⁵

Forgiving does not completely or suddenly disappear in war, but it survives mainly in seriously distorted forms. In war, each side forgives itself easily for any wrong it does, covering up the atrocities its own people commit, while taking every scrap of evidence to argue the enemy's unforgivability. Thus forgiving proves its social value only by becoming grossly partisan and self-interested, powerful in holding to Us and opposing Them. In this context, true forgiveness, which reaches out towards the as-yet-unincluded, dies of shame and shamelessness.

War changes the standards by which forgivability is measured. Giving comfort to the enemy becomes unforgivable, whereas being cruelly effective against the enemy is not merely forgivable but a praiseworthy virtue. This affects the spirit and culture of a society: it further squeezes out the will to forgive, and obscures the truth that forgiveness is foundational for good life.

War carries people away into the darkness where forgiving cannot be thought or risked. It requires them to do evil, to make enemies, to provoke resentment and hate, to the point where other people refuse to forgive them. And in response, the fighters can put hope only in living and dying by the sword, since without the sword they are defenceless against vengeance. In despair, they espouse evil as their good. They neither forgive nor want to be forgiven: leaving all such softness behind, they abandon humanity. So the perpetrator of evil becomes brazen, adding evil

to evil, in the hope both to defeat all the accusers and so escape into the enjoyment of unmolested guilt, or, by dying in battle in unyielding loyalty to the chosen evil, to become a monstrous hero. War locks people into histories, by which they gain historical characters, reputations, and logics, so that they see no possibility that they could ever be different. And where we cannot imagine a different life, there is no forgiveness.

War shapes people and societies so that when they think about their future, they do not count being forgiven as one of the choices open to them. They are weakened and impoverished in their relationships. They are diminished because they cannot rely on others to be friendly and helpful. Happy people, blessed with the truly good things of life, are those who open themselves to neighbours and strangers expecting to find and be received by understanding friendliness. War by contrast gives us a misery worse than loneliness, for there we find ourselves set around by enemies.

What people suffer in war, as collateral damage, or as murder under cover of war, makes forgiving hard. Individuals and families in all conditions suffer cruelties and losses that are hard to forgive, so that many count them as unforgivable. In war, these losses may be shared by whole societies, at least in sympathy and fear; those who suffer are taken up in public and political concern, so that their losses become the nation's business. And war, especially with its modern technological enhancements, makes whole societies and territories its victims. Dreadful things are done, sometimes in angry hate, sometimes with the cold determination of reformers: people are frightened, tortured and killed, children are orphaned, cultures and spirits are bedevilled, land is poisoned, economies misdirected and mortgaged, the ambiguity of inventiveness and ambition, morality and words are exploited without regard for truth, love and justice.

but politics is not war

War is politically plausible, even a pressing temptation: it seems to offer quick solutions to difficult problems within the reach of ordinary human power. At the least, it relieves the frustration and impotence required by the 'wait and see' of politics. It makes itself persuasive because very occasionally it achieves desirable change; it swaps one problem for a more promising one. War seems attractive as the *ultima ratio*, as though it is what we may finally trust and appeal to as the decisive arbiter. But war overall is waste, misery and corruption of spirit. That it systematically squeezes forgiveness out of action and spirit is one sign of its evil.

There is, then, good reason to seek another way. But such is the world that there is no practical way that is totally free from war and the potentiality of war. A practical alternative, like politics, has to cope with being embroiled in war while continually essaying significance difference.

A first step in another way is to distinguish between war and politics. Politics does not indiscriminately include war as one of its normal, acceptable components. Karl Barth was right: "war should not on any account be recognised as a normal, fixed and in some sense necessary part of what on the Christian view constitutes the just state, or the political order demanded by God."⁶ War is not inevitable, even though it may be very common. Politics (whether in a state or not) needs to make, and constantly reaffirm, this fundamental decision about its own nature and calling. The more plausible war may be as a continuation of politics, the more determined and resourceful politics must be in realising itself without letting war be intrinsic to it. Politics is a vast range of activities, practices and movements by which human beings shape human society, making decisions about values, order and action. It serves to form communities,



achieving social identity, and sets out options and makes choices in an unceasing flow of action. Politics is a self-discovering, self-inventing process: to make decisions in action about the nature of politics is of the nature of politics.

And one key point where repeatedly political communities have to decide what they intend and wish for is in the definition they give to politics and war and the difference between them. Although there is no marked and fixed boundary between politics and war, the difference between them is always to be discerned and realised through political work. While on one side war seems plausible, on the other it turns out on inspection to be miserable and degrading. We are not bound inevitably so to 'continue politics by other means,' that politics disappears in war: we can, on the contrary, work politically to enhance the difference between war and politics.

War has a totalising tendency. In the fear and ambition of war, the urgency and the panic, and the hardheaded will to win rather than to risk losing, war takes over all life, making it serve its necessities. So politics finds itself curtailed, if not quite suppressed, by war. War and those who are committed to making war cannot be trusted to discern the value of the difference between war and other ways and areas of human being, and it is not equipped to make the difference. It is true that soldiers often know the difference and care about it. They are taught by experience not to love war, and disciplined by politics to respect alternatives to it. Some soldiers know war too well to want to move in the direction of total war. Thus, the soldier may in practice choose politics in the face of war, marking, if not always making, the difference between them. The soldier may despise and distrust politicians, not because the soldier undervalues politics, but because politicians sometimes undermine politics by recklessness in loosing the hounds of war. But all good people with a sense for human well-being, including soldiers and politicians, need to choose, build up and cultivate modes of life different from war. The difference has to be continually envisaged and made by those who have some freedom from the totalising pressure and seduction of war.

how is politics is different from war?

By contrast with war, politics has forgiving as a key ingredient. Politics happens when forgiving is not squeezed out. Let us explore this further.

politics building community out of awkward stones

Politics makes community, or at least co-existence, possible between people who are not naturally inclined to live harmoniously together. There are many different causes of friction; people cut across each other, interests conflict, heritage and language build high walls, ambitions and self-presentation alienate others.

All these characteristics could make for exclusion by war,⁷ whereas in politics, they may be brought together into enriching diversity. The zero-sum games of war are transmuted into win-win arrangements. But this is not a painless process; it requires grace, tact, generosity, and patience – in short, the forgiving of hurts, disappointment and antagonisms. Nor is it automatic; it requires people, individually and collectively, to imagine and develop policies, institutions, processes and relationships to achieve them. Sometimes, it is not difficult to choose politics rather than war, since the benefits are so obvious to everyone, like picking ripe fruit off a loaded tree. At other times, it is slow hard work, like ploughing and sowing and waiting for a precarious harvest. It requires people again and again to choose to work with others, despite their incompetences and

malevolence. In short it requires forgiving in political forms.

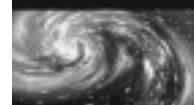
Because it is not smooth, the way of politics is dogged by wrongs, some of which may be really serious, and many of which can be exaggerated if it serves some interest or is seized on by ill minds. Unless there is ever timely, good enough forgiving, these wrongs escalate into being counted unforgivable – the occasions of war.

politics forgiving power

Politics necessarily involves giving people power over others. Or, more realistically perhaps, it involves questioning, calling to account, curbing, correcting, modifying, even sharing and reordering the power which some already have over others. Who is to be trusted with power? Power corrupts. We can expect power to be abused. Power tempts people to go to war, to hold on to it, to gain it, to increase it. We may dream of living together freely, in love, without power – but experiments in power-free community frequently collapse, because the power element is hidden and denied, rather than acknowledged and ordered. It runs out of control, until it produces an explosion that destroys the community. No society of any size can be run without power of some kind, and that means unequal power, exercised by some over others. Politics is concerned with the ordering of power, bringing people together in ways that ensure there is sufficient power to serve human needs (the State exists for people, not people for the State). So power must be allowed to some people. How can it be protected from progressive corruption? Politics practises simultaneous honesty and hope about power, dealing both with its abuse and use. Thus power is given in politics, but only with checks and balances, with regulation and guidance and accountability. Whereas in war, the aim is to *seize* and hold power, against the resistance of the enemy, and without even consulting him, in politics, the power-holder acknowledges that the power is *given* and must be exercised with respect and responsibility to the givers. The warrior gains power and defines its boundaries for himself. In politics, the source and definition of power is not in the hands of the politician. Even if politics is little more than a fig leaf covering naked power-play, it still serves as a critical witness against unbridled power, pointing to another way. Politics cannot abolish power: it must not glorify or trust power; it can seek to make it forgivable.

politics makes space for second thoughts, second chances, second parties

Politics restrains the action of power. Into relations even of hostility and distrust, it builds the time for second thoughts, whereas war hustles, exploiting haste and surprise. Politics cannot guarantee that time will be used, but it makes it. And politics puts pressure on people to use it to find solutions to conflicts by negotiation, which will give some satisfaction to all parties. Such solutions mean working on each other, not to destroy, but to persuade towards cooperation. Time gives people a chance to learn what the issues are, what the other parties are about, and to invent accommodations, new visions. The work of politics is not merely to achieve one's own ends (that makes for war) but to help others to achieve enough of theirs that they will be able to tolerate the presence and partial successes of others; it is a process in which everyone becomes forgivable by everyone else involved, rather than being unforgivable. Politics is a work with many different methods and techniques, whose overall effect is to achieve sustainable relationships which are acceptable, not because they are perfectly just, or totally desired by any one party, but because they are forgivable. Politics consists in the giving of time. Politics may not have high moral ambitions, to realise any human perfection, but it can serve the God who lets His sun shine on good and evil alike (Matthew 5:43-48).



politics against war

War has political reasons; it serves political purposes. I have argued that war squeezes out forgiving and so undermines politics. It is impossible to eliminate war, actual, potential, exploitable war from politics. Politics always plays host to its enemy, and frequently is robbed in its own house. But politics, being forgiving, looks towards new beginnings, second chances for politics and life beyond war. As war squeezes out forgiving, politics comes back forgivingly.

This relation between war, politics and forgiving is evident in attempts to control war politically, as in theories of the Just War. Despite their name, these theories do not assure combatants that their engagement in war is just. They are useful because they help to guide those who make war to do so in ways that will be forgivable. The forgivable is never in itself just – but nor can it be condemned as hopeless.

The effect of satisfying Just War criteria is not to be able to wage pure war with an easy conscience, but to inhibit the escalation towards pure or total war by giving respect to politics even in time of war and looking to the resumption of politics after war. War is to be undertaken only as a last resort – implying that politics as distinguished from war must be persisted in for as long as possible, with all inventiveness, and readiness for compromise and charity. It must be initiated only under proper authority, which implies some sort of politics, not the autonomous say-so of those who have force at their command. Proper authority is always open to political debate, so this requirement cannot point to some sovereign unquestioned power. It means that war cannot be authorised justly without open discussion. A war may be seen to be questionable throughout its history and afterwards, because the authority that declared it was not shown to be final through adequate discussion. The justice of a war is not certified merely by its being properly declared; it may well be continually debated in historical reappraisals. The function of historical discussion is less to arrive at a settled decision about its justice, than to gain wisdom to cope better with the ambiguities of authority, which, however real and serviceable it may be, is always questionable.

Another criterion of the Just War is non-combatant immunity. This must be respected, because non-combatants represent the humanity (society, life and being) that transcends war. War can only be just if it serves their well-being; they do not exist to serve war or to be treated cheaply because the alleged necessities of war have to be satisfied. As transcending war, non-combatants embody a second chance on which war depends, if it is not to descend into the unforgivable depths of unforgiving destructiveness. War needs to respect what embodies and represents its forgivability.

Other criteria remind us that the methods of war must be proportionate, not causing more evil than they prevent or stop. War must be directed towards achieving a viable outcome, in which old and new provocations to war are reduced rather than intensified. Thus war is subjected to the calling to politics. A war in which hate, fear and mere force blot out all forgiving of the enemy is held open towards a future forgiving of real political creativity, in which the erstwhile enemy becomes a partner in making a workable shared future.

Just War theory permits no one to be assured that his war is just, but it does something to make a war forgivable, because it invites people to keep politics and forgiving in view as real options and callings, even in the midst of war. War is destructive misery even in a just cause. The practical issue which people in and after war have to deal with is how a war with all its consequences may be forgiven and how those who have made war

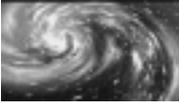
can make a new and better community together.

from just war to ordinary politics

This reading of the Just War helps us understand and practise apparently peaceful politics, where no one is threatening or using lethal weapons. Peaceful politics often works by polarisations and refusing compromises. It is not the open, unconditional acceptance of everyone; it is not the festivity of an inclusive community. Politics often approximates to war by other means. It squeezes forgiveness. The distinction between war and politics is real and significant but it is not a simple contrast of opposites, where one has nothing in common with the other. The distinction is achieved by the injecting of forgiveness. Energy and invention needs to be put into bringing forgiveness into human relationships where it is often absent, squeezed out and always difficult and costly. Where forgiving is embodied and grows in social practice, there will be movement towards politics and away from war. When we are at the war end of the spectrum, Just War criteria call us not to forget the possibility of forgiving and to be open to its practice. When we are nearer to the politics end of the line, we need to know and understand what enables us to live there. And when we find that we are somewhere in the middle, and our politics seems to be war, then especially we need to keep working towards forgiveness. We need to sustain politics even when it is unsatisfactory, conducive to war, tempting us to go to war – in order to work with the reality of the situation rather than take refuge in illusion. Even poor politics is better than war, because it gives more space and encouragement to forgiving. But since poor politics is so close to war, we can only hold to the right course in it, as we shoulder the burden of it with a determination to interpret and work on situations with a forgiveness which aims at increasing the practice, transparency and credibility of forgiving in social life and government.

forgiving does not give in

Politics as forgiving is in constant struggle with the unforgiving, the unforgiven and unforgivable, all of which threaten to obliterate forgiving, as war destroys politics. Forgiving seems doomed to defeat, but it does not give in. It has leverage from pragmatic human considerations: life is better than death, redeeming people is better than destroying them, those who take the sword will perish by the sword, judging unforgivingly deprives us of the justifying liberation we need, living in glasshouses, don't throw stones. It has inexhaustible resource in the grace of God, which goes the determinative step farther than sin (Romans 5:20). God actualised forgiveness in flesh and blood, in the life, sacrifice and rising of Jesus Christ, and so it is not enough for human beings to believe it in their private hearts or to celebrate it in song or churchly sacraments. It is to be realised in our bodily earthly lives, which are economic, social and political.



notes

¹Donald W. Shriver, *An Ethic for Enemies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), chapter 2.

²Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 1999).

³Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (Fontana, 1964), p.117.

⁴N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (SPCK, 1996), pp.268-273.

⁵Shriver, *op.cit.*, pp.127ff.

⁶Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics III.4* (T & T Clark, 1961), p.456.

⁷Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996).



recommended reading

L. Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1995).

websites

www.forgiving.org
 www.forgivenessday.org
 www.forgivenessweb.org
 www.forgiveness-institute.org
 website.lineone.net/~andrewhdknock/index.html

forgiveness papers already available

Forgiveness and Psychology
 Forgiveness in the Old Testament
 Forgiveness in the New Testament
 Forgiveness in the Protestant Tradition
 Forgiveness in the Catholic Tradition
 Forgiveness in the Anabaptist Tradition
 Forgiveness in the Orthodox Tradition
 Forgiveness, Truth and Memory
 Forgiveness, Guilt and Repentance
 Forgiveness and the Individual
 Forgiveness and the Church

forthcoming forgiveness papers

Forgiveness, Reconciliation and Justice
 Forgiveness in Literature and Popular Culture
 Concluding Reflections

about the author

Haddon Willmer is emeritus Professor of Theology at the University of Leeds, and is a Senior Research Tutor at the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies. In 1979, he published the first of an unfinished series of articles on politics and forgiveness in *The Furrow*. He is married to Hilary, a Christian community activist and they have three children and four grandchildren.

receiving the forgiveness papers:

There is no subscription charge but if you are able to do so, you are invited to make a donation (suggested £20) to help meet the cost of publishing and distributing this series.

If you would like to receive the *Forgiveness Papers* please send your name, address, and email address if appropriate, together with any donation you wish to make (sterling cheque payable to ECONI) to:

Embodying Forgiveness
 Centre for Contemporary Christianity in Ireland
 Howard House, 1 Brunswick Street
 Belfast BT 2 7GE
 Email: centre@econic.org
 Website: www.econic.org/centre

acknowledgements

Paper design: Colin Maguire
 Printed by: Dataplus





CENTRE FOR
CONTEMPORARY
CHRISTIANITY
IN IRELAND
a ministry of ECONI

£1.00

edited by stephen graham

howard house, 1 brunswick street, belfast bt2 7ge

tel: 028 9032 5258 fax:028 9043 4156

e-mail: admin@econi.org www.econi.org

thinking biblicallybuilding peace