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## **Rethinking Catechesis of Forgiveness in the Context of Historical Injustices: African Covenantal Oath-Taking as Panacea to Collective Memory**

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### **Abstract**

When a human being is offended by another, they hurt and the urge to revenge is inevitable. Nonetheless, forgiveness is imperative both as a Christian virtue and also for the purpose of healing from the hurting. This can only be achieved when genuine repentance on the part of the oppressor and genuine forgiveness on the part of the victim take place. When these values are missed out in the process, collective memories of the bitterness are likely to be passed from one generation to another. When bitterness of the past is passed on to younger generations through collective memories, we witness intermittent violence like that which we always witness during the electioneering period in Kenya. Persisting sporadic violence ignited by collective memories, despite truces between warring communities, is evidence that no genuine forgiveness ever took place. How can we then achieve genuine repentance on the part of the oppressor and true forgiveness on the part of the victim? This article proposes rethinking the catechesis of forgiveness. It argues that if forgiveness is understood in the light of covenantal oath-taking, the African Christian will take it seriously and will avoid passing on the bitterness to the next generation. Theological hermeneutics are applied to the exegesis of biblical texts on forgiveness and inculturation hermeneutics are applied in linking the cross of Christ and the African oath-taking. The research is library based.

## Introduction

The world today groans in pain from historical injustices that range through economic exploitations, social injustices, political oppression, cultural alienation, sexual discrimination, corruption, negative ethnicity, and inter-religious conflicts and atrocities. These vices are likely to recur whenever there has not been genuine confession and repentance on the part of the offender. Whenever these evil acts are perpetuated, the victim hurts and finds it difficult to forgive the offender. Repentance is a Christian virtue that is enhanced through daily prayers. In Christian prayers, the worshippers petition God for forgiveness of their sins and they promise to forgive those who have offended them. When said atrocities are perpetuated by people who claim to be Christians, one definitely doubts the sincerity of the confession of the worshipper.

One may wonder how such atrocities could be perpetuated in the context of nations boasting of Christianity because Christianity calls for forgiveness and reconciliation and peaceful co-existence among neighbours. Unforgiveness by the victims of historical injustices that have not been properly addressed have vented out through negative ethnicity and political conflicts. This was the case with Rwanda's genocide (1994) and Kenya's post-election violence (2007/08) which were ventilations of precipitated anger from the colonial period. This also underlies the worldwide interreligious conflicts of the twenty-first century.

Reflecting on this occurrence in the two nations, Kenya and Rwanda, which boast of high Christian conversions, one would wonder how they would drift into such serious ethnic conflicts. This article observes that, despite the efforts made by governments and non-governmental organisations to mitigate conflicts between communities that find themselves at war with each other because of historical injustices perceived to have been perpetuated by those they perceive to be their oppressors, these conflicts have always reared their ugly head especially during national elections. This is evidence that no genuine confession and repentance and genuine forgiveness ever took place.

The Church has attempted to reconcile warring communities, especially in Kenya's Rift Valley, through prayers and organising come-togethers of young

people for sports and youth camps, hoping that through such activities there would be cohesion, but intermittent violence has occurred during subsequent national elections. This means that any repentance, confession, and forgiveness that took place were superficial.

This article proposes that if repentance, confession, and forgiveness are understood in the light of African covenantal oath-taking, the African Christian will take the process seriously and will avoid passing on bitterness to the next generation. Using theological and inculturation hermeneutics, this article now proposes the rethinking of our catechesis of forgiveness from objective to subjective to covenantal oath-taking as a new hermeneutics of how we should approach forgiveness.

## **Collective Memories of Historical Injustices**

Many armed conflicts we experience in Africa today, although they may appear to have immediate causes, have true causes deeply rooted in what we call collective memories of historical injustices. This bitterness is passed on from one generation to another through collective memories. The bitterness of historical injustices is aggravated when election processes are flawed.

This has created hatred among communities, especially those that feel oppressed or disenfranchised by the dominant communities. Consequently, this kind of hatred that has been caused by political oppressors has been categorized among the ‘unforgivable sins’ by the victims of oppression. (Moenga 2020:9)

This is so because an election is supposed to be a platform that offers an opportunity to the citizenry to express their wish. Unfortunately, when electoral processes are flawed, the aggrieved group feels hurt and may react with violence. Such has been witnessed in Kenya’s national elections in 2007, 2013, 2017, and 2022. The losing sides incited their followers to take to the streets with chaotic demonstrations to force the government to resign. Victims of the rigged elections and of violence afterwards find it difficult to forgive those who hurt them. This bitterness is passed from one generation to the next through collective memories. Examples of expressions of bitterness

precipitated by historical injustices in Kenya and Rwanda are the post-election violence (PEV) in 2007/08 and genocide in 1994 respectively.

We shall draw lessons of non-forgiveness and collective memories from local and global scenarios like those of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, South African xenophobia and the religious crusades of the Middle Ages. Moenga (2020) notes that, before the establishment of colonialism in Africa, African communities lived in harmony and this harmonious relationship came to an end with the coming of colonial rule, which divided the communities into tribes. The 1994 Rwandan genocide is a case in point. The case of genocide in Rwanda is embedded in its history. Ilibagiza (2014), gives an overview of the events that led to the 1994 Rwandan genocide. According to this account, the German and Belgian colonialists applied a divide-and-conquer strategy between 1884 and 1917 between the Rwandan Hutus (the majority agrarians) and the minority Tutsi (livestock keepers). The two colonial governments recognised the Tutsi's elitism and appointed them to rule over the majority Hutu; thus the latter became the symbol of colonial rule. When the majority Hutus won the first elections in 1961, they perceived the Tutsi as collaborators with their colonisers; they embarked on a scheme to exterminate them and intermittent violence between the two communities became a feature of post-independence Rwanda. This brewed animosity between the two communities leading to the 1994 genocide.

South Africa is another nation that never healed from historical injustices despite forming a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) for the purpose of promoting national unity and reconciliation. The commission was tasked to establish the truth of events during apartheid, and depending on the magnitude of one's crimes they would offer amnesty, reparation, and rehabilitation to the victims. Signs of non-forgiveness and false reconciliation include the infamous xenophobia witnessed repeatedly in South Africa today. According to the Human Rights Watch (Masiko-Mpaka 2023), contrary to the expectation of many people that, after the TRC's efforts to reconcile the victims of apartheid and their oppressors, people would forgive each other, there have been increased incidences of xenophobia in South Africa since 1994.

Besides political factors, many world conflicts have been caused by religious pride. For example, during the Middle Ages Christians, basing their belief in election, regarded Muslims who lived in Jerusalem as a threat to the existence of their own religion Christianity. Such an attitude skewed the Church's hermeneutics, leading to dubious teachings that Arabs and by extension Muslims were an accursed nation. To counter the invasion of the holy city, the eastern emperor Alexius Comnenus appealed to Pope Urban II (1095) for military support to drive the Muslims out of the holy city (Clouse 1977:276).

Governments and religious organisations have made efforts towards the elimination of historical injustices and their effects, through forming commissions to lead the processes of reparation. Despite these efforts, intermittent conflicts based on historical injustices are still evident. This leads us to evaluate the approaches that have been used by governments and religious groups towards achieving peace in Africa.

## **An Evaluation of the impact of the attempted Solutions**

There have been efforts by various governments all over the world to achieve world peace through truces between warring factions. Similar effort has been made in religious circles; Christians and Muslims have initiated mechanisms that would bring them into dialogue for the purpose of finding a lasting solution to what divides them. Let us begin with non-religious circles. For the case of Kenya's post-election violence (2007/08), the government set a Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC) whose mandate was to investigate the historical injustices from 1963 to 2008. The TJRC model anticipated sincere confessions by perpetrators, punishments for the offenders, and compensation for victims as advised by Desmond Tutu. According to Tutu (Tutu and Tutu 2014:7), forgiveness requires an ongoing conversation of honesty and sincerity. This model was criticised on the grounds that confession and justice would open wounds and wouldn't bring about national integration and cohesion. The Church on her part proposed forgiveness without confession by perpetrators of the crimes.

Besides the TJRC, the government also created the National Cohesion and Integration Commission. Its mandate was to foster national unity, equity, and the elimination of all forms of ethnic discrimination. Despite the existence of

this commission, pre-election and post-election violence has persisted. This is evidence that genuine confession and forgiveness never took place.

Despite non-governmental organisations, the Church and the international community intervening to reconcile the historical animosity between communities in Kenya's Rift Valley, sporadic violence especially between communities living in the region has continued. Gabrielle Lynch (2011), analysing the political situation in the Rift Valley and western Kenya on the eve of the 2013 national elections, noted that, although things seemed relatively calm, the calm was 'negative peace' because it was based on Ruto and Uhuru's similar fate at the ICC. She noted that there was no substantive change in local relations and things could therefore change quite rapidly if Ruto and Uhuru were to fall out at some point. She goes on to note the dissatisfaction by the locals with the way the resettling process of internally displaced persons (IDPs) was conducted by the Kibaki government. According to the respondents from the non-Kikuyu communities, the Kibaki government favoured his Kikuyu community in the process of resettling the internally displaced victims of the 2007/08 post-election violence. She concludes that dissatisfaction could lead to further anti-Kikuyu narratives similar to those that motivated the 2007/8 post election violence.

Lynch (2011) further observes that, in the events running up to the 2017 general elections, there was a rise of anti-Luo feeling among Kikuyu and Kalenjin. Feeling in areas such as the Nairobi slums could lead to the possibility of anti-Luo violence in Nairobi, Nakuru, and Eldoret towns. She further notes there could also arise election-related violence in areas outside the Rift Valley such as Bungoma County in western Kenya where there is a history of election-related violence between the Sabaot (a sub-group of the larger Kalenjin) and the Bukusu. One of the politicians from the Sabaot community intimated to her of the possibility of violence if the county government seats in Bungoma County were not shared to the Sabaot community.

For inter-religious conflicts between Muslims and Christians, initiatives have been made through dialogue and diapraxis as an effort towards enhancing a Christian-Muslim relationship. Diapraxis is a living process which does not include evangelisation of the other group. As observed by von Sicard,

Diapraxis demands that Christians and Muslims live and work with one another toward reconciling conflicts and helping local communities act on their own choices in self-development towards a more just and participatory society. It is a living process, a way of coexisting and championing pro-existence. It involves people in communities working out ways to deal with violence, hooliganism, military or other despotism and economic depression. It takes place as people tackle corruption, educational and moral standards, etc., together. (von Sicard 2003:131)

Despite these efforts, each group has always treated goodwill activities from the other group with suspicion as acts of conversion, and sporadic conflicts have continued. It is for this reason that this article is seeking to find alternative, suitable methods to be applied in an attempt to resolve continued conflicts.

Whereas the situation in Kenya after the post-election violence remains volatile, the Rwandan case is rather different. As for the case of Rwanda after the genocide, the Rwandan government established the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC) to address the issues that had led the country into the genocide with the aim of healing the country and achieving national cohesion and reconciliation. General surveys indicate that the Hutu and the Tutsi offered a platform for genuine repentance and forgiveness.

Since the time of the Christian-Muslim crusades in the Middle Ages, a mention of crusade to Muslims invokes bitter memories that have been passed from one generation to the other. For Muslims, Christian crusades are a continuation of the Western Middle Ages aggression towards the Islamic religion. Despite efforts to reconcile Muslims and Christians, collective memories have played a significant role in the instigation of Christian-Muslim antagonism. Gada surveys the impact the medieval Christian-Muslim crusades had on Christian-Muslim relations and states:

The festering sore they left refused to heal, and scars on the face of the lands and on the souls of their inhabitants and [*sic*] still in evidence. As late as the twentieth century the anticrusading

ghost was invoked in connection with the mandate imposed on Syria and Iraq and the Anglo-French attack on Egypt in 1956. (2017:2)

Since all efforts proposed by religious organisations and governments have not born much fruit, this article proposes a rethinking of the catechesis of forgiveness in which the cross of Jesus Christ becomes the centre of convergence between warring human communities and God in the God/man. With the application of African covenantal oath-taking, genuine repentance, and forgiveness will be achieved.

## **Rethinking the Catechesis of Forgiveness as a New Paradigm**

### ***Justification for Rethinking the Catechesis of Forgiveness***

We have observed that efforts by governments, religious organisations, and non-governmental organisations to achieve world peace have not achieved their mandates and objectives as they were possibly anticipated. It is for this reason this paper proposes rethinking the way we have taught forgiveness, reconciliation, and peace-making in our churches. Genuine forgiveness and reconciliation are imperative for peaceful coexistence in our ailing continent. This is only possible when our catechesis of forgiveness is rethought. For genuine forgiveness and reconciliation to be achieved, Pope Benedict XVI argues, 'education in the faith is indispensable' (2011:Article 32). There has to be an authentic conversion based on whatever is taught and learnt; there must be a living connection between memorised catechism and lived catechesis that should lead towards a profound and permanent conversion of life. The lives of the converted Christians should be those permeated with the spirit of the Gospel. Thus, the Christians' understanding of the Gospel should shape their understanding of the world.

Our justification of this methodology is based on the fact that Christianity is spreading very fast in the global south and Africa in particular. According to Kenya's 2019 census, 85% of Kenya's population is largely Christian. This leads to our hypothesis that if Christian values, and more so forgiveness, are taught well, Christians who are the majority in this continent will influence genuine reconciliation and hence achieve lasting peace. Since the population of Kenya is majority Christian, we can conclude that its political class is majority



Christian and therefore, as exhorted by the Pope, according to the 'Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith', the political class has an essential duty to implement and administrate a just order and to 'be a major instrument at the service of reconciliation, justice and peace' (Benedict XVI 2011:Article 81). People in leadership positions should know that their position comes with responsibility and that leadership positions have been entrusted to them by the citizens and, therefore, they should be held responsible for their actions.

It is important to call for a renewed reflection on how rights presuppose duties, if they are not to become mere licenses.  
(Benedict XVI 2011:Article 82)

This understanding can only be achieved if proper catechesis of the Christian faith is done. Proper catechesis as an approach is also based on the ground that it is a Christian duty to forgive as taught in the Lord's Prayer. The Christian faith in the Beatitudes also teaches peace-making as a virtue. Thus the gospel is supposed to be informative, transformative, and formative. Therefore, proper catechesis has the potential to transform people's attitudes leading to genuine confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Based on this new understanding of the role of the Church in the process of transformation, we note that the Church is obligated to promote within her ranks and within society a culture that respects the rule of law. This then leads us to ask what is to be taught for us to achieve true forgiveness, peace, and reconciliation.

### ***From Objective to Subjective Forgiveness***

We have stated in our hypothesis that genuine forgiveness is imperative in the process of healing and achieving genuine reconciliation. Despite the Church teaching the Christian virtues of forgiveness, peace-making, and reconciliation, nations and communities that subscribe to this particular faith still experience hostilities emanating from historical injustices. This then calls for a new understanding of forgiveness. This is only achievable if the catechesis of forgiveness is given a new approach.

C. B. Peter observes that the reason why, despite Christians petitioning God in the Lord's Prayer to forgive them as they forgive those who sin against them, genuine forgiveness never takes place is because the Christians have understood it from an objective point instead of the subjective one implied

therein. He says, as we ask our Father in heaven to forgive us, we also ought to forgive one another. He further observes that ‘the whole concept of forgiveness is one that has been greatly distorted among many Christians’ (2011:51). He notes that ‘it has been plucked out of its subjective soil and conventionally re-planted in an objective seedbed’ (2011:51). What he means by subjective is

that if I have committed a fault, then I must realize it and beg for forgiveness, and if the other person has committed a fault, then I must forgive him or her without expecting or extracting any apology from that person. (Peter 2011:51-52)

So, according to Peter, this ideal approach to forgiveness has been distorted into an objective approach. And by objective approach he means that,

when it is my fault, I do not care to apologize but expect the other person, the grieved one, to forgive me as if it is my Christian birthright, and his or her Christian duty. But when the other person has wronged against me then I expect him or her to apologize to me in all Christian humility and in a nice Christian manner. This is the objective distortion of the subjective phenomenon of forgiveness. (2011:52)

Jesus at the cross is the best example of subjective forgiveness and, therefore, an example for us to emulate. Although he was hurt, he did not seek revenge nor did he require of his tormentors repentance. He simply forgave them and prayed to his father to forgive them for they did not know what they were doing. In the same manner, we are to forgive our trespassers even before they come to their senses like the prodigal son and come back to ask for forgiveness.

Moving forgiveness from objective to subjective still cannot achieve the eradication of superficial repentance and superficial forgiveness. Is it not the same people who petition God daily for forgiveness who turn against each other during elections? Does it matter to them whether the forgiveness was objective or subjective? What is imperative here is genuine repentance and genuine forgiveness. This then demands that we further search for a step that makes the repentance and the forgiveness more authentic. It is at this point

we propose rethinking forgiveness in the light of African covenantal oath-taking.

### ***Forgiveness in the Light of African Covenantal Oath-Taking***

Since the colonial and missionary invasion of Africa, world ideologies and religious diversities have greatly influenced African worldviews. This is because African culture has always been dynamic. However, despite this influence and Africa's cultural dynamism, Africans have not completely abandoned their traditional beliefs and practices. For example, African covenants and oaths are still administered in ceremonies such as marriage dowry negotiation agreements.

Besides the traditional covenants and oaths, in modern African Christian society many religious covenants are practiced. For example, baptism and the sacraments are forms of covenant between God and Christian believers. During baptism, the initiate vows to shed their old ways and follow Jesus Christ, and remain faithful and obedient to Christian teachings. This covenant is enacted through the ceremony of baptism. The church congregation and the priest serve as witnesses between the two parties, i.e. God and the new believer. In many church traditions, this covenant of baptism is followed by the administration of the sacrament of Holy Communion. If we can take the sacrament of Holy Communion as a sacrifice that seals the covenant entered in baptism, then we can see Christ's work at the cross as the sacrificial lamb that seals Christian covenants and that can also seal African traditional covenants. Other common covenants in the Church include ordination services. Outside the Church, we have various covenants and oaths such as loyalty to state oaths of allegiance, trade agreement treaties, peace treaties, land buying agreements, and employment contracts. This demonstrates the fact that covenants and oaths are not strange phenomena in modern Africa.

As already stated, despite conversion to Christianity and influence by Western ideologies and worldviews, African Christians' faith expression is tinged by their African realities. For example, an African Christian would fear taking a traditional oath if they were not sure of what they were about to say but willingly take a Western oath even when they were sure whatever they were about to testify was false. Therefore, this article is arguing that if forgiveness is taken as an oath taken by the warring parties, the African Christian on their

part will not at will go against that which they have sworn to do in an oath for fear of its consequences. According to Obioha,

An oath in African Traditional conception is defined as a solemn promise made by an individual or group of persons having a deity as a witness to the terms of the agreement within the African society. It can also be seen and regarded as an affirmation of an intended action or deed, binding on an individual with an obligation to be fulfilled. (Obioha and Etifiok 2023:58)

Many African traditional oaths were accompanied by animal sacrifices to seal the promises made in the oath. Curses for those who would dare go against the covenant and the oath taken were also invoked. In African traditional culture, curses were used as a form of deterrent and punishment. In the event of a conflict, formal curses would be used to punish the offender. Curses would only be uttered by persons of higher status against persons of lower status. They were also only effective if indeed an offence had been committed by the victim the curse is uttered to. However, such curses could be reversed by the one who invoked it if the victim repented and asked for forgiveness. The reverse could be achieved through a ritual or outright revocation by the one who uttered it (Mbiti 1969:211).

African people believed that the effects of the curse were experienced within this present life. John S. Mbiti notes that

The majority of African peoples believe that God punishes in this life [...] For that reason, misfortunes may be interpreted as indicating that the sufferer has broken some moral or ritual conduct against God, the spirits, the elders or other members of his society. (1969:210)

[The African] belief behind the oath is that God or some power higher than the individual man, will punish the person who breaks the requirements of the oath or covenant. Like curses, oaths are feared and many are administered ritually and at great expense. (Mbiti 1969:212)

Based on the fact that African Christians have this fear underlying and influencing their Christian behaviour, we are proposing that if forgiveness is taught in the light of African covenant- and oath-taking, it will provide a basis for the Christian to enter the oath of forgiveness with sincerity. Understanding forgiveness as an oath is better taught in the light of the work of Christ at the cross. At the cross, the God/man unites humankind with God to enter into a covenant of forgiveness. The warring human parties are essentially at war with God, through their sins. God who is offended invites the offender to enter into a forgiving and reconciliation covenant at the cross in which Christ's death is the sacrificial ritual that seals the covenant agreement.

Christ hanging on the cross is God hanging on the cross with arms spread inviting us all to participate in his forgiving act. The victimisers' acts of oppression and the victims' harboured bitterness and transmission of collective memories of the bitterness of historical injustices are imputed on Christ while his forgiving righteousness is imputed on the two parties. This imputed forgiving righteousness removes the superficial repentance and superficial forgiveness between the conflicting parties. The covenant takes place in the God/man as the arena in which the two parties meet (Mueller 1984:6). Christ the sacrificial lamb takes the sin of collective memory that has embittered the victims of historical injustices to the cross where he battles with it and defeats it. The captives of bitter memories are set free in the action of Jesus Christ at the cross.

The process of forgiveness at the cross is tripartite in nature. At the cross, the oppressor beholds God/man's action of love to both themselves and their victims of oppression. With this realisation that Christ the God/man is inviting them for a tripartite covenant of forgiveness, they are moved with this love to seek for forgiveness from their victims of oppression. On the part of the victim of oppression, when they behold Christ the God/man hanging on the cross for the sins committed against them by their oppressors, they realise the unmerited love and forgiveness the oppressor is receiving and they are moved to forgive their oppressors too without demanding apology from them. Christ hanging on the cross cries out to the Father, 'Forgive them for they do not know what they are doing' (Luke 23:34). This appeal to the Father is for forgiveness of both the oppressor and the oppressed, for the oppressor for

oppressing and for the victim for harbouring bitter memories and unforgiving attitude.

## **Forgiveness as an Imperative for Eschatological Hope**

The urgency of forgiveness is based on the fact that it is a Christian duty to initiate the processes of forgiveness, peace-making, and reconciling relationships. Jesus in the Beatitudes exhorts his followers to be peace-makers for they shall be called children of God. He also teaches them to forgive those who sin against them as many times as they can within a day. Pope Benedict XVI in his reflection on peace-making and reconciliation teaches that,

If all of us [Muslims and Christians] believe in God's desire to promote reconciliation, justice and peace, we must work together to banish every form of discrimination, intolerance and religious fundamentalism. (2011:Article 94)

The fact that God, in Jesus Christ, was reconciling the world back to himself makes it incumbent upon us to reconcile ourselves to one another. The Pope notes that, in Jesus Christ's ministry, especially in his death and resurrection, God was reconciling the world to himself, discounting the sins of humanity (see 2 Cor. 5:19, Rom. 5:10, Col. 1:21-22). He goes further to state that God the Father reconciled the Jews and Gentiles to himself, creating one new man through the cross (see Eph. 2:15 and 3:6). According to the Pope, therefore,

the experience of reconciliation establishes communion on two levels: communion between God and humanity; and –since the experience of reconciliation also makes us (as a reconciled humanity) 'ambassadors of reconciliation' – communion among men (Benedict XVI 2011:Article 20)

Therefore, if we are looking for lasting peace in the world, only authentic reconciliation can achieve this for us (Benedict XVI 2011:Article 21). Thus reconciliation has to have a vertical as well as a horizontal dimension: vertically we are reconciled to God and horizontally to fellow humankind. This perspective is illustrated in the parable of the 'Prodigal Son' (Luke 15:11-32).

At his return (conversion) he needed to be reconciled both to his father and to his brother.

Another basis for the imperativeness of forgiveness is the fact that at eschaton all creation shall be reconciled in God. This is best explained by Jürgen Moltmann in his theology of the end. Moltmann (1979 and 1999) locates his eschatology in the eternal trinity in which he argues all creation shall enter. He takes a cue from Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 15:28 in which Paul teaches that at the end God will be all in all. He also takes another cue from John's Gospel where Jesus in his prayer to the Father prays for the unity of humanity that they may be one as they (Father and Son) are one (John 17). Therefore, if the ultimate hope of all human beings is towards a universal reconciliation and hope in eternity, that God may be all in all, this should be a driving force for all humankind regardless of their religious differences and ideologies to forgive and seek peace and reconciliation one to another in this world before entering the ultimate perichoresis with the Trinity, for the kingdom of God begins here with us as it anticipates its eventual consummation at the eschaton. C. B. Peter observes similarly that

The Kingdom of God is not a heavenly destination to be reached beyond death. It is a blessing and a challenge and a challenge to be received here and now. It is manifested in the liberating miracles of Jesus: the blind see; the deaf hear; the dumb speak; the captives are set free. That which blinds the eyes of the conscience, that which blocks the hearing of God's silent voice amidst the social, political, and economic turmoil, that which binds the tongue to speak against injustices – that is broken in the Kingdom of God, and we are truly liberated. (2011:30)

He goes further to argue that

the Kingdom of God is not merely a Kingdom of philanthropy or charity. It is rather a kingdom of thorough overhauling of social, political, and cultural systems. It is a Kingdom where all love each other, and all love God. It includes the material world and it includes the here and now, but it does not exhaust itself either in all its spiritual and material, individual and societal

dimensions. Only in such a comprehensive totality does the great petition make its fullest impact: 'Thy kingdom come'. (2011:30)

Christ's invitation in his spread arms on the cross is both vertical and horizontal. The vertical aspect is the fact that God has condescended to meet the human beings in the God/man. He is now pulling to himself all human beings, reconciling them to the Father and to one another. In Jesus' saving act on the cross, both the estranged enemies of God and enemies of one another and friends meet. The invitation is imperative. In Matthew 28, Christ commissions his disciples to go all over the world to make disciples for him. This commission is urgent.

## **Pastoral Implication**

Lest it be misconstrued that such forgiveness and reconciliation lets the perpetrators of conflict go scot-free, the Pope teaches that

this reconciliation has to be accompanied by a courageous and honest act; the pursuit of those responsible for these conflicts, those who commissioned crimes and who were involved in trafficking of all kinds, and the determination of their responsibility. (Benedict XVI 2011:Article 21)

This is necessary because 'victims have a right to truth and justice' (Benedict XVI 2011:Article 21).

How should we understand this formula of forgiveness that includes justice? This can be understood in the light of the Pope's hermeneutics of Christ's encounter with Zacchaeus. Whereas human justice demanded that Zacchaeus be punished, 'God himself shows us what true justice is' (Benedict XVI 2011:Article 25). He observes that

They did not know the justice of love which gives itself to the utmost, to taking upon itself the 'curse' laid upon men, that they may receive in exchange the 'blessings' which is God's gift (cf. Gal. 3:13-14). (Benedict XVI 2011:Article 25)



This is divine justice that unconditionally forgives the perpetrator. Christ's beatitudes are a good example of this divine justice as they provide a new horizon of justice. The Pope notes that 'God's justice, revealed to us in the Beatitudes, raises the lowly and humbles those who exalt themselves' (Benedict XVI 2011:Article 26).

True reconciliation and authentic peace is that which comes from above (John 14:27). Such peace

is not the fruit of negotiations and diplomatic agreements based on particular interests. It is the peace of a humanity reconciled with itself in God, a peace of which the Church is the sacrament. (Benedict XVI 2011:Article 30)

Through sincere confession and repentance like that of Zacchaeus, followed by justice executed through forgiveness, genuine reconciliation and peace is attained.

## **Conclusion**

In the context of the perpetration of historical injustices, the victims are tempted to pass on collective memories to the next generation. This is a clear sign that genuine forgiveness and reconciliation never took place. This paper has argued that, for genuine forgiveness and reconciliation to take place, the catechesis for forgiveness ought to be rethought, to progress from objective to subjective to covenantal oath-taking as a new hermeneutics of how we should approach forgiveness.

In the subjective approach the victim takes the initiative to forgive the offender whether there were apology and genuine repentance or not. However, we noted that despite this approach in the past, the offender is not given the opportunity to participate in the process of forgiveness. Therefore, in our new hermeneutics we are proposing a further step in which both the victim and the perpetrator participate in the process. In the African covenantal oath-taking, the cross of Jesus Christ is central. Forgiveness is based on the ontological divine (the person of Jesus Christ), who by inbreaking into the human existence, he takes up human sins committed through collective memories,

imputes them on himself and nails them on the cross. The victim of historical injustices, by beholding Christ on the cross, realises his/her own sin of passing on the bitterness to the next generation while the perpetrators of those injustices also recognise their sins of victimisation of the victims. The cross becomes the turning point for both the victimiser and the victim, when they both realise their sins and are thus compelled to move from objective to subjective then to covenantal oath-taking. We have argued that since Africans take oaths seriously, they will make the covenant of forgiveness a serious thing. It is at this stage that true confession and repentance take place in a covenantal oath-taking context with God as both the witness and participant.

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