

DISCUSSION PAPER II

Forgiveness: Is It Possible to Forgive and Can Forgiveness be Taught?

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*...Forgiveness is a very subjective thing, depending on culture and the individual person.
So it is very personal for the victims...*

I. Introduction

My interest in forgiveness does not stem from having an experience which appeals to my capability to forgive, but from where I came from, Cambodia. My country went through decades of war and suffered from the most horrible crime in human history, the crime of genocide, from 1975 to 1979. With so many people as victims and a large portion of the population as perpetrators, forgiveness is clearly a major concern of Cambodian society if Cambodia is to move on.

Forgiveness is an elusive topic. People usually talk about it with ambiguity. In one occasion forgiveness seems a straight forward process, easy to understand and predictable. Then people begin talking about forgiving monsters, such as the SS men of the Nazis, as highlighted by Simon Wiesenthal's *The Sunflower*¹, members of the Argentinean dictatorship, Khmer Rouge cadres, South African Apartheid officers, people taking part in the Rwandan genocide, murderers and offenders who were alleged or known to have committed crimes with clear intention and in a systematic manner. Some of the most prominent heroes of forgiveness include Archbishop Desmond Tutu who believes forgiveness is the basis of South African reconstruction, Pope John Paul II who forgave Mehmet Ali Agca, the man who tried to kill him, Jesus

¹ *The Sunflower* is book by a holocaust survivor, Simon Wiesenthal, who was requested by a dying SS man named Karl in the concentration camp. Wiesenthal quietly walked away from the deathbed of Karl, neither say yes or no to Karl's request. He was not sure if he made the right decision. In the book there is a symposium of 53 distinguished men and women from different backgrounds discussing on Wiesenthal's question "What would you do?" Ref.: S. Wiesenthal, *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness*, USA: Schocken Books Inc., 1997.

who preaches forgiveness in all situations, and many others. It is in this regard that forgiveness becomes difficult to understand and confusing.

In this paper, I place a great emphasis on answering the question "can forgiveness be taught?" If it is always possible to forgive, then forgiveness can be taught. First I consider the possibility of forgiveness through an observation of cases in which people are able to forgive and look into religious forgiveness. Second, I explore scientific perspectives on whether forgiveness can be taught. Finally, I examine how forgiveness has been taught and look at the potential and limitations of forgiveness education and counseling.

II. Can Forgiveness Be Taught?

Forgiveness in general is seen as tremendously beneficial to one's health, life and social interaction, even to the offenders. Forgiving people talk of being free, happy and whole again. Despite this, forgiveness is a newly emerging field in psychology starting from as early as the 1980s. From the early fifth century to 1970, Enright has found only about 110 writings on interpersonal forgiveness. He calculated that at most there was one writing on forgiveness every ten to fifteen years.²

1. Definition of Forgiveness

As forgiveness is a new field in academia, there has been no consensus on a formal definition of forgiveness. Definition is vital because it provides a framework which allow researchers to study further and examine the specifics of the topic.

The Oxford Encyclopedic Dictionary defines forgiveness as "the act of ceasing to feel angry or resentful towards [someone]." The Longman Dictionary of English Language similarly describes forgiveness as "the act of giving up feeling resentment over or the desire to avenge oneself for insults."

Michael Henderson defines forgiveness as "abandoning the right to get equal."³ Archbishop Desmond Tutu, most famous for his forgiveness conviction, defines it as "taking seriously the awfulness of what has happened when you are treated unfairly...opening the door for the other person to have a chance to begin again."⁴ McCullough and his colleagues propose that "forgiveness is intraindividual,

² R. D. Enright & J. North, eds., Exploring Forgiveness, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998, p. 4.

³ Michael Henderson made the remark in a presentation of his book at the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum in November 2004, M. Henderson, Forgiveness: Breaking the Chain of Hate, London: Grosvenor Books, 2002.

⁴ D. Tutu, "Without Forgiveness There Is No Future" in Exploring Forgiveness, eds. Enright & North, p. xiii.

prosocial change toward a perceived transgressor that is situated within a specific interpersonal context."⁵

The definitions in the dictionaries seem to focus on abandoning resentment and desire for revenge, while Henderson gives similar explanation by putting it in terms of rightful retaliation. Bishop Tutu focuses on accepting the hurt and offering compassion for the offender.

Enright and his colleagues describe forgiveness as "a willingness to abandon one's right to resentment, negative judgment, and indifferent behavior toward one who unjustly hurt us, while fostering the undeserved qualities of compassion, generosity, and even love toward him or her."⁶ This definition seems to cover all of the elements of forgiveness given by others. I uphold this definition in the subsequent discussion of forgiveness.

2. Is It Always Possible to Forgive?

The possibility of forgiveness relates to the question if a person can be taught to forgive in a positive manner. The wider the possibility the more likely that a person can forgive, and if it is always possible to forgive, it follows that everyone can be taught to forgive, disregarding the nature and level of offense and the degree of hurt.

It is important to clarify the claim that "only victim can forgive" before proceeding to the case studies.

2.1. Only Victim Can Forgive?

Many contributors to *The Sunflower*⁷, which sets a platform for a discussion on forgiving the Nazis, believe that only Karl's victims can forgive him, not even Wiesenthal. In other words, only the victim who physically and mentally suffers from the hurt, can forgive the offender, meaning that forgiveness cannot be done by proxy. In the case of murder, according to this claim, one can assert that, there is no forgiveness.

However, it is important to note that a murder not only kills the victim, but it also affects the happiness of the victim's loved ones. Close relatives of the victim can talk about forgiveness on their behalf, with the perpetrator. As a victim is an individual, a member of his/her family, and a member of a community, there should be three levels of forgiveness—forgiveness done by the victim, the victim's loved ones and the victim's community. This also applies to the cases when the victim is

⁵ M. C. McCullough, Pargament K. I. & Thoresen C. E., "The Psychology of Forgiveness: History, Conceptual Issues, and Overview" in Forgiveness, edited by M.C. McCullough, K. I. Pargament & C. E. Thoresen, NY: The Guilford Press, 2000, p. 9.

⁶ R. D. Enright, S. Freedman & J. Rique, "The Psychology of Interpersonal Forgiveness" in Exploring Forgiveness, edited by Enright & North, pp. 46-47.

⁷ Wiesenthal, The Sunflower.

not dead. Yet, there is no assurance that the victim who is dead would not forgive. In the case of a victim who is too young, such as a baby or a child, or insane, the whole burden of forgiveness falls on the survivors. After all, forgiveness is for the living.

2.2. Stories of Forgiveness

Forgiving the Oppressor

Nelson Mandela, the first black president of South Africa, was incarcerated for twenty-seven years. In 1962 he was sentenced to life imprisonment in maximum security prison on Robben Island for attempting to overthrow the oppressive white-minority government. His family was harassed. When he was released he invited his jailers to participate in his inauguration as president of South Africa.⁸

The Dalai Lama, the religious and political leader of Tibet, collectively and personally forgives the Chinese for invading his country and bringing death to one-fifth of his country's population. He believes "people should forgive the person or persons who have committed atrocities against oneself and mankind."⁹ When oppressed, what he fears most is the loss of compassion.

Forgiving the Kidnapper and Murderer

Marietta Jaeger forgave the man who kidnapped and killed her seven-year-old daughter Susie, although initially had the desire to kill the man with her bare hands and bore hatred toward him. She believed that God is God of mercy and Susie's kidnapper is the son of God who has dignity and worth. She was convinced that the best option for her to be happy, whole and healthy again is to learn to forgive and that retaining a vindictive attitude would make her become another victim of the kidnapper. She talked to the kidnapper by asking him what she could do to help him get through.¹⁰

Marian Partington's younger sister, Lucy, was abducted, raped, tortured and murdered, then dismembered. Marian struggled hard on her road to forgiveness. Conducting a project on restorative justice in a Bristol prison, she found that most perpetrators have been victims of abuse in their childhood. She forgave the murderer. For her, forgiveness was not an act of betrayal toward Lucy, but honoring her.¹¹ (The F Word)

⁸ World Book Encyclopedia, 2004, Mandela, N.

⁹ Wiesel, The Sunflower, p. 129.

¹⁰ M. Jaeger, "The Power and Reality of Forgiveness: Forgiving the Murderer of One's Child" in Exploring Forgiveness, edited by Enright & North, p. 14.

¹¹ From The F Word: Image of Forgiveness. This document is an exhibition of The Forgiveness Project launched in 2004. Also available at www.forgivenessproject.org.

Forgiving Attempted Murder

Billy Burns, a policeman, was shot in the face by a bank robber. Billy survived the life-threatening injury, but never fully recovered from it. The robber, Stephen Korsa-Acquah, was later arrested and sentenced to life imprisonment. Seven years later, Stephen sent a letter to Billy describing the crime and finally said he was sorry. Billy fully forgave Stephen emphasizing the sincerity of Stephen's remorse and they are now friends.¹²

Forgiving the Bomber

Joe Berry's father Anthony Berry was killed in the IRA Brighton Bombing in 1984. Wanting to know why, she went to Ireland and listened to stories of people who had been caught up in the violence. She came to believe that "no matter which side of the conflict you are on, had we all lived each others' lives, we could all have done what the other did." She met Pat Magee, the man who planned the bomb, when they shared each other side of the story. Over the next few years they got to know each other. She partly forgives Pat and Pat then started to forgive himself.¹³

In 1990, Father Michael Lapsley's hands were blown off, eardrums shattered and one eye become blind by a letter bomb sent to him by members of the South African Government. He bore no hatred or a desire for revenge. He said he has made the journey from victim to survivor and to victor. Although he mentioned that all people could be perpetrators or victims or both, he believes in restorative justice and reparation. He forgives the perpetrators but ask them to look after those they crippled, not as a condition of forgiveness, but a part of reparation and restitution.¹⁴

In the case studies above, different victims forgave different perpetrators for offenses ranging from political oppression, execution, kidnapping, rape and murder. I draw two conclusions. First, the fact that there are people who can forgive for almost any offenses explains that forgiveness is always possible. Although only the slain victim of a murder can forgive for himself, we do not know whether the victim would or wouldn't forgive if the he/she were alive.

Second, it is individual aspects, religion and culture that play important roles in the forgiveness capability of a person. A seemingly small transgression considered by one person could be a cause of deep resentment for another, that he would find hard to forgive. Temoshok and Chandra claim that "the interpersonal and the

¹² Joe McCarthy, To Hell and Back, a documentary film on the possibility of forgiveness (Lanchester Library catalogue number VHS08188). McCarthy is a former Beirut hostage who is unable to forgive himself for going to Lebanon in the first place and the kidnappers for detaining him for five years. His mother died of uncertainty about his fate. Out of the four victims presented in the film, two were able to forgive.

¹³ From The F Word.

¹⁴ Ibid.

intrapsychic dynamics of forgiveness vary according to one's culture as well as one's life situation such as age, gender, socioeconomic status, health status, marital and family status, etc."¹⁵

Furthermore, some victims like Marietta Jaeger, Father Michael Lapsley, Marian Partington and Joe Berry stress the contributory causes leading the offenders to commit their crimes. In other words they agree that the wrongdoer is subject to outside forces beyond his control, but he makes the final decision whether to commit or not to commit the crime. Harry Wu, a victim of the infamous cultural revolution of China who was imprisoned for 19 years for political disobedience, after drawing from his own experience in China, wrote that Karl, in *The Sunflower*, was a part of a horrible and vicious society but he was responsible for his own action.¹⁶ The Khmer Rouge¹⁷ employed children of about 12 to under 20 as soldiers, executioners and prison guards to serve their regime. The youngsters, poor, uneducated, brought up in a culture of violence and afraid of severe punishment, even execution, did their best to serve the communist revolution. It was unfortunate for them to be in those positions, but still it was also their decisions.¹⁸ In this regard, for Father Michael Lapsley, the wrongdoer should look after him for crippling him as a form of restoration and reparation to the victim. As we blame the social structure for causing misery to many people, we should also blame it for making a person become vicious through propaganda and political indoctrination, like what happened in Germany during the Nazi rule, China during the cultural revolution and Cambodia during the Khmer Rouge regime.

2.3. Forgiveness in Religions

There is little doubt that in Christianity forgiveness is always possible. The most important phrase is Jesus's words from the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."¹⁹ This phrase signifies the limitless capability of God to forgive. As a serviceman to the Church under four popes and a board member of US Institute for Peace, Theodore Hesburgh mentioned:

¹⁵ L. R. Temoshok & P. S. Chandra, "The Meaning of Forgiveness in Specific Situational and Cultural Context: Persons Living with HIV/AIDS in India" in *Forgiveness: Theory, Research and Practice*, edited by McCullough, Pargament & Thoresen, p. 41.

¹⁶ Wiesenthal, *The Sunflower*, p. 274.

¹⁷ The Khmer Rouge was an extremist, communist group which took control of Cambodia in 1975 after a five-year civil war sparked by the Vietnam War. Under their barbarous rule, approximately two million people died of execution, forced labors, starvation and disease.

¹⁸ Meng-Try Ear, *Victims and Perpetrators?*, Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2001.

¹⁹ Luke: 23:34, the New Testament & Psalms (New International Version)

"...the sin [Nazi's atrocity]...is monumental. It is still finite and God's mercy is infinite. If asked to forgive for anything, I would forgive because God would forgive. If I had suffered as so many had,...I would still be forgiving...as a surrogate for our almighty and all-forgiving God."²⁰

Cardinal Konig, former archbishop of Vienna, warmly explains, "The question of whether there is a limit to forgiveness has been emphatically answered by Christ in the negative."²¹

In Judaism, Elliot Dorff, a Judaic expert, similarly mentions, "...God Himself is forgiving, and so we, in imitation of God, must be so as well," and quotes the Rabbi's words to the Torah that "...just as God is merciful, you too must be merciful; ...just as God is compassionate, you too must be compassionate."²²

In religions with similar origin such as the Abrahamic religions, which include Judaism, Christianity and Islam, followers are expected to imitate God who is all-forgiving.²³ In many of the case studies, those who can forgive the offenders are devoted religious people.

In Buddhism, there is no direct instruction by the holy book, the tripitakak, for people to forgive. In this religion, rather than imitate God, people are advised to be compassionate and to do good deeds toward others, including not holding grudge. A well-known Buddhist advice is "vindictiveness is ended by not being vindictive." The law of *Karma*, which is believed in both Buddhism and Hinduism, is the one which judges if a person should receive bad results of his sin in this or next life. *Karma* is considered as having the eyes of God which see everything. It takes into consideration all factors which involve in a particular offense. Therefore, there is no need for people to ruin their lives with hatred, bitterness, resentment and all other feelings of injustice; they place all the matters on *Karma*. Matthieu Richard, a monk and an interpreter for the Dalai Lama, concluded, "For a Buddhist, forgiveness is always possible and one should always forgive."²⁴

²⁰ Wiesenthal, The Sunflower, p. 169.

²¹ Ibid., p. 182.

²² M. S. Rye, K. I. Pargament., M. A. Ali, G. L. Beck, E. N. Dorff, C. Hallisey, V. Narayana. & J. G. Williams, "Religious Perspectives on Forgiveness" in Forgiveness: Theory, Research and Practice, edited by McCullough, Pargament & Thoresen, p. 23

²³ Ibid., p. 38

²⁴ Wiesenthal, The Sunflower, p. 235.

In conclusion, forgiveness is always possible (although there are situations in which forgiveness is not desirable, it is not impossible²⁵) because there are people who achieved forgiveness in a complete range of offenses; and is consistent with the words of God, "they know not what they do." Outside forces are a hidden factor leading the offender to commit an offense, although he makes the "final decision." These outside forces, although they can't justify an offense, make it difficult to hold a grudge. For the sake of justice, the offender has to be accountable for this decision. As it is always possible to forgive, forgiveness can be taught.

3. Psychological and Other Perspectives

Teaching to forgive or learning to forgive associates with individual endeavors to forgive, therapists' assistance to help one forgive or one being taught through religion or formal/informal education to forgive.

The definition given by Enright and his colleagues stresses on "the right to resentment, negative judgment, and indifferent behavior" of the victims. Marietta Jaeger mentioned about the "initial right to normal, valid, human response of rage."²⁶ The rights to negative feelings imply that those feelings are inherent but controllable. This means the victim needs to make a conscious effort to overcome the short-term anger and to forgive in the long term, that is to learn to forgive.

This interpretation is supported by Enright's observation that "...many people do not consciously consider forgiving when deeply hurt by another person." Joanna North, a philosopher, mentions that forgiveness is a "willed change of heart, the successful result of an active endeavor to replace bad thought with good, bitterness and anger with compassion and affection."²⁷ Therefore it is logical to assert that learning to forgive happened to everyone who forgave. Paul Coleman, a family psychotherapist, claims that "forgiveness is making a decision to offer love to someone who has betrayed that love" and " Forgiveness is a must in any family problem where there has been deep hurt, betrayal, or disloyalty. If there can be no

²⁵ See N. G. Wade & Worthington. E. L. 'Overcoming Interpersonal Offenses: Is Forgiveness the Only Way to Deal with Unforgiveness?' in Journal of Counseling and Development, Vol. 81, No. 3, 2003, pp. 343-353. "Situations in which forgiveness might trigger revictimization rather than healing... For example, some individuals have been hurt in such atrocious ways that attempting to feel positive emotions for the offender may be completely unrealistic, premature, and, in some cases, antitherapeutic." (pp. 348, 350)

²⁶ M. Jaeger, "The Power and Reality of Forgiveness: Forgiving the Murderer of One's Child" in Exploring Forgiveness, edited by Enright & North, p. 14.

²⁷ J. North, "The 'Ideal' of Forgiveness: A Philosopher's Exploration" in Exploring Forgiveness, edited by Enright & North, pp. 20-21.

reconciliation, forgiveness is the process that enables the forgiver to get on with his or her life unencumbered with the pain of betrayal."²⁸

III. How Forgiveness Has Been Taught?

It seems that one of the most effective ways to help people forgive is bringing victims and wrongdoers together. This method is being utilized by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, the Gacaca Court in Rwanda and the Institute for Healing of Memories. It also has been proved in the victim and offender mediation work of Barbara Tudor²⁹ who mentioned most of her cases ended up in forgiveness. Ms. Tudor has been working in the field for many years. She allows the victim to play a more active role in restorative justice such as giving information and expressing personal pains and needs. Both victim and offender are facilitated in face-to-face discussions and other guided processes over an extended period of time, in which they get to know each other's life situations. According to Ms. Tudor, interaction enables them to deal with the aftermath of the offence, put the past behind and begin talking about forgiveness and the better future.

Religion has played an important role in forgiveness. Almost all people who mentioned they could forgive the Nazis in *The Sunflower* are religious people, either Buddhist, Christian or Judaist. They do that by strictly believing and following God's advice that forgiveness is the only best thing to do and also taking pride in the process, raising their self-esteem.

On the other hand, science develops forgiveness models. Different researchers have different models based on their own findings. A perfect model, which should be effective in helping people to forgiveness in all cases, is yet to be developed and it is closely intertwined with the definition and understanding of forgiveness; if the definition is flawed, the model will be flawed.³⁰ The more accurate knowledge researchers have on forgiveness, the better model they can create. For example, Michelle Nelson proposed three types of forgiveness—detached, limited and full forgiveness. If forgiveness has types according to degrees as she suggested, it means that the therapist who wants their clients to achieve full forgiveness put a very high goal for them, while ignoring the progress they make.³¹

²⁸ P. W. Coleman, "The Process of Forgiveness in Marriage and the Family" in Exploring Forgiveness, edited by Enright & North, pp. 78-79.

²⁹ Barbara Tudor is the Victim/Offender Development Officer of the National Probation Service West Midlands. She provided a workshop on forgiveness and restorative approaches to justice to the Coventry's Center of Forgiveness and Reconciliation on 25th November 2004.

³⁰ Enright, Freedman & Rique, "The Psychology of Interpersonal Forgiveness," in Exploring Forgiveness, edited by Enright & North, p. 57.

³¹ Quoted in Beverly, F. "Forgivers and the Unforgivable" in Exploring Forgiveness, edited by Enright and North, p. 101.

Enright and his colleagues from the University of Wisconsin designed a four-phase model of forgiveness—uncovering, decision, work and outcome. In the uncovering phase, the victim recognizes his pain and goes through a series of psychological response to pain. In the second phase, he makes the decision to start the challenge of forgiveness after realizing that it is a healthy way. After making a commitment to forgive the victim starts working on reframing which results in better understanding toward the offender, but not condoning. In the final phase, the victim notices the benefits of forgiveness, thus gaining self-esteem, which gives him the boost to achieve full forgiveness. In short, in this model, the victim goes through a sequence of natural response, making decision and self-discovery. After using the model with a group of incest survivors over a one-year period, in which forgiveness education was first provided and an instructor was assigned to assist them, the team found the victims made "greater gain in forgiveness, self-esteem, and hope, and greater decreases in anxiety and depression," demonstrating the success of forgiveness education.³²

IV. Potential and Limitations of Forgiveness Education and Counseling

1. Potential

As agreed by researchers, successful forgiveness education will enable a victim to forgive and forgiveness in turn offers positive health outcomes to the victim (in some cases to both victim and offender). Forgiveness could be "as important to the treatment of emotional and mental disorders as the discovery of sulfa drugs and penicillin have been to the treatment of infectious diseases."³³ Forgiveness education in the educational system for the young could help them to cope with negative feelings resulting from crisis, to be prepared for peaceful resolution of conflict and to promote understanding and respect. Older people can also benefit from forgiveness education in the last years of their lives in terms of eliminating unsolved problems.³⁴

The Campaign for Forgiveness Research, a research organization supported by former president Jimmy Carter and co-chaired by Desmond Tutu, claims that forgiveness education has the benefits of reducing heart diseases, preventing crime at the source as vengeful responses are reduced, and healing troubled marriages. Moreover, forgiveness counseling has the potential to help adolescents who have experienced both physical or emotional abuse, Vietnam veterans to cope with disorders resulting from traumatic events in the war, patients of chronic diseases,

³² Enright, Freedman & Rique, "The Psychology of Interpersonal Forgiveness" in Exploring Forgiveness, edited by Enright & North, pp. 52-55

³³ P. W. Coleman, "The Process of Forgiveness in Marriage and the Family," in Exploring Forgiveness, edited by Enright & North, p. 71.

³⁴ Enright & North, Exploring Forgiveness, p. xiv.

victims of domestic violence, HIV/AIDS victims, suicide victims and disabled persons.³⁵

Forgiveness education has great potential not just for individuals, but for the whole society. In South Africa, forgiveness is not just a method for personal healing, it is "practical politics,"³⁶ upon which the country rebuilds itself from the devastation of the apartheid government. In Cambodia and other countries which suffered from genocide and protracted conflicts where retributive justice could be a compromise for peace, forgiveness offers a win-win solution for personal well-being, national reconciliation, peace and development. The Campaign for Forgiveness Research plans to conduct researches on the role of the social group in influencing behavior, particularly interpersonal forgiveness, in Northern Ireland; to analyze the transcripts of recorded testimonies in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa to further utilize forgiveness's role in rebuilding the country; to launch forgiveness counseling to families of Hutu and Tutsi groups in Rwanda which involved in the 1994 genocide so that life will be much better than.³⁷

Finally, forgiveness education has a world changing potential. It can break the chain of hatred between communities and countries and prevent conflicts. The world has always been at war, with the 20th century as the bloodiest and this happens without forgiveness ever been explored as a solution to stop war. Although there are several possibilities why forgiveness has been ignored by science such as: forgiveness is not only neglected in social science but throughout the academic world because the social sciences tend to consider forgiveness as a religious matter; and scientific psychology insisted on analysis of observable behaviors, forgiveness, which is hardly observable, is ignored³⁸; forgiveness research has gained momentum since the 1980s. Everett Worthington puts it, "increased racial tensions in communities and violent conflicts within and between nations argue for increased knowledge about how to repair the damage."³⁹ Forgiveness education can and will be used as a method to prevent conflict, promote mutual understanding and inhibit tolerance among rival groups.

2. Limitations

Drawing from twenty years of clinical experience as a psychiatrist, Richard Fitzgibbons said forgiveness has some limitations. One observation he made is that

³⁵ A Campaign for Forgiveness Research, <http://www.forgiving.org/Campaign/harness.asp> (2001)

³⁶ Wiesenthal, The Sunflower, p. 268.

³⁷ A Campaign for Forgiveness Research, <http://www.forgiving.org/Campaign/harness.asp> (2001)

³⁸ McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, eds., Forgiveness: Theory, Research and Practice, NY: The Guilford Press, 2000, p. 3.

³⁹ E. L. Worthington, ed., Dimensions of Forgiveness: Psychological Research & Theological Perspective, Pennsylvania: Templeton Foundation Press, 1998, back flap.

forgiveness does not resolve all emotional pain, excessive resentment, hostility and hatred. It helps to decrease the degree of sadness but not seem to heal the hopelessness or despairs resulting from deep hurt. Moreover, for persons whose anger is associated with weak characters such as narcissism, grandiosity, impatience, and having low moral values, forgiveness seems to be helpless in addressing their problems.⁴⁰ However, Fitzgibbons' pessimism cannot be judged as a limitation of forgiveness itself, because there has been no generally accepted definition of what forgiveness really is and therefore it might be that he conceptualizes forgiveness too narrowly.

There are some difficulties in forgiveness education, though there is no limitations to forgiveness education as forgiveness is always possible. The complexity of the forgiveness process and the lack of scientific understanding of forgiveness are barriers to forgiveness education and utilization for practical purposes. Forgiveness education and counseling could lead to false forgiveness and despair when improperly provided to victims. I notice some of the problems with some written works designed to help people forgive.

Many people find Smedes' convincing and optimistic book, *Forgive and Forget*⁴¹, aiming to guide those who are hurt by others and are locked by their own hatred to learn to forgive, very helpful. It describes issues and myths surrounding forgiveness. Smedes warmly and reassuringly clarifies different aspects of forgiveness and leads the readers to adopt a liberating forgiveness attitude at the end of the book. He divides forgiveness into four stages—hurt, hate, healing and coming together. Upon that he gives an account of how people forgive, how to forgive people who are hard to forgive and why one should forgive by using many case studies. The book however lacks scientific explanation on why forgiveness works in such a way. For some the book could be helpful, but others who can't forgive after consulting the book will not understand why they can't. It can also lead to "pseudo or false forgiveness" or "superficial forgiveness."⁴²

The popular *The Sunflower* is helpful in provoking the thinking on the issue of forgiveness. In the book, contributors discuss the confrontation between Wiesenthal and Karl from a many different angles. Some contributors' views are too extreme, others' are too complex, yet others offer premature forgiveness. Still these different views are of personal experiences rather generally accepted ones. The book is a good source of discussion but has no value in helping people to forgive. It is frustrating for those who expect to find some answers to their personal problems from it. The quick

⁴⁰ R. Fitzgibbons, "Anger and the Healing Power of Forgiveness: A Psychiatrist's View" in Exploring Forgiveness, edited by Enright & North, p. 67.

⁴¹ L. B. Smedes, Forgive and Forget: Healing the Hurts We Don't Deserve, New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 1996.

⁴² Enright, Freedman & Rique, "The Psychology of Interpersonal Forgiveness" in Exploring Forgiveness, edited by Enright & North, p. 49.

"yes" to forgiveness by some people could cause anger to the victim and bring to them double burdens, that is being hurt and having to forgive like others.⁴³ At the same time, the varying views are a source of confusion. If there is no forgiveness for murder, Wiesenthal's theme question, "what would you do?," is an invalid question and there should be no discussion, because Wiesenthal's encounter was not a dilemma.

IV. Conclusion

The goal of forgiveness studies is to help people learn how to forgive. In the Abrahamic religions and in Buddhism and Hinduism, forgiveness is always possible. The fact that there are people from different backgrounds and cultures who can forgive for seemingly every offense indicates that forgiveness is always possible. There are outside forces that cannot justify an offense, but make it hard for the victims to hold a grudge forever. If we blame violent social structure as a cause of war and poverty in favor of the victims, we should also blame it as contributing causes of crimes in favor of the offenders.

From this limitless possibility, we can safely assume that forgiveness can be taught. This claim is also supported by psychological views that forgiveness is a result of learning through education and counseling. However, there are special aspects of society, culture and of the victim which speed up and slow down the forgiveness process of the victim. If people can't find suitable conditions for forgiveness, they are likely to be unable to forgive.

Forgiveness education and counseling has great potential. It can heal individuals, families and nations. Forgiveness education has the potential to change the world by ways of breaking the chain of hatred. The complexity of the forgiveness process makes it difficult, but not impossible, to achieve full forgiveness. Until science has a greater understanding of forgiveness, only then can we say exactly how much forgiveness can and can't do for us.

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⁴³ P. W. Coleman, "The Process of Forgiveness in Marriage and the Family" in Exploring Forgiveness, edited by Enright & North, p. 83.

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