

RECONCILIATION WITHOUT VIOLENCE

Is it possible to solve conflicts without using violence, or is the use of violent retribution necessary to solve problems and restore peace after serious crimes and offences? Is some sort of revenge or retribution necessary in a reconciliation process as a matter of justice? In this article I will go some rounds with these extremely complex questions, and I will try to show that the same philosophical patterns and ethical dilemmas turn up in different professions. These are classical questions in the philosophy of law and in all the disciplines dealing with conflict resolution and mediation. They are more relevant than ever, in the tribunal in Cambodia dealing with the awful crimes against humanity committed by Red Kmehr, and in various nations, the Nordic countries included, who now rewrite their criminal codes and reform their judicial systems. In this article I will underline that the questions about violence and reconciliation are also deeply relevant for Christian theology: Is violent atonement a possible and sustainable concept in theology and Christology today?

I often include empirical work in my research in theology, criminology and ethics. In my books on *Ethics of punishment* and *Forgiveness*¹ I used the reflections from men convicted of homicide and women who had experienced rape and sexual abuse. The experiences and reflections of the offenders and the victims served as starting points for my theological and philosophical analyses. In my latest book on *Reconciliation*² I have several voices in the text: Sons who grew up with violent fathers, victims of offences from daily life and therapists with experience as mediators contribute to the reflections. I have asked them all to tell me their stories about conflict resolution and reconciliation. This way of researching and exploring can be called “empirical informed theology”. Interviews and fieldwork can in many cases enrich theological and ethical discourses. The procedure is inspired from Sociology and Social Anthropology, but also from philosophers like Ludwig Wittgenstein³. He recommended his students to explore how a phenomenon is spoken about in the languages of daily life as the first steps in a philosophical analysis. Similarly I find the experiences of victims and offenders highly relevant for theologians and philosophers who deal with the phenomenon of reconciliation.

Three violent patriarchs

The three sons⁴ I interviewed have survived extremely traumatic childhoods under the dominance of fathers who became violent patriarchs and oppressors in the families. They have showed me a part of Norwegian childhood history I hardly knew existed. They have important stories to tell about survival and acceptance, maybe also about reconciliation. Arne and Bjørn are now in their early forties, Mogens has passed fifty. They are truly survivors. Two of them lost their mothers early. The women died after serious physical violence and abuse. Bjørn killed his father when he was 16, and spent the next 5 years of his youth in prison. Arne and his sister had to take care of their little brother after the death of their mother. All three women tried to get away from their violent husbands. Mogens’ mother was the only one who succeeded. She managed to build a new life for herself and the children, in poverty, but without physical violence.

The three stories have some differences: Bjørn grew up in poverty on an isolated farm in the hills on the west coast far away from any neighbors. Mogens lived in the centre of the biggest city in Norway, and his family was also poor. Arne’s father was a charming and well respected man in a small town, and the family belonged to the middle class. The surroundings have been different for the three sons, but they tell very similar stories about what happened inside the families: The fathers beat the mothers often and seriously. They also used violence against the children. The physical violence was only one part of the brutal regime in the

families: Harassment, pestering, humiliating, neglecting were other parts of it. They grew up in constant fear of the next violent outburst. The neighbors and other family members knew a lot about what happened in the families. The police and the local public child care knew. But no one interfered. No one had the courage to intervene in the families to stop the violence and side with the victims. The women, the children and the violent men were let alone with their massive problems.

The fathers never said they were sorry for the harm they inflicted on their wives and children. They never admitted guilt and took no responsibility for the sufferings of the families. On the contrary: They justified the violence, either as “just dessert” and deserved punishment, or as understandable aggression because life was so difficult for the fathers. In the families these three men were dominating patriarchs with all rights and no visible sign of remorse and self-criticism. They became grotesque exemplars of the mankind R.W. Connell described as *hegemonic masculinity*⁵. And the two fathers who survived went on in the same direction for the rest of their lives, according to Arne and Mogens: They have never taken the blame for their violent behavior and oppression, and never showed any sense of guilt. The questions about forgiveness and reconciliation are therefore very difficult for the sons.

Nonviolent masculinities

According to deterministic theories about the influence of childhood for the life as a grown up, these three sons should have gotten terrible futures, turning the careers as victims into later careers as offenders. But one shall always be careful when using knowledge collected on a macro level in the lives of individuals. A life is always complex and mysterious. It is certainly true that families and societies with a high degree of violence and oppression recruit new offenders and oppressors, new losers. But it is not always true! Arne, Bjørn and Mogens are living examples of the opposite. They are nonviolent men and fathers today. They have all lived with the same woman for many years and have several children. They have never used violence in the family. They are well educated and have got safe jobs. How could it happen? I do not have the answers. This is not a psychological study of how to survive extreme childhoods. I have just listened to their stories, and these narratives also include fascinating reflections from men who had to deconstruct the images of fatherhood and manhood they grew up with, and struggle to construct other images of masculinity, other ways of being men. They had to dethrone the violent patriarch in their lives and find a different manhood, different masculine strategies.

It is difficult for a son to rebel against his *Imago Patri*. Arne and Bjørn tell me how difficult it was to resemble their fathers physically. They looked alike, and that was a threat. “To be a different man” became existential. Arne went away and served some years in the army, in a very tough and demanding unit. Afterwards he completed a long education in psychology and medical care. Bjørn met an older man with background from Foreign Legion in prison when he was 17 years old. This man had authority and respect among the prisoners. “He took over the care for me,” Bjørn tells. He came into the prison as a skinny youngster weighing hardly 60 kilos and left five years later as a heavy weight lifter at 120 kilos. He became extremely strong: “I had to be stronger than my father so that I shouldn’t fear him any longer.” Bjørn also served in the army for a period of time, and afterwards he completed higher academic education. Mogens studied sociology, criminology and philosophy. Today he is an established researcher in criminology and victimology.

Bjørn shot his father to death when he was 16 and got 5 years in prison. The sentence was disputed. People tell him that he wouldn’t have been sent to prison at all if the homicide had happened 20 years later. Bjørn disagrees. He finds the sentence fair and tells me that he doesn’t want a society which leaves homicides unpunished. He also says that the prison saved

him, in a way: It gave him a new start, a possibility to get an education and to become a sportsman, a different man than his father was.

Arne and Mogens have kept in contact with their fathers in all the years since their childhood, and they have taken care of them when they got helpless and ill in old days. Is this a sign of reconciliation? Maybe. But all the three sons tell me that reconciliation for them first of all means to leave the violent childhood behind and accept that it is no longer possible to change it. They tell me that the reconciliation process starts as a reflexive process: My possibilities to be reconciled with my own background and story, my own narrative of life. A full reconciliation with the offending fathers is not possible for these sons. Bjørn's father is dead. The two other fathers went on denying and justifying themselves right to the very end. It is extremely difficult to reconcile with an offender who in his own eyes has done nothing wrong. It is very hard, maybe impossible, to forgive an innocent person. But Bjørn says: "If God chose to forgive my father, I will have nothing against it."

If reconciliation means a full restoration of a broken relationship, these three sons are not reconciled with their fathers. I still mean that these men have taught me a lot about reconciliation. They have succeeded in dethroning the violent patriarchs from their own lives and showed themselves and their surroundings that it is possible to live others lives as men and fathers than what they grew up with. They have fought themselves free from an oppressing and dangerous *Imago Patri* and they have stood up against the strong forces which will push sons into *Imitatio Patri*. They have learned to live with their memories and narratives in ways where they no longer dominate and strangle the present time. Their reconciliation includes first of all themselves and their past. A full reconciliation with the fathers has been impossible.

Reframing

Bjørn became interested in his father's background some years ago. He recognized that he knew very little, and he contacted his aunt, a younger sister of the father. She could tell another story of a childhood in isolation, violence and abuse, another story of a violent patriarch: Bjørn's grandfather. They visited the cottage in the hills where this family lived fifty years ago, and Bjørn got some new images of his father: As a little boy, a frightened child. Therapists and mediators call this experience *reframing*⁶. It is an important step in dealing with conflicts: A change in focus, a possibility to see that the offender is not identical with the offence. He is something more than his violent deeds. This step is of great importance in conflict resolution, but is it reconciliation?

Bjørn raises the question of forgiveness in this way: "Who should I forgive? My father when he was a frightened child? My father when he bet my mother to death? And who should forgive him? Bjørn when he was seven years and saw his mother dead on the kitchen table? Bjørn when he is in his forties?"

The three sons have not forgiven their fathers. Nevertheless they have gone through a reconciliation process. If forgiveness implies to let go of resentment and anger, it is understandable that they haven't forgiven. They are still angry when they talk about the awful practice of their fathers. They still show resentment when they tell me that the fathers went on in their lives with no visible signs of remorse and admission of guilt. In my opinion, however, resentment and forgiveness are not phenomena which exclude each other mutually.

Resentment and moral anger

It should be possible to forgive the offender without letting go of the resentment against the offences. The moral anger is important in the healing process of victims of violence. This

anger says: “It was wrong, and it was not my fault! I didn’t deserve it!” I first learned about the importance of the moral anger from sexual abused women in my work on forgiveness⁷, and the sons of the violent fathers tell a similar story: Violence and abuse humiliate and belittle. Afterwards the victims fight to get back on their feet again, they struggle to stand upright and regain their dignity. The moral anger, the victims own anger and that of supporting and comforting others, is of great importance in this process. Therefore it is so wrong and dangerous to set up wrath and forgiveness as mutual excluding alternatives. “No one can forgive when she lies down,” wrote one of the abused women to me. “One has to get up on ones feet again!”

The American philosopher Jeffrey Murphy⁸ has in several books warned against a naïve teaching about forgiveness which put up forgiveness and resentment as alternatives. He defends what he calls “retributive emotions”, feelings and emotions which show that the victims resist what happened to them. His defense of these emotions is of moral character. If forgiveness really means to let go of all hard feelings, it comes very close to ethical ignorance: “O.K. It wasn’t that bad. We can put it behind us and go on.” Murphy is an advocate for “moral hatred”, wrath and resentment. He argues primarily philosophically and ethically, but also psychologically. Of course he can see that real forgiveness that happens without any sort of pressure from the surroundings can be liberating for the victim. But he strongly warns against a dichotomy where forgiveness means health and resentment and anger mean pathology. I quote from Murphy’s foreword to Thomas Brudholms book *Resentment’s virtue*⁹:

Selective and considered forgiveness may indeed reveal virtue in victims of wrongdoing, may legitimately free those victims from being consumed by unhealthy resentments, and may aid in restoring relations that are worth restoring. None of this, however, shows that forgiveness is always a virtue, that all resentments are unhealthy, and that all relationships are worth restoring.

Forgiveness in South Africa

Jeffrey Murphy has for years been among the most competent critics of *The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa*¹⁰, and first of all of Desmond Tutus preaching and writing about forgiveness as the undisputable number one solution in conflict solving processes. Murphy criticizes Tutus mixture of theological, political and therapeutic languages. He strongly warns against a widespread tendency to increase the dominance of therapeutic language and use it as equivalent to moral and religious languages. Surely, Murphy has got some very important points. Desmond Tutu’s famous book with the programmatic title *No Future Without Forgiveness*¹¹ argues that forgiveness is the best possible way to health and recovering for individuals and groups who became victimized of the Apartheid regime. Tutu elaborates forgiveness as a universal virtue with the same importance in all cultures where people struggle to move on from violent conflicts and even from genocides. And Murphy is also right when he points to the mixture of therapeutic and religious languages in the writings of Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Here is a famous part from Tutus book (p. 273):

In the act of forgiveness we are declaring our faith in the future of a relationship and in the capacity of the wrongdoer to make a new beginning on a course that will be different from the one that caused us the wrong. We are saying here is a chance to make a new beginning. It is an act of faith that the wrongdoer can change. According to Jesus we should be ready to do this not just once, not just seven times, but seventy times seven, without limit – provides, it seems Jesus says, your brother or sister who

has wronged you is ready to come and confess the wrong they have committed yet again.

I can read the words of Tutu into my own family life and find them meaningful. I can use them in my closest circle of friends and other of my lasting and durable interpersonal relationships, all these relations where we have smaller conflicts and often switch between the roles as offenders and victims. The original context for Jesus and Matthews call for forgiveness was the life of brothers and sisters in the first Christian parishes. But is it a possible position to preach “seventy times seven” when the “conflict” consist of mass rape of thousands of women in Bosnia or the genocides in Rwanda or Cambodia? Is it a sustainable position to meet mass murderers with the virtue of unconditional forgiveness after Holocaust? “This is cheap grace”, says Jeffrie Murphy and has inspired the Danish philosopher Thomas Brudholm in his research on TRC and his important book *Resentment’s Virtue – Jean Améry and the refusal to forgive*.

Brudholm builds his philosophical analysis on two different empirical resources. He uses a text from Holocaust survivor Jean Améry where he argues for the right of the victim not to forgive the unforgivable and explores the alternative position of *resentment*. Brudholm uses the concept of resentment in line with Murphy, as moral anger and resistance against evil and oppression. Brudholm also uses a number of texts from members and participants in TRC in South-Africa where forgiveness is described as the only really health bringing virtue for the victims and for the nation as a whole. Brudholm does not deny that forgiveness under specific circumstances deserves to be called a moral virtue, but he defends a position where resentment also is a virtue and a necessary position in a reconciliation process. I read Brudholms book as an argument to include the wrath into the Ethics of reconciliation. His analysis deals first of all with the worst and most serious conflicts in the modern societies: The genocides and crimes against humanity. But his thinking is also relevant for interpersonal conflicts.

A therapeutic language

In Tutus writings and other texts from the hearings in TRC, there are many stories about victims who were willing to forgive, but also some about those who refused. Brudholm found a lot of examples where representatives from TRC went far in the direction of pressing people towards forgiveness, and also situations where resentment and wrath literally were diagnosed as hindrances on the road to healing and reconciliation. The reconciliation is clothed in a therapeutic language, and “healing wounds from the past” is the favored metaphor used to describe the process. Using this language from the medical and psychological areas to describe the experiences of victimized and oppressed people leads the writers very near a position where the victims are “ill”. Resentment and anger are signs of continuing illness. Brudholm refers from a testimony Mrs. Savage gave for the commission. Desmond Tutu himself tells the story (Brudholm *Resentment*: p. 55 Tutu *Forgiveness* p. 146):

A white woman is a victim of a hand-grenade attack by one of the liberation movements. A lot of her friends are killed. And she ends up having to have open-heart surgery, and she goes into the ICU. She comes to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to tell her story. And she says, “You know, when I came out of hospital, my children had to bathe me, had to clothe me, had to feed me. And I can’t walk through the security checkpoint at an airport – I’ve still got shrapnel inside me – so, all kinds of alarms go off when I walk through.” Do you know what she said? (Tutu asks). She said, of this experience that left her in this condition? It has – can you credit

it – she says, “It has enriched my life.” She says, “I’d like to meet the perpetrator, I’d like to meet him in a spirit of forgiveness. I would like to forgive him.” Which is extraordinary. But then, she goes on to say “I hope he forgives me.”

Tutu holds forth this case as an example that “ought to leave people quite speechless at the wonder of it all.” Brudholm comments that Tutu did not accept any limitations on forgiveness. In the referred case about Mrs. Savage, Brudholm went to the original transcripts from the actual hearing. He found that after the quotation Tutu used in his book, she also made a long statement about all the pain and misery that the attack on her brought on her entire family. This part of her statement never figures in Tutu’s use of her case. What is this? Does Desmond Tutu only have the category “useful pain”, and not a category for the meaningless and useless? Brudholm has also another objection of great ethical importance (p. 55):

Is resentment so immoral or harmful and forgiveness so noble and valuable that it is always and unconditionally good and praiseworthy to overcome resentment? The hope that one will be forgiven is at least conventionally the prerogative of the sinner or, more broadly, the person who, intentionally and responsibly, has done wrong to another. When victims of terrorism hope that those who dropped the bomb can forgive them, perhaps one should consider that damage a too strong appreciation of forgiveness can do to people’s sense of responsibility and culpability.

Tutu and the other architects behind the TRC model in South Africa need the critic coming from philosophers as Murphy and Brudholm. Their intentions have been the very best, and we shall never forget that South Africa managed the transition from Apartheid to democracy in a nonviolent way. Therefore they still deserve their positions as heroes in the history of conflict resolution and reconciliation. But the rather naïve therapeutic talk about letting go of resentment and moral wrath as the only possible way to individual and social healing, need to be corrected, both from psychological, philosophical and theological sources. Maybe it is not correct to formulate a universal statement which says: “No future without forgiveness.” Murphy and Brudholm are pointing in other directions. So do many victims of violence, including the sons I told about in the opening. They can tell stories from lives where forgiveness of the perpetrators was impossible for different reasons, but where recovering and certain forms of reconciliation have still been possible. Other victims testify that it is possible to forgive, but that forgiveness is not the opposite of resentment. The reconciliation process can hold both phenomena.

Contextual theology

I choose to read Murphy and Brudholm in this direction. The alternative is a harsh one. Then I would say that they are defenders of retribution, revenge and violent solutions in the conflict resolution processes. What Murphy primarily defends is what he calls retributive emotions, the right of the victim to resist what happened with anger towards offenders as well as offences. He even uses the term “moral hatred”, so he also allows some sort of hatred a legitimate place in the process following violence and serious crime. But Murphy does not defend retribution and revenge in the legal system. Punishment, yes, but the punishment shall be in the hands of the State to prevent both offenders and victims from the terrible forces which are hidden in the phenomenon of revenge.

Is Hannah Arendt wrong, then, when she makes her famous statement about forgiveness in the book *The Human Condition*¹², proposing that the concept of forgiveness

should be spread from the religious context into the entire world as a universal virtue? Is not this exactly the program of Desmond Tutu, TRC and also Robert D. Enright and his staff in The International Forgiveness Institute in Madison, Wisconsin? All the modern mediators and researchers who include the phenomenon of forgiveness in their thinking of conflict resolution processes love the following passage from the great Jewish philosopher Hannah Arendt¹³:

The discoverer of the role of forgiveness in the realm of human affairs was Jesus of Nazareth. The fact that he made this discovery in a religious context and articulated it in religious language is no reason to take it any less seriously in a strictly secular sense.

What Hannah Arendt does, is so to say to formulate a program for contextual theology. In her text she explores how the virtue of forgiveness grew out of antic Greek (stoic), roman and also Jewish thinking. What Jesus of Nazareth does, is to make the appeal radical, and to connect it with the thinking of God as a forgiver. This is “contextual” in various senses of the word. First Arendt says that experiences and reflections emerging in a religious context have relevance outside in the secular world. And the other way around: Theology and religious thinking are certainly standing in a dialectic relationship to the secular culture surrounding them: To do Christian theology is to reflect on the Christian tradition and the culture in the very same movement, and to contribute to culture and society.

I still think that Hannah Arendt and Desmond Tutu deliver convincing arguments about the role forgiveness can play in conflict resolution among individuals and groups in our world today. But I also think that Jeremy Murphy and Thomas Brudholm have made some important contributions which bring us further into a sustainable and even more realistic thinking about reconciliation when they tell us that moral anger and resentment also have their legitimate places in the process.

I can see two demanding challenges here, one for the philosophy of law and the jurisprudence system, and one for the theology and religious thinking: How is it possible to keep the moral wrath and earnestness which are necessary when we deal with the worst violent offences and crimes against humanity, without landing in a position where we defend retribution, revenge and death penalties? How is it possible to keep the image of God as a judge and the image of God as a forgiver without landing in a position where we picture God as a violent patriarch who demands a bloody sacrifice before he can forgive? To put it short: Is a nonviolent philosophy of law and a nonviolent theology at all possible? Let me use the rest of this article to underline some of the challenges I see for a contextual Christian theology today.

Agnus Dei

René Girard has made some important contributions to the philosophy of religion and theology with his works on sacred violence and the Scapegoat mechanism¹⁴. He explores how violence is a primary and threatening force in all human societies, and how the sacrifice cult and the scapegoating are cultural instruments which arise to make it possible to overcome the problem of violence and to survive. To place the guilt on the back of the scapegoat and sacrifice it, is an ancient form of conflict resolution. Girard finds the mechanism in different religious systems dealing with conflicts between the divine and the human sphere, and he also finds scapegoating in secular milieus in modern societies.

I haven't got the space to fold out his wonderful argument here, but his radical statement is that Christianity represents the ultimate break with the scapegoat mechanism. In

the Bible we can see the break anticipated in Job's book and by Deuterocanonicals, but in the narratives about Jesus Christ in the gospels, it is fulfilled: God unmasks the scapegoating and sides with the victims against the violators. This is the mystery the Christian church is celebrating when *Agnus Dei* is sung in the liturgies and the psalms. In my words: God is not the violent patriarch who claims revenge. God sides with the suffering victims.

In the book *Violence Renounced*¹⁵, a group of theologian researchers have published texts inspired of Girard's thoughts. Girard himself has written a postlude, and here he says that God identifies with the scapegoat in the death of Christ. God chose to be the scapegoat of his people to lift mankind out of the scapegoating culture once and for all. (p. 319). This is a radical way of using theology and even Christology as a basis for social critics. It reminds me of the theologian Karl Barth¹⁶ who in the German debate about death penalty in 1950, argued that any sort of death penalty or atonement through death, is blasphemy after Golgata where Christ died for our sins once and for all. For Lutheran ears it sounds peculiar to make these direct analogies from Christology to philosophy of law and even politics. But it is fascinating to meet the thinking of Barth and Girard who both make radical ethical conclusions from the Christian Doctrine: God has chosen the *Agnus Dei* once and for all. Please let further sacrificing of scapegoats stop!

Nonviolent atonement

Several theologians have been inspired by Girard and have used his thoughts about violence and scapegoating to criticize and reconstruct the Christian theology of reconciliation. Feminist theologians have criticized images of God as a violent Father. Theologians as Howard Zehr¹⁷ and J.D. Weaver have delivered important criticism of the elements of violent punishment theories in catholic and protestant theologies. They both come from the Mennonite movement with its long tradition in nonviolence and peacemaking, and they use this background in efforts to construct a new and nonviolent theology of reconciliation.

Weaver's book has the programmatic title *The Nonviolent Atonement*¹⁸. He starts his argument by pointing out that it is a deep and alarming kinship between the right wing in American philosophy of law and conservative theology. I think he is right, and we can find the same positions in Europe. The first claims retributive punishment and death penalty arguing that this is absolute necessary to bring Justice into society. The second follows Anselm's objective doctrine of reconciliation and teaches that God had to claim punishment and atoning death to save his honour and appear as the just Judge. Both teach that violent punishment is absolute necessary for the case of justice, in human conflicts and in the conflict between God and mankind. They operate with an absolute law of balancing Justice which both God and man have to follow: The sin has to be punished, and the punishment has to be proportional with the degree of sin.

In his book Weaver tries to find an alternative nonviolent theology, following the classical *Christus Victor* motif¹⁹ from the early Church Fathers, and inspired by Girard: God did not kill Jesus Christ on Golgata to punish sin. God sides with the victim and does not claim a bloody sacrifice to be reconciled. The evil forces in the world are responsible for the killing of Jesus. Weaver moves the drama of atonement and reconciliation away from Anselm's heavenly courtroom and set up the scene in this world, where God sides with all the wounded and oppressed in an ongoing battle against the Evil.

I have much sympathy with the pacifist theologians from the mennonite tradition, and I find Girard inspiring both in my work as theologian and researcher in criminology. But one question remains unsolved for me, both in my theology and philosophy of conflict resolution, and that is the thoughts put forward by Jeremy Murphy and Thomas Brudholm: Moral wrath and deep earnestness are also necessary when we meet the enormous and terrifying field of

violence, oppressions and massacres. We have to forgive the perpetrators, says Tutu. We have to retaliate and punish them, say many serious voices arguing that impunity is dangerous in a state which should be governed by law. Are the alternatives so simple, a soft one and a harsh one, both in theology and in jurisprudence? Does the emphasizing of forgiveness lead to a ban on resentment and moral wrath, and does the earnestness and anger against the Evil lead to revenge and violent retribution?

God as the Judge

In my opinion we have important resources in Christian theology and tradition to deal with these difficult questions. And I agree with Hannah Arendt: The insights and experiences from the religious rooms should not stay there, locked up, they should be shared with the surroundings. Theologians should take active part in the important ethical and political discussions about the role of violence in conflict resolution. Since Anselm of Canterbury in 1099²⁰ and even longer, these themes has been dealt with in the Christian churches. Some times theology has served as legitimating ideologies for brutal regimes, death penalty and oppressive penal practices. But this is not the full story of the long lasting relationship between the church and the state and the jurisprudence system. The church history shows many examples where theologians have recommended nonviolent ways of dealing with crimes and conflicts, following Jesus from Nazareth who even asked God to forgive the men who tortured him and nailed him to the cross.

Resentment can be a virtue and moral anger the only possible and meaningful attitude against Evil. This position leads me to the following short draft of a theology of reconciliation: The God of reconciliation is not only the one who forgives the offenders. God is also the one who meets Evil with wrath and resentment and the one who judges the offenders and gives the victims restitution and justice. I will do what ever I can to tear to pieces the images of God as a violent patriarch, but we should not construct theology which no longer has room for the image of God as a judge.

A theology of reconciliation which consists only of forgiveness, and no longer moral anger and judgement, is a theology which has betrayed the victims. It is possible to move so far away from Anselm's forensic and juridical theology that we loose some very important elements in the Christian tradition. All theology is contextual. In our social context people are still struggling for justice, victims are begging to be heard, longing for compensation. A good courtroom and a good judgement create rooms where both the offender and the victim are taken care of. So should also the theology of reconciliation.

Knud E. Løgstrup pictures the scene of the coming Judgement in a thought-provoking way in his book *Skabelse og tilintetgørelse*²¹. First he declares that it is intolerably provoking when Jesus of Nazareth forgives the perpetrators he meets without any conditions. What sort of practice is this? What about the victims? How dear Jesus forgive the offenders without any sort of just compensation for the other side? Løgstrup states that we have to read the stories about the forgiving Jesus in light of the Christian hope: God will one day arise all the victims of history and give them restitution and justice. In this light, and only in this light, is the Christian virtue of forgiveness meaningful. For of course: We cannot wait for heaven. We have to live and work in prolepsis, in the hope of a future which has already started: A consequence of the Christian virtue of forgiveness and the Christian hope of a coming justice for the victims is hard work here and now on the side of the victims in this society.

The three sons I told about in the beginning of this article have as far as I can understand come far in the reconciliation process after childhoods dominated of violent patriarchs. They have recovered physically and mentally. They have met women, experienced love, got children and created families without violence. They are educated and have got good

jobs. They have managed to establish other masculine strategies than their fathers: Nonviolent strategies. They have liberated themselves from *Imago Patri* and have not gone into *Imitatio Patri*. Arne and Mogens have kept contact with their fathers into their old age, and they have tended to them and taken care of them. Still they will not say that they have forgiven their fathers or reconciled with them. The last relational steps in the reconciliation process are missing. I understand this as a consequence of the lack of remorse and acceptance of guilt by these fathers. It is very difficult, maybe impossible to forgive a person who is not guilty in his own self-understanding.

Maybe Desmond Tutu would say that the sons still should forgive their fathers and get rid of the last elements of moral anger and resentment they bear with them. I cannot ask them to forgive, in respect for the demanding reconciliation process they have gone through. I cannot ask them to oppose the resentment they still feel, because I think this emotion is an important part of their own earnest moral decision: "Never again! I will not be a violent patriarch."

Bjørn uses a minimalistic theology of reconciliation when he says: "If God chose to forgive my father, I will have nothing against it." Is not this an important part of theology, elaborated from a reading of the first commandment in the Decalogue? Man is not God. Therefore man shall be spared for efforts to act divine. Only God can forgive the unforgivable. It is not possible to say exactly where the limits for human forgiveness should be drawn. Some people have a capacity to forgive which is literally unbelievable. But to set up unconditional forgiveness as a Christian virtue in all situations, is oppressing, maybe even blasphemous. Only God can forgive unconditional by Grace alone, and we shall be spared to act as God.

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¹ Leer-Salvesen, P. *Menneske og straff* Oslo: Universitetsforlaget 1991. *Tilgivelse* Oslo: Universitetsforlaget 1999.

² Leer-Salvesen, P. *Forsoning etter krenkelser* Bergen: Fagbokforlaget 2009

³ Wittgenstein, L. *Filosofiske undersøkelser* Oslo: Pax forlag 1997

⁴ I have given the men fictive names. A more complete version of their stories can be read in Leer-Salvesen: *Forsoning etter krenkelser*.

⁵ Connell's classic analysis shows a masculine hierarchy where the white heterosexual male rules on the top, dominating women, children and homosexuals. He has given a frightening portrait of the violent patriarch. Connell, R.W. *Masculinities* California: University of California Press 1995 p 225.

⁶ Robert D. Enright at The International Institute for forgiveness in Madison, Wisconsin is a senior in research on forgiveness. I have visited the institute several times and have found inspiration in his books.

Enright, R.D. and Fitzgibbons, R.P. *Helping clients to forgive* Washington D.C: American Psychological Association. 2000

In this book he shows by cases several examples of reframing as important steps in the reconciliation process.

⁷ I collected letters from 100 Norwegians who wrote to me about forgiveness. 13 letters came from women who had been sexually abused or even raped.

⁸ Murphy, J Hampton, J *Forgiveness and Mercy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University press 1990

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