

Archbishop Chacour writes about a day that he pondered the Beatitudes at the site where Jesus gave them. He got to the one about hungering and thirsting after righteousness, and he thought about Jesus' new understanding of righteousness. "The stiff laws of the Old Testament were only a shadow of the higher law of God's love that He had come to fulfill." Scenes of Jesus' ministry raced through his mind. There was forgiveness for the woman taken in adultery. The blind and the crippled were healed on the Sabbath. The Samaritan outcast became a person worthy of honor and concern.

"For one of the first things Jesus did when He reconciled man to God was to restore human dignity.... Suddenly I knew that the first step toward reconciling Jew and Palestinian was the restoration of human dignity" (*Blood Brothers*, 153).

Forgiveness and reconciliation are hard work and they require strength of character, a strong sense of one's own dignity and the dignity of the "other." Both insecurity and chauvinism are enemies of forgiveness.

Margaret touches on another question well worth exploring. "Can nations or groups forgive?" (See her Insert 1.) It's a discussion well beyond this response, but in my opinion, forgiveness by a group is possible, although extremely rare. The Southern Province Synod of 2006 took a step in that direction by adopting a resolution in which it "expresses its regret and apologizes to the African American community for the past participation of the Moravian Church in the institution of slavery." That was a good step and was well received by the community.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission

in South Africa had national as well as individual dimensions and has been emulated in a number of other countries as well as at least one city (Greensboro, NC). In these and other contexts I think that the degree to which a group can forgive depends on the degree to which a group is truly a body or an organism, where group identity supersedes individuality. That means the church, the Body of Christ, is a place where forgiveness and reconciliation can indeed take place. Maybe Margaret's essay will move us along a bit further.

Robert E. Sawyer served as a Moravian pastor and administrator for 40 years and is now engaged in peacemaking in Israel/Palestine through his position as executive director of Pilgrims of Ibillin.

Angelene Swart

Margaret Wilde did well in addressing the issue of forgiveness as it is very relevant. Forgiveness is a pressing need throughout the worldwide Moravian Unity.

I wish to share my experience as a South African who lived through years of oppression where hatred, anger, rage, and resentment built up within the hearts of the majority of the oppressed population.

With the demise of apartheid there was fear that after so much pain, hurt, torture, and degradation and so many inhumane acts of violence and death, forgiveness would be almost impossible or unacceptable for the victims. The ultimate aim of the newly-elected government

was to rebuild and reconstruct South Africa into a new and all-inclusive democratic nation. Our leaders took the initiative to explore the road of confession, forgiveness and reconciliation. They established a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to hold public and private hearings in which victims of gross human rights violations could tell their stories with some prospect of possible reparations. The idea was to promote national reconciliation rather than vengeance.

Victims told their heartrending stories and expressed their willingness to forgive. Perpetrators gave their accounts of their disgusting acts of violence, murder, and unrest and asked for forgiveness. For both parties there was a sense of relief and a chance for a new beginning.

In his 1999 work *No Future Without Forgiveness*, Desmond Tutu, the retired Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town who was also the chairperson of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, said, "We do not usually rush to expose our vulnerability and our sinfulness. But if the process of forgiveness and healing is to succeed, acknowledgement of the truth and of having wronged someone is important in getting to the root of the breach" (270).

The whole process was very emotional and stirring. It was amazing to witness the exceptional consideration and respect that the victims demonstrated. Forgiving an oppressor is very difficult. The idea of rebuilding a relationship with an oppressor needs hard and long thinking as one is never sure of the oppressor's sincere desire for forgiveness and reconciliation.

It is sad to mention that not all perpetrators

and victims participated in the hearings, and not all were willing to give or receive forgiveness. There were those who said that they would never forgive. We are aware that the atrocities of our recent past cannot be easily forgotten. It will be difficult for people to forget personal crimes and abuses that robbed them of their loved ones, their dignity, and their security. But it is also necessary to remember so that we should not let it happen again. "Forgiveness does not mean condoning what has been done. It means taking what has happened seriously and not minimizing it; drawing out the sting in the memory that threatens to poison our entire existence," says Desmond Tutu (271).

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was a bold effort to deal with the situation that our country faced when we launched our newfound democracy. It was not a perfect process, but it did bring a sense of hope and a possibility of a shared diverse future.

In our process it was clear that all of the past had to be dealt with. The wrongs of the past had to be understood, and there had to be a willingness to confess, to forgive, and to reconcile.

People choose to let go of the wrongs of the past in their own time. We in South Africa, including our religious communities, are still on the path of seeking and offering forgiveness, of letting go of the bitterness and overcoming the powers of estrangement.

We can all do well if we follow the brave and gallant example of forgiveness and reconciliation as personified by our first

democratically elected president, Mr. Nelson Mandela. He stepped out of prison after 27 years as a political prisoner without words of hatred and revenge. With unwavering consistency he continues to promote national unity and reconciliation.

In conclusion, it can be said that the South African experience was a complex socio-economic transformation process. While allowing enough space for people to forgive each other on an interpersonal level, the reconciliation process on a deeper level was aimed at addressing the deep-rooted historical, economic, and political contradictions in the society. In this sense I agree with Lewis Smedes' observation, cited by Margaret Wilde in her article, that forgiving is an individual process whereas reconciliation is a social process.

The teaching of forgiveness and reconciliation is indeed a necessary and valuable tool in the hand of the church, helping congregants to fully understand how they contribute to establishing the reign of God through forgiving each other and participating in processes of reconciliation.

Born and bred in Cape Town, Angelene Swart served as the first full-time Christian educator for the Moravian Church in South Africa, the first female director of Moravian Theological Seminary, the first female president of the Moravian church in South Africa, and the first lay female president of the Moravian Unity Board. She currently serves on the Council of the Lutheran World Federation and as chairperson of the Western Cape Council of Churches.

Livingstone Thompson

I commend Margaret Wilde for a serious attempt to address the tension evident in the Moravian Community, particularly in America. Mind you, the tension in the American church is not unique. Recent tensions in the Czech Republic and hitherto in Nicaragua and Honduras, although having different causes, indicate a propensity to tension within the Christian community in general and within the Moravian community in particular.

In responding to Wilde's paper I will first comment briefly on the issue of forgiveness. I will show that part of the difficulty in discussing forgiveness is that because of the limitations of language, those in the discussion may be using the same word but speaking of different notions. When we refer to biblical notions like forgiveness, we should be mindful not only of differences between Hebraic and Greek concepts but also of differences within Greek usage itself.

Secondly, commenting a little on hermeneutics, I hope to show that engaging difference is an ongoing part of the Moravian tradition and not some unusual "sifting" moment. I will argue that in the Moravian Church there is a fundamental tension between the Comenian and Zinzendorfan sub-traditions. This tension accounts for some of the trends and difficulties historically evident in modern Moravian hermeneutics.

Forgiveness in the Hebrew Bible

In the Hebrew Bible there are, in the main, three words usually translated into English as