

Bringing forgiveness to life: Biographical preaching of Joseph's forgiveness in the context of conflict and violence in northern Nigeria

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Abstract

Preaching forgiveness requires the use of stories, metaphors and images that are the product of creative imagination to shape the imagination of listeners. Preaching forgiveness without depiction tends to be abstract, and worst of all unconvincing. Therefore, the preacher has to find a way of picturing what he or she is talking about. This means preaching reconciliation involves the use of evocative images rather than conceptual structures. For example, making people change their attitudes toward a perceived enemy requires depiction. In addition, asking people to forgive in a situation of deep wounds created by divisions, conflicts and violence calls for the use of evocative images. What is more, telling warring parties, be they of different family, tribe, ethnic group, or religion, to come together, stay together and grow together in a situation of division, conflict and violence requires the use of pictures. Therefore, this article argues that biographical preaching is an effective way of preaching forgiveness because it entails picturing of biblical character so that people may see what is required of them to forgive and live a harmonious life with one another.

Keywords

benefit; forgiveness; biographical preaching; conflict; violence; northern Nigeria

Introduction

Northern Nigeria is replete with feuds, banditry, Fulani herdsmen, guerrilla attacks, kidnapping, raping of women, land dispute and series of expansionist wars between tribes and communities. In some part of northern Nigeria, land disputes have led to the loss of lives and properties worth millions of naira. Bitrus Sarma (2019:75) observed that “Tribal

differences often degenerate into conflicts of alarming proportions in the church. As a result, Christian communities taking up arms against one another are an ongoing phenomenon in some parts of northern Nigeria.” In addition, northern Nigeria is replete with rampant ethno-religious, socio-religious, and socio-political conflict escalating into violence and crisis. The ethno-religious, socio-religious, and socio-political conflict have resulted to loss of lives, properties have been destroyed and places of worship have been demolished (Sarma 2019:75). Hassan Musa (2019:105) equally lamented that “In recent history there have been merciless attacks and reprisal attacks between Christians and Muslims. Human rights have been grossly abused, human lives have been consciously or unconsciously trampled upon.” To add to the list of conflict and violence in northern Nigeria there is “marginalizations, unhealthy competition and rivalries among political elite leading to killing and destruction of properties, communal and chieftaincy conflicts, partisan political violence, resource allocation and control crises (Ayokunle Fagbemi 2013:221). Kaduna, Benue, Nassarawa, Plateau, Katsina, Zamfara Kano, and Niger States have been facing serious attacks, kidnapping, raping of women and killing by Fulani herdsmen and bandits (Gajere and Handan 2019:48). Some people in northern Nigeria are in pain because their love ones were kidnapped, and a huge amount of money was paid as ransom, but the love ones were killed. Some people in the above-mentioned states are in anguish because their beloved wives or daughters were raped and killed at the same time.

Biographical preaching

According to Blackwood (1941:52), “biographical preaching is the one which grows out of the facts concerning a Biblical character, as these facts throw light upon the problems of the people in the pews”. The choice of the person on which to preach depends on what purpose the preacher has for the lesson. De Brand (1988:13) considers biographical preaching to be “sermons that interpret the life or some aspect of the life of a biblical person for contemporary significance”. This means biographical sermons interpret the biblical character’s personality, strengths, weaknesses, attitudes, motivations, and any other aspect of his or her life’s significance for the listener. Therefore, it can be argued that biographical preaching is great tool for preaching forgiveness in a situation of conflict and violence because it

helps people to see what it means to move from hatred to forgiveness that result to healing and create an environment for human flourishing.

The point of departure for the study on biographical preaching of forgiveness is that the article presents the benefits of forgiveness to help people to see and learn what it means to forgive and at the same time spark the desire for forgiveness by following the practical ways the Bible characters dealt with problems of conflict and violence similar to those of the listeners (North 2010).

The need for preaching forgiveness in northern Nigeria

As a result of conflicts and violence in northern Nigeria nearly every ethnic group, tribe and religion has wronged the others. Nearly every ethnic group, tribe and religion has suffered or is suffering the devastating effects of ethnic, tribal, and religious division, conflict, and violence. Nearly every ethnic group, tribe, and religion struggles to forgive and reconcile with the others. Nearly every ethnic group, tribe and religion impulsively considers revenge as the most delicious way of response to the wrong being done. Therefore, this article seeks to answer the questions: How can the people of northern Nigeria – particularly Christians – be motivated toward thinking, talking, and praying forgiveness and reconciliation in a situation of conflict and violence? How can the desire for forgiveness that will result in harmonious life and social cohesion in a situation of conflict and violence be sparked in the minds of the people, particularly Christians in northern Nigeria?

In order to respond to these questions the study employed the biographical preaching of Joseph's forgiveness as a mechanism for confronting the ethno-religious, socio-religious, and socio-political conflict and violence in northern Nigeria. In other words, this article aims at sparking the desire of forgiveness in the life of the people of northern Nigeria, particularly Christians, by bringing to the fore some benefits of forgiveness.

Contemplation of revenge and forgiveness in the life of Joseph (Gen 42–45)

The narrative of Joseph and his brothers continues from and develops the story of Jacob and his family tree in Genesis 12–36. It is a story filled with conflicting relationships (Fretheim 1994:593). The story of Joseph

and his brothers is also a continuation of one of the key themes that emerge from the patriarchal narratives, namely that Yahweh made certain commitments to Abraham. The fulfilment of the commitments brought about the conflict. All the patriarchal narratives relate to the same idea, that Yahweh has undertaken to bless Abraham with descendants and land and to make him a blessing for other peoples, but as the fulfilment of the promise unfolds, there is conflict between all the families of the patriarchs (Goldingay 1980:13). Central to the conflict in the narrative of Joseph and his brothers is who will be progenitor. In other words, the conflict is based on the perception that one of the sons of Jacob is chosen to continue the tradition, and the others are expelled from the lineage (Soller 1998:159).

The conflict in the family of Jacob started from hatred, moved to not being on talking terms, and then escalated to the point where Joseph's brothers took action that was more or less equal to killing him. In addition, the conflict was rooted in the perception that the younger in the family would supplant the older ones and inherit the Promised Land and be the elected offspring. So we see in Genesis 37:18–20: "But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted. 'Here comes that dreamer!' they said to each other. Come now, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams." Soller (1998:159) points out that "the intense hatred of the brothers toward Joseph becomes more understandable. It is not the resentment of a less favoured to a more favoured son. It is the fierce hatred for a usurper, by those who fear being completely disinherited, and despoiled of their birth right and blessing."

As the story unfolds however, Joseph and his brothers exhibit some characteristics of a change in point of view and actions that facilitate reconciliation. Sternberg (1985:296) argues that "Joseph and his brothers went through a change of heart from fraternal enmity and brutality to cohesion, the repentance of evil done or contemplated". Smith (2005:169) also points out that "Genesis 37–50 presents a double plot, bifurcating and reuniting to tell Joseph and his brothers' story – a story that takes as its unifying plot action reconciliation. This reconciliation has both human and divine dimensions". Therefore, this article shall consider contemplation of revenge and the depiction of forgiveness in the life Joseph (Gen 42–45).

Contemplation of revenge in the life of Joseph (Gen 42–45)

The narrator pictures Joseph contemplating evil when in a position of power over his brothers in Egypt. In other words, Joseph faced the temptation of doing to his brothers what they had done to him in Canaan when they had the opportunity over him. For instance, in the beginning of his first encounter with his brothers, Joseph is portrayed in a manner that is difficult for one not to consider the episode from the point of view of revenge. “As soon as Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them” (Gen 42:7). In addition, four times Joseph accused his brothers of being spies and then he put them all in custody for three days (Gen 42:9–17). Here the narrator is not explicit about Joseph’s intention of pretending to be a stranger to his brothers, and also the reason for accusing them of being spies or putting them in prison for three days. To this, Wenham (1994:406) argues that “By failing to explain Joseph’s conduct explicitly, the narrator leaves the reader to surmise and fill the gap and this allows the creation of a multidimensional image of Joseph”.

Considering how his brothers treated him and the kind of suffering he went through as a result of being sold into slavery, it can be argued that Joseph is portrayed in this episode as being possessed with thoughts of revenge. Alter (1981:164) asserts that “Joseph is not unknowable to God or to the narrator, but he must remain opaque because he is a human being and us, the readers of the story, see him with human eyes”. Seeing Joseph with human eyes, especially as the person who suffered much inhuman treatment at the hands of his brothers, prompts the following questions: Why does Joseph pretend to be a stranger to his brothers? Or why did he speak to them harshly? (Gen 42:7). And, worst of all, why would Joseph, of all crimes, charged his brothers with being spies? One could further ask why Joseph would put his brothers in prison for three days (Gen 42:17). With regard to these questions, Jacobs argues that “there is potential for good and evil at every juncture in the story of Joseph and his brothers. This means the story presents a depiction of human interaction within which good and evil arise and in which God works toward the deity’s own purpose” (Jacobs 2003:312). Elsewhere, Jacobs (2003:323) argues that more suspicion of Joseph’s participation in evil is seen in his encounter with his brothers. However, the climax of Jacob’s (2003:324) argument on Joseph’s participation in evil is in the episode of Genesis 42:7–17:

Here Joseph has the fate of his brothers in his hands much as they had his fate in their hands. He has the power to kill them – evil – or to spare their lives – good (or at least a lesser form of evil). Yet Joseph falsely accused the brothers of being spies, a charge/deed punishable by death. Joseph had experienced the consequences of being falsely accused (chs. 39–40), but he falsely accused his own brothers. Furthermore, Joseph had experienced imprisonment as a result of the false accusation, yet he subjected his brothers to the same fate. These behaviours can hardly be legitimately interpreted as acts of “good” unless “good” is taken to mean the lesser of two adversities as in the choice between selling or killing Joseph.

Therefore, it can be argued that Joseph’s action as depicted in this episode has an intention of revenge about it that might appeal to the person who has gone through a series of painful and traumatic experiences: attempted murder, enslavement, seduction followed by a charge of attempted rape and three years in jail. Moreover, his action in this episode also rhymes with the brothers’ own scheming in the previous episode, when they saw him at a distance and, before he reached them, they plotted to kill him (Gen 37:18) (Sternberg 1985:288).

Depiction of forgiveness in the life of Joseph (Gen 42–45)

The forgiveness depicted in the life of Joseph is devoid of a demand for repentance or confession of the evil done in the past. Jacobs (2003:337) points out that, “In the story, reconciliation comes about without a direct and deliberate confession of evil. The brothers confess their guilt among themselves but not with the intention of asking Joseph’s forgiveness.” This means Joseph forgave his brothers without them asking for forgiveness. Joseph had all it takes humanly to revenge what his brothers did to him. Furthermore, he was in a position to make them beg him for forgiveness for all the pain and hardship they subjected him to before forgiving them. As a matter of fact, knowing how Joseph had authority over them, two times the narrator says, “his brothers were not able to answer him because they were terrified at his presence.” Elsewhere they said, “What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs, we did to him” (Gen 45:3; 50:15).

The first act of forgiveness demonstrated by Joseph is that he gave orders to fill his brothers' bags with grain, to put each man's silver back in his sack, and to give them provisions for their journey (Gen 42:25). In this episode Joseph is not pictured saying to his brothers I forgive you, but he is portrayed as taking action that proves there is thought of forgiveness in his intentions. He allowed nine of his brothers to take food for the starving family in Canaan, thereby providing for the immediate and future needs of his brothers. The money put back in their sacks, along with the provisions, signifies immediate needs, while the grain is aimed at meeting future needs. All these are indications that his thoughts are motivated by forgiveness.

In addition, when Joseph revealed himself to his brothers he said to them, "do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by great deliverance" (Gen 45:5) And in Genesis 50:19–20, Joseph says to his brothers: "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." According to Grossman (2013:192), "Joseph presents here a new narrative of his sale: He was not 'sold' but rather 'sent,' meaning it was God who brought about this event, and Joseph thereby manages to avoid blaming the brothers and lowers their level of culpability for the incident." Fretheim (1994:644) further explains that "Joseph does not scold or blame his brothers: he does not try to make them feel either guilty or shameful. He asks for no confession of sin and issues no absolution." This means Joseph in this episode is depicted as someone who did not focus on what his brothers did to him in the past. He did not blame, accuse or in any way try to make his brothers feel guilty for all the suffering and affliction that he went through. Joseph forgave his brothers because he directed what happened in the past as a means of accomplishing God's plan, which is saving many lives

Another sign of forgiveness demonstrated by Joseph is that he kissed all his brothers and wept over them, and afterward his brothers talked with him (Gen 45:15). Westermann (1996:95–96) explains that "in this presentation, the emphasis is on the healing through forgiveness. This healing, moreover, is further exalted by the fact the reunification of the family now results in both its preservation and its protection: to preserve

for you a remnant on earth.” This means Joseph, by his words and actions, depicts forgiveness. In the action of Joseph, the reader is confronted with a prototype of forgiveness that does not demand repentance or confession of evil committed in the past; instead, a forgiveness that seeks to reassure his brothers they have no need to be alarmed or to be irritated with themselves. In addition, Joseph’s forgiveness seeks to re-establish his brothers’ dignity, which in their wickedness they had spurned.

Therefore, Joseph forgiveness is a graphic picture of the type of forgiveness that the context of multidimensional conflict and violence of northern Nigeria needs. This is because most of the perpetrators of violence are faceless. The victim may never see them talk less of expecting them to seek for forgiveness.

Biographical preaching of Joseph forgiveness in the context of conflict and violence of Northern Nigeria

This article brings to the fore some benefits of forgiveness and their implication for preaching forgiveness in the context of conflict and violence of northern Nigeria. The followings are the benefits of forgiveness gleaned from the forgiveness of Joseph in Genesis 42–45.

Forgiveness prevents the past from poisoning the future

According to Volf (2015:175), “forgiveness frees the past, marked by wrongdoing, from poisoning the present and spoiling the future.” In the narrative of Genesis 41–45 Joseph actions prevented the actions of his brothers toward him from poisoning the coming together of Jacob’s family and the fulfilment of God’s plan for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob becoming a great nation. Joseph actions of preventing the past from poisoning the present and the future can be illustrated by the words and actions of Nelson Mandela of South Africa. Mandela testified that “I would not mince words about the horrors of apartheid, but I said, over and over, that we should forget the past and concentrate on building a better future for all.” Furthermore, Mandela states that “I want South African to see that I loved even my enemies while I hated the system that turned us against one another” (Mandela cited in Wüstenberg 2009:43). Mandela’s acts of forgiveness as preventing the past from poisoning the present and the

future is aptly reflected in Tutu and Tutu's (2014:7) words that "South Africa chose to seek forgiveness rather than revenge. This choice averted a bloodbath, because revenge is always costly and forgiveness rather than retaliation makes people stronger, and peace comes to those who choose to forgive."

For example, Mandela portrayed radical forgiveness as an act of preventing the wrongdoing of apartheid from poisoning the future of South African while he was in prison. Mandela decided to use negotiations as a means of preventing South Africa from plunging into war while he was still in prison. He said:

I resolved to do something I had been pondering for a long while: begin discussions with the government. I had concluded that the time had come when struggle could best be pushed forward through negotiations. If we did not start a dialogue soon, both sides would soon be plunged into a dark night of oppression, violence and war (Mandela 1994:513).

Elsewhere Mandela stated that "I wrote to propose talks about talks. As before, I received no response. I wrote once more and again there was no response. I found this peculiar and demoralizing and I realized I had to look for another opportunity to be heard" (Mandela 1994:516). This means Mandela took the initiative to start negotiations between the South African Government and the ANC at that time. And, since his focus was to secure a good future for South Africa, he persisted.

In addition, Mandela exhibited radical forgiveness and even preached it when a respectable member of the ANC and a popular black South African, Chris Hani, was assassinated. In this regard, Tutu (2010:64–65) says that "in a moment of utmost volatility, Mandela chose to use his authority to damp the flames of bloody fury. He chose the long-term good of the country above the immediate satisfaction of demanding revenge." This means the focus of Mandela was to do that which may prevent the country from plunging into violence and war. When he became president, he inaugurated the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to guide the country through the process of forgiveness and reconciliation. In this regard, Tutu (2014:2) notes that "South Africa chose forgiveness because telling the truth and healing

history was the only way to save the country from destruction. This process was embarked upon through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.”

The article considers Mandela’s words and actions of forgiveness as a prototype of the biblical Joseph. This is a conviction shared by Rabbi Toba Spintzer (2013), who argues that “one of Nelson Mandela’s greatest gifts to the world is that he showed us – just as Joseph showed his brothers – the possibility of reconciliation in the wake of unspeakable brutality and oppression.” Like Joseph, Nelson Mandela had a choice to be bitter and do upon the white people of South Africa as had been done to him and his people, and once given the chance, he could have sought vengeance. But he used the opportunity that had been presented to him and his country to become a model of forgiveness (Brackman 2013).

This means in the situation of multidimensional conflict and violence of northern Nigeria the foundation for a harmonious relationship and a bright future is forgiveness. The foundation of a productive society is forgiveness. As such people in northern Nigeria need to forgive to secure a better future for the next generation. People need to forgive in order to secure great leaders for tomorrow. People need to forgive in order to create a society where people will not be judge by their ethnic or religious affiliation but the content of their character. People need to forgive because there can never be a future without forgiveness.

Forgiveness is a healing balm for wound created by conflict

Conflict and violence create wounds that sometimes last for years. It is the wound that causes hatred, resentment, and desire for revenge. The danger is that sometimes people behave as if everything is normal, but deep within them there are wounds. In addition, the greatest manifestation of wounds always occurs in the manner in which the destruction of lives and property is done with little provocation. This happens because internal wounds are still fresh in the people’s memory. In addition, research has shown that failure to forgive may be a risk factor for heart disease, high blood pressure and a score of other chronic stress-related illnesses. Medical and psychological studies have shown that a person holding on to anger and resentment is at an increased risk for anxiety, depression, and insomnia, and more likely to suffer from high blood pressure, ulcers, migraines, backaches, heart attack and even cancer. But genuine forgiveness may

transform these ailments (Tutu & Tutu 2014:18). Therefore, in the situation of multidimensional conflict and violence of northern Nigeria, people need help to offer forgiveness that may bring about the healing of internal wounds. As Lapsley and Karakashian (2012:211) point out, people could be terribly wounded by violence, yet it is possible to reach deep into their hearts and touch a place that enables them to move into the future with a measure of peace and hope.

One of the ways people may be helped in the healing process of reconciliation is the biographical preaching of Joseph's forgiveness. This is because Joseph's forgiveness depicts a forgiveness that resulted in healing the wounds of the evil done in the past. So we read in Genesis 50:19–20 that Joseph said to his brothers, don't be afraid. You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good. And he spoke to them kindly and reassured them that he would provide for them. Joseph's words and actions become the healing of memory that seals the reconciliation between him and his brothers. This is because, after this episode, we are told that the family of Jacob prospers in Egypt (Ex 1:7). This means both Joseph and his brothers were healed from the wounds and the guilt of the conflict and strife in the family of Jacob.

In the same manner, the biographical preaching of Joseph forgiveness may help people to acquire the ability to demonstrate the forgiveness that Lapsley and Karakashian (2012:279) call "releasing oneself from those who caused pain, sorrow and wounds in life." This is very relevant to preaching reconciliation where the experience of the evil done in the past formed a bad image of some ethnic, tribal, and religious groups in the mind of some people. There is a situation where some people consider all the people who belong to certain race, ethnic, tribal, and religious group as wicked, evil, and violent due to the activities of a few individuals among them. For example, there are some Christians who think of every Muslim as a killer and potential terrorist. In the same manner, some Muslims think of every Christian as being wicked and a killer. This is because of the deep wounds caused by some individuals among Christians and Muslims that have resulted in stereotypes.

Therefore, biographical preaching of forgiveness demands helping people to sometimes make a confession of regret and grief caused by the evil done in the

past. In other words, biographical preaching of forgiveness should empower Christians to forgive Muslims for the evil done in the past. In addition, the biographical preaching of forgiveness should empower ethnic groups and tribes to forgive the other ethnic groups or tribes for evil done in the past. This means the biographical preaching of forgiveness should empower people to be able to say I have forgiven all the evil that was done to me in the past.

Forgiveness is a fertile ground for human flourishing

There may never be meaningful progress without forgiveness. This means that conflict and violence deny people the environment to flourish. Volf (2015:ix) considers a flourishing life to be the life that is lived well, the life that goes well, and the life that feels good. In addition, Volf argues that a flourishing life evokes an image of a living thing, thriving in its proper environment. For example, the Psalmist's description of a tree planted by a stream of water, which yields its fruits in its season and whose leaves do not wither, is an image of a flourishing life. In addition, a flourishing life depicts a sheep lying down in green pastures and walking beside still waters (Ps 1:3, 23:2) (Volf 2015:ix).

The greatest source of a flourishing life is a good environment. This underscores my argument that forgiveness is a great necessity for human flourishing because forgiveness creates an environment for people to flourish. This concurs with Volf's (2015:173) argument that in order to decrease the motivation for conflict and violence, human beings need alternative visions of human flourishing that are centred not on bread alone, but on reconciliation. Elsewhere, Volf argues that life marked by love for God and neighbours is the end of human flourishing. In other words, human flourishing is how well people develop their capacities as created in the image of God and employ them so as to better love for God and their neighbours (Volf 2015:15–16). This is because conflict and violence deny people the environment to maximise the potential God has given them. In a warring situation, it is forgiveness that creates an environment for people to flourish. This is graphically displayed in the narrative of Joseph and his brothers, where forgiveness created a flourishing environment. In other words, in the narrative of Joseph and his brothers we are enabled to see how forgiveness led the family of Jacob to prosper and multiply and increase, thereby fulfilling God's plan for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. So we read in

Genesis 47:27: “Now the Israelites settled in Egypt in the region of Goshen. They acquired property there and were fruitful and increased greatly in numbers.” And in Exodus 1:7 we see that the “Israelites were exceedingly fruitful; they multiplied greatly, increased in numbers and became so numerous that the land was filled with them”. These episodes depict what emanated from Joseph’s forgiveness of his brothers for the evil done to him in the past. This means that, in a situation of conflict and violence, forgiveness opens a pathway to a bright future. This is because forgiveness breaks the vicious circle of conflict and violence created by revenge and vengeance. Tutu (1999:209) says it is only moving on to forgiveness that breaks the power of the circle of reprisal and counter-reprisal that characterises a situation of conflict and violence. One could also add that, unless the circle of conflict and violence is broken by forgiveness, there can be no future. The story of Father Michael Lapsley is a graphic example of how radical forgiveness may be an enabling environment for human flourishing.

In 1990, Father Michael Lapsley, an Anglican priest active in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, opened a letter bomb that nearly killed him. The blast took both his hands and one of his eyes. But Father Lapsley overcame all the negative feelings that come with such an experience. He testifies that he lost a lot in the bombing, but he also gained a lot. This is because he realised that if he remains consumed by hatred, bitterness, and a desire for revenge, he will be a victim forever. This means the attackers would have failed to kill his body, but hatred, bitterness and a desire for revenge would have made them kill his soul and above all denied him the environment for human flourishing (Lapsley & Karakashian 2012:22–23). Father Lapsley became a source of healing for many people who were wounded by conflict and violence in different countries of the world by organising and facilitating healing of memory workshops.

It is indeed very difficult to do away with the bitter feeling toward activities of kidnapping, raping, Fulani herdsmen, ethnic as well as religious conflict and violence in northern Nigeria that are denying people the environment to flourish. For example, it is very difficult for one to stop thinking how different it would be if the commitment, determination, resilience, resources, and all the efforts of Boko Haram, Fulani herdsmen, kidnappers, rapers and religious fanatics were directed to acts of kindness

and voluntary services to humanity. Nigeria would be better than what she is today; northern Nigeria would have been well developed and more advanced in all human endeavours. In addition, how different it would be if people in northern Nigeria were to be devoted, committed, determined, and believed in the best of the region, while they remain faithful, loyal, and passionate about their ethnicity, tribe, religion, and the like. The region would have been a place of opportunities, a home of flourishing, an arena of prosperity, a kingdom of fulfilment, and a home of peace and harmonious life.

As such, the task of the biographical preaching of forgiveness is to use the word of God to help people to voluntarily give up the right to seek repayment from those who harmed them. People need to be helped to acquire the ability to directly refuse to hurt those who hurt them in the past. They should refuse vengeance, payback, and the infliction of pain. Instead, they should remain as friendly as possible (Keller 2005:2). They need help to be able to overcome the burning human desire to make those whom they consider as enemies feel guilty for how they treated them in the past.

Conclusion

In the beginning, it was argued that as a result of multidimensional conflicts and violence nearly every ethnic group, tribe, and religion has wronged others. Nearly every ethnic group, tribe and religion has suffered or is suffering the devastating effects of ethnic, tribal, and religious division, conflict, and violence. Nearly every ethnic group, tribe and religion struggles to forgive and reconcile with others. Nearly every ethnic group, tribe, and religion impulsively considers revenge as the most delicious way of response to the wrong being done.

Therefore, preaching forgiveness should focus on how to help people to move from the desire and practice of vengeance to radical forgiveness. That is, preaching should empower people with the ability to stop counting the wrongful deeds of the past. People may name the wrongdoing committed and condemn it, but they should give the wrongdoers the gift of not counting their wrongdoing against them. In other words, people need to

be empowered through preaching to voluntarily give up the right to seek repayment from those who harmed them; to voluntarily refuse to hurt those who hurt them; to voluntarily refuse vengeance, payback, or the infliction of pain on those who inflicted pain on them.

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