

# Forgiveness is Not the Answer

## *A Christian response to wrongdoing in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict*

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### Abstract

This article seeks to explore potential responses to a case study of wrongdoing committed in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The article summarises what it sees as being the two main approaches to forgiveness before it discards them both as pastorally untenable responses to the specific wrongdoing in question. The article establishes that, often, Christian approaches to wrongdoing and the advocacy of forgiveness (often typical in situations where a person has been wronged) are sometimes misplaced and ill-judged in the circumstances. Here, I suggest one possible way to navigate a response to the case study of the wrongdoing that I explore is to look to the cross of Christ as an example of participating in solidarity with others' grief as a means of transcending and transforming the pastoral effects of wrongs that have been committed. I argue that such an approach can establish healing, restorative, and reconciliatory outcomes that forgiveness, in this context, is unable to bring about.

### Keywords

Forgiveness, Justice, Healing, Storytelling, Participation, Reconciliation

*It was winter in Palestine when in the early hours of the morning Yousef was awoken by the crash of doors being rammed off from their hinges and the scurry and thud of boots entering the multi-storey property where he, his wife and his brother lived together, leasing several of the other rooms to students. A contingent of Israeli Defence Force soldiers, their faces concealed with balaclavas, demanded that the house be emptied of all residents. It was the holidays, so the usual student occupants were not present. Yousef, his wife, and his brother assembled outside the building, accounting for themselves as the only occupants. This claim was only met with suspicion by the soldiers conducting the midnight raid. Frustrated at the seeming non-compliance of the assembled party of only three, Yousef*



*and his brother were mobilized as human shields by the soldiers whilst they searched the various storeys of the building, revealing only empty rooms. Yousef returned outside to his wife, where they remained, held at gunpoint. They awaited the re-emergence of Yousef's brother whilst the soldiers continued the searches in and around the building. As the soldiers withdrew to their vehicles, a series of explosives were detonated. Yousef and his wife watched as their home and livelihood crumbled to the ground. Yousef's brother was still in the building at the time of the explosion. His body was later recovered in the rubble.<sup>1</sup>*

The purpose of this article is to establish a preferred course of action for Yousef that would prove to be effective for determining a healing and restorative outcome to the injustice and wrongdoing that the Israelis had committed. To do this, I will analyse the variety of responses that purport to bring about forgiveness, engaging critically with their theological and practical underpinnings. I do this in order to show that there is an alternative response – participating in the suffering of others. The result of such a response can lead to an outcome that is healing and restorative for both communities and individuals. The response sidesteps the drawbacks to what might be called ‘forgiving’ – which may be limited and individualistic. I will conclude by observing that advocating forgiveness as a response to loss and bereavement is sometimes the square peg forced into the round hole of pastoral and practical responses. One reason for this may be an under-realized theology of the cross that fails to recognize that Christ's participation and solidarity with our suffering is a prototypical way for sharing in another's grief that can be transformative.

A necessary stepping-stone of our analysis is to break down the presenting issue into its constituent elements of wrongdoing and victimhood:

Clearly, Yousef is a direct victim of the wrongdoing and, no matter the course of action taken, there is no possibility of reversing the fact of his brother's death. Hannah Arendt describes such a situation as being characterized by ‘the predicament of irreversibility’.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, as a rather obvious aside, Yousef's brother, because he is dead, is unable to respond to the wrong committed against him. Forgiveness and reconciliation are impossible for Yousef's brother.<sup>3</sup> Thus, it is fitting that our focus is on the potential response of Yousef. He is the surviving victim who experiences grief from the loss of his brother, homelessness, loss of income and livelihood from his letting business and ongoing psychological trauma for him and his family.

Several questions also arise when considering the perpetrators: did everyone in the group of soldiers understand what was going on and collaborate knowingly in the events that occurred? Are some individuals more responsible than others, e.g., those who detonated the explosives knowing that Yousef's brother was still in the building? What about those responsible for the misguided intelligence that led to the raid in the first place?

<sup>1</sup> An anonymized testimony of Yousef (pseudonym), a Christian living in Palestine.

<sup>2</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1959), 212.

<sup>3</sup> Anthony Bash, *Just Forgiveness* (SPCK: London, 2011), 7.

To what extent is the wider government of the Israeli state responsible for the actions of the military leadership that encouraged and permitted such an unjust act? From the Israeli viewpoint, could it be said that the intentional taking of Yousef's brother's life was not an indiscriminate, but a retaliatory act, made simply because Yousef's brother happened to be Palestinian?

It is self-evident that the clarity of the *how* and to *whom* Yousef might direct his response is complex and needs to balance the need for justice and constructively address the anger over what has happened that he understandably experiences.

There are two, contrasting approaches to forgiveness that offer pastoral help to a person such as Yousef.

The first sees forgiveness as a process of *justice* that seeks restoration and restitution for victims of wrongdoing. The fullest, or in Bash's terms 'thickest'<sup>4</sup>, form of forgiveness will include: (1) a directed and intentional response of the victim toward the perpetrator and their wrongdoing; (2) a perpetrator's confession, repentance, and restitution; (3) mutual acknowledgement that an act is morally wrong; (4) the act of restoring a relationship – reconciliation; and (5) concerns itself with just outcomes that are fair, responsible, wholesome, and constructive for both victims and perpetrators.<sup>5</sup> The main distinguishing characteristic of this approach is that it views the *perpetrators' subsequent actions* after their wrongdoing as essential for a truly forgiving response. Critically, the 'justice' approach stops perpetrators 'getting away with it' by emphasising that individuals' actions are set in a social context and that individual actors (whether victims or perpetrators), as members of a community, also have responsibilities to that community to stop further injustice. When wrongdoers accept their wider social and corporate responsibilities, their attitudes to the wrong they have done may, as a result, change and so the victims of their wrongdoing are more likely to obtain justice. Usually and ideally, this happens when perpetrators, motivated by their sincere contrition, voluntarily seek to do and actually do restorative acts.<sup>6</sup>

Secondly, forgiveness as a *therapeutic* process strives to achieve closure and inner healing for victims. A popular proponent of this approach are Desmond and Mpho Tutu, who emphasise that a victim's ability to forgive is *not* dependent on a perpetrator's confession, remorse, contrition, or repentance. The Tutus understand that victims' expectations for such actions and reactions from perpetrators are what 'chains' them in a state of perpetual anger. Central to the Tutus' conception of forgiveness is the externalising of the wrong committed through meditative and creative practices such as storytelling.

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<sup>4</sup> Bash, *Just Forgiveness*, 35–40.

<sup>5</sup> Bash, *Just Forgiveness*, 30–33; for concurrence on these criteria see Andrew Rigby's comments cited in Marian Liebman, 'Restorative Justice and Forgiveness', in Stephen Hance (ed.), *Forgiveness in Practice* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2019), 99–113 (103); cf. Volf on justice in forgiveness: 'every act of forgiveness enthrones justice; it draws attention to its violation precisely by forgoing its claims' in Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace* (Abingdon Press: Nashville, 2019), 123.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Cherry, 'Is Forgiveness the Answer? Living Well After Violence Abuse or Betrayal', The Queen's Foundation Lecture, 2019, Bourneville Parish Church, Monday 13 May 2019.

The use of storytelling and narrative as a methodology for exercising 'forgiveness' is prolific within both Christian and secular practice. Examples of this include:

- 1) Marina Cantacuzino's *The Forgiveness Project*:  
'... that sets out through storytelling to explore how ideas of forgiveness, reconciliation and conflict resolution can be used to impact positively on people's lives, through the personal testimonies of both victims and perpetrators of crime and violence.'<sup>7</sup>
- 2) Desmond and Mpho Tutus' 'Naming the Hurt' in the practice of the 'Fourfold Path':  
'Telling the story is how we get our dignity back after we have been harmed. It is how we begin to take back what was taken from us, and how we begin to understand and make meaning out of our hurting [...] I know that it is through my storytelling I will begin to heal from trauma [...] It is not always easy to tell your story, but it is the first critical step on the path to freedom and forgiveness.'<sup>8</sup>
- 3) The Institute for the Healing of Memories (IHOM) whose use of storytelling in workshops facilitates the 'healing, empowerment and dignity' of victims of conflict and wrongdoing:  
'Everyone has a story to tell and every story needs to be heard, acknowledged, and respected. This is the first step to *personal healing* as well as *healing of interpersonal relationships*.'<sup>9</sup>
- 4) Storytelling also informs many of the leading psychological models of forgiveness such as 'Worthington's Pyramid Model to REACH Forgiveness' with 'recalling the hurt'<sup>10</sup> and Enright's 'Process Model' of forgiveness.<sup>11</sup>
- 5) In my own professional life at the Rose Castle Foundation<sup>12</sup> storytelling is used to foster empathy in the context of interreligious conflict and reconciliation, sometimes locating its practice within what is in effect the practice of forgiveness. We use practical exercises, where pastorally appropriate, to encourage participants to consider and perhaps even abide in the story of the 'other', encouraging the development of empathy for those on the other side of conflict.

<sup>7</sup> Marina Cantacuzino, *The Forgiveness Project* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2016), 11.

<sup>8</sup> Tutu, D.; Tutu, M., *The Book of Forgiving* (London: William Collins, 2015), 71, 78.

<sup>9</sup> See <https://www.healing-memories.org> (accessed 11 March 2021; my emphasis). IHOM was founded by the Anglican priest, Father Michael Lapsley, the victim of an almost deadly letter-bomb during the civil unrest of post-apartheid South Africa who subsequently dedicated his life to establish and run an NGO that primarily facilitates the workshops, usually taking place over 3 days, that explore the role of storytelling and narrative in facilitating therapeutic outcomes. It is noteworthy that these workshops are facilitate storytelling in a space where two opposing sides of a particular socio-political conflict are able to listen to one another's stories

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.evworthington-forgiveness.com/reach-forgiveness-of-others> (accessed 11 March 2021). Cf. Bash, 'Chapter 3: Forgiveness and Psychological Therapy' in *Forgiveness and Christian Ethics*, 37.

<sup>11</sup> Dr R. Enright is the Co-Founder of the International Forgiveness Institute, his 'Process Model' of forgiveness is described in his title *Forgiveness is a Choice* (Washington: APA, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.rosecastle.com/rcef/home> (accessed 11 March 2021).

The distinguishing characteristic of this approach is that it is often largely victim-centric, views forgiveness as a 'choice' to be made and does not necessarily require engagement with the perpetrator. 'Effective' forgiveness is usually offered as an unconditional 'gift'. Often, this is not rendered verbally to the perpetrator, but is a commitment to oneself to 'let go of the hold' a perpetrator's wrongdoing has over oneself. Storytelling with its therapeutic approach aims to abate ongoing emotional responses to wrongdoing that negatively affect victims' psychological wellbeing – including a relinquishing of the desire to seek revenge.<sup>13</sup>

We have learned to see that storytelling reigns supreme as a first response to those struggling with issues of forgiveness/non-forgiveness.

How might these contrasting views of forgiveness, as 'justice' or as 'therapy', aid the development of recommending a response to Yousef?

The 'justice' approach to interpersonal forgiveness raises several issues for Yousef in his situation. Yousef cannot make contact with or exercise any power or influence to identify *who* the perpetrators are. Even if Yousef could identify the individual/s responsible for these acts, it seems unlikely that a positive and restorative outcome would emerge.<sup>14</sup>

This point is poignantly illustrated by two case studies. The first is about Bassam Aramin, a Palestinian whose ten-year-old daughter was killed in cold blood by an IDF soldier's rubber bullet as she stood outside her school. Bassam campaigned for several years to bring his daughter's killer to justice and get recognition from the Israeli government for the crime that was committed – despite widespread media attention and overwhelming evidence, the killer has never openly identified themselves and the Supreme Court has dismissed the case for the fourth and final time. The second concerns Robi Damelin, whose son was killed by a Palestinian sniper as he guarded a checkpoint. Robi's son's sniper was eventually caught by the Israeli authorities and imprisoned. Some years later, Robi wrote to the family of the sniper with the hope of initiating a restorative outcome but the sniper wrote back with a hate-filled letter justifying the murder of her son.<sup>15</sup>

Whilst it is not impossible, it is very unlikely that Yousef's perpetrators will step forward, break their anonymity, recognize their deeds, and seek reconciliation. To seek justice is probably an unwise aim for Yousef as it is unlikely he will be able to ever identify the perpetrators or that they would be remorseful about their actions. Until the perpetrators choose to come forward, Yousef's pursuit of the 'justice' approach to interpersonal forgiveness will be stalled and become a source of frustration and bewilderment. The closure and resolution Yousef seeks will be unattainable.

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Bash on how this approach equates to a 'thin' process of forgiveness. This is akin to a form of interpersonal behaviour that has some, but not all, of the characteristics of forgiveness in a New Testament sense. See Bash, *Just Forgiveness*, 35–40.

<sup>14</sup> See Volf on the unlikelihood and difficulties of perpetrators' sincere and 'pure' desire to repent: Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace*, 119–20.

<sup>15</sup> Cantacuzino, *Forgiveness Project*, 72–76; 146–49.

The 'therapeutic' approach is also unlikely to result in a satisfactory outcome for Yousef. Its merit is its overarching emphasis on relinquishing the desire for revenge, whether the revenge is retaliation or the belief that justice facilitated by the state will somehow right the wrong committed. Some argue that this approach accords with the New Testament's vision for the Christian disciple's non-violent response to wrongdoing, such as by relinquishing vengeful desires, loving one's enemies, and praying for those who persecute the Christian disciple (Rom. 12.19; Matt. 5.44). However, many Christians who advocate the 'therapeutic' approach mistakenly justify it on a misreading of Christ's words on the cross in Luke 23.34. This often produces a Christian view of forgiveness that it should be 'proactive, immediate, unconditional'<sup>16</sup> and given to perpetrators as a gift.

Bash has argued conclusively against this misreading of Jesus' words and the dangers it poses for undermining the place of perpetrator repentance that is normative for forgiveness throughout the New Testament. Time and time again you see the words of Luke 23.24 cited in Christian literature as a reason for Christians to take up the 'immediate, proactive, and unconditional forgiveness' that Cherry speaks of. For example:

- 1) Ginn Fourie's story of forgiving Letlapa Mphahlele's command over the death of her daughter:  
 'Many could not countenance my forgiveness for Lyndi's killers, but as a Christian I cherished the memory of Christ forgiving his murderers.'<sup>17</sup>
- 2) Desmond and Mpho Tutu:  
 'Obviously, in Mpho's faith and mine, our model of the ultimate expression of forgiveness is Jesus Christ, who on the cross was able to ask forgiveness for those who were torturing and killing him.'<sup>18</sup>

However, this rendering fails to recognize the significant observation of Bash that:

[T]hese words are a prayer that *God* will forgive, not Jesus' own expression of forgiveness. Jesus demonstrates that he loves his enemies, but that is different from forgiving his enemies – and we should note that Jesus does not say that he forgives his enemies.<sup>19</sup>

This over-interpretation of Jesus' words has created a certain kind of theology of Christian forgiveness – the kind that Cherry describes – that does not depend on antecedent repentance, and this theology has been imported into the broader notion and practice of forgiveness in the rest of the New Testament. The obvious misreading here being that this

<sup>16</sup> Cherry argues that this view of forgiveness is pervasive in the public and practiced theology of the church: Cherry, 'Is Forgiveness the Answer?'

<sup>17</sup> Cantacuzino, *The Forgiveness Project*, 68.

<sup>18</sup> Tutu, *The Book of Forgiving*, 57.

<sup>19</sup> Bash, *Just Forgiveness*, 14. It is important to stress that Bash sees loving one's enemies as a virtuous response when forgiveness is not possible. However, he makes the important distinction that is often overlooked, that loving one's enemies and forgiveness are not the same thing. Loving one's enemies can therefore be seen as a universal response in the face of wrongdoing.

exegetical import compromises and distorts the normative paradigm of forgiveness including, perhaps even requiring, repentance from perpetrators (e.g., Luke 17.3–4).<sup>20</sup> A case in point is the unintentional but nevertheless, almost derogatory language of ‘strings attached forgiveness’ that the Tutus use regarding the expectations of repentance that victims may have:

Forgiveness is not dependent on the actions of others. Yes, it is certainly easier to offer forgiveness when the perpetrator expresses remorse and offers some sort of reparation or restitution... In this understanding, forgiveness is something we offer to another, a gift we bestow upon someone, but it is a gift that has *strings attached*.<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, there is also one further significant oversimplification of the application of Luke 23.34 in these terms that creates a false dichotomy of choice between forgiveness *or* vengeance. It is possible not only to forswear revenge, but also to be committed to a path of judicial justice without allowing the perpetrator and their actions to ‘hang over’ oneself, perpetuating a state of anger. This is a significant insight, because it suggests that the ‘therapeutic’ approach is mistaken to insist that it is necessary to relinquish a desire of justice.<sup>22</sup>

*The Book of Forgiving* and the Tutus’ efforts in Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) are both are praiseworthy and to be commended. However, what is clear from our analysis is that the Tutus’ certainty in forgiveness and reconciliation ‘always being possible’ is not established through a realistic reflection of the complexities entailed in achieving a ‘thick’ expression of forgiveness. Instead, the Tutus have opted for an approach in which the certainty of forgiveness is achievable by reducing it to its most basic (albeit still difficult) components: forswearing revenge and letting go of feelings of resentment toward perpetrators. One can understand and empathize with the development of the Tutus’ ‘thin’ conceptual approach to forgiveness by acknowledging its placement in the socio-political context of post-apartheid South Africa. ‘Thin’ forgiveness is needed, letting go is necessary, and in the context of the TRC aspirational models and ‘thick’ forgiveness might seem unlikely, if not impossible. Exactly how does one coordinate the ‘thick’ forgiveness that Bash describes amongst a nation? Amongst hundreds and thousands of individuals where, for example, both perpetrators and victims are unknown to each other or perhaps deceased? The plausibility of reaching anything like a rich expression of forgiveness has very serious challenges. However, where the Tutus have gone awry is by mapping the complex landscape of trauma and wrongdoing committed within apartheid South Africa on to *every kind* of context of wrongdoing. In doing so the Tutus have conflated the response of ‘letting

<sup>20</sup> See Bash for a succinct summary on the importance/non-importance of the issues surrounding Luke 23.34 in *Just Forgiveness*, 14–15; and *Forgiveness: A Theology*, 42–43.

<sup>21</sup> Tutu, *The Book of Forgiving*, 20 (my emphasis).

<sup>22</sup> For example, the Tutus present a strict binary of options to the victim dealing with unforgiveness: pursue revenge and enter vicious and perpetual retaliation cycles between perpetrator and victim *or* choose the Fourfold Path where you tell your story, name the hurt, grant ‘forgiveness’ and renew or release the relationship. See Tutu, *The Book of Forgiving*, 56 Compare these themes with Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace*, 123–24; and on Luke 23.34 see p. 126.

go' with the total sum of what forgiveness is. The contents of *The Book of Forgiving* are no doubt valuable when seeking the communal transformation of a bitter and vengeful nation, however, they do not adequately account for the potential of forgiveness to be 'thick' in its outcomes in other contexts of wrongdoing.

One tangible and easy way to avoid the oversimplifications of the 'therapeutic' approach is to stop calling it forgiveness and to instate a normative language amongst practitioners of 'letting go', or a victim's 'releasing' of perpetrators. This allows 'thick' and 'thin' forgiveness to be distinguished from one another in comprehensible terms that recognizes their outcomes. Furthermore, creating a distinction between forgiveness and 'letting go' upholds the importance of seeking justice within responses to wrongdoing whilst also allowing for therapeutic outcomes in contexts in which justice will not, or cannot, be obtained.

Whilst many aspects of the 'therapeutic' approach might help Yousef to constructively deal with the grief and anger he is experiencing, the process is reductionistic and unfaithful to the obvious need for tangible restitution. The 'therapeutic' approach could be considered a siloed and individualistic quest for inner healing that accomplishes little to make meaning or good out of the loss of Yousef's brother's life and the destruction of his home. Most significantly, it does nothing to confront the actors and agents that enabled the wrong committed to take place and makes no constructive steps to ensure the same events do not happen again.

Thus, severe shortcomings hinder both approaches to forgiveness in Yousef's case. So, what is the way forward, if there is one?

Returning to Bassam and Robi, they both concede that they have not been able to forgive the perpetrators who killed their daughter and son respectively:

For me to consider forgiveness, Israel has to recognize such crimes. (Bassam)

I am reluctant to use the word 'forgiving'. Does forgiving mean giving up your right to justice? Does it mean that what they did is OK or that they can do it again? Or do you forget? (Robi)

In the absence of restorative action from their perpetrators, Robi and Bassam have not been able to forgive in the 'justice' sense and have refused to declare forgiveness in the 'therapeutic' sense. Nonetheless, despite the non-viability of forgiveness they have still sought constructive responses using their experience of victimhood to achieve such ends. This has been accomplished through The Parents Circle<sup>23</sup>, an NGO that enables Israelis and Palestinians who have lost loved ones to share together in their grief, establishing mutual exchange of empathy and discrediting retaliation from either side as a result of bereavement. They use their stories of loss to influence political decision makers towards non-violent approaches to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

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<sup>23</sup> [www.theparentscircle.com](http://www.theparentscircle.com) (accessed 11 March 2021).



Though forgiveness is 'off the table', Robi and Bassam's response to their loss has successfully attained *restorative* and *healing* outcomes. Their chosen response to share in the suffering and grief of those on the other side of the conflict has effectively cut to the heart of the issue by stopping the continuing dehumanization that enables the self-justification for callous acts of unprovoked brutality against 'the other'. By meeting and sharing in the bereavement of 'the other', Robi and Bassam have initiated a process of mutual interchange of their grief filled stories that has enabled the restoration of the dignity of the humanity of both Israelis and Palestinians alike. Significantly, their response has *transcended the particularity of their own individual narrative of victimhood* by using the stories of their loss and grief to effect widespread transformation in corporate perceptions and actions towards 'the other', as Bassam movingly retells:

Abir's death could have led me down the easy path of hatred and vengeance, but for me there was no return from dialogue and non-violence. After all, it was one Israeli soldier who shot my daughter, but one hundred former Israeli soldiers who built a garden in her name at the school where she was murdered.

And as Robi indicates of the work in The Parents Circle:

I realized that I shared the same pain as the Palestinian mothers in the group and that with our pain we could become the most effective catalyst for change.

Robi and Bassam have refused to be exclusively preoccupied with their own restoration and healing. Instead, they have attended to the grief of others, and, in doing so, they have accomplished a mutual service to others by recognising and condemning the wrongs committed on behalf of the warring nations they represent. The affirmation of one another's victimhood has provided, albeit, without 'forgiveness', the healing and restoration they could not obtain from the perpetrators. The commissioning of these unique relationships bonded by one another's suffering and grief has become the catalyst for effective socio-political change and reconciliation. Bassam and Robi cannot bring their children back but they honour their deaths by working together to ensure that no one else need join The Parents Circle.

In his 2019 Queen's Foundation lecture, Cherry stirringly criticizes the Church's unwitting advocacy of forgiveness as 'the answer' to be given in all circumstances of violence, abuse, and betrayal. Indeed, it is this certainty in the belief that 'forgiveness must be the right response' that undergirds the 'therapeutic' approach's unremitting assertion that 'forgiveness is always possible' and that the virtue of its pursuit is unquestionable.<sup>24</sup> The forswearing of revenge, and establishing outlets to constructively process anger and bitterness in the face of wrongdoing is of obvious practical benefit to the psychological and emotional stability of the human soul, and to wider society – clearly, we would commend

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<sup>24</sup> Tutu, *Book of Forgiving*, 55.

this to Yousef.<sup>25</sup> However, the belief that forgiveness ought to be considered the *universal* response in the face of wrongdoing highlights the seeming inability and blindsided-ness of the Church to respond adequately, appropriately and even *creatively* to their stewardship of the reality of the grief and loss of others.

Yousef's response should, like Bassam and Robi, question and discredit the relevance, viability, and usefulness of 'forgiving' his perpetrators. Instead, he could explore the ways in which his brother's death and the destruction of his home can create transformative hope for advancing socio-political reconciliation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by using his loss to establish solidarity in grief with those on the 'other side'. This is where Yousef has the profound opportunity to tell his story not just for his own individual benefit (as is often advocated by storytelling in the 'therapeutic' approach), but as an exemplar of what it means to love one's enemies (Matt. 5.44). In taking his story to the 'other side', he does so with all the vulnerability and potential trauma that might be entailed in doing so. Yousef would carry this burden to and for the benefit of the very persons who participate in the socio-political system that enabled the callous acts of brutality committed against him. Is this not exactly what it means to follow Christ in taking up one's own cross (Matt. 16.24–26)? To willingly suffer for the sake of the other, even one's enemy.

Grief and bereavement have received scant attention in Christian writing, and where consideration has been given it typically treats the subject as cause for reflection on pastoral care and apologetics.<sup>26</sup> Little has been written about grief's transformative potential in contexts of socio-political conflict within the discipline of reconciliation studies. This is a disturbing observation when we consider that at the heart of the Christian faith stands the intervention of one man's suffering, sorrow, and solidarity with *our* grief, all of which transcends and transforms the known and unknown reality of God's reconciling purposes (Col. 1.20).<sup>27</sup> The cross is God's participation in the predicament of human sin and suffering. It is the collision of his *story* and ours, those who stand as his enemies (Rom. 5.10), and who, in that very moment, actively partake in the formation of the event of God-become-victim. Christ understood proleptically on the cross how his suffering would be vindicated through his resurrection. We *retrospectively* look back on these events and observe God's restorative plan. It is critical, however, that the experience of the disciples between Good Friday and Easter is one of trepidation and an overwhelming sense of loss – something is

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. Bash on the issue of equating psychological alleviation through therapy as 'forgiveness', he argues convincingly and conclusively that the two are not synonymous: 'Forgiveness, then, is a moral issue with psychological implications; it is not a psychological issue with moral undertones. Psychological therapy can help people to explore how to make an appropriate moral response to psychological trauma but the therapy will not – and cannot – bring about forgiveness. At best, and this is very valuable, therapy can bring people to the point where they can choose to forgive or not to forgive.' in 'Chapter 3: Forgiveness and Psychological Therapy' in *Forgiveness and Christian Ethics*, 46

<sup>26</sup> See works by Stephen Oliver, *Inside Grief* (London: SPCK, 2013) and Greg Garret, *A Theology of Grief* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008).

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Moltmann's recognition of Christ's solidarity in suffering as a major theme of the cross – the implications of sharing the grief of others for socio-political implications for reconciliation are not developed. See: Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace*, 12–13.

wrong and needs to be put right. Yousef finds himself in this liminal space, not knowing, at the time, how his suffering will ascend above his present experience of loss. But the gospel message is not one of trepidation, but of anticipation. The death of Christ anticipates that God will work in unimaginable and inconceivable ways to restore the injustice that mars creation. We are not referring here only to eschatological hope (though that is reassuring), we are also referring to a faith that acknowledges gospel hope for the present, that anticipates the surprise of God that even the very worst injustice can be used to bring about life-giving transformation.

As Yousef reflects on his chosen response, one potential resource for enrichment is Morna Hooker's exploration and articulation of Paul's conception of 'interchange' with Christ.<sup>28</sup> If the believer and Christ 'partake in the life of one another' and the cross is seen as a source and example of grief transcending the bounds of the sufferer themselves, effecting corporate transformation beyond the conceived limits of one individual's victimhood, then the poignant and significant question can be raised to Yousef: 'How might you as Christ's ambassador in this conflict transform your grief for the restoration and healing of the other?' In doing so, I would dare to suggest that Yousef could not only bring about transformation on a corporate level but also discover healing and restoration for himself.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Morna Hooker, 'Interchange and Suffering' in *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament* (Cambridge: CUP, 2008).

<sup>29</sup> I would like to thank Anthony Bash for his support in refining the clarity of argument of this article, and for his expertise in facilitative learning and drawing out the best in his students. I have been tremendously blessed by his generous teaching style and mentorship throughout my studies of forgiveness.