

Matthean Perspectives on Bloodshed, Obedience, and Bearing Arms

Barbara E. Reid
Catholic Theological Union
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Abstract:

Three unique features in Matthew's Passion Narrative open up questions about the appropriate responses of Christians to a call to war. (1) Matthew's emphasis on the shedding of blood, involving the religious leaders (23:35; 27:6-10), Judas (27:1-5), and the people as a whole (27:24-25), juxtaposed with Jesus' offer of the cup at the Last Supper as his "blood of the covenant, poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (26:28), invites discussion about bloodshed and the role of forgiveness. (2) Matthew's scene in Gethsemane (26:36-46) uniquely underscores Jesus' obedience as "Son of God" (27:40, 43), and invites discussion about whether obedience or resistance is the response to be given to ruling powers that would sacrifice beloved sons and daughters in war. (3) Jesus' saying, "all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (26:52) poses the question of whether bearing arms is possible for a Christian.

Introduction

On September 24, 2006 the number of military deaths of U.S. soldiers from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan surpassed 2,973, the number of deaths from the terrorist attacks in New York, Washington D.C., and Pennsylvania on September 11, 2001.¹ That same week the United Nations issued a report that the number of Iraqi civilians killed in the month of August 2006 alone was 3,009, bringing the death total of Iraqi civilians just since January 2006 to 21,022.² At the same time the National Intelligence Estimate asserted that the number of terrorists are increasing in both number and geographic dispersion.³ Five years into the war in Afghanistan, the Chicago Tribune reported on October 3, 2006, that Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist now says that the war against Taliban guerillas in Afghanistan could never be won militarily. He has learned from military briefings that Taliban fighters are too numerous and have too much popular support to be defeated on the battlefield. "Approaching counterinsurgency by winning hearts and minds will ultimately be the answer," Frist asserted.⁴

¹Chicago Tribune online: <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/chi-0609240329sep24,1,4931258.story>. Accessed 10/3/06.

²Chicago Tribune online: <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/chi-0609210084sep21,1,1982130.story>. Accessed 10/3/06. Figures from the U.S. Department of Defense estimate that as of October 17, 2006, the number of Iraqi civilians killed is between 43,937 and 48,783 (<http://domlife.org/Justice/Iraq/IraqINDEXpage.htm> accessed 10/17/06).

³Chicago Tribune online: <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/opinion/chi-0609270002sep27,1,2685648.story>. Accessed 10/3/06.

⁴Chicago Tribune online: <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/custom/newsroom/la-fg->

As the death toll continues to escalate, and as the costs soar,⁵ popular support for the wars is waning in the U.S. and questions previously not asked by most are now surfacing in the news. Some of the questions concern the handling of the war. Is the Secretary of Defense competent or should he be fired? What strategies are needed now that those currently being used are proving ineffective? Questions persist whether the attacks that led to the war were preventable. Who knew how much about the planned Al Qaeda attacks before 9/11? Other questions about the motive for the war with Iraq still swirl: Was there any connection between Al Qaeda and Iraq? What about the weapons of mass destruction that were never found? Were the motives presented to the American public false? Other questions concern "homeland security." What measures need to be taken? And as mid-term elections approach, What leaders are best able to keep the U.S. safe from terrorist attack? Those who ask such questions are not accused as often now of being anti-patriotic as they were in the early days of the war.

People of faith bring another set of questions into the dialogue. How do our Scriptures and tradition illumine the way for contemporary responses in today's circumstances? Does reflection on and living from the gospel lead to a different response than war? I write as a Roman Catholic Christian and a U.S. citizen. I have no expertise in foreign policy or politics, but as a biblical scholar I hope to make a modest contribution to the discussion about what kinds of questions and perspectives Christians might bring to the table from their reflection on the Gospel of Matthew.

Three unique features in Matthew's Passion Narrative open up questions about the appropriate responses of Christians to conflict. (1) Matthew's emphasis on the shedding of blood, involving the religious leaders (23:35; 27:6-10), Judas (27:1-5), and the people as a whole (27:24-25), juxtaposed with Jesus' offer of the cup at the Last Supper as his "blood of the covenant, poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (26:28), invites discussion about bloodshed and the role of forgiveness. (2) Matthew's scene in Gethsemane (26:36-46) uniquely underscores Jesus' obedience as "Son of God" (27:40, 43), and invites discussion about whether obedience or resistance is the response to be given to ruling powers that would sacrifice beloved sons and daughters in war. (3) Jesus' saying, "all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (26:52)⁶ poses the question of whether bearing arms is possible for a Christian. I will address each of these three features, beginning with the sword saying.

I. "All who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matt 26:52)

This saying, unique to the Gospel of Matthew, is Jesus' response to one who was with him at Gethsemane who drew his sword and cut off the ear of the high priest's slave (26:51). This statement comes at a climactic moment in the Gospel and is part of Jesus' consistent message of unequivocal rejection of violence as a response to violence.⁷ Among the alternative

afghan3oct03.1.6067608.story. Accessed 10/3/06.

⁵The running total of the cost of the war as of 10/17/06 is \$339,624,250,000.00. <http://domlife.org/Justice/Iraq/IraqINDEXpage.htm>. Accessed 11/4/06.

⁶All quotations of Scripture are from the *NRSV* unless otherwise noted.

⁷"Violence" is "exertion of force so as to injure or abuse another" (*Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged* [ed. Philip Babcock Gove;

responses to an enemy (ἐχθρός), an evildoer (πονηρός, κακός), or a persecutor (ὁ διωκὼν) featured in Matthew are the following:

Avoidance or Flight

In several instances avoidance or flight is featured as the proper response to a threatening situation. When Herod seeks the life of the infant Jesus, Joseph flees with the child and his mother to Egypt (2:13-15). After Herod's death, Joseph avoids the possible danger that Herod's son Archelaus poses and settles the family in Nazareth, rather than return to Judea (2:19-23). In his mission instructions to his disciples, Jesus advises them to keep fleeing to the next town when they are persecuted (10:23). And in the eschatological discourse Jesus advises, "those in Judea must flee to the mountains (24:15-16).

Rejoicing over Persecution

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus tells his disciples, "Blessed are you when people revile and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account" (5:11). He then advises them to rejoice in such a situation, as it signals their emulation of the prophets who have preceded them. He further assures them that their reward will be great in heaven (5:12). Jesus is not inviting his followers to seek persecution, but nor to adopt a Pollyannaish attitude that diminishes or overlooks attacks directed at them. Rather, he invites them to shift their attention away from their own suffering and embrace instead the joy that comes from their prophetic ministry that lifts up those who are most downtrodden while challenging those who benefit from the oppression of others.

Prayer for Rescue

In the prayer that Jesus teaches his disciples is a supplication for deliverance from evil (6:13). When confronting evil and evildoers, it is not enough to rely on human efforts. Reliance on God's power is essential.

Nonretaliation, Nonviolent Confrontation, Love of Enemies, and Prayer for Persecutors

The lengthiest instruction on how to respond to violence is found in the Sermon on the Mount. In Matt 5:38-42 Jesus first tells his disciples not to retaliate in kind to an evildoer.⁸ He

Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 1993] 2554).

⁸The verb ἀνθίστημι (v. 39b) means "to set oneself against, oppose, resist, withstand" (BDAG, 80). The *NRSV* translation, "Do not resist an evildoer," and the *NAB*, "Offer no resistance to one who is evil," are misleading. A command not to resist evil or an evildoer makes little sense on the lips of Jesus, when the whole Gospel shows him doing just the opposite. Christian tradition is replete with admonitions to oppose or withstand evil, e.g., Rom 12:9; 1 Thess 5:22; 1 Cor 5:13; Eph 6:13. The issue is *how* the disciple is to confront evil. From the context, the sense of μὴ ἀντιστῆναι is "do not retaliate in kind." See further Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, Including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3-7:27 and Luke 6:20-49)* (ed. Adela Yarbro Collins; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995) 280-81. Walter Wink (*Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992] 184-86) shows that, in the

then gives four concrete examples of how, in situations of unequal power and status, injured persons can break the cycle of violence by actively confronting the perpetrator of the injustice with a positive and provocative nonviolent act. In this way they retrieve their own honor and open the possibility for new kinds of exchanges that move toward achieving right relation.⁹

Then follows Jesus' instruction to love enemies and pray for persecutors (5:43-48). Scholars debate what kinds of enemies Jesus intends, and in what "love" toward them consists. Hans Dieter Betz understands the two phrases of v. 44 in synonymous parallelism, so that "enemy" is equivalent to "those who persecute you" and prayer for them is the loving action demanded.¹⁰ Richard A. Horsley envisions "enemies" as fellow peasant villagers enmeshed in the severe economic hardship that has created strife and division. "Love your enemy" is a call to people in local village communities to take economic responsibility for each other, sharing what they have with one another, even with those who are hostile toward them.¹¹ Gerard Sloyan suggests that what may be envisioned in Matthew's community is a situation of apostasy, in which Christians are counseled against violence toward those with whom they had shared intimately, but who now have abandoned the faith.¹² However, Krister Stendahl argues that, apart from the general use in Gal 4:16 and Phil 3:18, "enemy" is never used in the NT for a fellow Christian.¹³ Few scholars today think that the "enemy" in Matt 5:44 refers to foreign or political opponents, though Matthew does use ἐχθρός with this meaning in 22:44 in his citation of Ps 110:1. In the other two instances in which Matthew uses ἐχθρός it refers to members of one's own family (10:36) and to someone who sowed weeds in another's wheat field (13:24-30, 36-43). As William Klassen has observed, ἐχθρός is the standard NT term for "enemy" in its broadest sense, and the use of the plural in Matt 5:44 stresses inclusive usage.¹⁴ There is no compelling reason to limit the meaning of "enemy" in Matt 5:44 to a particular category. The command to love the enemy redefines "neighbor" and requires love that is not restricted. Concrete examples of such love include praying for persecutors (v. 44)¹⁵ and welcoming¹⁶

majority of instances of ἀντιστῆναι in the LXX, Philo, and Josephus, the connotation is "resist violently" or use "armed resistance in military encounters." See also Eph 6:13, where it is employed with military imagery.

⁹Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 175-84.

¹⁰Prayer for enemies is based on a desire for their good, not that they should die or that one should be delivered from them. See further Betz, *Sermon*, 312-13.

¹¹Richard A. Horsley, "Ethics and Exegesis: 'Love Your Enemies' and the Doctrine of Non-Violence," *JAAR* 54 [1986] 22-24. He allows that even if Matthew equates "enemy" with "persecutors," these are understood to be those outside the religious community but still in the local residential community.

¹²In conversation August 4, 2002.

¹³Krister Stendahl, "Hate, Non-Retaliatio and Love: 1QS x, 17-20 and Romans 12:19-21," *HTR* 55 (1962) 343-55.

¹⁴William Klassen, "Love. New Testament," *ABD*, 4.387. Elsewhere in the NT, ἐχθρός refers to enemies of humans (Luke 1:74; 2 Thess 3:15); enemies of God or Christ (Rom 5:10; 11:28); death (1 Cor 15:26); the devil (Luke 10:19; cf. Matt 13:39); enemies of righteousness (Acts 13:10) and of the cross of Christ (Phil 3:18).

¹⁵Douglas R. A. Hare argues (*The Theme of Jewish Persecution of Christians in the*

outsiders (v. 47).¹⁷

The admonition against taking up a sword (Matt 26:52), then, is not an isolated saying, but is part of a whole complex of teaching in Matthew on how Christians are to respond to aggressors. Taking up weapons is not an option. Instead, Jesus teaches nonretaliation, nonviolent confrontation, love of enemies, prayer for persecutors, avoidance, flight, rejoicing when persecuted, and/or prayer for rescue. Wisdom, innocence (Matt 10:16), discernment, and ability to read the signs of the times (Matt 16:3), are needed to know what is the proper response in each given situation.

II. Obedient Son

A unique feature of the crucifixion scene in Matthew's Gospel (27:38-43) is the emphasis on Jesus as Son of God. This theme builds throughout the gospel. At Jesus' baptism the heavenly voice declares, "This is my Son, the Beloved" (3:17). In the temptation scene twice the devil taunts Jesus, "If you are the Son of God . . ." (4:3, 6). Two men possessed by demons identify Jesus as "Son of God" (8:29). The frightened disciples in the boat exclaim after Jesus walks on water, "Truly, you are the Son of God!" (14:33). Peter declares, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (16:16). The heavenly voice at the Transfiguration announces, "This is my Son, the Beloved" (17:5). The high priest interrogates Jesus, demanding, "tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God" (16:63). At the crucifixion, the passersby who deride Jesus taunt him not only about the temple,¹⁸ but also say, "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross" (27:40).¹⁹ As the chief priests, scribes, and elders continue the mockery, Matthew alone adds "He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, 'I am God's Son'" (27:43). These references to Jesus as "Son of God" in 27:40, 43 are unique to the First Gospel. The theme climaxes when the centurion and those with him keeping watch over Jesus, declare at his death, "Truly this man was God's Son!" (27:54).

That Jesus goes to his death as the Son obedient to his Father's will is underscored in the Gethsemane scene (26:36-46). There Jesus twice addresses God as "my Father" (26:39, 42), and prays, "if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want" (26:39; similarly 26:42). Many Christians resolve the tensions in this scene by imagining that God knows the greater good that will result for humankind from Jesus' death, and so God allows the

Gospel According to Matthew (SNTSMS 6; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), that persecutors in Matthew are fellow Jews who opposed Christian missionaries. This is clearly the meaning of διώκω in Matt 10:23 and 23:34.

¹⁶ The verb ἀσπάζομαι connotes "welcome" and wish for well-being, not simply a perfunctory salutation (BDAG, 144). A rabbinic text that comes close to Matt 5:47 is *m. Git.* 5.9, "Greetings may be offered to Gentiles in the interests of peace." See also *m. Abot* 3.13; 4.15; *b. Ber.* 17a.

¹⁷ The term τοὺς ἀδελφούς (v. 47) may apply to any or all of the following: fellow Jews as opposed to Gentiles (οἱ ἔθνικοί, v. 47), other members of the Christian community, or family members. See Betz, *Sermon*, 319-20, for references in Matthew.

¹⁸ As also Mark 15:29.

¹⁹ Cf. Mark 15:30 "save yourself, and come down from the cross," with no reference to "Son of God."

death of the beloved Son, to which Jesus obediently accedes. Such an interpretation of Jesus' obedience can feed attitudes of acceptance and compliance in a time of war. It can lead Christians to reason that the sacrifice of some obedient sons and daughters is necessary for the sake of a greater good, and that they need to trust leaders to know what is that greater good.

Obedience and Resistance

The experiences of two different mothers who lost sons in Iraq surface questions about obedience. Lila Lipscomb, from Flint, Michigan, initially responded with unquestioning trust to our government's call to war with Iraq. She proudly displayed her American flag every day. Two of her brothers are Vietnam veterans, and her daughter served in the military in the 1991 Gulf war. She encouraged her son, Michael Pedersen, to join the army, when his job at a fast-food restaurant was not paying enough to buy diapers and formula for his young daughter. She never questioned the decision for the U.S. to go to war with Iraq. "I grew up with the understanding that you support the President, no matter who he is," she explained. Likewise, Michael "had a clear commitment to fulfilling his oath for this nation."²⁰ When he was sent to Iraq, Lila prayed fervently that Michael would come home safely. Only after Michael, in his letters from Iraq, began to question why he was there, did Lila also do so. Her grief reached excruciating proportions after he died when his Black Hawk helicopter was shot down in April 2003. She now questions why her son died and why we are at war in Iraq as she travels around the country speaking with anti-war groups.

While Lila Lipscomb frames her experience in terms of misguided patriotism and unquestioning willingness to obey the elected leader, one might ask whether a theology of obedience might also be at play in the decisions of Christians who trustingly follow leaders who take them into war. Casey Sheehan, son of Cindy, who has become a vocal anti-war activist, grew up in a devout Catholic home. He was an altar server at the Palm Sunday Mass on April 4, 2004, the day he was killed in Baghdad. Immediately after Casey returned from Mass, his sergeant called for volunteers to be part of a Quick Reaction Force to aid fellow Americans under attack by Muqtada al'Sadr's forces in Sadr City. "Where my chief goes, I go," Sheehan immediately responded.²¹

The case of Ehren Watada offers a contrary perspective. He enlisted in the army in the spring of 2003, just as the U.S. was going to war in Iraq. He initially supported the war, because he believed that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction and he wanted to do his part for his country. After having completed his training and having studied further, Watada concluded that "we have been lied to and betrayed by this administration."²² On June 7, 2006 Lt. Watada announced at a news conference that he has refused orders for deployment to Iraq on the grounds that he is bound to uphold the U.S. Constitution and not to follow illegal orders. He stated,

²⁰"'9/11' Documents a Mother's Grief," by Gary Strauss, *USA Today* 6/28/04.
http://www.usatoday.com/life/movies/news/2004-06-28-fahrenheit-lipscomb_x.htm. Accessed 10/10/06.

²¹http://www.blackfive.net/main/2005/08/army_specialist.html. Accessed 11/4/06.

²²As reported by Hal Bernton, "Officer at Ft. Lewis Calls Iraq War Illegal, Refuses Order to Go," *The Seattle Times* (June 7, 2006). Accessed 10/17/06 at:
http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/html/localnews/2003044627_nogo7m.html.

"Today I speak with you about a radical idea . . . born from the very concept of the American soldier. The idea is this, that to stop an illegal and unjust war, the soldiers can choose to stop fighting it."²³ In his editorial in *The National Catholic Reporter*, David Krieger sees echoes between Watada's stance and the principles derived from the Nuremberg trials: that claiming one was only following orders is not an adequate defense in trials for war crimes and crimes against humanity. Watada is unwilling to be placed in a situation where he will have no choice but to commit war crimes such as torture and inhumane treatment of detainees. Moreover, he sees this "war of aggression" as "a crime against the peace" and "an occupation violating the very essence of international humanitarian law and sovereignty" as "a crime against humanity."²⁴ Further, Watada challenges U.S. citizens: "Should citizens choose to remain silent through self-imposed ignorance or choice, it makes them as culpable as the soldier in these crimes."²⁵ Not only is Lt. Watada threatened with court-martial for refusing to deploy to Iraq, but also for making statements deemed to be contemptuous of the president and other top government officials.

David Krieger titles his editorial about Watada "Honor Above Obedience." I propose that, from the perspective of obedience as portrayed in the Gospel of Matthew, Watada's stance does not put obedience in a subordinate place, but rather, exemplifies an even more radical sense of obedience than the kind displayed by those that blindly obey superiors. Although Watada does not use religious terminology to describe his decision-making process, he exemplifies the kind of discerning obedience that we find in the Matthean Jesus and in the NT generally.

Obedience and Listening

Paul best captures the meaning of Christian obedience in his letter to the Romans. As he struggles to explain why his beloved fellow Jews have not accepted the gospel, he says, "But not all have obeyed (ὑπήκουσαν) the good news; for Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our message (ἄκοῇ)?' So faith comes from what is heard (ἄκοῆς), and what is heard (ἄκοῇ) comes through the word of Christ" (Rom 10:16-17). The word play with ὑπακούω, "to hear," and ἄκοῇ, "message, what is heard," makes clear the intimate link between the message, the hearing, and obedience. Obedience flows from a discerning heart that listens intently to God's word and to the lead of the Spirit in the present circumstances.

While the only Matthean occurrence of the verb ὑπακούω, "to obey," is at 8:27, where the disciples marvel that the wind and sea obey Jesus, there are several key passages where ἄκούω, "to hear," occurs in a context of instructions about discipleship, with the implication that hearing leads to obedience. In the parables discourse the emphasis on hearing is particularly acute (13:9, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18). Three times Jesus admonishes, "Let anyone with ears listen (ἀκουέτω)!" (11:15; 13:9, 43).

One way that Matthew shows Jesus himself as listening to God is in his practice of prayer. In Matt 14:23, Jesus goes apart by himself to pray. He also prays when children are brought to him (19:13). His prayer of thanks in 11:25 highlights the oneness between himself and the Father. He utters prayers of blessing and thanksgiving when feeding the crowds (14:19;

²³As reported by Krieger, David, "Honor above Obedience," *National Catholic Reporter* (October 6, 2006) 14.

²⁴Ibid., 20.

²⁵Ibid.

15:36) and over the bread and cup at the Last Supper (26:26-30). Jesus speaks of prayer numerous times to his disciples (Matt 5:44; 6:5, 6, 7, 9; 21:22; 24:20; 26:36, 41). His prayer in Gethsemane (26:39, 42, 44) and his final cry to God from the cross (27:46, using Ps 22:2)²⁶ are the culminating moments of a life-long communion with God by which Jesus discerns how to be obedient Son. Matthew also builds the theme of Jesus' obedience to God with his motif of fulfillment of Scripture and with his use of the noun θέλημα, "will," and the verb θέλω, "to will," in relation to Jesus' mission.

Fulfillment of Scripture

Matthew is more emphatic than other evangelists that Jesus died in fulfillment of the Scriptures. In the arrest scene, the Matthean Jesus twice interprets what is happening as fulfilling the Scriptures (26:54, 56).²⁷ This theme appears frequently throughout the Gospel, to interpret major moments: Jesus' birth (1:22), his rescue as an infant from Herod's murderous intentions (2:15), the massacre of other children in Bethlehem (2:17), the settling of the holy family in Nazareth (2:23), Jesus' baptism by John (3:15), Jesus' making his home in Capernaum at the beginning of his public ministry (4:14), his declared intent to fulfill the Law and the prophets (5:17), his healing ministry (8:17, relating it to the servant in Isa 53:4) and the opposition it provokes in the Pharisees (12:17, relating it to Isa 42:1-4), his use of parables (13:35); his entry into Jerusalem (21:4), and the buying of the potter's field (27:9). These incidents, along with Jesus' arrest in Gethsemane (26:54, 56), mark important movements in the narrative related to Jesus' mission. By explicitly naming each of these as fulfillment of Scripture, Matthew creates an aura of obedience around Jesus' life and actions.

God's Will

Matthew's frequent use of the noun θέλημα, "will," always referring to God's will, also contributes to his construction of Jesus as obedient son. In addition to the Gethsemane scene, where Jesus prays "Your will (θέλημα) be done" (26:42), there are five other instances. Jesus teaches his disciples to pray to "Our Father" "your will be done" (6:10) and says that his true kindred consists of "whoever does the will of my Father in heaven" (12:50). He tells parables that commend obedient responses of doing "the will of my Father," not just saying so (7:21; 21:31). And at the conclusion of the parable of the lost sheep, Jesus pronounces, "It is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones shall be lost" (18:14).

That Jesus' will is consonant with the will of God to heal and save is emphasized in the instances of the verb θέλω that refer to Jesus' will. A leper pleads with Jesus, "Lord, if you choose (θέλω), you can make me clean," to which Jesus responds, "I do choose (θέλω)" (8:2-3). When criticized for eating with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus articulates his will, "I desire

²⁶David M. Moffitt, "Righteous Bloodshed, Matthew's Passion Narrative, and the Temple's Destruction: Lamentations as a Matthean Intertext," *JBL* 125/2 (2006) 299-320, argues that the allusion in 27:46 is not to Psalm 22 but to Lam 2:15, which serves to interpret Jesus' crucifixion "as the act of righteous bloodshed par excellence that directly results in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple" (319). As such, Matthew engages in intra-Jewish polemic, patterning his critique of the religious leadership on the Jewish prophetic tradition.

²⁷Verse 54 is a unique addition by Matthew; verse 56 has a parallel in Mark 14:49.

(θέλω) mercy, not sacrifice" (9:13; similarly 12:7). Facing a hungry crowd of four thousand, Jesus says, "I do not want (θέλω) to send them away hungry" (15:32). He laments over Jerusalem, "How often have I desired (ἠθέλησα) to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were unwilling (οὐκ ἠεληήσατε)!" (23:37). In two instances θέλω refers to the will of one petitioning for healing. A Canaanite woman pleads for healing for her daughter, to which Jesus finally responds, "Let it be done for you as you wish (θέλεις)" (15:28). Jesus asks two men who are blind, "What do you want (θέλετε) me to do for you?" (20:32). That it is Jesus' will to heal them is evident when he does so.

Jesus instructs his disciples about how they should follow his example in what they should will: "If any want (θέλει) to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want (θέλη) to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it" (16:24-25). To the one who had many possessions, Jesus says, "If you wish (θέλεις) to enter into life, keep the commandments" (19:17), and "if you wish (θέλεις) to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor . . ." (19:21). To the ten who were indignant with James and John's desire to sit at Jesus' right and left in his kingdom, Jesus responds, "whoever wishes (θέλη)) to be great among you, must be your servant, and whoever wishes (θέλη)) to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (20:26-28).

Through his emphasis on Jesus' sonship, his prayer, the fulfillment of Scripture, and through his use of the verb θέλω and the noun θέλημα, Matthew builds a portrait of Jesus as beloved and obedient Son, whose will is to do God's will. Jesus enacts this divine will as he heals and saves the lost, and teaches his disciples adherence to Torah, relinquishment of possessions and even of life itself, for the sake of those made poor. Thus, in Gethsemane, when Jesus prays "not what I want, but what you want (οὐχ ὡς ἐγὼ θέλω ἀλλ' ὡς σύ)" (26:39) and "your will (θέλημα) be done" (26:42), we have not a sadistic God who is deaf to the pleas of the Son, nor a struggle between the will of Jesus and the will of God, nor a puppet-like compliance on the part of Jesus. Rather, Matthew's Jesus is one who has lived his whole life discerning the will of God and responding obediently to the divine will to save and to heal. This divine will does not change in Gethsemane. What Matthew does in the passion narrative is to situate Jesus' suffering and death within God's saving will; Jesus' death does not occur outside God's saving will and power. This is underscored when the chief priests, scribes, and elders taunt the crucified Jesus: "He trusted in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants (θέλει) to; for he said, 'I am God's Son.'" (27:43). The reader knows that this portrayal of God and God's will on the lips of Jesus' opponents is false, having echoes of the words of the tempter, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone'" (4:6). Different from that first struggle in the desert, at Gethsemane there are no ministering angels (4:11) to strengthen Jesus. There is no heavenly voice affirming that he is beloved son, as at his baptism (3:17) and the transfiguration (17:5). There is no palpable response from God; only silence, terror, and the uncertainty of *how* God will accomplish the divine will to heal and save through this gruesome death. Jesus' response is to go forward obediently in faith, trusting God and trusting that the Scriptures are being fulfilled. This is not an isolated act of blind

acquiescence, but rather the final obedient act of a life spent listening to and responding to God's will. Jesus' obedience to God has put him at odds with the ruling human powers. They will claim his bodily life, but they cannot destroy his soul (10:28).

A similar kind of obedience is exemplified in Joseph in the infancy narrative. Not knowing *how* God would bring about righteousness from the tangled circumstances of Jesus' conception, Joseph trustingly does as God's messenger commands and takes Mary as his wife (1:18-25). Similarly, when an angel of God commands him to take the child and his mother to Egypt and then to Nazareth, so he does (2:13-15, 19-23).²⁸

It is this kind of obedience to God, which sets one at odds with ruling human powers, as exemplified by Jesus and Joseph, that Christians must consider in a time of war. Lt. Watada asserts "It is the duty, the obligation, of every soldier, and specifically the officers, to evaluate the legality, the truth behind every order—including the order to go to war."²⁹ Christians emulating the Matthean Jesus would likewise exemplify obedience by resisting commands to engage in any act that inflicts violence and suffering on others.

III. Bloodshed and the Role of Forgiveness

Gut-wrenching images of escalating bloodshed in Afghanistan and Iraq continue to dominate our news. More often than not the bloody images are of innocent civilians. The theme of the shedding of innocent blood in Matthew's Passion Narrative can guide Christian reflection on the effects of bloodshed and responses to bloodshed. Jesus' offer of the cup of his blood poured out for the forgiveness of sins (26:28) signifies a means by which the cycle of responding to bloodshed with further bloodshed can be broken.

Blood and Bloodshed: Involvement of Religious Leaders, Pilate, the People, Judas

The motif of blood is more heightened in Matthew's Gospel than in any of the others.³⁰ The theme is introduced in Jesus' denunciation of the Pharisees in 23:30 as descendants of those who shed the blood of the prophets. He takes them to task for wrongly thinking that had they lived in the days of their ancestors they "would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets" (23:30). He warns them that upon them will come "all the righteous blood (αἷμα δίκαιον) shed on earth" (23:35). Judas declares that he has sinned by handing over innocent blood (αἷμα ἀθώον) (27:4) and the chief priests use the blood money to buy the "Field of Blood" (27:6, 8). When handing Jesus over to be crucified Pilate declares, "I am innocent of this man's blood" (27:24), which evokes the response from the people, "His blood be on us and on our children" (27:25).

²⁸In Luke's version, it is Mary who responds in obedient trust, without knowing *how* God would bring blessing and salvation from the messy situation (1:26-38).

²⁹As reported by Hal Bernton, "Officer at Ft. Lewis Calls Iraq War Illegal, Refuses Order to Go," *The Seattle Times* (June 7, 2006). Accessed 10/17/06 at: http://seattletimes.nwsources.com/html/localnews/2003044627_nogo7m.html.

³⁰All of the following references to blood and bloodshed are unique to Matthew except for the word over the cup at the Last Supper (compare Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20). In the Lucan parallel to Matt 23:30 (Luke 11:47, 49), Luke speaks of killing prophets, but does not speak of blood or bloodshed.

In each of these successive moments Matthew touches on questions surrounding involvement in bloodshed and its consequences. He faults the Pharisees for their judgmentalness and for falsely thinking that they are incapable of shedding the blood of a prophet. The irony is great, as they have been conspiring how to destroy Jesus since he healed on the sabbath a man with a withered hand (12:14). Jesus asserts that they are, indeed, implicated in the bloodshed of prophets; they themselves claim their descendance from the murderers of prophets (23:31) and they have inherited their ways. In an ironic command, Jesus urges them to go ahead and “fill up” what their ancestors measured out (23:32). Pilate, likewise, despite his wife’s plea not to have anything to do with “that innocent man” (27:19), washes his hands and declares himself innocent of the bloodshed in which he is intimately involved (27:24; see Deut 21:1-9; Pss 26:6; 73:13). Matthew depicts both Pilate and the religious leaders in denial as to their own involvement in bloodshed and of its consequences.

By contrast, the crowd responds to Pilate’s declaration of dissociation with a recognition that the effects of Jesus’ execution will continue to redound not only upon them, but upon their children (27:25). Their statement is most often read as an acceptance of responsibility or guilt for the death of Jesus, “His be upon us and upon our children!”³¹ However, there is no verb in the expression τὸ αἷμα αὐτοῦ ἐφ’ ἡμᾶς καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ τέκνα ἡμῶν, making it possible to read the exclamation instead as a statement, “his death is upon us and upon our children,” a recognition that the effects of violence committed by leaders reverberate onto the people as a whole³² and continue to affect future generations.³³ At the same time, this verse asserts that the forgiving effects of the shedding of Jesus’ blood also redound to them.³⁴ I will elaborate shortly on this meaning in relation to Jesus’ offer of the cup of his blood (26:28).

Another contrast to the stance of Pilate and the religious leaders is that of Judas, who does recognize his involvement in handing over Jesus, and he repents of it (27:3-4).³⁵ In his

³¹NT scholars widely deplore the use of this verse as placing blame on Jews of all times for the death of Jesus.

³²Here it is πᾶς ὁ λαός, “the people as a whole,” not ὁ ὄχλος, “the crowd.”

³³See Joseph Fitzmyer, “Anti-Semitism and the Cry of ‘All the People’ (Mt 27:25),” *TS* 26 (1965) 189-214, who also understands this verse to be explanatory, not condemnatory. He sees 27:25 as the climax of a theme whereby Matthew aims to explain to Jewish Christians why it is that “the nations” have accepted the gospel more readily than Jews.

³⁴Similarly, Robert H. Smith, “Matthew 27:25: the Hardest Verse in Matthew’s Gospel,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 17/6 (1990) 421-28, argues that Matthew intends the reader to see the irony in this verse and to weep with him for the crowd that does not comprehend that the blood of Jesus was on them for their blessing.

³⁵Scholars debate whether Judas sincerely repents or is simply regretful. J. Ramsey Michaels, for example (“The Parable of the Regretful Son,” *HTR* 61 [1968] 15-26), argues that μεταμεληθεῖς in 27:3 as well as in 21:29, 32 (the parable of the two sons), signifies futile regret, not repentance, which would be indicated with μετανοέω, as in Matt 3:2; 4:17; 11:20-21; 12:41. However, there does not appear to be as significant a difference in the meaning of the two verbs as Michaels would advocate. See BDAG, s.v. μεταμέλομαι, μετανοέω. Moreover, in 21:32 μεταμέλομαι is connected with the change of mind that leads to faith, for which John the

desperate attempt to stop what he has helped set in motion, Judas goes to the religious authorities, but as Matthew has painted them, they are closed to any recognition of wrongdoing. Judas' ending is tragic. Although he has drunk from the cup which Jesus offered him at the Last Supper, he is not able to seek or accept the forgiveness it signifies from the one he has handed over.

The Cup: Suffering, Life-Force, and Forgiveness (26:28)

In the Last Supper scene Jesus' invitation to his disciples to drink from the cup of his "blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (26:28) offers a way out of endless cycles of bloodshed. Among the many layers of meaning imbedded in this action and in these words, one finds the unique addition of the phrase "for the forgiveness of sins" in Matthew's version. By inviting his followers to drink from the cup, Jesus asks them to participate directly with him in a way of life that will open up a way out of the cycles of violence. He brings together two powerful symbols: blood and cup.³⁶ Blood signifies the life-force (Gen 9:4; Deut 12:23; Lev 17:14) over which only God has power. The metaphor of "cup" connotes suffering.³⁷ By accepting Jesus' invitation to drink from the cup, his disciples accept suffering that befalls them as a consequence of following him and living the gospel.³⁸ At the same time, partaking of the blood signifies acceptance of the life-force of God, which empowers disciples to endure and overcome suffering and evil. In the Gospel of Matthew this power is explicitly linked with forgiveness. Jesus has lived and taught forgiveness as a means of breaking cycles of violence. He has accepted "the cup" of opposition that such a life has engendered, which will culminate in his death. His own blood seals again God's covenant with God's people (τοῦτο γάρ ἐστιν τὸ αἷμα μου τῆς διαθήκης),³⁹ just as Moses did with blood sprinkled on the people (Exod 24:8).⁴⁰ This pouring out of Jesus' blood is an act that encompasses all (τὸ περὶ

Baptist calls. See further the discussion in W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, Jr., *The Gospel According to St. Matthew XIX-XXVIII* (ICC vol. 3; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997) 560-63.

³⁶See Robert Schreiter, *In Water and in Blood. A Spirituality of Solidarity and Hope* (New York: Crossroad, 1988) 53-62.

³⁷In the Scriptures "cup" frequently refers to the suffering of Israel (Isa 51:17; Jer 25:15; 49:12; 51:7; Lam 4:21; see also *Mart. Isa.* 5:13). In its two other instances in Matthew, it refers to that borne by Jesus. When the mother of the sons of Zebedee request privileged places for them, Jesus asks if they can "drink the cup" that he is about to drink (20:22-23). In Gethsemane he implores the Father to let "this cup" pass from him (26:39).

³⁸As in Matt 16:24, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me," where the metaphor is "cross," rather than "cup," the reference is to a very specific kind of suffering: that which a disciple is willing to take upon herself or himself as a consequence of following Jesus and living the gospel.

³⁹Note that in Matthew Jesus does not speak of a "new covenant" as does the Lucan Jesus (22:20).

⁴⁰Moses typology in the First Gospel is strong. The threats to the infant Jesus' life (2:16-18) mirror those toward Moses (Exod 1:15-22). Matthew's depicts Jesus as authoritative Teacher of the Law, often instructing from a mountaintop (5:1; 15:29; 17:1; 28:16). Many see the evangelist's arrangement of five major blocks of teaching as a deliberate parallel to the five

πολλῶν ἐκχυννόμενον).⁴¹ The phrase εἰς ὅφεισιν ἁμαρτιῶν not only interprets Jesus' death as effecting forgiveness for all, but also signifies an invitation *into* a life of forgiveness that releases all from the bondage of violence.⁴²

The theme of forgiveness is a strong one in the First Gospel, and the cup saying (26:28) brings it to its culmination. It is first announced in 1:21, when the angels tell Joseph to name the child Jesus "for he will save his people from their sins."⁴³ Matthew portrays Jesus as exercising this power to forgive sins during his ministry and as schooling his disciples in a way of forgiveness. He teaches them to pray "forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors . . . for if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (6:12, 14-15).⁴⁴ The prayer underscores the reciprocal nature of forgiveness: one's capacity to receive forgiveness is intimately linked to the ability to offer it to others. The parable in 18:23-35 illustrates this reciprocity in narrative form. The parable comes on the heels of Jesus' response to Peter that he must extend forgiveness an endless number of times to a brother or sister who sins against him.⁴⁵ The concluding saying (v. 35) links the ability to receive and give human forgiveness and the capacity to receive the divine offer of forgiveness. In another episode Jesus assures the Pharisees that every kind of offense is able to be forgiven, "people will be forgiven for every sin and blasphemy, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven" (12:31). The exceptive clause is referring not to a particular act that is unforgivable, but to a constant closing of oneself to the workings of the Spirit, which makes the reception of forgiveness impossible.⁴⁶

The controversial nature of Jesus' exercise of forgiveness is highlighted in the story of the healing of a man who was paralyzed (9:2-8). Jesus' opponents think he is blaspheming when he declares the man's sins forgiven (v. 3). Not only is the question of Jesus' authority to forgive at issue (v. 6), but the episode also brings to the fore the question of how difficult it is to forgive (v. 5). Jesus' query, "which is easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say 'Stand up and

books of the Law of Moses. Explicit references to Moses occur at 8:4; 17:3-4; 19:7-8; 22:24; 23:2.

⁴¹As in Matt 20:28 πολλῶν, "many" has a comprehensive sense (see Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3.474), reflecting a Semitic expression where "many" is the opposite of "one," thus the equivalent of "all." This phrase echoes Isa 53:12. The preposition περὶ carries the connotation usually conveyed by ὑπέρ, "on account of, for." It also has a sense of encircling, encompassing, "around" (BDAG, 798; Maximilian Zerwick, *Biblical Greek* (Scripta Pontificii Instituti Biblici 114; Rome, 1963. §96).

⁴²The preposition εἰς indicates not only the end in view (Zerwick, *Biblical Greek*, §87), but also signifies motion into a thing (BDAG, 288); in this case, movement into a way of forgiveness.

⁴³Here the verb is σῶζω, whereas in other references it is ἀφίημι (6:12, 14, 15; 9:2, 6; 12:31, 32; 18:21, 32, 35).

⁴⁴Similarly Mark 11:25. There is no parallel for Matt 6:14-15 in Luke's version (11:1-4).

⁴⁵Luke's version of the saying (17:3-4) is far more brief. The parable is unique to Matthew.

⁴⁶Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins. A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2000) 275.

walk'?" (v. 5), points out that neither is easy and the ability to walk freely is intimately tied to the ability to receive and offer forgiveness. Ironically, it is often much easier to cling to hurts inflicted by others than to enter into a process of forgiveness. The final verse widens the lens not only to Jesus' authority to forgive, but to that given to all human beings, "When the crowds saw it, they were filled with awe, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to human beings" (9:8). As the theme comes to its climax, Jesus offers the cup to his disciples at the Last Supper, holding out to them the life-giving power to follow his pattern of forgiving love. Immediately on the horizon is the question of whether they will be able to forgive Jesus' executioners, and able, then, to lead others in a path of forgiveness.

Processes of Forgiveness in Contemporary Conflict Transformation

Countless examples in contemporary situations of conflict transformation have shown that the way of forgiveness exemplified and taught by the Matthean Jesus is not simply a "utopian dream harbored by the unrealistic."⁴⁷ Nor is it applicable only to interpersonal conflicts; it is the key to bring about true reconciliation and peace within fractured communities and between nations. Fresh in our memories is the stunning example of the Amish community who extended forgiveness to the family of Charles Carl Roberts, who killed five of their girls in a schoolhouse in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania on October 2, 2006. In post-apartheid South Africa it is widely recognized that when blacks, under the leadership of Nelson Mandela, decided not to do unto whites what had been done unto them, a bloodbath was averted. As Desmond Tutu explained in his book, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, if black leaders had chosen to bring white abusers to trial, rather than enter into a process of truth telling, forgiveness, and reconciliation, they could only have had justice, and a South Africa "lying in ashes—a truly Phryrrhic victory if there ever was one."⁴⁸

To explore the complex mechanics of forgiveness and reconciliation processes and the stories of the successful use of such in contemporary situations is beyond the scope of this paper.⁴⁹ There is, as R. Scott Appleby has observed, no uniform model. "What is needed in each and every case, rather, is local cultural analysis wedded to political insight."⁵⁰ But there are common elements that are key to processes of forgiveness that lead to conflict transformation:

⁴⁷R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred. Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000) 203.

⁴⁸Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 1999) 23.

⁴⁹In addition to works referenced in notes 46, 47, 51, see Marc Golpin, *Holy War, Holy Peace. How Religion Can Bring Peace to the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); *Between Eden & Armageddon. The Future of World Religions, Violence, and Peacemaking* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Joseph F. Kelly, *Responding to Evil* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2003); Edward Leroy, *Facing Terrorism. Responding as Christians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004); Robert Schreiter, *Reconciliation. Mission & Ministry in A Changing Social Order* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1992); *The Ministry of Reconciliation. Spirituality & Strategies* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1998); Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace. A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996).

⁵⁰Appleby, *Ambivalence of the Sacred*, 44.

truth-telling, empathy, forbearance, and the commitment to repair fractured relationships.⁵¹ Forbearance has been addressed above in the discussion of the sword saying (26:52). Following are brief reflections on the other three characteristics of forgiveness processes as they relate to the current wars with Afghanistan and Iraq and to the Gospel of Matthew.

In the wake of the bloodshed in Afghanistan and Iraq, for there to be any amount of real peace, the truth will need to be told in all its horror, not only of the terror and grief experienced by U.S. citizens in the aftermath of 9/11, but also of the atrocities and the torture that have been committed by the U.S. against people of Afghanistan and Iraq. The real motives, particularly for the war with Iraq, will need to be told honestly. Mytho-histories and alternative versions of the truth will have to be let go.⁵² From the Matthean Jesus we have a model for truthful speaking, with his oft-repeated phrase, "Truly I tell you."⁵³ Even his opponents recognize him as one who speaks truth (22:16), and whose death reveals truth (27:54).

Empathy, not to be confused with sympathy, is grounded on the recognition that the victim and the perpetrator share a common humanity, and that the enemy is more than just the enemy.⁵⁴ Would war have been averted had leaders in the U.S. been able to take an empathic position and ask hard questions about the real motives of the attackers on 9/11? Former CIA agent Ray McGovern remarks, "It's such an oversimplification to talk about extremist terrorists without identifying their grievances."⁵⁵ For disengagement from the present quagmire, McGovern offers that one of the strategies needed is empathic listening to the Iraqi people, sixty-five percent of whom said in a recent poll that they wanted U.S. troops to leave immediately.⁵⁶ In a similar vein, Cardinal Francis George of Chicago recently observed that the world distrusts the U.S. because "we are deaf and blind, because too often we don't understand and make no effort to understand; because we know what is best."⁵⁷ This proclivity, he said, must be surrendered, "or we will never be part of God's kingdom." Likewise, the Matthean Jesus frequently exhorts his disciples to listen (11:15; 13:3, 9, 43; 15:10; 21:33), as does the heavenly voice at the Transfiguration (17:5). Jesus laments the hardness of heart on the part of those who refuse to hear (13:13-15) and underscores the necessity of listening in the work of reconciliation within communities (18:17).

⁵¹Donald W. Shriver, Jr. *An Ethic for Enemies. Forgiveness in Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); William Bole, Drew Christiansen, and Robert T. Hennemeyer (*Forgiveness in International Politics...an Alternative Road to Peace* (Washington D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2004).

⁵²See Bole et al, *Forgiveness in International Politics*, 14-18, on the role of dangerous and distorted memory and mytho-histories in impeding reconciliation.

⁵³Matt 5:28, 26; 6:2, 5, 16; 8:10; 10:15, 23, 42; 11:11; 13:17; 14:33; 16:28; 17:20; 18:3, 13, 18, 19; 19:23, 28; 21:21, 31; 23:36; 24:2, 34, 47; 25:12, 40, 45; 26:13, 21, 34.

⁵⁴Bole et al, *Forgiveness in International Politics*, 51-53.

⁵⁵Margo Patterson, "The Mission of Ray McGovern," *National Catholic Reporter* (October 27, 2006) 11.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Remarks from his homily delivered on October 29, 2006 at Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, on the occasion of the dedication of the new academic center. A transcription can be found at: <http://www.suntimes.com/lifestyles/religion/117886,CST-NWS-cardtranscript3.article>.

Finally, for genuine peace, there must be a commitment to work toward repair of the fractured relationship. This means moving away from a desire to eliminate the enemy, or even icy tolerance, or uneasy co-existence, toward real engagement with the other. The Matthean Jesus teaches his followers not only to avoid insulting one another and becoming angry with one another, but he also insists on face-to-face reconciliation when they have grievances (5:21-24; 18:15-20). Moreover, when there is litigation, he would have his disciples not simply resolve it and go their separate ways, but “make friends” with, or “think kindly” (εὐνοέω) of their accuser (5:25). Jesus’ practice of eating with alienated people (9:10-13; 11:19; 22:1-14) symbolized the necessity of sharing life together in reconciled relationship.⁵⁸

In our current situation, former CIA agent Ray McGovern observes that “This business of ‘We don’t talk to bad people. We only talk to good people’” is a doomed strategy. “If we persist in this,” he says, “we’ll never work out a relatively peaceful disengagement.”⁵⁹ Likewise, Alex Reid, a Redemptorist priest working in West Belfast, who was a notable mediator in the conflict in Ireland, recognized that public denunciations and condemnations were counterproductive. Building relationships that would create conditions for dialogue was the necessary route, he insisted. He asserted that “you can unite people by showing your interest in them, by caring for them, by loving them. But you can’t unite them by using violence on them.” He argued that “the Catholic church and others could not stand aside and simply condemn the IRA: they had to become involved, to engage them.”⁶⁰

Conclusion

The role that religious leaders who are formed in a culture peacebuilding can play in contemporary processes of forgiveness and reconciliation is of no small import. By forming communities of believers who pray with, reflect on, and support one another in living the gospel, they can help forestall a rush to war and they can be powerful agents in working toward reconciliation when war has not been averted. Extraordinary actions of forgiveness, such as those of the Amish community toward Charles Roberts, or of Nelson Mandela toward his white jailer, do not come naturally. As the grandfather of one of the slain Amish girls observed, it is possible to do, however, when one’s life has been formed by patterns of prayer, intentional learning of and practicing of methods of nonviolent conflict resolution, and by formation of communities committed to live and support one another in this way.⁶¹ Matthew’s Gospel highlights several key elements toward such: forbearance from taking up arms (26:52) or from violent retaliation (5:38-48); fervently seeking and obeying God’s will, which sometimes will put one at odds with human rulers; and partaking of the “cup of the blood” of Jesus, by which Christians accept both a way of discipleship that entails suffering and the strength from God to persevere in the path of forgiveness, reconciliation, and peace.

⁵⁸Shriver, *Ethic*, 40-41.

⁵⁹Reported by Patterson, “Mission,” 11.

⁶⁰As told by Appleby, *Ambivalence of the Sacred*, 186.

⁶¹L. Gregory Jones, “Amish Forgiveness the Result of a Lifetime of Nonviolence,” *Charlotte Observer* October 7, 2006. <http://paceebene.org/pace/nvns/nonviolence-news-service-archive/amish-forgiveness-the-resu> Accessed 11/3/06.