ELEPHANTS IN THE LIVING ROOM

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FORGIVENESS IN THE SERVICE OF JUSTICE
MERCY CENTER CHAPEL

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Introduction — Bishop Tom Gumbleton

I am pleased to introduce Margaret Farley; and I'm very happy to welcome all of you here today. We have a larger conference than usual and a more enthusiastic one. I have the privilege to introduce Margaret Farley. A few weeks ago, I'm sure we all remember, that we celebrated the 50th anniversary of that most famous of Martin Luther King's speeches, *I Have a Dream*; and around that time I was looking through some writing of his, some speeches of his, and I found this particular quote. Dr. King says, "The ultimate measure of a person is not where you stand in moments of comfort and convenience, but where you stand at times of challenge and conscience." Because it is at those times, isn't it, that your integrity is tested, your consistency and your faithfulness. Dr. King passed that test on many occasions; but today we have a speaker who also, I think, is a person who is able to show consistency, integrity and faithfulness in times of challenge and controversy. Margaret Farley is, of course, a woman in the Church and in a Church that doesn't fully respect the full dignity of every woman. She's also a woman religious in a Church which doesn't fully respect the integrity and wholeness of women religious. She's also a leading theologian who is willing to challenge the pope to find the truth. So she has been tested; and I assure you she has come through as one who is filled with consistency, integrity and faithfulness. And so it is really a pleasure for me to introduce her and ask you to welcome her today.

I'll tell you just a few things about her background. I think we all know that she is a Sister of Mercy. She graduated from the University of Detroit, and got both her Bachelor of Arts degree and Master of Arts degree. She got her Doctorate of Philosophy degree from Yale University. And Margaret very soon became a professor at Yale University, and was teaching there from 1971 to 2007. During that time she was the first woman appointed to serve full time in the Yale's school board, along with Henri Nouwen, its first Catholic faculty member. Margaret has published a great deal. She is the author and co-editor of seven books including *Personal Commitment: Beginning, Keeping Changing, Compassionate Respect* and most recently, *Just Love*, *a Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics.* She has published more than 100 articles and chapters of books on topics of ethics, methodology, medical ethics, sexual ethics, social ethics, historical and theological ethics, and ethics in spirituality, justice and HIV aids. She has lectured widely, not only in the United States, but Southeast Asia, Africa and Western Europe. Margaret recently retired from Yale University, and so is now the professor emeritus from Yale; and this afternoon she is going to speak to us about Forgive*ness in the Service of Justice* from her life experience, her academic background. She is well qualified to speak on this topic: Forgiveness in the Service of Justice. I ask you to welcome enthusiastically, Sr. Margaret Farley. (Applause)

Forgiveness in the Service of Justice — Sr. Margaret Farley, RSM

Thanks, Tom. Well, I am truly delighted and grateful to be among those of you whose activities and events in the *Elephants in the Living Room* have often been described to me over the years as graced and challenging, liberating and nourishing. I cannot pretend to meet fully the expectations this afternoon that I've heard about in *Elephants in the Living Room* for many years, but I am truly honored to be here with you.

My topic today, as you know, is about *Forgiveness in the Service of Justice*. With this topic I intend to talk not only about individuals, but about societies; and not only actions, but relationships; and not only relationships, but attitudes of the heart. We live in a world in which it is imperative, as never before, to blend our lives together attempting, to understand our engagements in our society and in the wider world,

whose struggles we come inevitably to share. And we live in a Church where we may not yet have understood what it means to be "world church," recognizing that Christian faith is not primarily a western export, but a faith that is both heard and spoken, received and given, by peoples in all the corners of the world. To seek justice in our relationships, and to sustain justice, requires that we cross more and more borders - whether of culture, age, gender, geography, religious beliefs, social and economic exigencies. It requires bridging the gaps between backgrounds, traditions, ideological perspectives and diverse experiences in new and creative ways. If we are awake at all, we know that the other is always with us. But without learning together the ways and forms of "just" encounters, we pass in the night, never really understanding one another, never fully appreciating multiple perspectives, never adequately respecting our profound differences; or even more tragically, we feel the flames of hostility against one another.

This afternoon I will pursue what I think may be a potential clue for our understanding of what justice requires in human encounters and relationships. I'm not here searching for a full-blown theory of justice, or even a practical program of justice in specific situations. I am, rather, looking ultimately for some insight into the kinds of attitudes of mind and heart that may conduce to fuller justice in our turning to the "other." I'm looking, therefore, to ways of seeing and acting that can make possible of some degree of "de-centering" of ourselves. Now we all know how important it is to be centered. I'm not talking about that right now. We need to be centered, anchored in ourselves; but we also need, as the philosophers talk about today, a way of decentering ourselves that is not being totally preoccupied with ourselves but open to the "other," the face of the "other," the needs of the "other" in order to respect and welcome the "other." To this end I'm going to explore particular experiences that can change us in our approaches to all others. The experiences I want to explore are those of forgiving and being-forgiven. As you know, I am addressing the topic of *Forgiving in the Service of Justice*. It will up to you to test whether my analyses and arguments are accurate or not, whether they fit your experience or not, and whether they are useful or not in our efforts to be just.

As you are no doubt aware there, are many scholars and practitioners writing and speaking about forgiveness and reconciliation today. Indeed, in the last three decades, an impressive body of literature has developed in this regard. A kind of urgency of inquiry has emerged, not only among religious thinkers, but among philosophers, historians, political theorists, psychologists and even social and biological scientists. To the forefront have come questions of the conditionality or unconditionality of forgiveness, of the potential corruption of the concept of forgiveness when it becomes primarily a therapy for victims, and the compatibility between forgiveness and justice. This afternoon, of course, my focus is on the latter question, the relation of forgiveness to justice. I aim to argue, ultimately, that forgiveness, as such, must never trump the need for justice; but actions for justice must also not obscure the need for a disposition of the heart that is at least something like a readiness to forgive. I begin by describing the contemporary context for forgiveness, asking what it is that has awakened so much recent interest in questions of human forgiveness.

<u>Context for Forgiveness</u>

So, the overall social and political context for new interest in forgiveness is one in which poverty, oppression, exploitation and violence seems to grow exponentially. Perhaps it has always been so. Humans have struggled through history for justice and peace, for fairness and freedom, for healing of the pain of body and of spirit. Still the suffering goes on: violence begetting violence, exploitation escalating seemingly beyond remedy. New issues of race, class and gender fuel worldwide conflicts: anger, resentment, and intractable greed fracture human relationships; religious and cultural imperialisms undergird human battles of devastating proportion - whether between or within nations, corporations, tribes, families, political parties, and even churches. Everywhere visible are both the causes and the consequences of these conflicts: destitution, war, abuses of power, loss of faith, systemic evils hidden behind "business as usual," and relentless but unnecessary injury and dying.

Between and among humans the need for forgiveness is common place in our everyday experience. Small offenses occur all around us and between us, and although they are small, they may gradually tear the fabric of human life. But we also live against a horizon - past and present - when "crimes against humanity" are so much with us that we come to tolerate unspeakable assaults on humans as human. The question is alive among us as to whether, after the Holocaust, and the atrocities in Argentina, the Balkans, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, and the almost unimaginable

trafficking of young girls and boys in every country - including our own; after and with all of this: the question is alive as to whether the possibility of forgiveness has died.

Given the terrible needs and massive injustices that characterize our world, it may seem odd, even dangerous, to talk about forgiveness. Such talk may simply mask what is "premature reconciliation," and burden yet further the ones among us who are already most vulnerable. "You! You should forgive." Surely, *if* we are to talk about forgiveness, we must do so in a way that does not ignore calls to resistance and restitution, and that does not obscure urgent strategies and actions to be undertaken. My argument will be that an attitude of what I call "anticipatory" as well as "actual" forgiveness can constitute today a necessary challenge to groups, nations, cultures, churches around the world - a challenge and an antidote to interpersonal and social violence. This will be so, however, only if we learn to "de-center" ourselves sufficiently to offset our worst forms of fear, prejudice, resentment, indifference, greed and, above all, self-righteousness. Letting go of these will alone will provide the "conditions of possibility" for *recognition* and *respect* for one another. Yet, I realize that to propose forgiveness as the remedy for our inhumanity one to the other sounds rather like pious wishful-thinking rather than a practical objective. I'm going to try however to show how it may be otherwise.

My considerations of forgiveness will be in three parts:

- First, I'll begin with a Biblical text that asks of the Church something it has little understood through the centuries, perhaps particularly in our own day.
- Second, I'll explore the meanings of forgiveness in human experiences, both of forgiving and being forgiven.
- And third, I'll try to show the necessary relationship between forgiveness, justice, and resistance by considering the power of forgiveness in contexts of conflict and stark injustice.

I. Forgive Them

So first, my Biblical text: Most long standing religious traditions are shaped by moral imperatives of forgiveness, as well as trust in being-forgiven by whatever is ultimate, sacred or divine. Forgiveness is a preoccupation, not only of the Christian tradition, but of other world religious as well-in particular Judaism and Islam. The Hebrew Bible, for example, offers pragmatic stories of divine forgiveness and human, from the prophets who combine lamentation with hope for God's forgiveness, to the astonishing forgiveness given by Joseph to the brothers who betrayed him. In the traditions of Islam *Allah* is named "The most forgiving," and the followers of Mohammed are required to not only believe in divine mercy, but to imitate it. The *Qur'an* describes believers as "those who believe in divine mercy and imitate it'. It describes believers as "those who avoid major sins, but when they are angry, they forgive." (Al-Shura 42:34) Also, in *Mahayana Buddhism,* the bodhisattva offers a form of radical forgiveness that is precisely for the sake of the one who has caused harm.

I'll focus this afternoon primarily on the Christian tradition. Nonetheless, the questions raised and the insights offered from all major religions remain on the horizon for our exploration - especially because there are multiple ambiguous interpretations of the meanings of forgiveness; and there are apparent inconsistencies in its practice - even in Christianity. It is not enough to "proof-text" when we are probing so significant a concept, a call, and a command.

In my consideration of the Christian tradition I'm focusing first on a text in the Fourth Gospel, that is, the Gospel attributed to John. The text is John 20:19-23. I think you know it well. It tells of a post-Resurrection appearance of Jesus to his disciples in which he greets them with peace, shows them the marks of his wounds, gives them his Spirit, and sends them forth with this charge: "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." This text has sometimes been interpreted, and often popularly understood by Christians - and I have to say, especially Roman Catholics - to refer to the granting of authority and power to judge, and out of this authority and power, to forgive or not, to open the gates of heaven or keep them closed. The text is frequently put together with Mathew 16:19: "On this rock I will build my church. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loosed on earth will be loosed in

heaven." Together these texts are thought to establish not only authority to judge on the part of the first disciples of Jesus, but beyond this also a structure for authority in the Christian church that followed.

You know, it has always struck me as rather odd the number of times Jesus says, again and again, "Do not judge." Yet, so many of us, our nations and our churches, have been jumping into the judgment seat ever since. But what if there is another meaning to this text in John's Gospel? It is not, after all, like Mathew 16, where there is reference apparently to technical rabbinical procedures? And the situation is different - with the now risen Christ commissioning his disciples to carry on his mission of forgiveness. What if its primary meaning, this text, is not that the disciples of Jesus, and the Church, are to sit in judgment on individuals and groups, binding them or freeing them, but rather that they are to forgive and thereby *free* people? And if they do not do so, the word of God is somehow blocked, left silent? What if the force of the mission is this: "If you forgive them, they are forgiven and freed; but if you do not forgive them, they remain bound. So then, *forgive them*, because if you do not, they will remain bound and un-free." And what if the message down through the centuries is primarily, "*If you do not forgive them, who will?"*

As some theologians argue: the message of forgiveness is in a sense the Christian message in its entirety. It is the decisive gift of the Holy Spirit. It is what makes possible a "new heart." Christians are taught to ask for it every day: "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us." It reaches to communities and groups as well as individuals. It requires repentance, but not total innocence. It is to be offered to all who desire to come to the waters to drink of the Spirit, to all who desire to come to the table of the Lord.

But *is* this an accurate interpretation of this text in the Gospel of John? Surely Christians, and everyone else, must make judgments, even prophetic judgments, about evil situations and against the human forces of evil. Jesus, after all, did himself make judgments; he did not remain silent in the face of evil; and he did not offer instant forgiveness to all. Yet, who were those that Jesus challenged and judged. As far as I can see, only the self-righteous - those whose hearts were hardened with their own self assurance, those who laid burdens on others, yet refused to take up burdens themselves; who behaved arrogantly, not even looking at the suffering they caused; those who recognized no need to drink of new waters and asked for greater mercy. Others - so many great sinners - Jesus did not examine for the perfection of their repentance; he simply forgave them when they approached him. He rejected no one - not Peter, who had his troubles; not James and John who needed a long time to learn humility; not any of those who betrayed him: not even Judas, with whom he shared a life and a table (and who today may shine in heaven as a blazing testimony to the power of a forgiven love). No evil is so great that God's forgiveness cannot overwhelm it.

What does all of this mean for the significance of forgiveness in our world, in a time marked all too often by punitive responses, cries for revenge, and the perpetuation of conflict? What is there about "forgiveness" that might be not only possible but necessary for us today? What "happens" in the action and experience of both forgiving and being-forgiven? What is the "new heart" that is made possible by the power of the Sprit and that is characterized as forgiveness? And how can this new heart beat in the multiple contexts of conflict and injustice today? What "happens" when forgiveness is either given or received?

II. The Meanings of Forgiveness

So my second part: The meanings of forgiveness. To forgive is not to be passive in the face of injury, neglect, betrayal, abuse. Indeed, forgiveness may be one of the most active responses possible in the face of whatever sort of breach occurs in human relationships. It's easy to understand the necessity and the role of forgiving when treasured personal relationships are damaged. We reach out to the one we love, participating in the restoration of the bond between us. Or, at the very least, we wait patiently, holding on to the love and the hope that the relationship represents. It's not so easy to comprehend the necessity or possibility of forgiving when we are harmed by institutions or groups, or injured by those in power, violated by those who are in some sense our enemies.

But again, what happens within us in the experience of forgiving. So here, I'd like to ask each of you to think of an experience you have had of forgiving of someone or some ones. We are all of an age that we surely have had that experience. So think of that experience so that, when I try to describe the experience of forgiving, you can measure your experience against what I have to say, and determine whether my description makes any sense or not. You be the test of it.

So in describing the experience of forgiveness I would suggest this. To forgive is to "let go" of something within us, in order to *accept* someone who has harmed us. But what do we "let go" of? Not our sense of justice, nor a sense of our own dignity as a person. Yet, in forgiving another, we let got (at least partially) of something *in* ourselves - perhaps anger, resentment, building blocks of stored up pain. And we let go (at least partially) of something *of* ourselves - perhaps our self-protectedness, ourselves as desiring renewed self-statement in the face of misjudgment or exploitation by another.

Being forgiven: To understand our experiences of forgiving, it's useful to recall our experiences of *being-forgiven*. And here I want to ask you again, think of an experience you have had of being-forgiven. Being-forgiven, like forgiving, involves action, not being passive. The action is again complex, including both acceptance and letting go. If anything is actually going to "happen" in response to the offer of forgiveness, the one who can be-forgiven must choose to receive the offer of forgiveness, and to accept the one who offers it. When we recognize our own responsibility for harming another, for marring a relationship, we are afraid for the future which we had taken for granted and in which we had hoped. To experience being-forgiven, however, is to experience new acceptance, in spite of ourselves, and the restoration of a relationship with now a new future. It generates joy in us, gratitude that our failure has not finally broken the bonds of friendship, colleagueship, or family. The greater our offense and our realization of its seriousness, the greater the possibility of our gratitude of being-forgiven, and the greater our new love in response. Pointing to the depths of the mystery of a "forgiven love," Jesus himself observed that the one who is forgiven much, may love more than the one who is forgiven only a little (Luke 7:41).

Although we no doubt learn what it means to be-forgiven within human relationships, the potentially paradigmatic experience for many is the experience of being loved, being-forgiven by God. Experience with humans helps us to understand being-forgiven by God; but for believers, the experience of divine forgiveness is *unique;* and it sheds distinctive light on what being-forgiven means in every context. To experience the forgiveness of God is to experience ourselves accepted by the incomprehensible source of our life and existence; accepted even without becoming wholly innocent, without being completely turned around in our ways; accepted even while we are, as St. Paul says, still sinners (Romans 5:8). From the almost-incredible "good news" of this forgiveness, this acceptance, we can learn and tell of the love of God that exceeds all understanding, that invites us into communion with infinite goodness and beauty. And the one response that is asked of us, and made possible within us, is the response of *trust*. To trust in the Word of God's forgiveness is to let go all of our objections and fears, and to believe. It involves a surrender of the heart precisely in the *acceptance* of being-forgiven. It is, to use a phrase, in one of the poems of Emily Dickenson, it is to "drop our hearts," to feel them "drop" their barriers and burdens, in freedom, accepting eternal Acceptance. It foreshadows the ultimate experience, of which we have inklings. And here's one of the lines in Dickenson's poem, "By my long bright and longer trust, I *drop* my Heart, unshriven."[1/]

Forgiving: If this kind of surrender is what being-forgiven entails, so too it is what characterizes our experience of *forgiving*. Hence, at the center of human forgiving, there is also a kind of "dropping of the heart" that is the surrender, the letting go, of poisonous memories that bind us to past injuries inflicted on us by others. It entails a letting go of our very selves, a kenosis, that alone frees us to become ourselves. "Dropping our hearts," surrendering ourselves, in forgiveness, is the beginning choice that makes renewed relationships possible.

But one of the injuries we undergo leave our hearts incapable of the kind of love that makes forgiving possible? And what if those who injure us continue to do so - whether they know or do not know "what they do?" What if there is no regret or remorse, no willingness or ability on their part to accept our forgiveness? What if the perpetrators of oppression believe their actions are justified - by whatever twisted stereotyping, judging, stigmatizing? How can forgiveness be a remedy in the new killing fields of

the century, this era's tangled webs of domination, enslavement, and new levels of destitution? Must our focus now be not on forgiveness, but on justice? Not on "dropping our hearts," but on a struggle against the evils that cry to heaven for change?

III. Forgiveness, Justice and Resistance

And my third part: Forgiveness, Justice and Resistance. Forgiving and being-forgiven have nothing to do with tolerating grave wrongs, or - as I indicated before - with being passive in the face of massive injustices. Neither the forgiveness offered by God in Jesus Christ, nor the forgiveness that can be a graced and glorious human work of mercy, is to be equated with "premature reconciliation" or a covering over of exploitation and ongoing violence. Human forgiveness can include a radical "No!" to the world as a place of injurious conflict, of gross injustice and needless destruction. It can require that we resist the forces of evil until we can do no more. The attitude of forgiveness, however, the disposition of heart required for this work of mercy, does entail that we not return lies for lies, violence for violence, domination as a supposed remedy for domination. Yet, in relation to these evils a stance of forgiveness can mean "Never again."

Many stories come to mind that provide glimpses of the power of forgiveness (or at least its attendant possibilities) in diverse historical situations. But in our time here together this afternoon, I'll point to only one - at least one genre of a story - that is the stories of the "truth commissions." As you know, since the 1970s, "truth commissions" have been established in nearly twenty countries - for example, in El Salvador, Chile, Argentina, and perhaps the best known of them all, South Africa. And we're even attempting them in the neighborhoods in our own country. Although the results have varied, many of them offer insights into possibilities of transforming hostilities, equalizing relationships, and starting in new ways that does not always reach to the level of forgiveness, but also, do not descend into the quagmire of past horrors of conflict and oppression.[2/] The "truth commissions" aimed precisely to structure new approaches to rebuilding societies in the aftermath of horrendous acts perpetrated against innocent people - acts of abduction, torture, wide spread murder, and sometimes full-scale genocide. Previously, in similar situations, when the killing stopped there might have been only courts to re-establish justice, to judge and to punish perpetrators, perhaps to require some restitution. But when so many were involved in so much evil, the task of bringing all to justice in court systems appeared impossible. Judicial processes alone could not ferret out all who were guilty, nor determine the exact degrees of guilt, nor heal the desire of victims for revenge. Courts by themselves could not bring about, in a timely manner, the healing of whole societies whose fabric had been torn apart by wide scale violence. Above all, courts could not mend the fissures, the breaks, from years and years of conflict between groups, now marked by so much blood.

If countries or societies were to have a future, something more was needed - that is, the freeing of the voices of the victims, the telling of their stories, in order to make visible the truth of their suffering, making it known in the world, and receiving an official, public acknowledgement of what had happened. Not all victims lived to tell their stories; of all those who lived they could not by themselves tell the truth of their experiences; not all by themselves could forgive. By the truth commissions it was possible to develop procedures that might provide healing (and in fact did so in many instances). Here was a shared process aimed at remorse on the part of perpetrators and forgiveness on the part of victims.

Words, language, became the way to a new life. Previously shattered, silenced voices were able to speak; what they spoke were their own stories, the truth of their experiences. Speaking the truth became of form of resistance to evil: "Never again" was part of its message. For victims, it became a way to recover one's life, once again to gain control again over one's agency and destiny. Sometimes in this process, forgiveness became possible; sometimes, it did not. But even when it was not possible, or at least not yet possible, something happened to those who spoke or heard one another.

The story' is told of a South African woman who, after listening to the testimony of her husband's killer and thereby learning for the first time how her husband had died … was asked if she could forgive the man who did it. Speaking slowly … her message came back through the interpreters "No government can forgive … No commission can forgive … Only I can forgive … And I am not ready to forgive."[3/] Yet, somehow, those

who knew her, afterwards said, her dignity was affirmed; she had been given the truth, and an opportunity to choose. Once again, her own voice counted; the conditions for forgiveness began to be in place.

What the stories of the truth commissions reveal is that forgiving and being-forgiven have a role deep within large-scale conflicts and injustices a well as small. They offer alternative ways to provide "conditions for the possibility" of both justice and mercy. So cycles of external violence and internal violence (the poison of rage and revenge) can sometimes be broken. A new future can sometimes emerge.

III.B Anticipatory Forgiveness: The Greatest Challenge of All

There are situations, however, in which injury is ongoing, injury is ongoing; abuse, violence, exploitation, marginalization do not stop. How, then, is forgiveness possible and what would be its point? In such situations, is forgiveness simply a naïve and futile work of mistaken and ineffective "mercy?" Is it here that struggles for justice must take priority over efforts at forgiveness? How, otherwise, are we not to be seduced into what I've been calling "premature reconciliation," the kind of covering over of evil that allows it to continue unchallenged and unchanged? Is the disposition to forgive even relevant at all to responses of the oppressed to their current oppressors?

The challenge in each of these questions is not to be taken lightly, I think. I want to suggest, however, that even in situations where injustice still prevails, where the rights of individuals and groups continue to be violated, the dispositions in the hearts of the oppressed and violated ought to include (insofar as this is possible[4/]) forgiveness - or more precisely, can include a readiness to forgive. To argue this in no way contradicts what I have said about the need for resistance - against exploitation, abuse, domination. If we think that forgiveness, all by itself, is a sufficient antidote to injustice, this, too, is a mistake. But if we think that struggles for justice are sufficient, no matter what is in our hearts, this too is a mistake. The challenge and the call to forgiveness in situations of ongoing humanly inflicted evil and suffering is a call to forgive even those we must continue to resist. Forgiveness in such situations is what I call "anticipatory forgiveness."

Anticipatory forgiveness shares the characteristics of any human forgiving. That is, it involves a letting go within oneself of whatever prevents a fundamental acceptance of the other as a human person, despite the fact that the other is the cause of one's injuries. It is grounded in a basic respect for the other as a person, perhaps even love for the other as held in being and loved utterly by God. It does not mean blinding oneself to the evil that is done to oneself or to others. It does not mean passive acquiescence to subservience, or silence when it comes to naming the injury that is imposed. It does not mean failing to protect victims or to struggle with all ones might to prevent the "breaking of the bruised reed." It does mean being ready to accept the injurer, yearning that he or she turn in sorrow to whoever has been injured; it means waiting until the time that the enemy may yet become the friend. It is "anticipatory" not because there is as yet no disposition for acceptance and love, but because it cannot finally be fulfilled until the one who is forgiven (the perpetrator) acknowledges the injury, and becomes able to recognize and accept the forgiving embrace. In other words, it cannot come full circle until something happens in both the perpetrator and the one who forgives.

Perhaps nowhere is the challenge and the call to anticipatory forgiveness more clearly issued to Christians than in the community of the Church. It is here that the moral imperative comes forth to love our enemies. It is here that grace should be passed from one to the other, making possible the melting of hearts and the acceptance of friend and enemy, of neighbor and stranger alike. It is here that Christians are marked by the encomium, "See how they love one another." It is here where Christians can learn the model of God's anticipatory as well as infinitely actual love and forgiveness - whether as expressed in the parable of the "Prodigal Son," where the son is awaited with open arms, seemingly without judgment, seemingly with only yearning desire for the son's return; or as depicted in the story of salvation historically enacted in the forgiveness given in and through Jesus Christ, which holds out for our recognition and acceptance the forgiveness of God.

But, of course, anticipatory forgiveness needs to stretch to others beyond the Church. Forgiveness and readiness to forgive shapes lives of nonviolence. It may be that forgiveness, and the very possibility of

forgiveness, dies in countless assaults on individuals and groups within countless human relationships yet it remains or can remain at least for some a matter of hope. It could have been that forgiveness dies in countless assaults on individuals and groups within countless human relationships. Yet it remains, or can remain, at least for some, a matter of hope. It could have been that forgiveness died in the death camps of Germany, or in the slaughtering hills of Rwanda. But it did not, at least not for everyone - although its power for holding human lives together was shattered, crucified, in such terrible ways. But rather than the end of the history of forgiveness, contemporary crimes (great or small) against humanity may have brought unprecedented urgency to its possible new beginnings.

Conclusion. Just a short paragraph in conclusion. How, in fact, can this kind of human perception, action, choice be part of the justice in our encounters with ordinary people, whether within our families, communities, churches, nations? Forgiveness can sometimes be so radical a response that it seems to have no bearing on most of our interactions in our institutions, professions, even ministries. Are there no better clues for understanding justice in these encounters and relationships? Perhaps. But to ponder the meaning of our experiences of both forgiving and being-forgiven, precisely, because they can be such radical experiences of de-centering, may help us to learn how to expand our minds and hearts, transforming them, little by little, into attitudes that help us to enact our encounters justly, whether they are great or small. How we think about such matters makes a huge different as to how we interpret our lives, and build or sustain our relationships. I take it that we each have a contribution to make regarding how we think about these matters, as well as countless others. Thank you. (Applause)

1/ Emily Dickinson, in *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickenson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Boston: little, Brown and Company, 1987), 108.

2/ I rely heavily here on the marvelous analysis of these truth commissions provided in Teresa Godwin Phelps, Shattered voices: Language, Violence, and the Work of the Truth (Philadelphia: university of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). For other useful views on the commissions and similar proposals for reconciliation, see Miroslav Volf, "Memory of Reconciliation-Reconciliation of Memory," *The Catholic Theological Society of America: Proceedings of the Fifty-ninth Annual Convention 59* (June 2004): 1-13; Denise M. Ackerman, "Reconciliation as Embodied Change, A South African Prespective," ibid., 50-67; Raymond G. Helmick & Rodney L. Peterson, eds., *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Religion, Public Policy, and Conflict Transformation*, (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 2001); Robert J. Schreiter, *The Memory of Reconciliation: Spirituality and Strategies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998). I note here that while my own rendering of the work of truth commissions emphasizes their positive value, they have had their many critics as well. Some of these are considered in the works cited above.

3/ Timothy Garton Ash, "True Confessions," *New York Review of Books* (July 17, 1997): 36-36; as cited in Phelps, 112.

4/ "Ought" might be too strong a term here. By using it, I do not want to impose yet another burden on those who suffer ongoing oppression of whatever kind. I simply mean that it is an appropriate disposition, one that can be freeing and strengthening, even under these circumstances.

Transcribed by
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