

Forgiveness, restorative justice and reconciliation in sustainable peacebuilding

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*Forgiveness, Restorative Justice and Reconciliation in Sustainable Peacebuilding:
Contemporary Debates and Future Possibilities*

Introduction

Over the past decades, forgiveness and reconciliation have been increasingly reflected upon and highlighted as core components of healing and peacebuilding in a multitude of studies and publications: in a first phase focusing mainly on individuals and relations between them, and later as well on relations between communities and states in the public sphere. Amongst the pioneering and leading scholars and practitioners are Robert Enright and Everett Worthington, both with a psychology background and with a focus on the personal dimension.¹ Since the mid 1990's growing attention has been given in the scholarly debate and in public policy to the contribution forgiveness and reconciliation can make in peacebuilding and to processes of restorative justice in the public sphere. Reference works like the proceedings of a major 'Forgiveness and Reconciliation' Symposium² (funded by the Templeton Foundation) in 2001 and the 'Handbook of Forgiveness'³ in 2005 have been published in the first decade of the 21st century, providing good introductions and an overview of the scholarly debate of the many aspects, conceptual definitions, diverse disciplinary approaches and contexts of forgiveness and reconciliation.

¹ Robert D. Enright and Joanna North, eds., *Exploring Forgiveness* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998).

Robert D. Enright, *Forgiveness is a Choice* (Washington, DC: APA Books, 2001).

Robert D. Enright, *The Forgiving Life* (Washington, D.C.: APA Books, 2012).

Robert D. Enright, *8 Keys to Forgiveness* (New York: Norton, 2015).

Everett L. Worthington, Jr., ed., *Dimensions of Forgiveness: Psychological Research and Theological Perspectives* (Philadelphia: The Templeton Foundation Press, 1998).

Everett L. Worthington, Jr., *Five Steps to Forgiveness: The Art and Science of Forgiving* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2001).

Everett L. Worthington, Jr., *Forgiving and Reconciling: Bridges to Wholeness and Hope* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

Everett L. Worthington, Jr., ed., *Handbook of Forgiveness* (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2005).

Everett L. Worthington, Jr., *The Power of Forgiving* (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 2005).

Everett L. Worthington, Jr., *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Theory and Application* (New York: Brunner/Routledge, 2006).

Everett L. Worthington, Jr., *A Just Forgiveness: Responsible Healing without Excusing Injustice* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009).

Everett L. Worthington, Jr., *Moving Forward: Six Steps to Forgiving Yourself and Breaking Free from the Past* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook/Multnomah, 2013).

² Raymond G. Helmick, S.J. and Rodney L. Petersen, eds., *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Religion, Public Policy and Conflict Transformation* (Radnor, Pennsylvania: Templeton Foundation Press, 2001).

³ Everett L. Worthington Jr., ed., *Handbook of Forgiveness* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

Forgiveness, Restorative Justice, Reconciliation and Peacebuilding

This article focuses on the question of forgiveness and reconciliation in peacebuilding, in contemporary scholarship and in the public sphere over the past 25 years. Any attempt to better understand forgiveness and reconciliation in relation to peacebuilding has to address, at the same time, the critical issue of how to safeguard and integrate processes of justice into peace processes. It is necessary to include justice processes for peace processes to be sustainable and to retain the support of victims of atrocities, large-scale violence and crimes. After first clarifying the distinction between retributive and restorative justice, this article reviews core findings of two selected, leading scholars, as exemplars of the current debate of critical issues in forgiveness, restorative justice and reconciliation scholarship: Daniel Philpott (University of Notre Dame, with a Political Science background) and John Paul Lederach (University of Notre Dame, with a Sociology, Mediation and Conflict Transformation background).⁴ These scholars have studied and analysed *private and public aspects* of forgiveness, restorative justice and reconciliation *in relation to peacebuilding*, as well as having included a reflection on the *religious and secular* contexts in their research.

This academic reflection is expanded and contextualised by considering briefly two selected, contemporary examples of peace and reconciliation initiatives in the public sphere, in the light of the preceding arguments: the work of Leonel Narvaez (a Catholic Priest and social reformer in Colombia)⁵ and the Schools of Forgiveness and Reconciliation he founded in Colombia (in Chapter Two) and the Peace Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation initiative (in Chapter Three)⁶.

In addition, the question is considered why *liberal peacebuilding* overall has been reluctant to integrate forgiveness into its standard practices, whilst restorative justice and reconciliation processes have been increasingly acknowledged and integrated in peacebuilding, conflict resolution and transformation. The article concludes with the recommendation that forgiveness, restorative justice and reconciliation processes (ideally all three processes

⁴ Daniel Philpott, *Just and Unjust Peace: An Ethic of Political Reconciliation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Jennifer J. Llewellyn and Daniel Philpott, *Restorative Justice, Reconciliation and Peacebuilding* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014).

John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace. Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997).

⁵ Leonel Narvaez, ed., *Political Culture of Forgiveness and Reconciliation* (Bogota, Colombia: Fundación Para La Reconciliación, 2010) (English Edition)).

⁶ Peace Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation. See its website: www.charterforforgiveness.org

combined in an integrated process) should be further mainstreamed and more equitably and sensitively implemented as part of any standard, comprehensive response to major conflicts and wars by national political bodies, national and international NGOs, as well as international organisations, agencies and institutions, in order to positively and sustainably resolve and transform conflicts, wars and violence between groups.

The concepts of forgiveness and reconciliation are, not surprisingly, understood and defined in a variety of ways by different scholars, across such diverse disciplines as philosophy, psychology, theology, political science and law, focusing on a range of aspects of these values and describing their varied impact on individuals, communities and societies. In the main, and documented through the examples in this article, forgiveness is seen as an *internal process* or activity of a person, letting-go of a harmful state of mind, and thereby finding freedom and peace of mind and heart. Reconciliation is seen, in the main, as a *process between persons and/or communities* that can take place in private or in public settings, *re-establishing right relationships*. Contemporary discussions and scholarly research concerning *forgiveness* are linked to the closely connected question of its relation to *justice* and *reconciliation*, whether and how these values are related, if there is an interdependence and interconnectedness between them, if they can be achieved separately and what, in the long-term, could be the most promising route to restore broken relationships and foster healthy and peaceful individuals, families, communities and societies.

Restorative Justice and Retributive Justice

In any reflection concerning the relation and potential interdependencies between forgiveness, reconciliation and a holistic view of justice the distinction between *retributive justice* and *restorative justice* needs to be taken into consideration, a distinction that was developed in scholarship and practice since the 1980s.

Retributive justice seeks punishment for crimes that were committed and assumes that the imposed punitive judgements and sentences serve as a deterrent for the offender not to re-offend and for potential offenders to consider the severe consequences before they engage in criminal activities, thereby preventing crime and unlawful behaviour. Defenders of *retributive justice* consider it to be essential for upholding the rule of law, from a consequentialist point of view, and support an inherently deserved punishment for the crimes that were committed, from an ethical point of view.

Restorative justice does require that crimes, abuse and human rights violations that have been committed are admitted and that only then a process of seeking restoration, healing and repairing of any harm suffered can take place. *Retributive justice* does not seek the healing and restoring of broken and harmed relationships, whereas *restorative justice* seeks to heal and transform the offender as well as the victim, and seeks to restore right relationships between them and in the concerned/involved communities. Braithwaite defines restorative justice as follows:

Restorative justice is a process where all the stakeholders affected by an injustice have an opportunity to discuss how they have been affected by the injustice and to decide what should be done to repair the harm. With crime, restorative justice is about the idea that because crime hurts, justice should heal. It follows that conversations with those who have been hurt and with those who have afflicted the harm must be central to the process. Restorative justice comes in many forms. The most common in Europe and North America is victim-offender mediation.⁷

Forgiveness, Restorative Justice and Reconciliation

Howard Zehr, a pioneering scholar and practitioner of *restorative justice*, defined in his book '*Changing Lenses. A new Focus for Crime and Justice*' forgiveness in relation to the justice process as follows:

Forgiveness is letting go of the power the offense and the offender have over a person. It means no longer letting that offense and offender dominate. Without this experience of forgiveness, the wounds may fester and the violation may take over our consciousness and our lives. The offense and the offender are in control. Real forgiveness, then, is an act of empowerment and healing. It allows one to move from victim to survivor.⁸

Daniel Philpott and Jennifer J. Llewellyn, in a co-written book chapter, provide a similar definition of *forgiveness* as a practice of letting-go in the context of *restorative justice*:

“Finally, forgiveness is a practice through which victims will to forgo anger and revenge and resolve to look upon a perpetrator as one against whom they no longer hold their crimes”⁹

In the same chapter they summarise their understanding and definition of *reconciliation* in comparison with *restorative justice*:

Like restorative justice, the core concepts of reconciliation all involve the repair of actual harms to right relationship that injustices inflict. The justice of reconciliation restores right relationship by aiming to repair harms to persons and relationships. The

⁷ John Braithwaite, 'Restorative Justice and De-Professionalization', *The Good Society*, 13, 1 (2004): 28.

⁸ Howard Zehr, *Changing Lenses: A new Focus for Crime and Justice*, Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Edition (3rd Edition) (Harrisonburg, Virginia: Herald Press, 2015), 53.

⁹ Llewellyn and Philpott, *Restorative Justice, Reconciliation and Peacebuilding*, 27.

peace of reconciliation is the condition of right relationship that results from this repair. Mercy is the virtue that wills the reparation of what is broken.¹⁰

In the specific context of national reconciliation efforts after large-scale atrocities there are both positive and critical views in contemporary scholarship of the contribution forgiveness and reconciliation can make in these contexts. There is some criticism of the ‘institutionalisation’ of forgiveness in ‘Truth Commissions’, pointing out that forgiveness has to be always a free, non-coerced decision of an individual. Victims of grave injustices and great harm are often in a weak position in public settings, as they are still seeking to recover their self-esteem and self-respect whilst experiencing a moral obligation to forgive, presented to them by religious or political authority figures.¹¹ Forgiveness can be understood in a variety of ways in public processes after conflicts and mass atrocities. Often forgiveness and reconciliation are a part of transitional justice, which raises additional questions and concerns:

When speaking about forgiveness in those situations, it is necessary to be very concrete. When using this word, one could be referring to political reconciliation among the parties in a conflict, amnesty for the perpetrators of certain crimes, or personal forgiveness that victims concede to those who have victimized them. In addition, these three senses are not necessarily contradictory because it is possible to speak about forgiveness in one, two, or all three senses at the same time. However, it seems evident that any of aforementioned three senses of forgiveness in the processes of transitional politics seem to contradict the habitually understood sense of justice in the context of the law. It does not seem like it should be the role of ordinary judges and the courts to achieve national reconciliation, award amnesty to the perpetrators of a crime, nor have the victims forgive the victimizers.¹²

If it is not the role of ordinary judges and the courts to achieve national reconciliation, this raises the critical question *whose role it could be* and what public processes, policies and institutions could advance forgiveness and reconciliation, between individuals, communities and nations? Historically and pragmatically the establishment of truth, reconciliation and peace commissions with a range of relevant stakeholders has been the appropriate response to find a public resolution to the grave crimes and atrocities committed during major conflicts and wars.

¹⁰ Ibid., 26.

¹¹ Neelke Doorn, ‘Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Empowerment in Transitional Justice’, *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 1, 4 (April 2011): 13,14.

¹² Pedro Rivas, ‘Forgiveness, Law and Politics. Considerations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’, *Journal of Politics and Law*, 6, 2 (2013): 19,20.

Another frequently debated critical issue is the question if there are crimes so severe (mass murder, mass atrocities and genocide) that they fall outside the immediate reach of individual, restorative justice and forgiveness, and that they have to be addressed first of all in traditional public justice settings, either nationally in criminal courts or internationally through the International Criminal Court. Hannah Arendt is perhaps the best known contemporary author to address the moral question of the limits of forgiveness.¹³ She maintained that ‘radical evil’, as experienced in the Holocaust and the Nazi death camps, can neither be understood, nor judged, nor forgiven:

All we know is that we can neither punish nor forgive such offences and that they therefore transcend the realm of human affairs and the potentialities of human power, both of which they radically destroy wherever they make their appearance.¹⁴

Responding to this contemporary debate on forgiveness, Jacques Derrida sought to overcome the perceived limitation and powerlessness of such a view of human affairs and asserted in his writing the ‘limitless’ and ‘unconditional’ nature of forgiveness, the possibility of healing even the ‘unforgivable’. ‘Pure forgiveness’, according to Derrida, is ultimately safeguarding the very meaning of forgiveness and reconciliation, where the unforgivable is forgiven:

Yet despite all the confusions which reduce forgiveness to amnesty or amnesia, to acquittal or prescription, to the work of mourning or some political therapy of reconciliation, in short to some historical ecology, it must never be forgotten, nevertheless, that all of that refers to a certain idea of pure and unconditional forgiveness without which this discourse would not have the least meaning.¹⁵

Pure, unconditional, limitless forgiveness is, however, in real life present as a ‘hyperbolic, ethical vision’, as a paradox and always in an irreducible tension to pragmatic processes of reconciliation and justice:

I remain ‘torn’ (between a ‘hyperbolic’ ethical vision of forgiveness, pure forgiveness, and the reality of a society at work in pragmatic processes of reconciliation). But without power, desire, or need to decide. The two poles are irreducible to one another, certainly, but they remain indissociable. In order to inflect politics, or what you just called the ‘pragmatic processes’, in order to change the law (which, thus, finds itself between the two poles, the ‘ideal’ and the ‘empirical’ –and what is more important to me here is, between these two, this universalising mediation, this history of the law, the

¹³ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 239.

For a summary of Arendt’s thinking on forgiveness, see: Michael Janover, ‘The Limits of Forgiveness and the Ends of Politics’, *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 26, 3 (2005): 230, 231.

¹⁴ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 241.

¹⁵ Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 45.

possibility of this progress of the law), it is necessary to refer to a ‘“hyperbolic” ethical vision of forgiveness’.¹⁶

How to bring the personal dimension of forgiveness and reconciliation together with the communal and public dimension in contemporary society, whilst at the same time taking the demand of justice seriously, is a topic that has been extensively researched and discussed in the scholarly work of Daniel Philpott. His insights will be discussed further in the next section of this paper and will be complemented by the insights of John Paul Lederach, a highly respected mediator, conflict resolution, reconciliation and peacebuilding practitioner, with experience in many different country settings over a time period of several decades.

1. Daniel Philpott and John Paul Lederach: Exploring the Relation between Forgiveness, Justice, Reconciliation and Peacebuilding

a.) *Daniel Philpott: Reflecting on the Interconnectedness of Forgiveness, Justice, Reconciliation and Peace*

Daniel Philpott is Professor of Political Science at Notre-Dame University in the United States. He has written extensively about the tension and relation between forgiveness, reconciliation and justice and is one of the best-known authors and scholars in this field of study. *Just and Unjust Peace. An Ethic of Political Reconciliation* in 2012¹⁷ and *Restorative Justice, Reconciliation and Peacebuilding* (written and edited together with Jennifer J. Llewellyn, a Professor of Law at Dalhousie University) in 2014¹⁸ are his main publications reflecting on the relationship between these values in peacebuilding.

As mentioned in the introduction section, the many aspects and processes of forgiveness and reconciliation are not only debated and analysed in view of healing and restoring *personal relationships* in contemporary scholarship, but also in relation to restorative justice and sustainable peace in the *public sphere*, in societies and between states. In his book ‘*Just and Unjust Peace. An Ethic of Political Reconciliation*’ Philpott summarises succinctly the dilemma and the political as well as institutional challenge in the debates of forgiveness:

The most surprising, controversial, and dramatic development in the age of peacebuilding is the growth of forgiveness. It is embodied far less than the other practices in global norms and institutions. Punishment is supported by international law, an international criminal court, national courts, and large communities of officials

¹⁶ Ibid., 51.

¹⁷ Philpott, *Just and Unjust Peace: An Ethic of Political Reconciliation*.

¹⁸ Llewellyn and Philpott, *Restorative Justice, Reconciliation and Peacebuilding*.

and activists. Human rights and democracy have even stronger support among activists and in international law. Acknowledgement has its truth commissions and its memorials. Reparations and apology are practiced and enacted by presidents and legislatures. Not so forgiveness. It has practitioners and proponents, but arguments for it are generally not found in speeches and statements coming from the United Nations, Western government, or other advocates of the liberal peace. It is also the practice that is most disproportionately and distinctly – though not solely or unanimously – advocated by religious leaders and their followers.¹⁹

Forgiveness, which is often seen as a highly personal and private matter, has so far proved to be too complex, too elusive and too controversial to be defined and expressed in shared global norms and to be routinely applied in public processes in national and international institutions, whilst justice, human rights, rule of law and judicial punishment have been increasingly embodied and institutionalised internationally over the past decades.

Forgiveness becomes possible when a perpetrator is not solely seen and defined as the one who has committed evil, but as a person who is grounded always in his/her much deeper and wider nature as a human being, with the possibility of regretting and transcending any act of evil committed by him/her, and as a person having the potential to transform himself/herself to overcome evil and to participate in restoring good. For religious and spiritual persons this process of forgiveness, transformation, restoration and reconciliation is ultimately grounded in mercy, compassion, grace and love of the all-pervasive presence of ultimate Divine Reality. One of the core questions explored in this article is the possibility that such a religious and spiritual view of a person who always has the potential for transformation towards the good, could be embodied and expressed in norms in public and in institutional realms.

Daniel Philpott refers to the possibility of transformation of evil and restoration of the good in the following clarification on how to overcome evil in his book *Just and Unjust Peace*, seeking to strengthen the argument for a restoration instead of retribution and resentment:

Not only does constructive forgiveness not condone or necessarily forget evil but it takes evil seriously in the same ways that resentment does. It names, confronts, and draws attention to the evil, asserts that the victim has been the target of evil, and wills that the perpetrator renounce the evil. The difference between constructive forgiveness and resentment is the manner in which they seek this defeat. Resentment seeks it by actively asserting the perpetrator's evil against him, denouncing him for his deed, and perhaps drawing others' attention to it. Forgiveness seeks this defeat by willing a world

¹⁹ Philpott, *Just and Unjust Peace*, 251.

in which the perpetrator has rejected the evil and in which the evil has been transformed and overcome.²⁰

The argument explored in this article is twofold: a) that a restorative, transformative understanding of justice can contribute to healing, liberation, a lasting overcoming of evil and a restoration of right relationships; and b) to highlight the important role that forgiveness can play in restorative justice, reconciliation and sustainable peace.

In order to overcome the *antinomies between justice and forgiveness* that are often expressed by those who prioritise *retributive justice* in dealing with past trauma, conflicts, abuse and violence, an explanation of a *relational approach*, as expressed in models of *restorative justice* and *reconciliation*, can lead the discussion beyond these perceived antinomies into a synthesis.

Jennifer J. Llewellyn and Daniel Philpott stated in their introduction to '*Restorative Justice, Reconciliation and Peacebuilding*' that

both restorative justice and reconciliation are relational approaches. They conceive of human persons not as isolated individuals or as mere bearers of utility but rather as beings who are fundamentally connected and defined in and through their relationships with others. Peacebuilding at the level of the nation-state, then, seeks not only to restore rights and the rule of law but also to address the range of harms that violence causes to human relationships, to restore relationships out of these variegated harms, and to elicit the participation of a wider range of parties involved in understanding and responding to these harms.²¹

There exists a variety of meanings of the terms *restorative justice* and *reconciliation*.²²

In this article the approach and concepts of Philpott and Llewellyn are highlighted because they attempted to develop definitions of these two terms

that can be applied to the problem of peacebuilding on the level of the nation-state and the community..... Each concept, we propose further, can also be understood both from religious and secular perspectives and can facilitate and promote communication and collaboration among these spheres.²³

Definitions that can be applied to personal, communal and state-levels, as well as religious and secular environments, enable a holistic and relational approach to justice that takes the inter-relatedness and connectedness of all human life serious across all sections of societies,

²⁰ Philpott, *Just and Unjust Peace*, 263.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 3,4

²² *Ibid.*, 8

²³ *Ibid.*, 8

engaging persons as autonomous and interdependent individuals and as responsible citizens seeking the common, public good.

Restorative Justice and Peacebuilding

Restorative justice seeks justice by repairing and healing relationships between individuals, the perpetrator and the victim, and by including their surrounding community in the process.

Restorative justice takes the fact of human connection – of human beings as relational – as its starting point for thinking about what justice means and what is required to do justice ... From this perspective we can see that our protection lies not in isolation or separation but through the right conditions and character of relationships between individuals, communities and societies.²⁴

Often opposed to the restorative justice approach, and challenging its primacy, are defenders and proponents of retributive justice, claiming that punitive consequences are necessary where crimes and atrocities have been committed, in order to uphold the rule of law, to prevent impunity and to deter perpetrators of committing similar violence, crimes and atrocities in the future. Defenders of retributive justice and the current dominant, retributive judicial system overlook, however, another consequence of putting the state and its prosecution, as well as lawyers in charge: it normally disempowers victims of finding their own, personal resolution to the injustice they suffered from. It prevents them from restoring, if they would wish so, a healing and right relationship with the perpetrator and, in consequence, thereby also enabling the perpetrator to reintegrate into the community *if he responds and engages* with the restorative justice process. Zehr summarised the disempowering and dividing dynamics of the contemporary, predominantly retributive justice systems:

The justice process ... requires dependence upon proxy professionals who represent offender and the state. This, in turn, removes the process of justice from the individuals and the communities which are affected. Victim and offender become bystanders, nonparticipants in their own cases.... The justice process does not seek reconciliation between victim and offender because the relationship between victim and offender is not seen as an important problem.²⁵

There are great differences amongst a multitude of NGOs active in peacebuilding and conflict transformation in their approaches how to achieve justice after conflicts, atrocities and war. In the 1990s, after the end of the Cold War and as part of renewed attempts to strengthen the

²⁴ Ibid., 18,19

²⁵ Zehr, *Changing Lenses: A new Focus for Crime and Justice*, 79-82.

rule of law in international relations and in global politics, there was a growing momentum to bring perpetrators of violence and mass atrocities to justice by establishing, for example, the International Criminal Court.²⁶ Retributive justice and transitional justice understanding were gaining prominence in debates how to address atrocities in national and international judicial systems. A fierce debate followed, if local reconciliation efforts, often including forgiveness, should be allowed to prevent the implementation of retributive justice and punishments through national and international criminal courts and justice systems. Such retributive justice was demanded by secular, national and international organisations focused on a law- and rights-based approach, including the demand that war crimes had to be prosecuted at the International Criminal Court in grave and large-scale cases. Faith-based NGOs and religious organisations often tended to prioritise forgiveness and reconciliation, whilst secular organisations more often demanded the rule of law and retributive justice to be implemented and upheld. The desire to prevent and not to reinforce an attitude of impunity amongst perpetrators of crimes and atrocities was as much of an argument as the demands that justice and rule of law in its retributive character must be upheld.

Louise Mallinder addressed the often perceived negative linkage between (unconditional) amnesties and impunity, and summarised instead principles for a ‘restorative amnesty’.²⁷

In contrast, amnesty laws that aim to deliver peace may also contribute to delivering restorative justice and reconciliation, where they are designed to encourage offenders to take responsibility for their actions and engage with accountability through participation in restorative justice processes. In this way, by encouraging offender participation, amnesty laws can potentially contribute to creating the conditions for the restoration of relationships.

I would argue that for amnesties to be understood as an expression of restorative justice they must be designed according to restorative justice principles.²⁸

The concept of *transitional justice*, including truth commission, restoration programmes and amnesties, gained greater acceptance in the 1990s in secular settings and in international law discourse, seeking to maintain justice in contexts where a criminal prosecution of all offenses, including human rights offenses, could not be realistically assured, primarily because of the great number of such offenses committed. The International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) was founded in New York in March 2001 and it defined transitional justice as follows:

²⁶ Philpott, *Just and Unjust Peace*, 37,38.

²⁷ Louise Mallinder, ‘Amnesties in the Pursuit of Reconciliation, Peacebuilding, and Restorative Justice’, in Llewellyn and Philpott, *Restorative Justice, Reconciliation and Peacebuilding*, 140.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 150

Transitional justice refers to the ways countries emerging from periods of conflict and repression address large scale or systematic human rights violations so numerous and so serious that the normal justice system will not be able to provide an adequate response. Transitional justice is rooted in accountability and redress for victims. It recognizes their dignity as citizens and as human beings. Ignoring massive abuses is an easy way out but it destroys the values on which any decent society can be built. Transitional justice asks the most difficult questions imaginable about law and politics. By putting victims and their dignity first it signals the way forward for a renewed commitment to make sure ordinary citizens are safe in their own countries – safe from the abuses of their own authorities and effectively protected from violations by others.²⁹

Another major difference in justice approaches can be noticed between a legalistic and formal Western justice and rule of law approach and models of justice found in developing countries and amongst religious and indigenous communities.³⁰ According to a UNDP publication, “informal justice systems usually resolve between 80 to 90 percent of disputes”³¹ in many developing countries. The contemporary, dominant understanding of justice and law as a form of retribution and punishment, and as the rational way to protect order and the rule of law, has not been exclusively the only way justice has been understood and practised in the history of societies and civilisations. In the West, the contemporary, dominant understanding of systems and institutions of justice and law are strongly influenced by and can be traced back to their origins in Greek and Roman times. In Europe and the Middle East, values of mercy, forgiveness, restorative justice and reconciliation can be found predominantly in the religious and indigenous traditions, however they were rarely expressed in Greek and Roman sources of law. Philpott writes:

What is true of mercy is also true more broadly of reconciliation and restorative justice: These are odd visitors, discordant entrants, in modern Western thought, law, and politics as well as in global institutions. Reconciliation has played little role in Western law since it emerged in the Middle Ages and is not a major theme in the Greek and Roman sources of Western law and thought or in the natural law tradition of ethics.³²

But even in Roman times, other paradigms of justice and reconciliation were present in the many local cultures and religions under Roman rule. Historically speaking, Jesus of Nazareth, the founder of Christianity, can be understood as an individual who has challenged profoundly a Roman, predominant legalistic, retributive justice paradigm. Christians might argue that over the last 2000 years Jesus of Nazareth had perhaps the most widespread and

²⁹ *What is Transitional Justice*, from the web site of the International Center for Transitional Justice: <https://www.ictj.org/about/transitional-justice> Accessed on 21 July 2019.

³⁰ Louise Mallinder, ‘Amnesties in the Pursuit of Reconciliation, Peacebuilding, and Restorative Justice’, 139.

³¹ Ewa Wojkowska, *Doing Justice: How Informal Justice Systems Can Contribute* (UNDP: 2006), 5

³² Philpott, *Just and Unjust Peace*, 7.

enduring impact on how justice was understood in the Western hemisphere, first on the private and then on the public quest for a more holistic, forgiving, reconciling and healing understanding of justice, inspiring countless persons to seek a restorative response to human failing, betrayal, crime, conflict, atrocities and even wars. The reconciliation between France and Germany, and to some extent between Germany and Poland, after the Second World War, are recent examples which were pioneered by individuals with a Christian worldview and supported by Christian denominations in Europe. However, such examples are still not the rule, but rather the exception in the contemporary world of politics, national interests and international order, where realpolitik, economic might and military power continue to be the dominant factors.

Philpott and Llewellyn see the origins of reconciliation as a concept of justice strongly rooted in the Abrahamic religions (which was the selected, particular religious focus in their book and does not deny the presence of these values in other religious traditions):

Reconciliation as a concept of justice? That idea will ring strange to westerners, for whom reconciliation is more familiarly an overcoming of enmity, a state of embrace, or perhaps a personal and intimate matter. It is in fact in ancient religions, their texts and their traditions, that the idea of reconciliation as a concept of justice can be found. Here we focus on Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In these traditions (though perhaps not in every theological interpretation of them) the meaning of reconciliation indeed converges strongly with the meaning of justice as well as the meaning of peace and mercy.³³

The search for justice in its deeper and more holistic meaning, focusing at the core on the relationships amongst individuals, in families, in communities and with the Divine, has - included rituals, traditions and prophetic responses going beyond retribution, seeking healing, restoration and wholeness throughout the history of Abrahamic religions.

In the scriptures of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, justice commonly translates to something very much like 'righteousness', meaning the demands of right relationship among the members of a community in all of their roles – economic, political, familial, cultic – and with respect to God. Peace, then, is the comprehensive right relationship, or state of justice that results from processes of restoration.³⁴

Here we find the common ground where the concepts of justice and reconciliation meet: *right relationships, healed and restored*. Philpott has summarised this shared purpose, building on insights from Abrahamic traditions and schools, as follows:

Reconciliation, in these traditions and schools, is the restoration of relationships that wrongs have ruptured with the aim of realizing a condition of right relationship, that is,

³³ Llewellyn and Philpott, *Restorative Justice, Reconciliation and Peacebuilding*, 23.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 24

a state of being reconciled. If justice, too, is both a state of right relationship and a process of restoring right relationship following wrongs, then it follows that justice is identical to reconciliation. Put more simply, reconciliation is a concept of justice – the justice of comprehensive right relationship.³⁵

According to such a holistic understanding of the various contributing processes needed to constitute and maintain justice and peace, *a sustainable peace can only be the result of restorative justice, forgiveness, and reconciliation.*

b.) John Paul Lederach: Sustainable Reconciliation and Peacebuilding

Prof John Paul Lederach from the University of Notre Dame, USA, is a pioneering, well known peacebuilding scholar who was amongst the first to highlight in his writings the intricate link between relationships, reconciliation and sustainable peace. In 1997 Lederach published one of the classics of contemporary peacebuilding literature which has been used in countless seminars and workshops around the world: *Building Peace. Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*.³⁶ In this book he outlined core models of building peace, including his often quoted Pyramid model³⁷, and presented the core conceptual framework for building peace as being constituted by four key values: truth, mercy, justice and peace. This framework was developed by Lederach after he was part of mediation group meetings in Nicaragua between the Sandinista government and an indigenous resistance group, the Yatama. These mediation meetings had opened with a reflection on Psalm 85 (10) from the Bible: ‘Truth and Mercy have met together, peace and justice have kissed.’³⁸ The place where these four concepts meet was named reconciliation.³⁹ Reconciliation was understood as a place and a perspective, as a locus and a focus.⁴⁰ Lederach wrote:

Reconciliation, I am suggesting, involves the creation of the social space where both truth and forgiveness are validated and joined together, rather than being forced into an encounter in which one must win out over the other or envisioned as fragmented and separated parts.⁴¹

³⁵ Philpott, *Just and Unjust Peace: An Ethic of Political Reconciliation*, 54.

³⁶ Lederach, *Building Peace. Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 39

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 28-30.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 30,31.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

Forgiveness was understood by Lederach as being an aspect of mercy and mercy as being related to compassion, restoration and healing.⁴² In his argument the insight is expressed that lasting, sustainable reconciliation and peace involves all concerned parties *and* their righteous and healthy relationships. Based on these insights, Lederach argued for a change in the paradigm of peacebuilding, away from a statist diplomacy paradigm to a relational paradigm. He wrote:

I believe this paradigmatic shift is articulated in the movement away from a concern with the resolution of issues and toward a frame of reference that focuses on the restoration and rebuilding of relationships. [1] This calls for an approach that goes beyond a mechanical strategy. The framework must address and engage the relational aspects of reconciliation as the central component of peacebuilding.⁴³

20 years later, the reconciliation and peacebuilding initiatives and organisations have multiplied amongst NGOs, and at the United Nations there is now a Peacebuilding Support Office⁴⁴, a Peacebuilding Commission and a Peacebuilding Fund, to expand, complement and inform the United Nations peacekeeping operations and to improve co-ordination with national peace efforts.⁴⁵

Reconciliation and forgiveness values, however, still have not found their *own* institutional expression or formalised processes in the international institutional arena, *even though both are seen as being essential and a core part of sustainable peacebuilding* by leading scholars in the field of peacebuilding and by many religious actors who are following the precepts of their traditions. However, the topic of post-conflict reconciliation is debated increasingly also in UN settings and the UN Peacebuilding Fund has begun to support national

⁴² Ibid., 28.

⁴³ Ibid., 24. In this quotation Lederach referenced two earlier authors [1] to strengthen his argument for a relational approach: Hizkias Assefa, *Peace and Reconciliation as a Paradigm* (Nairobi, Kenya: Nairobi Peace Initiative, 1993), 10-16; Howard Zehr, *Changing Lenses: A New Focus for Crime and Justice* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1990), 177.

⁴⁴ <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/supportoffice> Accessed on 9 December 2020 .

⁴⁵ <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/news/secretary-generals-remarks-general-assembly-high-level-meeting-peacebuilding-and-sustaining> Accessed on 9 December 2020.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, remarks to the General Assembly high-level meeting on peacebuilding and sustaining peace on 24 April 2018:

"The central message of my report on peacebuilding and sustaining peace is that we need to enhance the coherence of international efforts in support of national governments and their people.

The scale and nature of the challenge we face calls for closer strategic and operational partnerships between all key stakeholders, based on what are the national priorities and the national policies. These key stakeholders include Governments, the United Nations, other international, regional and sub-regional organizations, international financial institutions, civil society, women's groups, youth organizations and the private sector. To achieve greater coherence, we are strengthening partnerships around all our efforts, and at every stage along the peace continuum from conflict prevention and resolution to peacekeeping, peacebuilding and long-term development."

reconciliation efforts in several countries.⁴⁶ On 19 November 2019 took place a first UN Security Council meeting with a focus specifically on reconciliation⁴⁷, whilst on 29 August 2018 the UN Security Council held a meeting focusing on mediation and conflict resolution. The Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby called during the 2018 Security Council meeting for a better integration of the peacebuilding work of the UN with local and national reconciliation processes:

If we can learn how to set conflict transformation in a framework of reconciliation – including at the grass roots, and not only by elites in conferences – we open ourselves to working together in new and more effective ways as we strive for peace, as the Secretary-General has just said. We enable mediation to be orders of magnitude more effective. As I have already said, the United Nations is the most extraordinary example of a framework of reconciliation – but this framework needs to be embedded in current ways of working and analysis. A cross-agency and cross-departmental reconciliation strategy, supported by the necessary resources, will open up current ways of working to new and innovative ways of negotiating strategies for peace, offering more options in an increasingly complex international system.⁴⁸

Whilst Truth (and Reconciliation) Commissions have been set up after many conflicts⁴⁹ and, for example, are being called for also in the current national effort to reach reconciliation in the peace process in Colombia, these efforts remain however *national efforts*. They begin following national initiatives initiated by grassroots or civil society campaigns, or after being initiated by influential individuals, politicians or political parties. There are some documents and guidebooks available internationally, but no standardised international policies or norms, or international, institutionalised processes of *forgiveness and reconciliation* that could be *called upon* by local and national actors. A globally acknowledged depository or hub for reconciliation processes and studies could therefore make a significant contribution to further improve and mainstream forgiveness and reconciliation processes in peacebuilding. Crucial to advance the argument for forgiveness and reconciliation in all areas of public life, local, national and international, is a deeper understanding of the reasons, the nature and the necessity for political reconciliation in order to achieve a more sustainable peace. Philpott

⁴⁶ https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/pbf_strategy_2020-2024_final.pdf UN Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund, 2020 – 2024 Strategy, page 8.

Accessed on 9 December 2020.

⁴⁷ Remarks of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres at UN Security Council meeting, 19 November 2019 <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2019-11-19/secretary-generals-remarks-the-security-council-the-role-of-reconciliation-processes-delivered> Accessed on 9 December 2020.

⁴⁸ Remarks of Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby at UN Security Council meeting, 29 August 2018. <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/speaking-and-writing/speeches/archbishop-canterbury-addresses-un-security-council> Accessed on 9 December 2020.

⁴⁹ Philpott, *Just and Unjust Peace: An Ethic of Political Reconciliation*, 181,182. Philpott counted some 40 truth commissions at the time of writing his book.

outlined some of these reasons and the proper application of political reconciliation in his book *Just and Unjust Peace* (2011). He summarised his approach and its constituting principles as follows:

At this point the ethic of political reconciliation can be stated as a definition. It is a concept of justice that aims to restore victims, perpetrators, citizens, and the government of states that have been involved in political injustices to a condition of right relationship within a political order or between political orders – a condition characterized by human rights, democracy, the rule of law, and respect for international law; by widespread recognition of the legitimacy of these values; and by the virtues that accompany these values.⁵⁰

To explore further the contemporary challenges and critical issues of applying the values of forgiveness, reconciliation and restorative justice after conflict and war in a national setting, the following section will critically reflect on the pioneering, scholarly and practical work of Leonel Narvaez seeking reconciliation and a just peace in Colombia.

2.) Leonel Narvaez and the Case of Forgiveness, Justice and Reconciliation in Colombia

Leonel Narvaez, whose scholarship is shaped by the experience of decades of civil war and violence in Colombia, is a scholar, priest and activist who is seeking to apply his insights on forgiveness and reconciliation in the current peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives in Colombia. The inclusive reconciliation process in Colombia involves the victims of the civil war, the opposing actors in the civil war and the Colombian government, and is attempting to take serious human rights, justice, truth finding, forgiveness and restoration. Narvaez collected and summarised the insights of his and his team's forgiveness and reconciliation work and research in the book *Political Culture of Forgiveness and Reconciliation* (2009). He also founded the workshops named *Schools for Forgiveness and Reconciliation (Escuelas de Perdón y Reconciliación, ESPERE)* and the *Foundation of Reconciliation (Fundación para la Reconciliación)*.⁵¹

The ESPERE workshops of forgiveness and reconciliation are designed around ten modules, guiding the participants *on an inner journey* in a safe and private environment. The 10 steps and 10 modules are described by Narvaez as follows:

1. Motivation and agreements of total privacy
2. I decide to move from darkness to light
3. I choose to forgive

⁵⁰ Philpott, *Just and Unjust Peace: An Ethic of Political Reconciliation*, 58.

⁵¹ Narvaez, *Political Culture of Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, 171.

4. I see with new eyes
5. I share the pain
6. I accept the other within me
7. I construct the truth
8. I guarantee justice
9. I agree on a pact
10. I organize the celebration.

These ten work modules are structured within a common framework: a safe environment, case presentation, theoretical inspiration, commitment and ritual. These modules and the route they take are filled with a strong symbolic concentration, where the colors, aromas, music, rituals, games, representations, and agreements play an important role.⁵²

Whilst these modules were developed at the beginning of the public and collective forgiveness work of Narvaez, focusing on a communal setting and on restoration of relationships, a large repository of principles, theories and ideas has been collected since ESPERE started its work in 2001.

A partial collection of the great diversity of approaches, processes, principles and ideas that Narvaez and his team encountered during their collective work for forgiveness and reconciliation is provided in the chapter *The General Principles of Forgiveness and Reconciliation*⁵³, co-written by Leonel Narvaez and Jairo Diaz, in the book on *Political Culture of Forgiveness and Reconciliation* (2009) edited by Narvaez. He emphasises the focus of his approach as follows:

For centuries, the strategies of peacemaking and citizen security have strongly emphasized rationality and law enforcement. ESPERE Schools want to offer a different paradigm by designing communal work techniques that are sustained through the strengthening of the emotional intelligence.⁵⁴

The personal, relational and communal aspects of restorative justice are given pre-eminence in this paradigm, taking precedence over law enforcement and retributive justice. The processes of forgiveness and reconciliation in this paradigm involve both the interior healing of the individuals, as well as the restoration of healthy, peaceful relationships between individuals and in communities. In the typology of *interpersonal reconciliation* of the Schools of Forgiveness (ESPERE) the following clarification is made:

⁵² Leonel Narvaez, 'Schools of Forgiveness and Reconciliation. Constructing Peace', *ReVista. Harvard Review of Latin America* (Spring 2003): 49.

⁵³ Narvaez, *Political Culture of Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, 171 – 220.

⁵⁴ Narvaez, 'Schools of Forgiveness and Reconciliation. Constructing Peace', 49.

In other words, to repair people is to forgive; to repair relationships is to reconcile. Thus, forgiveness is a process of interior repair that permits, if it is possible and if it is so desired, the initiation of a process of reconciliation, of reparation of the relationship that was ruptured by the offense.⁵⁵

Inevitably such a reconciliatory and restorative approach will evoke criticism and opposition from those who want punishment for crimes and atrocities and strict law enforcement to be the foundation of any peace settlement. Based on his decades-long work and reconciliation experience, Narvaez has responded to recurring, fundamental criticism and opposition to the public implementation of the values of forgiveness and reconciliation in his writings. In seeking to accommodate the validity of truth and justice claims, whilst asserting at the same time the foundational character of forgiveness and reconciliation for enabling healing and a stronger peace, Narvaez wrote:

Certain paradigms have begun to form part of the everyday language of the ESPERE Schools. Against the irrationality of violence it is necessary to propose the irrationality of forgiveness, as well as demonstrate that cities are built from inside out, that forgiveness is not forgetting but rather remembering with different eyes, that without reconciliation there is no future, that hatred and resentment have grave somatic and psychological effects, that truth and justice are indispensable elements of reconciliation, and, finally, that compassion and tenderness must be reinstated as basic elements of the culture of peace.⁵⁶

The argument made here in this article concludes, in agreement with Narvaez' insights expressed above, that ultimately a *solely* rational solution to the legitimate, and at times, conflicting demands of justice and reconciliation, has not been found in Colombia or elsewhere, and that the 'reasons' and 'voices' *of the heart and of faith* need also to be heard and integrated in public processes of forgiveness and reconciliation, for individuals and communities to have any chance of a lasting, peaceful future. In such a viewpoint, understanding and approach, the wisdom and combined life experiences that find expression in the world's religious traditions can help to navigate the deepest and darkest experiences in communal and personal life, such as crime, war, betrayal, violence and multiple forms of abuse. Compassion, love, mercy, forgiveness (sometimes referred to as letting-go) and reconciliation are values that are central to all major religious traditions. These values and their application in demanding life situations and crises haven been shared through religious traditions, their rituals, stories and scriptures for millennia. As in so many other war, civil war and post-conflict zones around the world, the question of seeking forgiveness and

⁵⁵ Narvaez, *Political Culture of Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, 207.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p 49

reconciliation, without, at the same time, abandoning the quest for truth and justice, is at the heart of the current debates concerning the peace and reconciliation process in Colombia. Whilst former President Juan Manuel Santos has launched and strongly supported a peace and reconciliation process in 2015, there was a substantial opposition led by former President Álvaro Uribe Vélez and his political party *Partido Centro Democrático (Democratic Center Party)* against the Peace Agreement. It was finally ratified by both houses of Congress on November 29-30, 2016, with abstention from the supporters of former President Uribe. The opposition is against implementing, in their view, a premature and unjust peace agreement with the FARC and other armed guerrilla groups. The demand to ensure that justice is maintained and that crimes committed during the civil war in Colombia are prosecuted is central for the opposition to the Colombian peace process. Former President Uribe himself was supporting in 2005 the Justice and Peace Law which was meant “to create a legal framework that would permit the reintegration of illegal armed groups into society.”⁵⁷ In his and his supporter’s judgement, apparently, the conditions are not yet given for a just peace, for the upholding of law and a succeeding reintegration of guerrillas into Colombian society. The current President of Colombia, Iván Duque, is seeking to reform and adjust the Peace Agreement, without rejecting it completely.

3.) Peace Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation: An Example of a Contemporary Initiative

In addition to the scholarly debates and political processes on a national level, the public discourse and argument concerning forgiveness, reconciliation and restorative justice are advanced also through a variety of national and international NGOs and peace initiatives, in national and international settings. One such recent initiative, the *Peace Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation (PCFR)*⁵⁸ was started in 2011 in Birmingham, UK.⁵⁹ It is a

⁵⁷ Ibid., 210, 211.

⁵⁸ For further information, see the web site of the Peace Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation: www.charterforforgiveness.org

⁵⁹ In 2011, the question of developing a Charter for Forgiveness was raised by Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh, Chairman, Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha, in a series of conversations between Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh and Dr Josef Boehle (University of Birmingham). They have co-led the Peace Charter project and organisational development since then. In 2014, Dr William Vendley, former Secretary-General of *Religions for Peace International*, embraced the Charter idea, vision and project and he joined as Co-convenor the Peace Charter project. A Charter Editorial Panel with 13 members was set up in 2016 to jointly develop the Charter text and to safeguard universal ownership and a high-quality Charter. <https://www.charterforforgiveness.org/processes/> See Peace Charter Information Brochure. Accessed on 18 February 2021.

public and multi-religious initiative that aims to raise awareness for the critical issues that have been debated above and advance the private and public understanding and engagement with forgiveness, reconciliation and peacebuilding. It also aims to make a contribution to a growing recognition and further mainstreaming in national and international public settings for the need to include *forgiveness and reconciliation* in the default, standard responses, formal processes and tools of diplomacy that state actors, NGOs and international agencies offer and apply for the resolution and transformation of conflicts and war. The Peace Charter's global and public launch took place at the 10th World Assembly of Religions for Peace International⁶⁰ on 20 August 2019 in Lindau, Germany where it was formally adopted by the World Assembly as Action Point 1 and it was subsequently included in the 5 year strategic plan (2020 -2025) of Religions for Peace International.

The Declaration of the 10th World Assembly of Religions for Peace, announced on 23 August 2019, stated: "We – 900 women, men, and youth – have gathered in Lindau, Germany, coming from 125 countries for the 10th World Assembly of Religions for Peace. We are grateful for 49 years of determined focus on building peace and on speaking for those most in need. We are an alliance of care, of compassion, of love. We adopt The Peace Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation, convinced that transforming violent conflicts requires the healing of historical wounds and painful memories, forgiveness, and reconciliation. We commit to integrating efforts for healing into all our conflict resolution work."⁶¹

The *Peace Charter* and the 10th World Assembly of Religions for Peace is mentioned here as an example of the growing public awareness and public discourse that is considering the indispensable contribution forgiveness and reconciliation processes can make to transform conflicts, restore justice for all and secure sustainable peace.

Forming a consensus on how to integrate forgiveness and reconciliation remains challenging however, and critical issues that need to be addressed in multi-religious, public initiatives like the Peace Charter include: the challenge to balance religious and secular language and religious and secular worldviews; gaining and maintaining acceptance in religious and secular environments, amongst religious communities, spiritual movements and in secular, public institutions; avoiding the appearance of religious syncretism and giving no single

⁶⁰ For further information on Religions for Peace International, see its web site: www.rfp.org
For information on the 10th World Assembly of Religions for Peace, see: <https://www.rfp.org/10th-world-assembly-of-religions-for-peace/> Accessed on 11 December 2020.

⁶¹ Declaration of the 10th World Assembly of Religions for Peace, 23 August 2019, Lindau, Germany.
<https://www.rfp.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Declaration-of-the-10th-World-Assembly-of-Religions-for-Peace-FINAL-2-1.pdf> Accessed on 10 December 2020.

religious tradition a preferred or pre-eminent status; and retaining a focus on shared, universal values, such as forgiveness, reconciliation, justice, peace.

A concise statement reflecting on the multiple challenges on the path of inter-religious peacebuilding was given by Pope John Paul II three decades earlier, responding to similar concerns and necessities of equitable partnerships, when he addressed senior leaders of diverse religions, and the world at large, during the World Day of Prayer for Peace on 27 October 1986 in Assisi, Italy:

The fact that we have come here does not imply any intention of seeking a religious consensus among ourselves or of negotiating our faith convictions. Neither does it mean that religions can be reconciled at the level of a common commitment in an earthly project which would surpass them all. Nor is it a concession to relativism in religious beliefs, because every human being must sincerely follow his or her upright conscience with the intention of seeking and obeying the truth. Our meeting attests only - and this is its real significance for the people of our time - that in the great battle for peace, humanity, in its very diversity, must draw from its deepest and most vivifying sources where its conscience is formed and upon which is founded the moral action of all people.⁶²

4. Conclusion and Outlook

The argument proposed here in this article is that (1) forgiveness as well as political and communal reconciliation after conflict are very much needed on community and national levels *and* that (2) local and national reconciliation and peacebuilding benefits from being supported and strengthened by national and international organisations, wherever possible, through *national and international norms, practises and formal processes*. Such norms, practises and processes on the issues of forgiveness and reconciliation are still being further developed and discussed, and there is no widely accepted, *standard response*. It is important to keep in mind, however, the widespread consensus amongst conflict resolution and peacebuilding practitioners and scholars that resolutions of local and national conflicts and restoration at community level have to be created by the local and national concerned parties *themselves* and that *insider mediation* is key.⁶³ Any international support from the outside can

⁶² Pope John Paul II, Address to Heads and Representatives of the Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities and of the World Religions, Assisi, Italy, 27 October 1986.

https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1986/october/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19861027_prayer-peace-assisi.html Accessed on 20 May 2018.

⁶³ *Supporting Insider Mediation: Strengthening Resilience to Conflict and Turbulence*, UNDP Report, 2014. <http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/crisis%20prevention/Supporting-Insider-Mediation---Strengthening-Resilience-to-Conflict-and-Turbulence--EU%20Guidance%20Note.pdf> Accessed on 3 June 2018.

only *assist* the local and national actors: with external expertise and collected depositories of past learnings, with the intention to help the conflict parties in achieving their reconciliation and peacebuilding goals, through facilitation and mediation, by creating safe spaces, by being a witness, by providing funds and by adding contextual and historical insights.

There are many local and national initiatives to advance forgiveness and reconciliation as part of post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding. Best known amongst these are the many ‘Truth (and Reconciliation) commissions’ (different authors have counted between 40-50 national commissions) that have been set up in many countries after major conflicts over the past 40 years. These are seen by some as an emerging new international norm for processes of national reconciliation, democratisation, and post-conflict reconstruction.⁶⁴ However, these national initiatives, organisations and commissions are in general not focused on advancing these values and practises beyond their national contexts and spaces. There is therefore a substantial and timely need to further raise awareness, deepen understanding and advance the public discourse concerning forgiveness, restorative justice and reconciliation inside international agencies and institutions, as well as in the international public sphere, aiming to create and mainstream international norms and standards in response to these critical issues.

Initiatives such as the Peace Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation (PCFR) aim to address this institutional and public challenge by working at local, national and global levels. They seek to advance the public and political discourse on these three inter-related values (forgiveness, reconciliation and peacebuilding) in the contexts of international agencies and institutions, and in the formulation of international norms and policies.

A variety of international non-governmental organisations and networks, government departments, as well as academic research centres are considering the contribution that forgiveness and reconciliation processes can make for building sustainable peace and are engaged in reconciliation work.⁶⁵ Reconciliation processes are increasingly and more widely

⁶⁴ Michal Ben-Josef Hirsch, Megan MacKenzie, Mohamed Sesay, ‘Measuring the Impacts of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions: Placing the Global ‘Success’ of TRCs in Local Perspective’, *Cooperation or Conflict*, 47, 3 (2012): 386-403.

⁶⁵ For example, see the research reports:

‘Mapping on Approaches to Reconciliation’ (March 2019) written by Prof Simon Keyes for the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers:

<https://live-peacemakersnetwork.pantheonsite.io/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Mapping-on-Approaches-to-Reconciliation.pdf> Accessed on 11 December 2020.

‘Pathways for Peace : Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict’ published by the World Bank (2018): <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/28337> Accessed on 11 December 2020.

accepted, whilst forgiveness processes are still often considered to be fraught with difficulties and to be a matter first of all for each individual victim to address. This reluctance to engage more formally and institutionally with forgiveness is observable especially in secular contexts and settings. For reconciliation and peace processes to succeed and to be sustainable, all constituencies and communities that are part of a conflict and have suffered from it need to be engaged.

In large parts of the world this includes religious and indigenous communities. Respect for religious and secular diversity, and the uniqueness of the 'other', as well as the challenge and necessity for all citizens to develop a shared understanding in public discourse and in public institutions across very diverse worldviews, are critical concerns that need to be taken seriously if forgiveness and reconciliation are to be better integrated into the highly secular international institutions of our time. A genuine understanding of these critical concerns is therefore essential for inter-religious, inter-cultural, public initiatives that seeks public endorsement and support in pluralistic societies in a post-secular world.

Jürgen Habermas, one of today's best known and leading public intellectuals, expressed succinctly in his reflections on *Religion in the Public Sphere* the *common* challenge of seeking mutual understanding in the public sphere, requiring openness as well as the ability to communicate from both secular and religious citizens :

Moreover, religious citizens must develop an epistemic stance toward the independence of secular from sacred knowledge and the institutionalized monopoly of modern scientific experts.

Finally, religious citizens must develop an epistemic stance toward the priority that secular reasons enjoy in the political arena. This can succeed only to the extent that they convincingly connect the egalitarian individualism and universalism of modern law and morality with the premises of their comprehensive doctrines.

However, secular citizens are likewise not spared a cognitive burden, because a secularist attitude does not suffice for the expected cooperation with fellow citizens who are religious. Instead, the insight by secular citizens that they live in a post-secular society that is epistemically adjusted to the continued existence of religious communities first requires a change in mentality that is no less cognitively exacting

See also:

The Winchester Centre for Religion, Reconciliation and Peace at the University of Winchester:

<https://www.winchester.ac.uk/research/building-a-sustainable-and-responsible-future/centre-for-religion-reconciliation-and-peace/>

The Jena Center for Reconciliation Studies at the Friedrich Schiller University Jena: <https://www.jcrs.uni-jena.de/>

The Mary Hoch Center for Reconciliation at George Mason University: <https://carterschool.gmu.edu/research-and-impact/centers/mary-hoch-center-reconciliation>

than the adaptation of religious awareness to the challenges of an ever more secularized environment.⁶⁶

Better integrating forgiveness and reconciliation practices with international peacebuilding therefore means ensuring the participation of a diversity of communities and cultural and religious traditions, finding language that is acceptable across many different worldviews and cultures, engaging religious and secular citizens, reaching out across a multitude of interests, constituencies and communities, and engaging with private individuals and public officials. Openness, respect and inclusiveness are essential qualities for processes of healing, for restoring broken relationships between individuals and communities, when seeking sustainable peace and when safeguarding justice, and while searching for unity in diversity, locally, nationally and globally. These are the complex and often conflicting demands of the concrete work of forgiveness, reconciliation and restorative justice, especially in increasingly pluralistic societies.

⁶⁶ Jürgen Habermas, 'Religion in the Public Sphere', *European Journal of Philosophy*, 14, 1 (2006): 14,15. See also Jürgen Habermas, 'Notes on a Post-secular Society' (2008). English version online at <http://www.signandsight.com/features/1714.html> Accessed on 21 May 2018. (German original first published as: 'Die Dialektik der Säkularisierung', *Blätter für Deutsche und Internationale Politik*, 4, (2008).