

Transforming the Deep-rooted Conflicts Between Diaspora Sinhalese and Tamil Roman Catholics in Toronto: A Forgiveness Framework Based on the Theology of Miroslav Volf

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For my parents, Sebastian Manuel and Gloria Lena

It was my father's devotion, determination and discipline, and my mother's enduring spirit and unconditional forgiveness that inspired and motivated me to pursue this topic of forgiveness. My parents, their children and grand-children suffered the consequences of the civil war in Sri Lanka and were fortunate in that they were able to leave the country. But to all those who suffered and lost their lives, and to those who are still struggling to rebuild their lives, I dedicate this research. May this work be an instrument of peace to build bridges between the ethnic communities of the Sinhalese and the Tamils, in Sri Lanka, Canada and other parts of the world.

Abstract

Having observed the division between the diaspora Sri Lankan Sinhalese and Tamil Catholics in Toronto, my call to ministry came out of a deep concern for them and their children. The problem as I saw it was a superficial (ritualistic) religion and a lack of understanding of forgiveness, which seemed to perpetuate the conflict. My call to ministry prompted me to develop and engage in educational processes that aimed to encourage personal transformation to address this problem. Pope Francis, in his *Evangelii Gaudium*, said: “Genuine spiritual accompaniment always begins and flourishes in the context of service to the mission of evangelisation.”

The Sri Lankan ethnic conflict between the majority Sinhalese and the minority Tamils has a long history. The civil war that began in Sri Lanka in 1983 ended in 2009 with the genocide of Tamil civilians. Thousands had left the country and taken refuge in different parts of the world. One of the countries that welcomed many Sri Lankan refugees was Canada. The majority of the refugees settled in Toronto. Tamil refugees lived alongside Sinhalese immigrants, but each group had its own separate community life. These two ethnic groups were divided not only in Toronto, but also in other cities, such as Ottawa and Montreal.

The problem was that the Sri Lankan diaspora Sinhalese and Tamil Catholics in Toronto could not come together to celebrate the Eucharist or participate in other religious activities together because of the legacy of the civil war. The Tamils wanted the Sri Lankan government to acknowledge accountability for the crimes committed against their community, and the Sinhalese blamed the Tamils for having caused the civil war. In spite of their common Catholic faith,

neither group was able to forgive the other in order to heal and move on. It seemed their ethnic identities superseded their religious faith.

My hypothesis is that the teaching Miroslav Volf's concept of forgiveness, could open up avenues to motivate personal transformation, and that this will in turn helps to resolve the deep-rooted conflict between the diaspora Sinhalese and Tamil Catholics. Throughout this thesis I argue that forgiveness is complex but possible and desirable. To be human is to be relational; it is important to be able to live in harmony and to communicate. I apply the theology of Volf because he himself struggled to forgive his oppressor and succeeded. I myself have taken a similar journey, challenging my biases and preconceived notions to open myself up to the path of transformation.

The methodology is based on Richard Osmer's model of practical theological interpretation. It is by its very nature interdisciplinary, and seeks to bring a religious dimension to bear on a situation in a way that leads to critical and transformative dialogue. Practical theology is not only interconnected with other disciplines, but is also related to the web of life in which ministry takes place. The thesis is guided by the four core tasks of practical theology as described by Osmer: What is going on? Why is this going on? What ought to be going on? and How might we respond?

The data has been gathered using a questionnaire, one-on-one interviews and two focus group sessions. An equal number of participants from the two ethnic groups were given a teaching on forgiveness based on Volf. The questionnaire was administered before and after the teaching, and the responses were analysed to discover whether there was a change in the understanding of forgiveness pre- and post-teaching. Results showed that there was significant

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transformation for the majority of the participants. However, the study has only been conducted once, and would need to be replicated in order to confirm the findings.

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Introduction

Considering the complexity of the subject of forgiveness and the ontological rift between the Sri Lankan Sinhalese and Tamils, I would like to give some background to my research. The genesis of my research can in a sense be traced to when I, as a new arrival to Canada, connected with the Sri Lankan community in Ottawa through a Roman Catholic Church group. It wasn't long before I witnessed the division between the Sinhalese and the Tamils.

The two ethnic communities were unwilling to take the Eucharist together or join in common prayer groups. They worshiped in the same church but at different times. Efforts were made to have both groups celebrate the Eucharist together, but both groups were reluctant to accept the invitation. Their ethnic identity superseded their Christian faith.

I had a strong call to minister to them and attempt to heal the breach, but was held back by my lack of knowledge. My first step needed to rigorous study of the background and issues. My desire to make a difference in the relationship between the two groups led me to apply to a doctoral program at Saint Paul University in the Faculty of Theology, with a twin focus on theology and conflict studies. I was aware that I had a limited knowledge of the history of Sri Lanka, the Buddhist and Hindu cultures, and the impact of the colonial period, and, having never studied deep-rooted conflict, which was a new field, I chose a program of study that would allow me to learn in-depth the historical, theological and deep-rooted conflict pertaining to these two groups. I had an awareness of some of the factors involved; however, knowledge of the root causes and dynamics at play would not be enough to resolve the situation. In order to continue my ministry with these two ethnic groups, I needed to learn about forgiveness.

As human beings we need to forgive; but forgiveness is challenging, and even hurtful. As Volf concurs “sometimes it feels utterly impossible.”¹ Volf suffered in ways very similar to Sri Lankans as a Croatian caught up in the Balkan conflict. He underwent psychological torment at the hands of an interrogator. He explored the concept of forgiveness as a theologian to come to terms with his own experience. Unless we ourselves, like Volf, have experienced suffering, we may have difficulty relating to the woundedness of those who have encountered atrocities.

Recently there has been an intense focus on forgiveness and reconciliation with a significant growth in academic literature on these subjects. In fact, many disciplines are exploring forgiveness because of the violence and conflict in the world, and the challenge is to find in what ways forgiveness can be practiced in real life by people who are suffering from the consequences of war.

In the Christian prayer, “Our Father,” we beseech God to forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Paul says “Be kind and tender-hearted to one another and forgive one another as God has forgiven us through Christ.” (Ephesians 4:32) If God has forgiven all our sins why is it so difficult for us to forgive each other? As Volf comments,

The powerful emotional pull of revenge is not the only reason we resist forgiving, however. Our cool sense of justice sends the same message: the perpetrator deserves unforgiveness; it would be unjust to forgive.²

The answers to these questions are complex and difficult, yet part of our Christian tradition is to follow the example and teachings of Christ. According to Osmer, “Good ministry

¹ Miroslav Volf, *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 126.

² Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 120.

is never merely a matter of solving problems; it is a mystery to be ventured and explored.”³

Therefore, the aim of this research is to clear a path—to kindle the desire for forgiveness through a teaching on forgiveness that could motivate personal transformation and lead to forgiveness and possibly to reconciliation.

One of the challenges, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer points out, is that forgiveness involves a certain amount of suffering.⁴ The question is: can one ask someone to forgive? The ministry that works towards forgiveness is difficult, because one cannot outright tell people to forgive. But one can invite them to think through what it means to forgive. It does involve suffering, but there is also a benefit. It is my hope to be able to help the people who have suffered in the recent conflict in a way that opens up the possibility for forgiveness while acknowledging all the difficulties encountered. Forgiveness is not a quick fix; a certain amount of spiritual development is part of getting prepared to forgive. This raises the question: does something have to happen before people even initiate this process of forgiveness? The ministry of empathy, of being with them, has the effect of validating their experience—of acknowledging the reasons it is hard for them to move past what has happened. Once they feel understood and validated, they often realize that they have become stuck. It is then we talk about forgiveness.

In the history of the introduction of Christianity to Sri Lanka under the Portuguese, there are overwhelming accounts of mass conversions to Catholicism, attributed to the material advantages that conversion offered or the disadvantages associated with the choice of remaining a non-Christian at that time. When Catholicism was introduced to the Sinhalese Buddhists and Tamil Hindus, the deeper teachings of Jesus were not emphasised, and there are hardly any

³ Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmanns, 2008), 3.

⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (London: SCM Press, 1964), 80.

records of people undergoing genuine spiritual conversion. It had rather been a case of accepting the rituals and practices as a matter of formality; hence people had not historically connected with the essence of Christianity. The realization of this gave me clarity in what my calling was and in how to go about it. It gave me the reasons I needed to continue in this kind of ministry.

My hypothesis is that the teaching of forgiveness based on the theology of Miroslav Volf could motivate personal transformation in the context of the deep-rooted conflict between the Sri Lankan Catholic Sinhalese and Tamils in Toronto. It is exploratory, tentative, and heuristic in nature. First they must be given the opportunity to learn about forgiveness, and then they must be provided with appropriate settings within which to explore in practice what forgiveness looks like.

This thesis has a theoretical and an empirical part. The first part of the thesis will demonstrate that there is a need for forgiveness and explain what forgiveness is. From my understanding, people have forgiven in similar kinds of situations where there have been deep hurts, and I believe that forgiveness is both possible and desirable. I will particularly explore Miroslav Volf's approach to forgiveness as well as the concept of forgiveness within the Roman Catholic Church.

The second part of the thesis describes the field work, which involved presenting a teaching on forgiveness to Sinhalese Catholics and Tamil Catholics. The field work illustrates how forgiveness can be expedited based on teachings. When people are given a chance to think about forgiveness, and to encounter the other, forgiveness can be advanced. In short, the study brought diaspora Sinhalese and Tamil Catholics from Toronto, seventeen in all, together to experience a teaching on forgiveness. Their attitudes and understanding of forgiveness were

assessed with a questionnaire before and after the teaching. One-on-one interviews were used to expand on the responses to the first questionnaire where needed.

My field research is based on the model of practical theology, as interpreted by Osmer. Bringing together the different perspectives of the social sciences, practical theology seeks to integrate religious experience and the present situation in a way that leads to critical and ultimately transformative dialogue. Practical theology is not only interconnected with these disciplines, but is also related to the “web of life”⁵ in which ministry takes place.

My study is limited to exploring the Christian concept of forgiveness in the context of a relatively small group of Roman Catholic Sinhalese and Tamils in Toronto. It does not include others such as Tamil Hindus, Sinhalese Buddhists, and Muslims. I also did not expand the research to include Buddhist and Hindu teachings of forgiveness, only the Christian notion of forgiveness. I am focussing on forgiveness and I am not entering into the social and political reconciliation and forgiveness. One of the features of the problem I observed was that the Roman Catholic Church itself is divided along these ethnic lines which I will illustrate later on.

Another of the study’s limitations is that I did not replicate the study. In an ideal situation, I would have had the chance to replicate the processes that were used, but because of practical circumstances of time and resources that was impossible. But I did try to respond following the methodology design that forgiveness is possible by bringing the Sinhalese and Tamil Catholics together and introducing Volf’s concept of forgiveness. This process followed my own personal journey, and my own personal transformation. There is a certain authenticity in my presenting the idea of forgiveness to my Sri Lankan people, because I, like Volf, have myself

⁵ Living systems are nestled in other systems, which together make up the web of life. Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 17.

gone through the painful process. As a Sri Lankan, I can challenge the Sri Lankans to move ahead.

There are many reasons for the deep feelings of hurt that Sri Lankans live with. They make it difficult to forgive. In spite of this, I have shown how forgiveness, that central concept of Christianity, can be understood and practiced.

Another limitation deals with the relationship between forgiveness and reconciliation. Though reconciliation and forgiveness are closely related, they are two different concepts and the relationship between the two is treated differently depending on the discipline. For example, in psychology and in conflict studies, forgiveness is possible without reconciliation. From the point of view of Christian theology, the fruit of forgiveness is reconciliation. Because of this, the research was restricted to forgiveness only.

Very little has been written about Catholic Sinhalese and Catholic Tamils in any capacity, so much of my information is based on direct observations, discussions, and dialogue with members of the Sri Lankan diaspora community. I refer to these connections as “living human documents,” as Anton Boison described in Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE). His impressive metaphor of “living Human Document” in pastoral theology is related to CPE, and is still recognised and practised. The reason why he gave importance to this metaphor was that he recognised there was a gap between theory and everyday practise. He saw the need to give authentic human documents the same importance as to theology, history, and doctrines.⁶

⁶ Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, “Revisiting the Living Human Web: Theological Education and the Role of Clinical Pastoral Education,” *The Journal of Pastoral Care & Counselling* 62, nos. 1-2 (2008): 7.

Boisen began a training program, urging students to see the “living human document” of patients struggling with illness as essential to learning theology as essential as close study of textual documents of scripture and tradition.⁷

Boisen’s metaphor of “living human document” was shifted to the “living human web,” by Bonnie Miller-McLemore and she describes that the “web” is less limited and more spread out as a metaphor than “document.”⁸ Like the threads of a spider’s web which are interconnected, similarly individuals are connected to families, communities, larger social systems and systems around the world.⁹ She emphasises that this metaphor is expanded and also connected to politics, ecology, education, and congregations.¹⁰ Thus the living human web brings together numerous forms of interconnections. In relation to interconnectedness with other disciplines, Osmer, also reminds us the interconnectedness of ministry, which involves the individual and the collective: the congregational leaders, pastors, educators and all those who are engaged in pastoral care. He maintains that practical theology unravels the narratives of contemporary lives in what Anton Boison called “living human documents.”¹¹

As a Sri Lankan Tamil Catholic, I knew, or thought I knew, much about the issues and concerns of the Tamil group. My first task was to challenge my assumptions about this group; my second to also learn about the Sinhalese, not least their perspective on the civil war and on the history of Sri Lanka, as well as the influence of Buddhism on their national identity. In this latter pursuit, I discovered a large amount of literature—as well as several instances of misinformation—and am indebted to many renowned Sinhalese historians.

⁷ Miller-McLemore, “Revisiting the Living Human Web,” 7.

⁸ Miller-McLemore, “Revisiting the Living Human Web,” 10.

⁹ Osmer, *Practical theology*, 16.

¹⁰ Miller-McLemore, “Revisiting the Living Human Web,” 10.

¹¹ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 33.

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I will hopefully have the opportunity to replicate this process with other Christian groups and perhaps also with non-Christian groups. My future ministry will be guided by the results of this research and its implications for revised practices.

Chapter 1

Call to Ministry and Practical Theology: The Statement of the Problem

Year after year, the world is confronted with ceaseless violence, killings, and numerous atrocities committed against humanity. As people of faith, we ask ourselves how it is possible that human beings made in the image of God can act this way towards each other. Take any country, and you find lines of conflict drawn, be they religious, ethnic or racial. Sri Lanka is no exception. Once it was a peaceful country, governed by Buddhist philosophy and principles of nonviolence, but then it was torn apart by violence and bloodshed. This thesis will delineate the history of violence in Sri Lanka between the Sinhalese and the Tamils, and the root causes of the violence.

Sinhalese was made the official language in 1956, causing many non-Sinhalese citizens, especially the educated Tamils and the Burgers,¹² to become fearful of their future rights and to leave Sri Lanka in search for better futures elsewhere. Subsequently, there have been periodic conflicts between the Sinhalese and the Tamils, causing people to flee. With the 1983 Black July riot, thousands left the country as refugees, and many Tamils came to Canada and settled in Toronto. Many of the immigrants and refugees had suffered from trauma and violence; those who had been personally spared were nevertheless affected by the experiences of others, having known family and friends who were persecuted or harmed. Many could never return to Sri Lanka and grieved for that. The memories cause both longing for their motherland and pain, and make healing the division and moving on very difficult. Both sides recognize their own suffering but not the suffering of the other. Forgiveness can change the situation, but it is a daunting task.

¹² Burghers are the decedents of the Portuguese, Dutch and British settlers in Sri Lanka.

Recent scholarship has investigated the interface between theology and psychology on forgiveness. Frise and McMinn explore the different approaches to forgiveness and reconciliation from the point of view of psychology and Christian theology.¹³ They argue, from a psychological point of view, that forgiveness and reconciliation are two distinct processes and that one can happen without the other. It is taken for granted from Christian perspective that forgiveness leads to reconciliation or the fruit of forgiveness is reconciliation.¹⁴ Coyle, as a developmental psychologist examining interpersonal processes of forgiveness in the context of abuse, discusses whether forgiveness and reconciliation are the same, as they relate to healing. She concludes that they are not synonymous; forgiveness is a unilateral process and reconciliation involves both the victim and the offender and their joint decision to rebuild the relationship.¹⁵ Ferch, in his book *Forgiveness and Power in the Age of Atrocity*, explores forgiveness and servant leadership and the path towards a more hopeful and compassionate world.¹⁶ Following the example of Larry Spears, Ferch provides ten characteristics of servant leadership: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualisation, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community.¹⁷ An example of servant leadership would be Desmond Tutu, the African religious peace builder, who stated so well: “there is no future without forgiveness.”¹⁸

¹³ Nathan Frise and Mark McMinn, “Forgiveness and Reconciliation: the Differing Perspectives of Psychologists and Christian Theologians,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 38, no. 2 (2010): 83–90.

¹⁴ Jones, L. G., *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1995), cited in Nathan Frise and Mark McMinn, “Forgiveness and Reconciliation,” 83–90.

¹⁵ Catherine T. Coyle, “Forgiveness, Reconciliation and Healing,” *Journal of Religion and Abuse*, 4:4 (2003): 95–105.

¹⁶ Shann Ray Ferch, *Forgiveness and Power in the Age of Atrocity*, (Langham: Lexington, 2012).

¹⁷ Ferch, *Forgiveness and Power in the Age of Atrocity*, x.

¹⁸ Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness* (New York: NY: Doubleday, 1997).

Forgiveness is a complex topic that is studied in many disciplines: psychology, theology, philosophy, ethics, sociology and politics. I have focused on the theological/religious perspective for three reasons: first, as all the participants in the case study are Roman Catholics, a theological orientation in the field of Practical Theology is appropriate. Second, I believe in religious based peacebuilding which has evolved into an academic field since 2000. According to Hertog, “Religious peacebuilders more and more base themselves on inclusive visions of peace which are multi-religious and multicultural.”¹⁹ Johnston, another proponent of faith-based diplomacy and peacebuilding writes that the reconciling aspects of religious faith-based mediations can provide a new vision of existence, interactions, build bridges, heal wounds and promote a process of forgiveness and reconciliation.²⁰ Religion can promote transformation in people and even prevent conflicts.²¹ Therefore the model of religious peacebuilding is very suitable for my research.

1. 1 Presenting the Issue

The purpose of my research is to find a way to overcome the inability of the diaspora Sinhalese and Tamil Catholics in Toronto to come together in worship or other religious or cultural activities.

These two ethnic groups the Sinhalese and the Tamils remain divided in their new home country because of the legacy of the civil war in Sri Lanka. The civil war was waged between the Sri Lankan (predominantly Sinhalese) government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE). More than 30 years of ethnic conflict ended in a 26-year-long civil war (1983–2009) in

¹⁹ Katrien Hertog, *The Complex Reality of Religious Peacebuilding: Conceptual Contributions and Critical Analysis*, (Lanham: Lexington, 2010), 4.

²⁰ Douglas Johnston, *Faith Based Diplomacy: Trumping Realpolitik*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 18-19.

²¹ Douglas Johnston, *Faith Based Diplomacy*, 18-19.

which thousands of Sri Lankan Tamils were killed by Sri Lankan forces, thousands more were wounded and many made homeless. Many of the Tamils in the north of the country lost everything and became refugees in their own country. Sinhalese civilians and military were also killed or attacked by the LTTE, but the total number is unclear. The deep-rooted conflict has caused an ontological rift, a rupture between people, meaning that they see each other as dehumanized.²² In Chapter 4 the civil war and the deep-rooted conflict that led to it will be explored in more detail.

Atrocities were committed against the Tamils, and the Sinhalese have their own list of historic grievances. Each group blames the other for the violence and the civil war. They are stuck in the past, and cannot move forward. Some of the Tamils are asking for justice and an apology from the government. And some of the Sinhalese are indifferent to the sufferings of the Tamils; still others feel the LTTE are to blame for all the trouble. In spite of their common Christian faith, they cannot forgive each other. Without healing, the risk is that the situation will not only have an effect on their well-being, but that the negative narrative will be passed on to younger generations.

My knowledge of this situation and solidarity with their suffering drew me to attempt to be a bridge between the two communities that I felt deeply connected to.

1.2 Call to Ministry

I was born and raised in the Christian community in Sri Lanka, and as a religious, ministered to a diverse apostolate there, comprising both Tamils and Sinhalese. After my immigration to Canada, I became a member of the diaspora Tamil Catholics and continued my ministry to them.

²² Vern Neufeld Redekop, *From Violence to Blessing: How an Understanding of Deep-rooted Conflict Can Open Paths to Reconciliation* (Ottawa, Canada: Novalis, 2002), 15.

As a Sri Lankan Catholic and a Tamil, and having ministered in Canada for more than twenty-five years, I have seen first-hand the division, the animosity, and the competition between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. I am deeply concerned about the effect this perpetuated conflict is having on these people, and the effect it will have on their children and future generations.

The concern I had for my people encouraged me to find opportunities to meet them and get to know them. As a student at Saint Paul University I encountered some student priests who organized Eucharistic celebrations for the Sinhalese and Tamil Catholics. I was interested and became part of that community. To my surprise I discovered that the Eucharist was celebrated in the same church but at different times—one for the Sinhalese and one for the Tamils. I participated in both celebrations and wondered if it would be possible to have both groups together at least once a month. In spite of my efforts, both groups disagreed to cooperate and wished to have the celebration in their own mother tongue.

This was the starting point of my call to minister to my people who were wounded and broken by the ethnic conflict and who needed internal change and transformation in order for forgiveness and reconciliation to take place. I needed academic training to take up this challenge of bringing the two communities together so registered in the Doctor in Ministry program at Saint Paul University.

This ministry of reconciliation is a form of religious-based peacebuilding. Religious-based peacebuilding provides people with the teaching they need to open them up for forgiveness. This teaching was something I wished to provide through my ministry. Through my readings and studies, especially of the work of Miroslav Volf, I came to know that there is strong support for the possibility of personal transformation leading to the forgiveness that is so central to Christianity.

An important question is how we can be unified in Christ and yet divided as a community. Disunity is an issue that concerns us all. As Roman Catholics, when we come to celebrate the Eucharist, we are supposed to gather in unity. As the Apostle Paul argues, “Because there is the one loaf of bread, all of us though many are one body, for we all share the same loaf.” (1 Corinthians 10: 17)²³ As the Second Vatican Council affirmed, we “become sharers in the body of Christ and so become one body.”²⁴ Division impairs the way in which we live our faith. Through personal experience, I believe that the forgiving God of Christianity can transform this culture of division into a culture of peace.

To practice the essence of faith, in this case forgiveness, and overcome disunity or resentment, requires more than simply being religious or having religious beliefs. Despite being a religious person, I had myself struggled to challenge my biases, which stemmed from my ethnic background. I had not taken the time to delve into the experience of the Sinhalese; I saw only one side of the situation. It was part of my journey to open my eyes and see the pain of the others—of all who were involved in or touched by the conflict. As Brian McLaren says “religion is at its best when it leads us forward, when it guides in our spiritual growth as individuals and in our cultural evolution as a species.”²⁵

In addition to the changes I perceived in myself, here are some examples of leaders and scholars that influenced my call to ministry. The story of Miroslav Volf’s struggle, which was similar to my own, challenged my attitudes and brought about a change of heart for me, a personal transformation. His story shows that personal transformation can lead to collective

²³ Good news: New Testament and Psalms (Toronto, ON: Canadian Bible Society, 1995).

²⁴ Austin Flannery, O. P., ed., *Vatican Council II*, vol.1, New Revised Edition, (Northport: Costello Publishing Co 1992), 108.

²⁵ Brian D. McLaren, *The Great Spiritual Migration: How the World’s Largest Religion is Seeking a Better Way to Be Christian* (UK: Hodder & Stoughton Ltd, 2016), xii.

conversion. He developed a theory based on what he himself had experienced and this theory also inspired me: if he can do it, then I can do it.

Gandhi's life and his dedication to nonviolence changed India and brought about independence. I believe one person can make a difference and as Gandhi said: "Be the change you wish to see in the world." I wanted to make a difference and the change would begin with me by overcoming my own biases, listen to both sides, and show compassion and empathy.

Nelson Mandela stated that: "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."²⁶ I feel education is for life and doesn't begin or end in the classroom. I needed to be imbued in my own life with the lesson I wanted to pass on to others. The teaching of forgiveness is a way of giving others a chance to achieve personal transformation, a change that I had experienced and continued to experience.

Black Kettle and his six hundred Cheyenne were massacred by the U.S military in the late 1800s. After experiencing years of shame, oppression, and cruelty by the white Americans, Black Kettle forgave them and pursued peace.²⁷ Similarly, Havel Vaclav and his Czech people who endured years of suffering from Nazi dominance emerged as a nation giving a new life called the Velvet Revolution, a revolution without bloodshed.²⁸ They are examples of courageous leadership through non-violence in times of crisis.

Vern Neufeld Redekop, a pioneer in the theory of mimetic structures of violence, has evolved new concepts that provide building blocks to rebuild relationships through structures of

²⁶ Nelson Mandela, accessed 04/02/2017, taken from <http://www.forbes.com/sites/mfonobongnsehe/2013/12/06/20-inspirational-quotes-from-nelson-mandela/#61bec2cc49d5>

²⁷ Shann Ray Ferch, *Forgiveness and Power in the Age of Atrocity: Servant Leadership as a Way of Life* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), 59.

²⁸ Ferch, *Forgiveness and Power in the Age of Atrocity*, 13.

blessings which lead to reconciliation. His notion of “blessing” ventures a new and promising concept for future reconciliation efforts.

In the case of Sri Lanka, visionary leadership is lacking. For example, with regard to the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) ²⁹ its mandate was to examine the failed ceasefire of 2002, make recommendations to prevent a reoccurrence of events, and promote national unity and reconciliation. Not enough has been done to circulate the LLRC’s report to the people, and even government officials are not familiar with the commission’s work. The journalist Jehan Perera argues that building roads and teaching languages are not enough, but more has to be done to educate the people about the LLRC’s report and recommendations.³⁰ The same author insists that “internal change is the best and maybe only hope.”³¹ This internal change cannot come from an outside authority, it must come from within. Each individual can then be an agent of change and this begins with an inner or personal transformation.

The ministry of forgiveness is to advance this internal change, taking into account the Sri Lankan historical background. It involves reflection on forgiveness and increased awareness of some challenging issues. The focus of my research is on developing a teaching model of forgiveness that can be applied, in the first instance, in my ministry with the diaspora Sinhalese

²⁹ Following the end of the civil war in 2009, the international community pressured the government to inquire into the final stages of the war, in which it was alleged to have killed thousands of civilians, possibly as many as 40,000. The Sri Lankan government rejected calls for an independent *international* inquiry but instead, President Rajapaksa appointed the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC), composed of eight members in May 2010. The commission’s mandate was to look into the facts that led to the failure of cease fire, and the events that followed after May 2009. The purpose is also to ensure that there will be no recurrence of such fears in the future and to advocate national unity and reconciliation among all communities. After studying the document (409 pages) for 18 months the commission presented its report to the President on 15 November 2011. The report was submitted to the members of the parliament and made public on December 2011.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lessons_Learnt_and_Reconciliation_Commission#cite_note

³⁰ Jehan Perera, “Internal Change is the Best and Maybe Only Hope,” *Colombo Telegraph* August 19, 2013, <https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/internal-change-is-the-bes-and-maybe-only-hope>

³¹ Perera, “Internal Change is the Best or Maybe Only Hope.”

and Tamil Catholics in Canada, and, in the second instance, in other parts of the world. Do the diaspora Sinhalese and Tamil Catholics want the divisions that haunted Sri Lanka in the last few decades to continue for decades to come? How do they achieve a sense of unity within the Canadian Catholic Church if there is deep resentment and animosity? What kind of changes do they want for themselves and for their children? What I am suggesting is to think about whether or not forgiveness has a role and to reflect on what forgiveness means. If there is to be no forgiveness, what are the reasons? And what does forgiveness do for the forgiver? These are the questions studied in the course of this research.

As seen, my call to ministry is based on my initial observations, as a religious peacebuilder, of the long-standing animosity and division between the Sinhalese and the Tamils in Canada. Although both groups are Catholics, I speculate that they may not have a clear understanding of Christian forgiveness. I believe that it is through the teaching of forgiveness that the rupture can be healed and this will incur personal transformation in the participants. My own journey of growth through this process encourages me to imagine that this is possible.

1.3 Method in Practical Theology

The methodology will be based on Osmer's model of practical theological interpretation.³² Before outlining the pillars of this model, I will present key aspects of the nature of practical theology, drawing on significant practical theologians.

As a theological discipline, practical theology is by its very nature, interdisciplinary. Relying on a number of disciplines in social sciences as well as other fields of study, it examines and reflects on religious practices in order to understand those practices and consider how both theological theory and religious practices might be transformed. Practical theology also takes

³² Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, 4.

into account the web of life in which ministry takes place.³³ For Bonnie Miller-McLemore, the heart of practical theological interpretation can be seen as a “living human web”; as the strands of a spider’s web are interconnected, so are the ties that connect individuals, communities and larger social systems.³⁴ Practical theology focuses on particular situations and seeks to discover the multifaceted forces at work in them, in order to foster a life-changing and enlightening understanding of what is going on in those situations.³⁵

Osmer is influenced by Don Browning. In his examination of parish life, Browning sees the parishioners as the context of renewed dialogue within pastoral theology—a dialogical approach between the researcher and the congregation. In this way, the whole congregation may decide that it needs to find new solutions to its problems, and actively looks to sacred texts for new relevance. This practice consists of a cycle that creates new questions and discovers new answers.³⁶ Graham suggests that through dialogical and conversational descriptions, Browning sees the congregation as involved in the “correlational process of reflection” that encourages change.³⁷ Browning defines fundamental practical theology “as critical reflection of the church’s dialogue with Christian sources and other communities of experience and interpretation with the aim of guiding in action toward social and individual transformation.”³⁸ Swinton and Mowat describe practical theology as empowering the faithful practice of the gospel and discovering the human relationship with God:

³³ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 17.

³⁴ Bonnie J, Miller-McLemore, “The Living Human Web: Reflections on the State of Pastoral Theology,” *Christian Century*, April 7, (1993), 366–69.

³⁵ John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006), v.

³⁶ Don Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 108-9.

³⁷ Elaine Graham, Heather Walton & Frances Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods* (London: SMC Press, 2005), 128.

³⁸ Don Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 36.

Practical theology is critical, theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practice of the world, with the view to ensuring and enabling faithful participation in God's redemptive practices in, to and for the world.³⁹

It is important to observe the four key points in this definition: first, practical theological study is *critical* in the sense that it challenges the accepted assumptions and practices of the Christian community. It is guided by the human experience of God through a theoretical or academic knowledge. Second, although it has its place in the social sciences, practical theology is *theological* reflection. Third, the site of inquiry for practical theology is not just the Church and Christian experience, but also the practices of the world at large: "The practices of the Church cannot be understood as ontologically separate or different from the practices of the world."⁴⁰ Fourth, the main purpose of practical theology is to safeguard and support *participation* in faithful practices.⁴¹ The structure of this research and thesis is based on method of practical theology. The particular method I have chosen is organized according to four core tasks of theological interpretation⁴² that can be applied to any situation or context, following a simple and logical investigative narrative, which we will examine next.

Osmer divides the methodology of practical theology into descriptive-empirical, interpretive, normative, and pragmatic tasks. These four tasks can be applied to any problem or concern in a given context. He suggests that "teaching leaders and church leaders how to engage in practical theological interpretation is an important goal of theological education."⁴³

His four core methodological tasks are the following:

³⁹ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 6.

⁴⁰ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 8.

⁴¹ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 9.

⁴² Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 4.

⁴³ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, x.

1. The descriptive-empirical task seeks to answer the question “what is going on” by using observation and attentive listening to determine what is happening and identifying reoccurring events or behaviours. One begins to explore theories that help to explain the situation. Questions to be asked could be “why did this event occur” or “what might be an explanation for the dynamics in play”? In the context of my research, I observed the division and behaviours of the Sinhalese and Tamil diaspora, and inquired about their attitudes. I also explored the cultural context of this situation.

2. The interpretive task seeks to answer the question “why is this going on.” This task comprises exploring the foundation and contributing factors of the situation. Theoretical frameworks are examined to see if they can explain the reasons why the situation exists. These theories may come from anthropology, psychology, and other disciplines. In the context of my research, the two theoretical frameworks applied are the theory of deep-rooted conflicts and forgiveness, from a multi-disciplinary perspective with a foundation in theology and Miroslav Volf’s concept of theology.

3. The normative task addresses the question of “what ought to be going on?” shifting attention to how the situation can be resolved. There are three steps to this task. First, theological concepts are used to interpret the events, episodes and contexts. What is God doing and what might our human response be? Next, appropriate and applicable ethical or moral guidelines are identified. Finally, normative principles, found in the Christian tradition of the past and present, are examined as a source of guidance for Christian life. In the context of my research, Volf’s concept of forgiveness will be presented, discussed, and reflected upon.

4. The pragmatic task answers the question “how might we respond.”⁴⁴ This includes the formulation of a plan and its implementation in order to achieve a particular goal and thus impact a situation. Browning called his theological method “practical” because when a community recognises that their usual behaviours or responses are no longer meaningful to the present situation, new practices will necessarily replace them.⁴⁵ The pragmatic task embodies the notion of servant leadership, of daring to inaugurate change on behalf of the people whom we guide, and in so doing, being agents of God’s unconditional love.⁴⁶

These four tasks provide the structure for my research on “forgiveness.” The research design, consisting of a case study structure, questionnaires, interviews and focus group sessions, will guide and give new meaning to the context and situations.

My hypothesis is that the teaching of forgiveness, based on the theology of Miroslav Volf, could motivate personal transformation in the context of the deep-rooted conflict between the Sri Lankan Catholic Sinhalese and Tamils in Toronto. In order to explore this hypothesis the participants will be provided with teachings on forgiveness as well as occasions that will allow them to discover what forgiveness looks like in practice. What follows is an outline of the remaining chapters in my dissertation.

In Chapter 2, I explore Osmer’s first essential task of practical theological interpretation, namely the descriptive-empirical task of finding out “what is going on.” In my case study, this task relates to what is happening between the Sinhalese and Tamil Roman Catholics in Toronto.

Chapter 3 continues to explore the question of what is going on. While Chapter 2 deals largely with the religious dynamics, Chapter 3 will address the ethnic and political dimensions.

⁴⁴ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 4.

⁴⁵ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, 108–9.

⁴⁶ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 29.

Chapter 4 pursues Osmer's interpretive task of answering the question "Why is this going on?" Here I will analyse the foundation and contributing factors of the situation. Deep-rooted conflicts have contributed to immeasurable suffering all over the world and Sri Lanka is no exception. In Vern Neufeld Redekop's words, "Deep-rooted conflicts plumb the depths of human emotion and produce incredibly inhuman action, causing immense human misery."⁴⁷ This chapter will look at a number of factors related to deep-rooted conflicts.

Chapter 5 explores Osmer's normative task of "What ought to be going on?" focusing on theological theories. In chapters 2, 3, and 4, we discovered the root causes of the conflict between the two ethnic groups. We diagnosed the disease and now it is time to find a remedy. One remedy for these conflicts, which we will explore, is Miroslav Volf's theological framework for forgiveness.

Chapter 6 will discuss the fourth and final core task of Osmer's practical theological interpretation, namely the pragmatic task: "of forming and enacting strategies of action that influence events in ways that are desirable."⁴⁸ This is the creation of a plan and its application in order to achieve renewed practices to serve the community. Practices are renewed when the community acknowledges that their usual practices are no longer meaningful to the present situation. In my case study this strategy of action consisted in gathering the participants, performing the intervention and giving the participants the teaching of forgiveness. Based on the results and responses of the participants, the study has moved them towards forgiveness through renewed practices.

⁴⁷ Redekop, *From Violence to Blessing*, 9.

⁴⁸ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 176.

Chapter 2

Sri Lankan Historical Context: Sinhalese and Tamil Roman Catholics in Toronto

“What is going on?” is the first thing to ascertain, according to Osmer’s practical theological interpretation. This task is not only about gathering information in a defining moment, but it also focuses attention on people and what is happening in their everyday lives—in Osmer’s terms, the “spirituality of presence.”⁴⁹ This signifies connecting with others with honesty, understanding, and prayerfulness, to know the other in all their otherness;⁵⁰ it is similar to Miroslav Volf’s “embrace”⁵¹ which will be discussed in Chapter 5. In what follows I explore the various layers of the Sri Lankan context.

2.1 The Sinhalese and Tamil Diaspora in Canada

The Sinhalese diaspora Catholics (SDC) and the Tamil diaspora Catholics (TDC) in Toronto are part of the larger picture of the Sinhalese and Tamil diaspora in Canada. Among this group, there are immigrants and refugees. The majority of Tamils arrived in Canada after Black July 1983.⁵² Amarasingam points out that the Burghers⁵³ were the initial Sri Lankan migrants to Canada and the number of Sinhalese and Tamils arriving after the unrest in 1956 remained relatively small.⁵⁴ It is important to distinguish the immigrants who arrived before the 1983 riots, for educational or employment prospects, from those who arrived after 1983 seeking asylum to escape the

⁴⁹ Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 33.

⁵⁰ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 34.

⁵¹ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: The Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996).

⁵² The events of July 1983 are poignant for the entire Tamil population around the world. Between July 24 and 29, Tamils were systematically targeted with violence in Colombo and many other parts of Sri Lanka. Sri Lankan Government officials categorized the violence as uncontrollable race riots instigated by the killing of 13 Sinhala soldiers on the night of July 23 by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE).

⁵³ Burghers are a Eurasian ethnic group in Sri Lanka descended from Portuguese, Dutch, British and other Europeans who settled in the island.

⁵⁴ Amarnath Amarasingam, “A History of Tamil Diaspora Politics in Canada: Organisational Dynamics and Negotiated Order, 1978–2013,” *ICES Research Paper II*, November (2013), 5.

hardships and the bitter life of a country torn by war. From 1980 to 1990, thousands of Tamils landed in Canada and established themselves in large cities like Toronto and Montreal.⁵⁵

Amarasingam states, and the Canadian 2006 Census confirms, that 138,130 people identified as Sri Lankan or Tamil. Within the Tamil community itself, the estimates of the Tamil presence ranges from 200,000 to 300,000.⁵⁶ Wayland suggests that it is possible that many new immigrants do not register with the Canadian Census.⁵⁷ This Sri Lankan group may include the Sinhalese community, Burghers, Sri Lankan Muslims and other smaller groups.⁵⁸ Apart from the significant minority of Muslims and Christians, the mainstream Tamils are Hindus belonging to the Saivite sect.⁵⁹

Most of the refugees who arrived in Canada spoke only Tamil and had trouble finding suitable employment. They often opened up their own businesses. With their arrival, Hindu temples began to appear in Canada; three were built in the Toronto area. Through rituals, prayers, and community events the temple maintained social order and hierarchy in Hindu society.

In the Greater Toronto Area, there are approximately 50,000 Sinhalese compared to approximately 300,000 Tamils.⁶⁰ The majority of the Sinhalese live in Ontario, mostly in Toronto; and smaller communities are located in Montreal, Vancouver, Halifax, Calgary and

⁵⁵ Amarasingam, "A History of Tamil Diaspora Politics in Canada," 5.

⁵⁶ Amarasingam, "A History of Tamil Diaspora Politics in Canada, 5.

⁵⁷ Sarah, Wayland, "Immigration and Transnational Political Ties: Croatians and Sri Lankan Tamils in Canada," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 35, no. 2 (2003): 61–85, cited in Amarasingam "A History of Tamil Diaspora Politics in Canada, 5.

⁵⁸ Sarath Chandrasekaran. *Inventing the Sri Lankans: Construction of Ethnic Identity by Immigrants to Ontario*, PhD Dissertation, University of Toronto, 2008, 18, cited in Amarasingam "A History of Tamil Diaspora Politics in Canada, 6.

⁵⁹ One of the main traditions in Hinduism is Saivism. Those who follow Saivism are called Saivites.

⁶⁰ Sepali Guruge, "Perceptions About and Responses to Intimate Partner Violence in the Sinhalese Immigrant Community in Toronto," *Arts and Social Sciences Journal* S:SI – 006(July 2014): doi:10.4172/2151-6200.SI -006

Edmonton.⁶¹ They have lively social and cultural celebrations such as at New Year and various Buddhist religious occasions organized by religious and cultural groups. The Sinhalese Association of Canada in Toronto, founded in 1998, is well known for holding summer musical events, celebrating the people and their accomplishments. Sinhalese Buddhist temples provide social and cultural centres within most communities. The Toronto Maha Vihara, founded in 1978,⁶² and the West End Buddhist Centre, founded in 1992, are famous Sinhalese Buddhist temples in Toronto. The Buddhist Cultural Centre “Dhamma School” offers religious education to children. All those providing religious instruction are former teachers from Sri Lanka working as volunteers. Children as well as their parents receive Dhamma education.⁶³

2.2 Sinhalese Diaspora Catholics (SDC) and Tamil Diaspora Catholics (TDC) in Toronto and Their Relationship

A good number of TDC live in Scarborough and Mississauga, and the SDC mostly live in Mississauga and Brampton. Even though there are friendships between Tamils and Sinhalese, the two groups do not come together to worship or participate in social events. In discussions with members of the two communities, I have found little evidence that either group organizes religious or social events together. Many people in the community are aware that there is a rift between the groups.

In order to understand the target group, I will explore the features of both the SDC and the TDC in Toronto. Their characteristics can be seen from different angles: their identity, their faith, their culture—all internal aspects that they inherited from Sri Lanka. Whether they are Sinhalese Catholics or Tamil Catholics, they are deeply connected to their ethnic identity.

⁶¹ The Canadian Encyclopedia, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/sinhalese>

⁶² The Toronto Maha Vihara, <http://www.torontomahavihara.com/history1.htm>.

⁶³ The Toronto Maha Vihara, <http://www.torontomahavihara.com/history1.htm>.

Connections between the two exist on an individual or social level; however, in spite of the commonality of residence, experience, and degree of social or daily interaction, as a group, these communities cannot relate to or reconcile with each other. The division may be due to such factors as religious conception, social identity, or political affiliation. For example, the way in which religion is lived by some people is different from the way it is lived by others; some may practice on a superficial level and others on a more emotional, spiritual one. Some see religion as a sacramental way of living through religiosity, others merely as fulfilling an obligation or following a code of law; in this sense religion becomes a formalized social practice. In this type of experience there is no explicit demand to forgive or to reconcile.

The lack of reconciliation may also stem from social circumstances. If they find a strong connection and sense of belonging within their own group, they may not see the necessity of reaching out to the other ethnic group. Or the reason may be psychological: they may be struggling with their own emotional hurt or need for justice or revenge so much that they cannot focus on reconciliation. The sense of ethnic identity and belonging can be so strong that it supersedes both their religion and their individual sense of self. In the diaspora, one achieves a certain kind of self-identity only when one is recognized as an immigrant from a particular country and identity group. The fear of losing that status can cause a person to keep the “enemy” at a distance as a self-defence mechanism.

On the political level, the diaspora keeps their old identity and holds onto it hoping to maintain their ties with and sense of belonging to their mother country. The Sri Lankan diaspora is politically very aware. Events in Sri Lanka are followed through Sri Lankan newspapers and other media. Some of the SDC strongly resent the Tamils because of the civil war and believe that the actions of their government were justified. Others sympathise with the Tamil victims and

recognize the atrocities that were committed, but still blame the LTTE for the civil war. The TDC blame the government for treating them as second-class citizens, depriving them of their rights to an equal education, to land, and to employment. They feel that they are not considered to belong in Sri Lanka.

The division and resentment between the two Catholic groups goes against the idea of Christian unity, emphasised by Vatican II. To understand this Canadian reality, it is necessary to examine the relationship between Sinhalese and Tamil Catholics in Sri Lanka. In fact, the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka is divided. For example, when the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) requested implementation of the recommendations made by the Lessons Learned and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC),⁶⁴ the Roman Catholic authority in Colombo criticised what it termed “international meddling in the sovereignty”⁶⁵ of Sri Lanka. In contrast, a bishop and 30 clergy from the majority Tamil area in the north of the country submitted a letter to the UNHRC commenting that an international monitoring system was necessary in order to address accountability concerns not dealt with by the LLRC. This could have, as a result, widened the gap between SDC and TDC in Toronto, since each group maintains constant contact with its counterparts in Sri Lanka.

There is also internal division among the Tamils regarding class and caste. In Sri Lanka there is caste-based discrimination among the Christians, although it is slowly dying away. Many years ago, there were churches in the northern province of Sri Lanka designated for different

⁶⁴ The Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) was an inquiry created to investigate the failed ceasefire agreement of 27 February 2002, an effort to end the hostilities of the decades-long civil war. Among other things, the report proposed greater freedom of the media and the removal of military presence from former war zones. However, the process itself has been heavily criticized.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/srilanka/9084403/Sri-Lankan-army-agrees-to-probe-war-crimes.html>

⁶⁵ Kshama Ranawana, “Catholic Church in Sri Lanka is Deeply Divided on the Proposed Resolution at the UNHRC,” 2012: <http://dbsjeyaraj.com/dbsj/archives/4851>

castes and the faithful were strictly forbidden to worship outside of the selected churches. At one time, those of a lower caste could not enter religious life. As a young nun, I witnessed this exclusion and some of the efforts made to end the practice by one particular congregational leader. Very little can be done to bring people together unless the clergy takes the leadership and creates an atmosphere where both communities can be reconciled. After multiple failed attempts to interview Sinhalese and Tamil clergy in Toronto in 2015, the only priest to respond, who performed the Eucharist for both the SDC and the TDC, remarked that the “Sri Lankan church has become a place of dividing people here in Toronto. The Good News is there are a few good-hearted people who try to bring these communities together, but their voices are unheard and lost in the midst of the majority who are unwilling.”⁶⁶

The TDC in Toronto have more advantages than the SDC. There exists a Tamil parish, approved and designated by the diocese of Toronto. It has its own native Tamil priest who provides all the religious services in Tamil, and the parish organizes pilgrimages to different shrines and other activities. These events have brought the TDC together. These opportunities are not available for the SDC in Toronto. They do not have a church of their own. Even though they have a chapel for their monthly mass it is not a permanent one. They do not have a chaplain to cater to their spiritual needs or to celebrate the Eucharist in Sinhalese. They depend totally on the visiting priests and bishops from Sri Lanka and the student priests studying in Ottawa. However, they organize their own religious activities and are very active. In a conversation in 2015 in Ottawa, Fr. Cryton Outshorn, a Sri Lankan student priest at Saint Paul University, recalls travelling to Toronto to perform mass for the Sinhalese every month. He observed:

⁶⁶ This was expressed by some Tamils who were interviewed in my field work.

Unlike the Sinhalese community, the Tamils have a parish of their own. An assumption would be that the two communities could not worship together because one speaks Tamil and the other Sinhalese, but masses (could be) performed in English, a language common to both groups. There is no language barrier. It is evident that there is a division between the two... for example the Midland Shrine to the Lady of Madu is a commemoration to those who died during the war. The Sinhalese are willing to have a joint ceremony there once a year but the Tamil community is not willing to participate. There is a kind of competition between the two groups when it comes to organizing special events. They each invited bishops from Sri Lanka to Toronto, but the Tamils will invite the bishop who is Tamil and the Sinhalese will invite the bishop who is Sinhalese. Interestingly, the Sinhalese Catholics in Toronto have participated with Sinhalese Catholics in Montreal and Ottawa in organized events, but this has not been the pattern for the Tamil Catholics in Toronto.⁶⁷

My own observations and conversations with members of the two groups, confirm what Fr. Outshoorn has witnessed. Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation reminds his flock that in a world ragged by war and violence that divides people, “old divisions from the past are re-emerging.” He urges all Christians in communities all over the world “to offer a radiant and attractive witness of fraternal communion.”⁶⁸

There are no studies on how the two communities interact with which to validate my observations of the division between the two ethnic groups. Some academic articles have focused on the diaspora Tamils in Canada, but the focus has been limited.⁶⁹ Amarasingam has written about religion and ethnicity among Tamil youth in Ontario.⁷⁰ Thuraiajah studied the influence of shared history and identity as a motivator to collective action in the context of protest in the

⁶⁷ Interview with Fr. Cryton Outshoorn by Mangalam Lena, in Ottawa on September 8, 2015.

⁶⁸ Pope Francis. *The Joy of the Gospel (Evangelii Gaudium): Apostolic Exhortation*, Publication (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2013), Article 99.

⁶⁹ Amarnath Amarasingam, “A History of Tamil Diaspora Politics in Canada: Organisational Dynamics and Negotiated Order, 1978-2013,” *ICES Research Papers*, Nov. 2013.

⁷⁰ Amarnath Amarasingam, “Religion and Ethnicity among Sri Lankan Tamil Youth in Ontario,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 40, no. 2 (2008): 149–69.

Greater Toronto Area by members of the Tamil community,⁷¹ in the attempt to share their story with the Canadian public. Guruge examined the issue of domestic violence in the SDC.⁷²

Because of the lack of scholarly research focusing on the relationship between the two communities, the material that I present stems from my field work and discussions with the Sri Lankan diaspora prior to the research. This research will be the first to study these two diaspora groups of Toronto.

To summarize the relationship between the two communities, it is clear that the SDC and the TDC in Toronto take measures to remain apart and celebrate only with their own ethnic group. They carry a legacy of resentments and trauma from their home country of Sri Lanka and its civil war. Although of the same religion, their preference for the Sri Lankan Catholic clergy of their own ethnic and linguistic background and their resistance to inter-ethnic religious celebration reinforces the division rather than bridges it.

In order to advocate forgiveness and reconciliation among them, more work is needed on the spiritual and religious aspects of Sri Lankan SDC and TDC in Toronto. The goal of bringing these two groups together, considering the fact that there has been tremendous suffering in their relatively recent past, makes this research very important. This study has the potential to create a model for teaching forgiveness as a tool that can motivate personal transformation and peacebuilding.

⁷¹ Kalyani Thurairajah, "The Narrative of Cultural Identity: An Opening for Collective Action among the Sri Lankan Tamil Diapora in Toronto,"

<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.597.5369&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

⁷² Sepali Guruge, "Perceptions About and Responses to Intimate Partner Violence in the Sinhalese Immigrant Community in Toronto," *Arts Social Sciences Journal* S:S1-006 (July 2014): doi:10.4172/2151-6200.S1-006

Having introduced the present situation of the diaspora Catholics in Toronto, it is important to review the factors in Sri Lankan history that have shaped and contributed to the conflict between the two groups.

2.3 Religion in the Sri Lankan Historical Context

This section offers a short summary of the role of religion in Sri Lanka in different periods: early, medieval, colonial, post-colonial and contemporary. The political, socio-cultural and ecclesial context will be examined later in Chapter 3.

The Early Historical Period from the Third Century BC to Sixth Century AD

The Sinhalese and the Tamils take great pride in the history of Sri Lanka; however, they have completely different interpretations of both legends and facts. The Buddhist Chronicle, the *Mahāvamsa*,⁷³ tells the story of the origins of Sri Lankans, both Sinhalese and Tamils, the country's two largest ethnic groups. However, there exist other differing accounts. Some resources confirm that historical locations, religious buildings, even the names of villages, seem to have multiple, ambiguous narratives about their origin, and stories blended with religious myths and local legends. According to Thambu Kanagasabai, history reveals that the Tamils in Ceylon lived in the north and northwestern parts of the country more than 3000 years ago. It was proved after the excavations of human remains, which were found in the buried urns in Anaicottai Manthai and Pomparippu.⁷⁴ Thus, both groups believe that the island is their own exclusive homeland.⁷⁵

⁷³ Mahāvamsa, (Pāli: "Great Chronicle"), historical chronology of Ceylon (modern Sri Lanka), written in the 5th or 6th century AD, probably by a Buddhist monk: at www.britannica.com/topic/Mahavamsa.

⁷⁴Thambu Kanagasabai, Sri Lanka's Sinhalese & Tamils: Historical Myths & Realities," *Colombo Telegraph*, April 21, 2015: <https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/sri-lankas-sinhalese-tamils-historical-myths-realities/>

The island's setting brought a variety of visitors, immigrants, invaders, missionaries, traders and travellers, mostly from India, to its shores. Gunawardena suggests that "Sri Lanka's founding myth involves the intermingling of native peoples with Hindu immigrants from North and South India."⁷⁶ Some of them stayed on; they integrated, intermarried, and perhaps converted to Buddhism. The island's history and its ethnicities follow a pattern of constant instability and shifting governance. It may be worth pointing out that, in spite of these changes, during this early period there was not only racial harmony but both the religious groups—the Hindus and the Buddhists—worshiped together venerating common sacred places and objects.⁷⁷

It was Mahinda, the son of King Asoka the Great of India, who introduced Buddhism to Sri Lanka in 250 BC during the reign of King Devanampiya Tissa. An account from the *Mahavamsa* demonstrates the ethnic and religious harmony that existed during this time. The arrival of the Bodhi tree from King Asoka, under which Buddha attained enlightenment, was first received and worshiped by a Brahmin priest who was a Hindu. Later on, two saplings were given to ksatriyas⁷⁸ to be planted in the north.⁷⁹ Buddhism spread fast and soon became an integral part of Sinhalese culture. The Kings supported the Buddhist monks and built temples and monasteries. In the sixth century AD, the Pali epic the *Mahavamsa*, the country's primary

⁷⁶ R. A. L. H. Gunawardena, "Buddhist Nationalism and Religious Violence in Sri Lanka," under the section "Introduction": <http://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/ngier/slriv.htm>

⁷⁷ Gunawardena, "Buddhist Nationalism and Religious Violence in Sri Lanka," under the section "Integrating the 'Other'" in Precolonial Sri Lanka.

⁷⁸ Ksatriya is a member of a high Hindu caste, usually serving in government or military positions.

⁷⁹ Gunawardena, "Buddhist Nationalism and Religious Violence in Sri Lanka" under the section "The Mythical Origins of the Sinhalese Nation"

historical source, was written.⁸⁰ Buddhism gave the Sinhalese people a sense of national identity, and encouraged the progress of their culture and literature.

Although Hinduism and Buddhism co-existed largely in peace in this period, the creation of the *Mahavamsa*, the Buddhist chronicle, began to shape a uniquely Sinhalese culture and identity. The relative constancy during this period would be challenged in the coming centuries, beginning with the medieval period.

The Medieval Period

From the sixth century onward, the political situation in Sri Lanka was not promising for the advancement of Buddhism. This period was characterized by frequent fighting between the Sinhalese and their rival foreign invaders. As Perera describes, during this period Sri Lanka was invaded by the Pandya and the Chola from South India who ransacked monasteries and carried away vast treasures.⁸¹ As a result, the Buddhist communities, monasteries and temples were abandoned.

In the course of this political unrest, several important events happened in the history of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Under the reign of Moggalaana I (495–512 AD), the Sacred Hair Relic of Buddha was imported from India to Sri Lanka with great celebration. The *Mahavamsa* was widely disseminated and the Mahaayaana text⁸² was brought to Sri Lanka. A number of rulers

⁸⁰ H. R. Perera. "Buddhism in Sri Lanka: A Short History," (2007) under the section "The Pali Chronicles": www.accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/perera/wheel100.html

⁸¹ Perera, "Buddhism in Sri Lanka" (2007) under the section "Political Unrest and the Decline of Buddhism,"

⁸² Theravadan Buddhists saw Bodhisattva, or achieving enlightenment but postponing Nirvana in order to serve others, as merely a guide or a model to the journey of individual enlightenment. The Mahayana determined that Bodhisattva was a mandate not for individual perfection, but to save all sentient beings from suffering. The goal of Mahayana Buddhists is to return to the world of suffering and assist all others in reaching Nirvana first, thus casting the role of Buddhists as compassionate protectors and saviours. http://www.religioustolerance.org/budd_mah.htm

refined the Saasana (the teaching of Buddhism), restored the abandoned temples and monasteries, and recommended the reading of Dhamma.⁸³

Hindu invasions continued until the thirteenth century, ending in the establishment of the Hindu kingdom of Jaffna in the north of the country. The Buddhist revival was brought about by the King Paraakramabaahu II (1234–1269 AD) and it continued until about the fifteenth century. During this time, Sri Lanka was divided into three kingdoms: Jaffna in the north, Kotte in the southwest, and Kandy in the center (see map on following page). In spite of these instabilities Buddhism in its Theravada form⁸⁴ remained the dominant religion of the country.

By the end of the medieval period, Buddhist resurgence had begun and it remained the dominant faith of Sri Lanka. This religious revival brought so much fame to Buddhism in Sri Lanka, that the King of Burma sent 22 chosen *bhikkhus* (monks) to Sri Lanka to be ordained and take back to Burma the practices of Lanka. Soon, however, the arrival of European colonizers, and with them Christianity, would have an indelible impact on the religious and political landscape, as we will see in the next section.

The Colonial Period (1505–1948)

The political solidity that was sustained by Paraakramabaahu II and his successors began to weaken by the beginning of the sixteenth century. The Sinhalese king who ruled Kotte governed only a very small region. The interior of the country was ruled by petty chiefs who neglected religion and the people, and the coastal area was under the control of the Moors. Such was the

⁸³ Perera, “Buddhism in Sri Lanka,” (2007) under the section “Political Unrest and the Decline of Buddhism.”

⁸⁴ It may be worth pointing out that Theravada and Mahayana are two of the main schools of Buddhism. Although many of the teachings are the same there are some concepts and practices that differ from each other. But the main difference is that Theravada is more common in Southeast Asia, in countries such as Sri Lanka, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar (Burma), Mahayana, on the other hand, is more common in Tibet, China, Japan, Taiwan, Korea, and Mongolia.

condition when a new kind of invader appeared on Sri Lanka's shores; European colonization began with the Portuguese who first introduced Christianity to the island. A more detailed analysis of the role of the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka will follow in Chapter 3.

The Portuguese Period (1505–1658)

The Portuguese arrived in Sri Lanka by accident. While trying to seize some Muslim merchant ships, Lorenzo de Almeida arrived in the port of Colombo in 1505. He established friendly relations with the Kotte king and gained a monopoly on the valuable spice trade. At this period, Sri Lanka was divided into three kingdoms.



On setting foot on the island, the Portuguese built a small chapel and celebrated Mass: thus began the story of the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka.⁸⁵ Before the arrival of the Portuguese, the Sinhalese were Buddhists and the Tamils were Hindus. Conversion to Catholicism began with the arrival of the Portuguese. The Portuguese conquered the kingdoms of Kotte (Western Kingdom) and Jaffna (the Wanni region to the north), but attempts to capture the kingdom of

⁸⁵ V. Perniola. *The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka: The Portuguese Period*, Volume I, (Dehiwala: Tisara Press, Sri Lanka, 1989), xi.

Kandy were unsuccessful. This period is very important for the purposes of my study as one of the underlying causes for the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka was the Christianisation of the Buddhists. This theme will be analyzed in Chapter 4.

The kings of Portugal reminded the naval captains that “the conquest of new lands was justified by the duty they had of spreading the Faith of Christ.”⁸⁶ The lay officials took this opinion to heart during the first 50 years and showed greater enthusiasm than the friars. They were motivated by their personal interest in winning the favour of the king of Portugal, rather than in winning favour with God.⁸⁷ Without any instruction, at times by force, the Sinhalese and the Tamils were baptised and converted to Christianity. There is evidence that many conversions were motivated by material advantages or by political expediency. Fr. Perniola, a Jesuit priest and historian, relates the story of Nuno Alvarez Pereira who convinced the king of Kandy, Vikrama Bahu that the only way of winning Portuguese help was to become a Christian. The king was baptised together with his five chief captains, but they continued to be Buddhists as they had been before.⁸⁸ Those who resisted giving up their Buddhist faith faced severe consequences. According to Perera “the period of Portuguese rule became one of the darkest periods of Buddhism in Sri Lanka.”⁸⁹ The Lanka chronicles describe the Portuguese as “cruel, inhuman, rapacious, bigoted and savage persecutors of Buddhism in their endeavour to impose their own faith—Roman Catholicism, on the people of Sri Lanka.”⁹⁰ The Christianisation of Sri

⁸⁶ Perniola, *The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka*, xii.

⁸⁷ Perniola, *The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka*, xii.

⁸⁸ Perniola, *The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka*, xii.

⁸⁹ Perera, “Buddhism in Sri Lanka,” under the section “The Arrival of the Portuguese and the Persecution of Buddhism”

⁹⁰ Perera, “Buddhism in Sri Lanka,” under the section “The Arrival of the Portuguese and the Persecution of Buddhism”

Lanka continued with the arrival of the Dutch who introduced Protestantism and sought to convert the Roman Catholics.

The Dutch Period (1658–1796)

The Portuguese were expelled from the country in 1658 by the Dutch who then took over all the occupied territory of the Portuguese. Unlike the Portuguese, the Dutch were attracted to Ceylon for its economic potential—the cinnamon trade to be specific.⁹¹ Perera gives an account of the Dutch rule and their practices. They were Protestants, and followed a policy different to that of the Portuguese. They were interested in commerce, and in order to maintain relations, they endured the slights and annoyances of the Sinhalese. However, Dutch Reformed Christianity played a key role in how they colonized the island. The Dutch focused on creating a system of education, building churches and schools, often in one building; the schoolmaster was both teacher and minister. All civil rights and laws of inheritance were entirely determined by one's membership in a church and particular denomination. Those who were not Christians could not hold any employment in the government, nor could they get married officially, nor record the birth of a child.⁹²

The Dutch extended the banning of Roman Catholicism to all districts under their control. In the Old Statutes of Batavia (the Van Dieman Code), issued in 1642 by the Dutch East India Company, is the following edict:

⁹¹ Samuel H. Moffett, *History of Christianity in Asia, Volume 11: 1500–1900* (Orbis Books: New York, 2005), 223.

⁹² Perera, “Buddhism in Sri Lanka” (2007) under the section “Successors of Vimala Dharmasuriya 1 and the Arrival of the Dutch in Sri Lanka.”

Within the territories of the Dutch East India Company, no other religion will be exercised, much less taught or propagated, either secretly or publicly, than the Reformed Christian Religion as it is taught in the public Churches of the United Provinces [the Netherlands].⁹³

It is noteworthy to mention, as Perera maintains, that their organization was so vast that they turned to hiring Buddhist Sinhalese as teachers and agents of religion. Most of those who were employed in this manner remained devout Buddhists and were “Christians only in the sense of their office.”⁹⁴ Other people followed the same strategy, for the purpose of registering their marriages or the births of their children or for holding office. Therefore, the attempts of the Dutch to proselytize did not harm Buddhism.⁹⁵

According to Russel and Savada, the Dutch tried their very best to substitute Roman Catholicism with Protestantism. They rewarded native conversion to the Dutch Reformed Church with promotions, but the Catholics were too deeply rooted in their faith and many remained Roman Catholics. Unlike the Portuguese, the Dutch tolerated the indigenous religions but forbade the Roman Catholics from practicing their faith. They persecuted them and took away their church properties building Protestant chapels in place.⁹⁶ It was the Catholics that suffered more than Buddhists.⁹⁷ In spite of the hardship imposed on them by the Dutch, the Portuguese missionary priests remained faithful and cared for their communities.

⁹³ Perniola, *Dutch Period*, 1:1. This clause on religion is from the Old Statutes of Batavia (the Van Dieman Code), issued in 1642 by the Dutch East India Company through which the government in Holland administered Ceylon. Cited in Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia, Volume 11: 1500–1900*, 223.

⁹⁴ Perera, “Buddhism in Sri Lanka” (2007) under the section “Successors of Vimala Dharmasuriya I and the Arrival of the Dutch in Sri Lanka.”

⁹⁵ Perera, “Buddhism in Sri Lanka” (2007) under the section “Successors of Vimala Dharmasuriya I and the Arrival of the Dutch in Sri Lanka.”

⁹⁶ Russell, R. Ross & Andrea, M. Savada. “Sri Lanka History – The Dutch Period,” Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1988,: <http://defonseka.com/articles/sri-lanka-history-the-dutch-period>

⁹⁷ Russell, R. Ross & Andrea, M. Savada. “Sri Lanka History – The Dutch Period,” Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1988.

The conversion of insignificant Roman Catholics to Dutch Reformed faith was quick. In five years the Dutch converted 65,000 Tamils in Jaffna and initiated a seminary in 1663. By 1668 there were more than 180,000 Protestants, and the Tamil Northern Province was likewise becoming Protestant.⁹⁸ But in the south, the Catholics were more fervent and determined, some went underground, many Sinhalese and Portuguese families and Catholic priests took sanctuary under the King Rajasinha II of Kandy.⁹⁹

During the domination of the Dutch, the rulers of the Kandyan kingdom tried to reinstate Buddhism. They built a huge pavilion for the Sacred Tooth Relic, encouraged young men to join the order, educated the people in Buddhist doctrines, provided the monks with their needs, and encouraged them to write literary works. By the efforts of these devout kings, Buddhism and the purity of the Saasana revived.¹⁰⁰ Conversely, the last Kandyan king Sri Vikrama Raajasinha who was in constant fear of his Adigar (Prime Minister) and his followers, became an alcoholic who brought shame to the kingdom and treated his enemies with cruelty. He created conditions which were not favourable to the further development of Buddhism.¹⁰¹

The British Period (1796–1948)

In 1796, Dutch rule gave way to British. After the Dutch formally yielded the island, Sri Lanka became Britain's first crown colony. The two former colonizers the Portuguese and the Dutch, had conquered two of the Sri Lankan kingdoms, but been repelled by the kingdom of Kandy. The

⁹⁸ James Emerson Tennent, *Christianity in Ceylon*. (London: John Murry, 1850; New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1998) 44; cf. 73-74 n. C) cited in Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia, Volume 11: 1500–1900*, 226.

⁹⁹ Tennent. *Christianity in Ceylon*, 44, cited in Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 226.

¹⁰⁰ Perera, "Buddhism in Sri Lanka" (2007) under the section, "The Arrival of the British and the End of Sinhalese Rule in Sri Lanka."

¹⁰¹ Perera, "Buddhism in Sri Lanka"

British finally conquered the kingdom in 1815 after several efforts. This was the end of the glory of Kandy, which had stood against all aggressors until that point.¹⁰²

Due to the defeat of Kandy, a treaty was signed the same year that promised British protection for Buddhism. Nevertheless, the British violated the treaty and even banned the Buddhists from enjoying some of the privileges that were given to the Christians. Perera confirms that the British gave wholehearted support to the Christian missionaries to continue their educational and missionary activities.¹⁰³ According to Pinto, American missionaries founded the first medical college in the north in 1848, before the medical school in Colombo was established. The government approved the denominational school procedure that facilitated the Christian schools to develop rapidly, and in 1886 nuns from the congregation of the Franciscan Missionary of mission were welcome to work in public hospitals.¹⁰⁴

Deborah John describes how the Roman Catholic Church, while persecuted during the Dutch period, found a “comfortable existence” under the British.¹⁰⁵ But this gradually led to resentment among the non-Christians, which eventually turned violent. Leonard Pinto gives a good account of the adverse popular feeling:

A surge of nationalism against the colonialists occurred towards the middle of 19th century, which took diverse forms. The anti-Christian feelings were high among the Buddhist-Sinhalese nationalists, and the expression of such feelings in debates as in the Panadura debate¹⁰⁶ of 1862 turned into a violent clash at Kotahena in 1883 and the burning of a Catholic Church in Anuradhapura in 1903.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² Perera, “Buddhism in Sri Lanka,”

¹⁰³ Ibid, under the section, “The Christian Missionary Activities,”

¹⁰⁴ Leonard Pinto, “Sri Lanka: A Brief History of Christianity” *Scoop*, September 23, 2013:

<http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/WO1309/S00362/sri-lanka-a-brief-history-of-christianity.htm>.

¹⁰⁵ Deborah John, “Sri Lanka – a Divided Church in a Divided Polity: the Brokerage of a Struggling Institution,” *Contemporary South Asia* vol. 20, 1(2012), 79.

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09584935.2011.646076>.

¹⁰⁶ The debate consists of a face to face debate over the course of two days between a Buddhist monk and a Wesleyan minister. Buddhism in Sri Lanka was in danger of disappearing and the goal was to challenge Christianity. <https://www.scribd.com/doc/113061389/The-Panadura-Debate>

¹⁰⁷ Pinto, “Sri Lanka” *Scoop*, September 23, 2013.

At the end of the nineteenth century, Buddhists and Hindus began to undertake activities in the wake of European colonialism to protect Sri Lankan culture and religion against the influence of Christian missionaries. It was during this time that Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism developed. Christianity was flourishing because of missionary work, which was supported by the British. A pivotal character in the Buddhist revivalist movement was Colonel Olcott, an American who arrived in Sri Lanka in 1880 and asserted that “Buddhism was natural expression of their own spiritual universalism.”¹⁰⁸ He indicated to the Buddhist leaders, if Buddhism was to develop and grow against the Christian missionary activities, they should build Buddhist schools to educate their children.¹⁰⁹ Revivalist activities were carried out by various lay religious leaders, one of which was Anagarika Dharmapala (1864–1933) who was the founding father of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism.¹¹⁰

In summary, the arrival of European powers and the introduction of Christianity created a climate of rivalry and persecution. Legal rights and privileges became tied to Christian religious identity and Buddhism was often attacked and its members marginalised. In the end, the movement to resist British domination and the influence of Christianity led to the modern model of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism. This mind-set had a deep impact on the importance of Buddhism in Sri Lankan society and this will be explored in the next section.

2.4 The Influence of Buddhism in Sri Lanka

Religion in Sri Lanka is a serious contributor to the *problematique*; it is hence important to understand the history and role of religion in Sri Lanka. Sri Lankan society is considered to be

¹⁰⁸ Gunewardena, “Buddhist Nationalism and Religious Violence in Sri Lanka,” under the section, “The Misdirected Trajectory of 19th Century Sri Lankan Buddhism,”

¹⁰⁹ Perera, “Buddhism in Sri Lanka” (2007), under the section “Colonel Olcott and Buddhist Activities”

¹¹⁰ Gunawardena, “Buddhist Nationalism and Religious Violence in Sri Lanka,” under the section “The Misdirected Trajectory of 19th Century Sri Lankan Buddhism”

multi-religious and multi-ethnic, but the primary or dominant religion is Buddhism. Other religions are Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity. However, the Sinhalese are predominantly Buddhist and this religious identity plays an essential role in their culture.

As early as the sixth century CE Buddhism became an ethno-religious boundary marker in the population of the country, creating an important division. The *Mahavamsa*, written at that time, describes Buddha's three visits to Sri Lanka; on his third visit, he laid his foot on the top of the magnificent mountain known as Samantakuta and made it sacred.¹¹¹ According to Obeyesekere, "it is as if the land is consecrated as a place where Buddhism will flourish" and he affirms that almost all historical manuscripts recognize that.¹¹²

The *Mahavamsa* explains the essence of Buddhism, such as the four noble truths, the five precepts, and other sacred principles. Buddhism not only shapes philosophical thought and attitudes, but also values and behaviours in everyday life. While highlighting this aspect, Richard Gombrich gives an example of a poem on kindness in the Pali canon called the "Metta Sutta." It praises the virtue of kindness and recommends that one should love all living beings in the universe the way a mother does her own child: "Standing, walking, sitting or lying, one should be as alert as possible and keep one's mind on it. They call this divine living in the world."¹¹³ One of the fundamental teachings of the Buddha is boundless compassion and *ahimsa* (non-harm to living creatures).¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Gananath Obeyesekere, "Buddhism, Ethnicity and Identity: A Problem of Buddhist History," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 10, (2003), 199.

¹¹² *Mahavamsa*, 1–13. Cited in Obeyesekere, "Buddhism, Ethnicity and Identity," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 10, (2003), 199.

¹¹³ Richard Gombrich, "Kindness and Compassion as Means to Nirvana," (1997 Gonda Lecture), (Amsterdam: Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1998): <https://ocbs.org/kindness-and-compassion-as-means-to-nirvana-in-early-buddhism>

¹¹⁴ Richard Gombrich, "Kindness and Compassion as Means to Nirvana"

Mahavamsa contributed to the idea that Sri Lanka was destined to be the island of dharma and should be dominated by Buddhists. According to Obeyesekere, “The *Mahavamsa* is not just a text that gives us information on Sinhala Buddhist identity; but, importantly, it is a text that helps to create such an identity in a way that the previous chronicle, the *Dipavamsa* (the oldest historical record of Sri Lanka), did not”.¹¹⁵ Kirti Nissanka Malla (Sinhalese ruler from 1187 to 1196 AD) wrote in his rock inscriptions that “non-Buddhists should not be placed in power in Sri Lanka.”¹¹⁶

The mythological accounts in *Mahavamsa* shape the thinking of the Sinhalese population, some of whom believe in them literally. *Mahavamsa* was interpreted in such a way that made Buddhism an exclusive religion in Sri Lanka. As Samaranayake states,

It is a power that is overwhelming in terms of the strength of the ideas, concepts and myths which have been appropriated by those in power in Sinhala Buddhist society... Buddhism in Sri Lanka has amassed a host of authentic externals... we cannot postpone the urgent need to realize the dharma as an authentic internal experience.¹¹⁷

He recommends “that post-war reconstruction should be a spiritual reconstruction—a transformation of our collective shadow into a shining spirit.”¹¹⁸ Up to now reconstruction in Sri Lanka has focused on material aspects, such as economic and infrastructure development, and not on the human or relational dimension, through e.g. the promotion of dialogue and spiritual renewal. The objective of this research is to address this deficiency.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Obeyesekere, “Buddhism, Ethnicity and Identity,” 223.

¹¹⁶ Revolvy, Nissanka Malla of Polonnaruwa:
https://www.revolvy.com/main/index.php?s=Nissankamalla&item_type=topic.

¹¹⁷ Sajeeva Samaranayake, “Understanding the Sinhala Buddhist Doctrine of ‘Holding On’,” Groundviews.org, July 25, 2013: <http://groundviews.org/2013/07/25/understanding-the-sinhala-buddhist-doctrine-of-holding-on>

¹¹⁸ Samaranayake, “Understanding the Sinhala Buddhist Doctrine of ‘Holding On’”

¹¹⁹ This study focuses on Christianity but the implication is that a similar methodology could be applied to the Buddhist and Hindu communities to achieve personal transformation and forgiveness.

In brief, Buddhism in Sri Lanka has shaped the society and its attitudes towards nationalism. The foundational myth that Buddha visited Sri Lanka three times and consecrated the land as a place for Buddhism is accepted by all Buddhist religious texts. According to Obeyesekere, “it is an inescapable part of the historical consciousness of the Sinhalese,” which gives political legitimacy to the majority people in Sri Lanka, validating the fundamentally Buddhist nature of the place.¹²⁰

Conclusion

In answer to Osmer’s first question of “What is going on,” I have outlined the division that exists between the diaspora Sinhalese and Tamils in Toronto and what prevents them from coming together despite their common faith. While some studies have been done on either group separately, none have prior to this examined the relationship and interactions of the two and it is important to now examine that aspect.

The animosity and resentments between the two groups are a legacy of civil war. However, as discussed above, the myths and legends of Sri Lanka’s origins show how the two ethnic groups have each seen themselves as the true descendants of the land from the very beginning. The influence of Hindu invaders, the introduction of Buddhism, and the arrival of different brands of Christianity as a result of the three waves of European colonialists all contributed to further complicating the religious map of Sri Lanka.

We have seen how religion plays an important role in Sri Lanka. The anti-Christian and anti-British protests in the nineteenth century demonstrate the forging of Sinhalese and Buddhist identity to become the nationalist identity.

¹²⁰ Obeyesekere, “Buddhism, Ethnicity and Identity,” 200.

Having described the *problematique* and begun the examination of the first core task of Osmer, Chapter 3 will continue to explore the religious dimension of the Sri Lankan conflict as one of the causes of the ethnic division.

Chapter 3

The Religious Dimension of the Sri Lankan Conflict

Having presented a brief review of the history of religion in Sri Lanka, I shall now explore in more detail the advent and role of Catholicism, which brought envy, division and competition with the Buddhists and the Hindus.

3.1 Introduction of Catholicism During the Portuguese Period (1505–1658)

The spread of Christianity was a key component and motivation of colonialism. The Roman Catholic Church gave explicit directives to this end. In 1493, Pope Alexander VI assigned to the Portuguese the evangelisation of the Eastern Countries.¹²¹ Jesus said in Mark (16:15–16), “Go throughout the whole world and preach the gospel to all people,”¹²² While Jesus’ words may be interpreted differently in modern or contemporary terms, they were taken literally at that time.

¹²¹ W.L.A. Don Peter, *Catholic Church in Sri Lanka: A History in Outline, the Portuguese Period (1505–1658)*, (Colombo, Sri Lanka: https://mahawansa.wordpress.com/2005/10/03/catholic-church-in-sri-lanka-a-history-in-outline-the-portuguese-period-by-w_l_a_don-peter)

¹²² Good news: New Testament and Psalms (Toronto, ON: Canadian Bible Society, 1995).

The kings of Portugal impressed this mission and its justification for the seizing of new lands upon their captains and viceroys.¹²³

When the Portuguese arrived in Sri Lanka in 1505, there was a priest among them. It can be construed that the Portuguese were the first Roman Catholics to arrive in Ceylon. But, according to Samuel Moffett, a Nestorian explorer encountered Christians in Ceylon in the sixth century, but no evidence of that community has been found.¹²⁴ Oswald Gomis had also confirmed, in *Some Christian Contributions in Sri Lanka*, that there were two groups of Christians; St. Thomas Christians and Nestorian Christians, lived in Sri Lanka during the pre-colonial era, and later established union with the Catholic Church.¹²⁵ The first Catholic priest, the Franciscan Father Vincent, arrived with the Portuguese expedition, celebrated the Eucharist and returned with the others to Portugal.¹²⁶ Thus began Roman Catholicism in Ceylon.

The rituals and images of the Catholic Church, such as rosaries, religious orders and colourful celebrants, bore a similar aspect to Buddhist and Hindu rituals, and this helped create an affinity for the faith among the newly converted.¹²⁷ Later, the Protestant Dutch and British did not offer the same pomp and ceremony and as such did not sway the people in the same way.¹²⁸ In 1543, King Bhuvaneka Baahu VI of Kotte sent a delegation to Portugal with a golden effigy of his grandson, Prince Dharamapala, to be crowned by the king of Portugal; in return he would

¹²³ Conquest was justified and encouraged by the premise that the Christian faith was being served. However, rewards and promotion were given for these activities and so evangelisation became a method of winning royal favour rather than God's.

¹²⁴ Samuel H. Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia, Volume II (1500–1900)*, 37.

¹²⁵ Oswald Gomis, *Some Christian Contributions in Sri Lanka*. (2004): <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Kotehena>

¹²⁶ Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia, Volume II (1500–1900)*, 38.

¹²⁷ C.R. Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire 1415–1825* (London: Hutchnson), 81–82, cited in Senaka Weeraratna “Repression of Buddhism in Sri Lanka by the Portuguese 1505-1658, under the section “Similarities in Outward Manifestation of the Roman Catholics Vis-a vis Buddhism and Hinduism.”

¹²⁸ Boxer. *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire 1415–1825*, 82, cited in Senaka Weeraratna.

welcome Christian Missionaries to the island.¹²⁹ The king of Portugal rejoiced at what he thought was an opportunity to convert Bhuvaneka Baahu VI. The first group of Portuguese missionaries, consisting of six Franciscans, arrived on the island three years later at the request of the king of Kotte. With his permission, they built the first church in Colombo and established a mission.

The following events illustrate how kings, leaders and the people were pressured by the Portuguese authorities and missionaries to convert to Christianity. There was no other way for the Sri Lankan kings to maintain their power or secure the support of the Portuguese. Two princes of Kotte were converted, taking the names of Don Joao and Don Luis, and lived as Christians, but this may have been a political strategy. According to the Jesuit N. Lancillotto, Don Joao converted to please John III of Portugal and to ensure his own ascension to the throne.¹³⁰ Conversion often meant material advantages or an escape from the prevailing laws, especially that of *rajakariya*, which was a system of annual forced unpaid labour for the monarchy, usually for a period of forty days, introduced in the Anuradhapura period.¹³¹ When a family was tied to the land to perform a service for the king, they retained the land only as long as they could carry out their function. If they were unable to do so, the land reverted back to the king. Christians were exempt from this principle, resulting in many deathbed conversions to secure the land for the family.¹³² King Bhuvaneka Baahu VI was displeased that some of his subjects became Christians in order to escape his laws and jurisdiction rather than out of true conviction. He said, if they became Christians out of belief, and still fulfilled their obligations to

¹²⁹ Perera. "Buddhism in Sri Lanka," (2007) under the section, "The Arrival of the Portuguese and the Persecution of Buddhism,"

¹³⁰ V. Perniola, *The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka: The Portuguese Period, Volume 1, 1505–1565*, The Ceylon Historical Journal, Monograph Series, 12, (Dehiwala, Sri Lanka: Tisara Press, 1989), xiii.

¹³¹ Rohan2, "Rajakariya," Lanka Library Forum, Sept. 24, 2006.

¹³² Perniola, *The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka*, xiii.

him under the law of the kingdom, he would have no objection to their conversion but would on the contrary welcome it.¹³³

The Portuguese officials aspired to convert the royalty hoping that their subjects would follow their example. Among the kings, the only one who did not submit to their demands and convert to Christianity was the king of Kotte, Bhuvaneka Baahu VI. Although he had a good relationship with the Portuguese, he vowed to never change his religion and he never did.¹³⁴ He would rather have renounced his kingdom than convert. However, Bhuvaneka Baahu VI is remembered by the Buddhists as one who did great harm from their perspective: living on close terms with the Portuguese, he sent the Prince Dharmapala whom he had brought up, to live with John III of Portugal. Dharmapala became the first Christian king of Sri Lanka, Don Joao, and a willing collaborator in the repression of Buddhism.¹³⁵ According to Queyroz, Dharmapala became so powerful after his conversion, that he ordered his officials to appropriate all the Buddhist Temple lands and hand them over to the Franciscans to be used as seminaries and colleges. When Buddhist monks in Kotte protested this, it led to the arrest and execution of thirty of them.¹³⁶ Vimalananda describes, “Thus began the gradual destruction of Buddhism, the only organisation which existed for the spiritual and intellectual education of the people of Ceylon.”¹³⁷

¹³³ Perniola, *The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka*, xiv.

¹³⁴ Perniola, *The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka*, xiii.

¹³⁵ Rajavaliya, *A Historical Narrative of Sinhalese Kings from Vijaya to Vimala Dharma Surya II*, (Colombo: Government Printer, (1900) 68, cited in Senaka Weeraratna. “Repression of Buddhism in Sri Lanka by the Portuguese 1505–1658,” under the title “The Introduction of Christianity to Sri Lanka”, *ACSLU Essays on Unethical Conversion*, (June 12, 2005): <http://www.vgweb.org/unethicalconversion/port>

¹³⁶ Queyroz, quoted in O. M. de Silva Cosme, Fidalgos in the Kingdom of Kotte (1505–1656), Colombo, 1990, 144, cited in Senaka Weeraratna. “Repression of Buddhism in Sri Lanka by the Portuguese 1505–1658.”

¹³⁷ Vimalananda Tennakoon, *Buddhism in Ceylon under the Christian Powers* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: M.D. Gunasena, 1963) xxv, cited in “Repression of Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

The Portuguese went one step further and built their churches on ruins of Buddhist Viharas and other religious sites. The Buddhist monks and the laity were infuriated and revolted against this desecration and alienation of their sacred places of worship.¹³⁸ Moffett maintains, as a result of this, converts began to leave the church by the hundreds.¹³⁹ On the other hand, as described by Moffett, it was during Dharmapala's reign that missionary activities brought new energy to the mission and an increase in the number of new converts. In the first year, 3000 people were converted to Christianity in Kotte; the following year they built schools and orphanages in Colombo and in the coastal areas. A few years later, the Franciscan superior converted an entire tribe of fisher folk, 70,000 in number, on the north coast of Colombo. Following the baptism of King Dharmapala, there were numerous conversions among the nobility.¹⁴⁰

In his book *Portuguese Rule in Ceylon 1594–1612*, the historian Tikiri Abeysinghe describes how the Portuguese colonial state had two objectives: the first was to deny the existence of the local religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism; the second, to support those who converted to Christianity. He adds, “The persecution of Buddhism during these years of Portuguese rule was more severe than the persecution of Catholicism under the Dutch.” Concerning the highly disputed question whether conversion was forced on the people of Sri Lanka, Abeysinghe responds, “the question must be framed differently, not whether Catholicism

¹³⁸ W.L.A. Don Peter, *Catholic Church in Sri Lanka: A History in Outline, the Portuguese Period (1505–1658)*: <http://xoomer.virgilio.it/alperera/slindex.html>

¹³⁹ Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia, Volume 11 (1500–1900)*, 40.

¹⁴⁰ Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia, Volume 11 (1500–1900)*, 40.

was propagated by force, but whether force was employed against Buddhism and Hinduism. While the answer to the first question is ‘no’, that to the second is an unhesitating ‘yes’.”¹⁴¹

It is also noteworthy that in the northern Hindu territory of Jaffna, Hindus of all castes were converted to Christianity. In 1544, the fisher caste on the island of Mannar heard about Father Francis Xavier’s mission among the fisher caste in south India and invited him to Ceylon to baptise them. Father Xavier sent a priest in his stead who baptised about 1000 people. The Tamil king of Jaffna, on hearing about this, turned violently against the Portuguese and had about 600 of the newly converted killed.¹⁴² Since then the island has been known as the “Isle of Martyrs.”¹⁴³ This demonstrates that the presence of the Portuguese and the political aspect of religion also had an impact on the Hindu community. Hindu temples were also demolished. Felipe de Oliveria, the conqueror of Jaffna was charged with having destroyed 500 temples.¹⁴⁴ Some of the temples were transformed into churches, one of them being the famous Temple in the Kingdom of Kotte.

3.2 Significant Political, Social and Religious Events During the Dutch Period (1658–1796)

The arrival of the Portuguese and the introduction of Catholicism brought about significant changes to the political, legal and social landscape of Sri Lanka. Christianity was favoured for political and legal reasons, and Buddhism and Hinduism suffered exclusion and repression. As a result, release from oppression was sought in the hands of a European rival, the Dutch. During

¹⁴¹ Tikiri Abeysinghe, *Portuguese Rule in Ceylon 1594–1612* (Colombo: Lake House Investments, 1966), 209 cited in Senaka Weeraratna “Repression of Buddhism in Sri Lanka by the Portuguese 1505-1658”, *ACSLU Essays on Unethical Conversion*, (June 12, 2005, under the title Bequeath of the Kingdom of Kotte to the Portuguese Crown: <http://www.vgweb.org/unethicalconversion/port>.

¹⁴² W.L.A. Don Peter, *Catholic Church in Sri Lanka: A History in Outline, the Dutch Period (1658–1796)*, under the title “Xavier and the Martyrs of Mannar”: <http://xoomer.virgilio.it/alperera/biblio.html>.

¹⁴³ Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia, Volume 11 (1500–1900)*, 40.

¹⁴⁴ Peiris, P.E. *The Portuguese Era Vol. II* pp. 118–166. cited in Senaka Weeraratna “Repression of Buddhism in Sri Lanka by the Portuguese 1505-1658”, *ACSLU Essays on Unethical Conversion*, (June 12, 2005), under the section “Destruction and Plunder of Buddhist temples.

the reign of Rājāsīnha II (1635–1687), the Dutch East India Company had vessels in Indian waters¹⁴⁵ whose help the king requested to expel the Portuguese from the country.

The two European nations fought until 1658 and the war ended with a Dutch victory. The Dutch then occupied all the regions formally held by the Portuguese. Once in power, the Dutch concentrated on ridding the country of Catholicism. Don Peter describes what happened to the Catholics during this period. The Catholic faith was banned, and churches and schools were seized. All Catholic priests were exiled from the country. Anyone protecting or helping a priest was threatened with severe punishment. Catholics were required to attend services in Dutch churches and to have their children baptized, their marriages formalised and their dead buried according to Calvinist rites.¹⁴⁶

During the Dutch period, the situation was arduous for the Catholics. This went on for about 30 years. After this long period without spiritual leadership or pastoral care, Fr. Joseph Vaz arrived from India, working secretly among the Catholic faithful, celebrating Mass in their homes, administering the sacraments, and taking care of those who had given up the practice of the faith or who had been converted to the Dutch Reformed Church.¹⁴⁷ The Catholic population must have been significant for the Dutch to see them as a threat and institute such repressive methods against them.

Perera observes that the Dutch had a different approach towards Buddhists. For the Dutch, commerce was their main concern and for this, peace was essential. Keeping this in mind they tolerated provocations by the Sinhalese. They even helped the Sinhalese bring monks from Siam to establish higher ordination in Sri Lanka and hired Sinhalese teachers to instruct the

¹⁴⁵ Don Peter. *Catholic Church in Sri Lanka: The Dutch Period*. <http://xoomer.virgilio.it/alperera/dutch.html>

¹⁴⁶ Don Peter, *Catholic Church in Sri Lanka: The Dutch period*, under the section “A Flock without a Shepherd.”

¹⁴⁷ Don Peter, *Catholic Church in Sri Lanka: The Dutch Period*,

Christian religion in their schools. These teachers were Christians only professionally; at heart, they remained Buddhists. Therefore, Buddhism was not as affected by the Dutch in their efforts to propagate Calvinism.¹⁴⁸

This would change under the British rule, during the pre-independence stage, when Christianity would once again be seen as a threat to the majority Buddhists. The British government had signed a treaty to safeguard Buddhism but then contravened the treaty, encouraging Christian activities and promoting Christianity at the expense of the Sinhalese Buddhists.

As shown, the Portuguese conquest had as one of its core objectives the propagation of Catholicism and the conversion of Buddhists and Hindus. The Sri Lankan royalty was pressured to accept Catholicism in order to win favour from the Portuguese king, and the hope was that their subjects would follow suit.¹⁴⁹ Portuguese cruelty towards Buddhists and Hindus inspired hatred and violence towards them, and also towards the Sri Lankan Catholics. The majority Buddhists lost their dignity and much of their material and religious wealth, and became powerless. Moffett notes that the Portuguese presence in Sri Lanka has been partially identified by some as a period of colonial belligerence. A more positive description would be as a period of Portuguese imperial investment and Catholic evangelization.¹⁵⁰

The Dutch period has generally been described as one of indifference and harassment, but Moffett depicts it as one of neglect and exploitation.¹⁵¹ In spite of all the hardship during the Dutch period, Catholicism survived and was passed on. Perhaps because, as Perera remarks,

¹⁴⁸ Perera, “Buddhism in Sri Lanka” under the title “Successors of Vimala Dharmasuriya I and the Arrival of the Dutch,”: www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/perera/wheel100.html.

¹⁴⁹ This policy, *cuius region, eius religio*—the religion of the country is the religion of the sovereign—was the prevailing attitude in Europe and implemented in mission territory.

¹⁵⁰ Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia, Volume 11 (1500-1900)*, 336.

¹⁵¹ Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 336.

unlike the Dutch, the Portuguese missionaries were able to look after their congregations, they were zealous and serious in their duties, and took a genuine interest in the well-being of their flock.¹⁵² This created a deep sense of loyalty to the Catholic Church.

In the first chapter, we examined how Buddhism created division in Sri Lanka. In this chapter, we have seen how Catholicism contributed to conflict and division. These religions share notions of compassion for all living beings, but the adherents of both religions have failed to put these principles into practice. One of the objectives of this research is to reconnect with this compassion through forgiveness, and to bring the faithful back to the heart of their traditions. Perhaps this is an opportunity to express the faith that has matured and purified through suffering and struggles, move on transforming hostility and finding a willingness to forgive, and contribute to the advancement of peace and reconciliation in the midst of ethnic conflicts.

3.3 Significant Political, Social, and Religious Events During the British Period (1796–1948)

In the previous chapter, it was briefly shown how the British supported Christian missionaries including Catholic institutions, and how this contributed to the rise of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism. Here, I shall continue to describe the significant political, social and religious events that took place under British rule during the pre-independence era which increased the division between Sinhalese and Tamils. In order to understand how this came to be, we need to examine the steps taken in the British governing structural systems.

The British period began in 1796; by 1833, the British had, in order to facilitate the administration of the territory, transformed Sri Lanka's former three kingdoms into one unitary

¹⁵² Perera, "Buddhism in Sri Lanka" (2007) under the section "Successors of Vimala Dharmasuriya I and the Arrival of the Dutch in Sri Lanka,": www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/perera/wheel100.html

state. They centralized power in Colombo, which is situated in the Sinhalese area.¹⁵³ Adrien Wijemanne suggests that this unification of the country was a territorial convenience and that the British themselves knew that they were bringing together two different peoples. The present conflict/rift in Sri Lanka stems from the government wanting to maintain this geographical integrity, and the Tamils calling for the creation of two nations.¹⁵⁴ This can be understood from the perspectives of ethnonationalism and mimetic rivalry, which will both be discussed in Chapter 4.

In the same year, the British government sent the Colebrook-Cameron commission to inspect its colonial government and to contribute suggestions for managerial, economic and legal reforms. Most of the proposals were accepted and the first constitutional government formed. It is worth noting some of the recommendations: (1) that the power of the governor be reduced by creating an executive council to act jointly with the governor in matters of decision-making; (2) to have one administrative system for all Ceylon; (3) that Sri Lankans be given more civil service posts; (4) that a uniform system of education be established with English as the language of instruction.¹⁵⁵ Another significant event was the ending of slavery in 1844.

The fall of Kandy in that year led to the signing of a treaty that promised protection for Buddhism, but after annexation, the Sinhalese chiefs and the Buddhist monks experienced a loss of the prestige and support they had enjoyed under the Kandyan monarchy. Initially, the British participated in annual Buddhist ceremonies and appointed the chief monk, but then gradually abandoned these duties and eventually violated the treaty. Legislation was instead enacted that

¹⁵³ Brian Senewiratne. "What the Majority Sinhalese Must Know" *Colombo Telegraph*, April 23, 2016 <https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/what-the-majority-sinhalese-must-know/>.

¹⁵⁴ Adrian Wijemanne. *War and Peace in Post-Colonial Ceylon 1948–1991*, Orient Longman, 1996: <http://www.tamilnation.co/books/Eelam/adrian.htm>

¹⁵⁵ Encyclopedia Britannica, "Colebrook Cameron Commission": <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Colebrook-Cameron-Commission>

required a person to be a baptized Christian in order to be registered, and that favoured Christians for government employment.¹⁵⁶

For more than three centuries, Portuguese Catholics, Dutch Reformed and the British Anglicans governed the country in succession. James Tennent, describing Christianity in Ceylon in 1850, admitted that the British invasion was an opportunity for a new move toward propagating the message of the gospel by Christian missions.¹⁵⁷ As Perera notes, at the very beginning of the British rule, numerous Christian missionaries involved themselves in the missionary activities. The Baptists began their mission in 1792, the Wesleyan Methodists in 1814, the American missionaries¹⁵⁸ in 1816, and the Church of England in 1818 and they were assisted by the government.¹⁵⁹ Moffett observes that the British from the very beginning adopted a more tolerant attitude towards the Catholics and Buddhists than the Dutch had had. The British government espoused religious freedom, at least formally, for all: Catholics, Protestants, Buddhists and Hindus.¹⁶⁰

Another element that contributed greatly to the growth of the Catholic Church was the system of education that was in operation from 1869 onwards.¹⁶¹ Don Peter notes that the system permitted the state and Church to work together. Catholics took the opportunity to open schools widely in both the cities and the rural areas; as a result, it had a system of Catholic schools throughout the country. The schools were meant primarily for Catholic children, but students of

¹⁵⁶ Perera, "Buddhism in Sri Lanka: A Short History," (2007) under the section "British Attitude Toward Buddhism,"

¹⁵⁷ James, Emerson Tennent, *Christianity in Ceylon*. (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1998) 77 Cited in Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 337.

¹⁵⁸ The American Missionaries, as they were known, were sent by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM).

¹⁵⁹ Perera, "Buddhism in Sri Lanka" (2007) under the section "Christian Missionary Activities."

¹⁶⁰ Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 338.

¹⁶¹ Don Peter. *Catholic Church in Sri Lanka: A History in Outline, the British Period*:
<http://xoomer.virgilio.it/alperera/portu.html>

other faiths were also permitted to attend. The schools were under the administration of the Church but overseen by the state. The government authorised a priest for each diocese with authority given by the Government Department of Education to function as General Manager. As part of the system, there were also state-aided Catholic training colleges for the training of teachers for the Catholic schools. Both religious and secular subjects were taught in a Catholic atmosphere.¹⁶² From the above accounts we can get a sense of how the religious, social and political elements favoured the Catholics.

The reason why the Catholic schools were so efficient and fruitful was the availability and commitment of the religious—nuns and priests—as teachers. The schooling helped improve the quality of life of Catholics with respect to their religious formation, as well as their social and economic welfare. It offered them the prospect of secure employment and posts of responsibility in both government and private sectors. In addition to the schools, there were charitable institutions, such as orphanages and nursing homes for the sick and elderly, managed by the orders of nuns that came to the island during the British period.¹⁶³

Perera claims that the missionaries at some point began to distribute books and brochures condemning Buddhism and its teachings and praising Christianity.¹⁶⁴ As a consequence, Buddhism, the long-standing religion of the majority of the Sri Lankan Sinhalese people, which was honoured, respected and promoted by the Sinhalese Buddhist kings, now suffered the effects of prejudice. Colonial Western powers had introduced Christianity, and had propagated it among the inhabitants, showing partiality to its followers. A change in consciousness began in the

¹⁶² Don Peter. *Catholic Church in Sri Lanka: A History in Outline, the British Period*: <http://xoomer.virgilio.it/alperera/slindex.html>

¹⁶³ Don Peter. *Catholic Church in Sri Lanka: A History in Outline, the British Period*:

¹⁶⁴ Perera, “Buddhism in Sri Lanka” (2007) under the section “Christian Missionary Activities,”

Sinhalese community at that time as a result of this propaganda. Moffett affirms that the origin of the Buddhist renaissance in late 1820s was a response to the printing and distribution of Christian pamphlets and posters, such as “Why I Am not a Buddhist,” by the Methodist Robert Clough.¹⁶⁵ As a result of this, Buddhist leadership began to employ the same strategy of building Buddhist schools and printing educational and persuasive literature, at first merely endorsing Buddhism, but later vilifying Christianity.¹⁶⁶

In response to the conversion efforts, the Buddhist monks made attempts to contest the opinions of the Christian preachers with little effect.¹⁶⁷ Finally, in 1860, a young novice monk named Mohottiwatte Gunaananda came forward to challenge the missionaries in an open debate. This novice was well educated in Christian scriptures as well as Buddhist teachings. The purpose of the debate was for the Buddhists and the Christians speakers to present their beliefs, and then challenge each other to defend their positions. Each attempted to demonstrate the fallacies of the other’s beliefs. They had three public debates; the final one took place in Panadura in 1873. The novice monk argued well, debunking the misconceptions of the Christian speakers, in such a way that it aroused vigour and zeal among the Buddhist to work for the revival of their former greatness.¹⁶⁸ In the end, he triumphed, defeating the Christian clergy. The Buddhists had won a victory. This was the Buddhist re-awakening. A newspaper account of the success of the Panadura debate captured the attention of the American Colonel Henry Olcott. Impressed by the event and attracted to Buddhism, he traveled to Sri Lanka with his wife in 1880 to receive first-hand knowledge of the religion.

¹⁶⁵ Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 342.

¹⁶⁶ W. J. T. Small, ed., *A History of the Methodist Church in Ceylon 1814-1964* (Colombo: Wesley Press, 1964), 74-77, cited in Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 342.

¹⁶⁷ Perera, “Buddhism in Sri Lanka” under the section “Mohottiwatte Gunaananda Thera and the Buddhist Re-awakening.”

¹⁶⁸ Perera, *Buddhism in Sri Lanka*.

Colonel Henry Olcott's guidance and support of the Buddhist monks and lay leaders lead, in 1880, to the founding of the Theosophical Society for the promotion of the welfare of the Buddhists in Sri Lanka. Colonel Olcott remained in Sri Lanka to inspire Sinhalese Buddhists so that they could redefine their own tradition and respond to what they perceived to be the destructive effects of increasing numbers of Christian missionaries.¹⁶⁹

Anagarika Dharmapala (1864–1933), the founding father of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism, had attended Christian schools and disliked the negative way in which Buddhism was portrayed there. He worked with Olcott and the Venerable Kikkaduwe Sumangala to establish Buddhist missions throughout the world. Dharmapala had affirmed that “with Buddhism Ceylon shall yet become the beacon light of Religion to the World.”¹⁷⁰ His words emulated Jesus' proclamation that his followers would be “the light of the world...” (Matthew 5: 14)¹⁷¹ Samaranayake states that this religious restoration during the British period had turned out to be a success for creating communal identities instead of laying the groundwork for building the nation.¹⁷²

Sumangala, Dharmapala and Olcott focused on safeguarding Buddhism as a state religion. Dharmapala devoted most of his energies to fortifying ancient sites in the Island and abroad. Olcott also focused on promoting Buddhism as a communal religion, venturing to create a Buddhist education system and the Theosophical Society. The spiritual aspect of Buddhism,

¹⁶⁹ R. A. L. H. Gunnawardena, “Buddhist nationalism and religious violence in Sri Lanka.” under “The Misdirected Trajectory of 19th Century Sri Lankan Buddhism”: <http://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/ngier/slrvt.htm>

¹⁷⁰ Anagarika Dharmapala, *Return to Righteousness: A Collection of Speeches, Essays and Letters of the Anagarika Dharmapala*, ed., Ananda Guruge (Colombo: Government Press, 1965), 512, cited in L. Gunawardena. “Buddhist Nationalism and Religious Violence in Sri Lanka” Under the section Misdirected Trajectory of 19th Century Sri Lankan Buddhism: <http://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/ngier/slrvt.htm>

¹⁷¹ Anagarika Dharmapala, *Return to Righteousness: A Collection of Speeches, Essays and Letters of the Anagarika Dharmapala*, ed., Ananda Guruge.

¹⁷² Sajeeva Samaranayake. “Understanding the Sinhala Buddhist doctrine of ‘Holding On,’” under the section “Loss of Culture, Civilization and Morality”: <http://groundviews.org/2013/07/25/understanding-the-sinhala-buddhist-doctrine-of-holding-on>

however, was neglected. According to Samaranayake, this spiritual component remains largely imperceptible.¹⁷³ Though Buddhism in Sri Lanka continues to attract people from near and far, attracted by the impressive number of external representations of the faith, such as sacred sites and sacred objects, including the Tooth Relic, dharma, as an authentic internal experience needs to be emphasized.¹⁷⁴ The essence of Buddhism is compassion, kindness, and non-violence, and it is this that needs to be practiced over the observing of rituals. By living this way and fulfilling the noble truths, one is truly following Buddha and his teachings.

Other events apart from the Buddhist resurgence occurred on the political level. Universal Adult Franchise was introduced for all Ceylonese under the Donoughmore Constitution in 1931.¹⁷⁵ Plantation Tamils were also granted the right to vote like all other Ceylonese. The Donoughmore Constitution was a document that offered Sri Lankans “training for self-government” although the ultimate responsibility for legislative approval remained with the British.¹⁷⁶ Certain key measures were neglected, such as the recognition of multiethnic identities, legal protection for group and individual rights and the transference of power to several provinces. Committees were formed to perform executive duties; however, this system failed to develop national political parties. The Sinhalese nationalism ascended once again, reinstating Buddhism as a majority religion. The Great Council of the Sinhalese established by Bandaranaike in 1937 was a powerful supporter of this growing nationalism. Other groups also

¹⁷³ Sajeeva Samaranayake, “Understanding the Sinhala Buddhist doctrine of ‘Holding On,’” under the section “Loss of Culture, Civilization and Morality,”

¹⁷⁴ S. Makenthiran, “Plantation Tamils: The Oppressed People of Sri Lanka” posted November 2004. <http://www.sangam.org/articles/view2/?uid=653>

⁵⁸ Donoughmore Constitution, accessed on January 23, 2016 at <http://countrystudies.us/sri-lanka/19.htm>

¹⁷⁶ “The British in Sri Lanka,”: <http://www.lankalibrary.com/geo/British/history4.htm>

formed, such as Burgher Political Association in 1938, the Ceylon Indian Congress in 1939, and the All Ceylon Tamil Congress in 1944.¹⁷⁷

To summarize, the early events under the British, such as the development of the Christian educational system as well as the pre-eminent role Christians were allowed to take in the governmental sector, created an atmosphere of favouritism and competitiveness. The Buddhist leadership reacted to re-claim the prestige and influence of their religion. Under the leadership of Ven. Sumangala, Dharmapala and Olcott, a Buddhist revival occurred. It is interesting that the Buddhists mimetically adopted an evangelical style modeled on Christian evangelism. Initiatives in the political sphere under the Donoughmore Constitution began to shape the political structure of Sri Lanka and would have a significant impact on the future.

3.4 Significant Political, Social and Religious Events After Independence (1948–1983)

Before a discussion of the period of independence, it is important to examine another minority group in Sri Lanka, the South Indian labourers, who although integral to the wealth of the country were marginalized. These workers, Plantation Tamils as they are known, were introduced by the British at the beginning of the nineteenth century to work on the coffee and tea plantations or estates. Often with false expectations of what awaited them, they arrived in groups of interrelated families. Hence they kept their natural cultural identity on the estates where they worked.¹⁷⁸ They were Hindus who while they spoke the same language as the Sri Lankan Tamils and the two communities both traced their cultural identity to southern India, were not accepted by the older Sri Lankan Tamils. These labourers toiled on the coffee, tea, rubber and coconut plantations to make Ceylon prosperous under grueling and inhuman conditions, and they

¹⁷⁷ “The British in Sri Lanka,”

¹⁷⁸ “The British in Sri Lanka”: <http://www.lankalibrary.com/geo/British/history4.htm>

continue to do so today. As a social worker and religious educator, I have first-hand knowledge of these labourers, having lived on an estate and witnessed their hardship and difficult surroundings. They are an oppressed people, without hope or aspirations for the future. This is significant from the point of view of ethnonationalism and the establishment of an intra-Tamil hegemonic structure, which I explain in Chapter 4.

Regardless of the deprivation, under the British, they were treated as equals in the eyes of the law. In the 1920s, two members of the Plantation Tamil community were appointed to the legislative council, and in 1924, their distinctive identity was recognized in the constitution, separate from the Sri Lankan Tamils and the Sinhalese.¹⁷⁹ Sri Lankan Tamils of the north-east, of native origin, have profited by their existence by including them in their community for political benefit,¹⁸⁰ but in truth have never accepted the idea of kinship with them. Although they received the right to vote along with the rest of the country in the 1920s, at independence in 1948, one of the first acts of the Sinhalese government was to disenfranchise them: 1,000,000 people, who had contributed to the wealth of the country for more than a century, became non-citizens. They have been neglected by both sides.

In 1947, when the British announced that India was to become independent, Ceylon demanded its independence as well, and the British agreed. On February 4, 1948, Ceylon became a new state. Wijemanne observes that Ceylon gained independence not because of a swelling of a popular movement, but through mediation between the British government and the anglicized middle-class elite including both Sinhala and Tamil professionals. Without any nationalistic

¹⁷⁹ The British in Sri Lanka”: <http://www.lankalibrary.com/geo/British/history4.htm>

¹⁸⁰ In the census of 1824, the Ceylonese Tamils formed 18% of the population, but in the 1946 census, they numbered only 11% while the Plantation Tamils formed 12%. The Tamil-speaking Muslims comprised 6%. The Sinhalese however represent 69% of the population. Ratnajeevan H. Hoole, “The Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka: The Christian Response and the Nationalist Threat, ”*Dharma Deepika* 2, No. 2, (1996), 122–150: <http://www.egr.msu.edu/~hoole/ChristianReaction.pdf>

mass uprising, freedom was obtained easily by peaceful means.¹⁸¹ Senewiratne remarks that when Ceylon was given independence, the British could have authorised two federal states, one for the Sinhalese and one for the Tamils, since the Tamils were seriously worried about their future under Sinhalese government, but did not ask and were not asked.¹⁸² After independence, it became evident that conflict was developing between the Sinhalese-educated rural elite and the English-educated urban ruling elite. These two groups who had come together under the British were now pulling apart, siding with their own communities and seeking to protect their communitarian interests.¹⁸³

Sandra Marker, in examining the effects of colonization, offers Sri Lanka as an example of how wealth was allocated unequally during the colonial periods, and how this continues to influence ethnic relations today.¹⁸⁴ The contributing factors in intractable violent conflicts lay in favouritism of one group over another, the unbalanced distribution of wealth, the preclusion of democratic governments, and the banning of local participation in governmental decisions. Marker suggests that in order to understand these ethnic conflicts and their causes, it is essential to examine not only the present problems but also the historical factors, most significantly, outcomes of past colonial policies.¹⁸⁵ In the case of Sri Lanka, the first Sinhalese-based government's actions were an indication of how strongly they would react to right the wrongs of recent history.

¹⁸¹ Adrian Wijemanne. *War and Peace in Post-Colonial Ceylon 1948-1991*:

<http://www.tamilnation.co/books/Eelam/adrian.htm>

¹⁸² Brian, Senewiratne. "What the Majority Sinhalese Must Know," *Colombo Telegraph*, April 23, 2016: www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/what-the-majority.

¹⁸³ Ashok K. Behuria. "Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka: Seeking a Transformative Way Out" *Strategic Analysis* 30, No. 1 (2006), 97: http://www.idsa.in/system/files/strategicanalysis_abeheria_.0306pdf.pdf.

¹⁸⁴ Sandra Marker, "Effects of Colonisation." Published on *Beyond Intractability* November (2003): <http://www.beyondintractability.org>

¹⁸⁵ Sandra Marker, "Effects of Colonisation."

After the disenfranchisement of a million Plantation Tamils, the next significant piece of legislation was the introduction of the Official Language Act of 1956—it decreed that Sinhala was to be the only official language. This took away the rights of the Tamil-speaking people to use their language in their working environment, in the court system, and in their communications with state representatives. During the British period, the Tamils had learned English and had prospered as a group, and they were over-represented in universities and public service jobs; this generated resentment among the Sinhalese. The main political parties of the time fostered an atmosphere of fear in the Sinhalese community: fear that their religion, language and culture could be wiped out by the Indian Tamils who were seen as the natural allies of Sri Lankan Tamils. The Tamil Hindus had become more prominent and were now seen as a threat by the Sinhalese. The language issue, among other debates, brought the Sinhalese–Tamil conflict to the vanguard of Sri Lankan politics. Sasanka Perera quotes from The World Bank report:

In terms of the dominant strands of Sinhalese nationalism the Sinhalese language along with the Buddhist religion necessarily had to occupy the pre-eminent position in society. This was perceived to be the only way the glory of ancient Sinhalese civilisation could be revitalised. Even though Tamil has been decreed an official language along with Sinhalese in terms of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution in (1987), the damage caused by the politics of language generally remain unaddressed. Moreover, the vast gap between the official recognition of Tamil as an official language and the practical implementation of the provisions and conditions it entails, is yet to be bridged.¹⁸⁶

The restrictive measures against minorities continued. Independence provided Buddhism the opportunity to recover its lost position, repute and freedom. While achieving this, they also tried to deprive the Christians of whatever privileges they had. In 1960, all the Catholic schools, over 600, had their lands, buildings, and furniture confiscated by the state without any

¹⁸⁶ Sasanka Perera (2001) “*Root Causes of the Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka: A Historical and Socio-political Outline*” (English), Washington, DC: World Bank:
<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/727811468302711738/The-ethnic-conflict-in-Sri-Lanka-a-historical-and-sociopolitical-outline>

compensation. Some of the decisions made by the Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP) government towards the Catholic Church were the result of pressure by the Buddhists. One such decision limited the recruitment of foreign missionaries. Samaranayake observes, “Since Portuguese colonists established the Church in the sixteenth century; it has been associated with colonial intervention.”¹⁸⁷ The work of the Church was able to continue because of the presence of the native clergy.¹⁸⁸ Furthermore, at the request of the government, the Franciscan nuns who worked at the General Hospital in Colombo were removed in 1964 in spite of 70 years of congregational service there. Even in modern times, conversions to Christianity have been opposed by Buddhists as being carried out by unethical means.¹⁸⁹

Since the 1970s, admission to higher education has been ethnicized.¹⁹⁰ A new “standardisation” policy was implemented whereby “the minimum entry requisites for a Tamil student were higher than for a Sinhalese medium student.”¹⁹¹ Jayawardena comments that this was unfair; the impression was that the state not only intentionally diminished the prospects for the Tamil youth in government service, but also hindered educational opportunities in the fields of medicine and engineering.¹⁹² In 1971 a “radical ideology” advocated by the Janatha Vimukti Peramuna (JVP)—the People’s Liberation Front—was implemented, and there was a concerted

¹⁸⁷ Sajeeva Samaranayake, “Understanding the Sinhala Buddhist Doctrine of ‘Holding On’ “*Groundviews*” (July 25, 2013).

¹⁸⁸ Don Peter. *Catholic Church in Sri Lanka: A History in Outline, the British Period*. (Colombo: Sri Lanka, 1996).

¹⁸⁹ Ratnajeevan H. Hoole, “The Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka: The Christian Response and the Nationalist Threat” *Dharma Deepika* 2, No. 2, (1996), 122–150.

¹⁹⁰ Sasanka, Perera. “Root Causes of the Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka” *Tamil Guardian*, June 24, 2014: <http://tamilguardian.com/content/root-causes-ethnic-conflict-sri-lanka?articleid=1609>.

¹⁹¹ Sunil, Bastian. “University Admission and the National Question in Ethnicity and Social Change,” 1985, cited in Kumari Jayawardhana, “Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka and Regional Security,” (1987): <http://www.infolanka.com/org/srilanka/issues/kumari.html>

¹⁹² Jayawardhana, “Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka and Regional Security.” Under the section “Political Reform”: <http://www.infolanka.com/org/srilanka/issues/kumari.html>

effort to destroy non-Sinhalese culture in the country.¹⁹³ In response, the youth movements of the Tamil separatist parties formed radical cells. A power struggle ensued amongst the separatist groups, leading to factions; one such faction was the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which had support from the government of the Tamil Nadu state in neighbouring India.¹⁹⁴

Ashok Behuria, from the Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis (IDSA), describes how in 1972, a new republican constitution excluded section 29 of the Soulbury Constitution, which had given minorities the right to exercise their faith in their own way, and declared Buddhism the state religion.¹⁹⁵ In addition, the standardisation policy in education enabled a greater percentage of Sinhalese students than Tamil students to attend universities. The state also initiated a policy of population redistribution, reallocating some of the Sinhalese population into the area known as the Dry Zone, which the Tamils claimed as part of their homeland. It was specifically included by the separatist Tamil movements as a part of their territory. However, the Sinhalese also felt that they had a right to that land. Patrick Peebles explains:

The issue has intensified conflict because the colonization of the Dry Zone evokes not only the Sinhalese ethnic myths that idealize the prosperity and simple piety of the ancient Sinhalese but also the ones that exaggerate the hostility of the Tamils, who they believed threatened the very existence of Buddhism and eventually drove the Sinhalese from the Dry Zone.¹⁹⁶

Behuria is of the opinion that the rise of Tamil militancy in the 1970s happened as a response to such policies.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹³ Rayan, Walkiewicz and Kurt Brockman. "Ethnic Conflict and the Impact on the Dry Zone of Sri Lanka" *CCE Case Studies*, No. 123, (Jan 2004).

¹⁹⁴ Walkiewicz and Brockman. "Ethnic Conflict and the Impact on the Dry Zone of Sri Lanka."

¹⁹⁵ Ashok K. Behuria. "Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka: Seeking a transformative way out." *Strategic Analysis* 30, no. 1 (2006): 19.

¹⁹⁶ Patrick Peebles, "Colonization and Ethnic Conflict in the Dry Zone of Sri Lanka," *Journal of Asian Studies*. February (1990) 32, cited in Walkiewicz and Brockman, "Ethnic Conflict and the Impact on the Dry Zone of Sri Lanka" *ICE Case Studies*, no, 123, (2004).

¹⁹⁷ Behuria, "Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka," 100.

The journalist Jeyaraj adds that these political decisions also resulted in disturbing, large-scale mob violence against the Tamils during the years 1956, 1958, 1977, 1981 and 1983. The worst and most ruthless instance of anti-Tamil violence was that of Black July 1983.¹⁹⁸ This violence and destruction broke out in the capital city of Colombo and thousands of Tamils were butchered, burned, or shot to death, after which the violence spread to other parts of the country. The Black July riots and attacks were in response to the ambush and killing of 13 soldiers by the LTTE in the North of Jaffna.

In Jeyaraj's opinion, the Black July violence did not happen spontaneously, but was a planned pogrom. He explains: a "pogrom" is a form of violent riot, accepted or condoned by the state or military authorities, directed towards a particular group, ethnic, religious, or other, and often characterized by killings, and destruction of homes, businesses, property and religious centers.¹⁹⁹ A publication by The International Commission of Jurists observed: "the evidence points clearly to the conclusion that the violence of the Sinhala rioters on the Tamils amounted to acts of genocide."²⁰⁰ The riots manifested a significant change in the development of ethnic politics as peaceful and diplomatic attempts gave way to Tamil militancy.²⁰¹ Many felt that separation was the only sustainable option that remained open to the Tamils on the island.

During the Black July violence, the prime minister's and other senior ministers' official responses on television conveyed apathy. Not a word of sympathy was expressed for the victims

¹⁹⁸ D. B. S. Jeyaraj, "Anatomy of an Anti-Tamil Pogrom: Thirty-second Anniversary of Black July 1983": <http://dbsjeyaraj.com/dbsj/archives/23154>

¹⁹⁹ Jeyaraj, "Anatomy of an Anti-Tamil Pogrom: Thirty-second Anniversary of Black July 1983": <http://dbsjeyaraj.com/dbsj/archives/23154>

²⁰⁰ "Anatomy of a Pogrom." *Tamil Guardian*, July 29, 2006: <http://www.tamilguardian.com/content/anatomy-pogrom?articleid=735>

²⁰¹ Amarnath Amarasingam. "Black July: Remembering the 1983 Riots in Sri Lanka," *The Huffington Post*, July 23, 2011: http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/amarnath-amarasingam/black-july-riots-sri-lanka-1983_b_897591.html

of the violence.²⁰² It was a breaking point in the contemporary history of the Sri Lanka. Conversely, it awakened the conscience of many Sinhala people. Certainly, many fortunate Tamils escaped danger because of the courageous protection extended by their Sinhala friends. Some Christian clergy, notably the Anglican Bishop of Kurunegala, Rt. Rev. Lakshman Wickremasinghe, and Methodist Church President Rev. Soma Perera, reached out to the Tamils to make amends.²⁰³ Many a survivor story speaks of the random acts of kindness provided by some in the Sinhalese community. As one Sinhalese individual recalled recently: “I was completely shattered for months (I was actually hospitalized for exhaustion) after running around transporting my friends and unknown Tamil-speaking families to safe places. We had nearly 15 people in our house.”²⁰⁴ I have heard accounts similar to this about the Black July riot in the course of my research field work, of Tamils, on the one hand, hiding from Sinhalese thugs, on the other hand being offered refuge by Sinhalese strangers.

In summary, Behuria asserts that the democratic experiment of the post-colonial years was characterized by ethnic conflict, beginning with the Sinhalese majority governments taking steps to correct the over-representation of Tamils in the government and administration.²⁰⁵ According to Jaywardhana, an additional result was “also of increasing the access of the Sinhala-educated to prestigious jobs.”²⁰⁶ These were attempts to redress inequalities under colonialism, but minority rights suffered in efforts to safeguard Buddhism and the Sinhalese language and culture. Over time, Tamils were gradually deprived of privileges, rights and opportunities.

²⁰² Jeyaraj. “Anatomy of an Anti-Tamil Pogrom: Thirty-Second Anniversary of Black July 1983”

²⁰³ Jeyaraj. “Anatomy of an Anti-Tamil Pogrom: Thirty-Second Anniversary of Black July 1983”

²⁰⁴ Amarasingam. “Black July: Remembering the 1983 Riots in Sri Lanka”: http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/amarnath-amarasingam/black-july-riots-sri-lanka-1983_b_897591.html

²⁰⁵ Behuria. “Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka,” 98:
http://www.idsa.in/system/files/strategicanalysis_abehuria_.0306pdf.pdf.

²⁰⁶ Jaywardhana. “Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka and Regional Security,” (1987):
<http://www.infolanka.com/org/srilanka/issues/kumari.html>

Policies were imposed that limited their access to employment and education. These measures lead to the creation of Tamil separatist movements and incidences of anti-Tamil violence, which eventually culminated in the Black July riots. In the years that followed, these events contributed to the final eruption of violence, the civil war and its aftermath, which will be examined in the next section.

3.5 Civil War (1983–2009)

After the Black July riots in Colombo, thousands of Tamils who had escaped the killings left the country or fled to Tamil-populated areas in the north or east of the country. Thousands more had to take shelter in refugee camps. The political response to the riots was to create a sixth amendment to the constitution, which prohibits the violation of the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka. Any support for a separate state within Sri Lanka was banned, and all parliamentary members were required to take a pledge of loyalty “to the unitary state of Sri Lanka.”²⁰⁷ The Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), the only political voice for the Tamil community, refused to take the oath, and left the country for Tamil Nadu in India. Faced with their absence, the LTTE began to fill the vacuum.²⁰⁸ The LTTE had appeared, under the leadership of Velupillai Prabhakaran, as a brutal and highly effective fighting force. They used suicide bombings and other attacks to dreadful effect in Colombo and elsewhere in the 1990s. They killed high-profile figures, including Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Sri Lankan President Premadasa.

Incidents of killings and counter-killings were reported on a regular basis. The long-term outcome of the 1983 riots was the Sri Lankan civil war, during which approximately 100,000

²⁰⁷ Amarasingam. “Black July”: http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/amarnath-amarasingam/black-july-riots-sri-lanka-1983_b_897591.html

²⁰⁸ Amarasingam, “Black July”

people died according to estimates of the United Nations,²⁰⁹ and hundreds of thousands of people were internally displaced or fled to neighbouring countries.

In 2002, the Norwegian peace mission brokered a ceasefire agreement between the government and the LTTE. However, key differences in opinion and the refusal to compromise ended the peace process. The Sri Lankan government formally pulled out of the ceasefire agreement in 2008, and fighting resumed between the two groups until 2009. Here is a summary given by the Genocide Watch recounting events from the last months of the conflict:

Sri Lankan troops committed war crimes during the final phase of the Tamil rebellion from January–May 2009. The Tamil Tigers aggravated the atrocities by using civilians as human shields. A recent report of an investigative panel of the United Nations confirmed that the Sri Lankan troops deliberately targeted civilians, hospitals and aid workers, arbitrarily executed prisoners, and committed mass rape, all contrary to the Geneva Conventions which have been ratified by Sri Lanka. From January–May 2009 at least 7,934 persons died, of which 550 were children younger than 10, but real figures probably amount to tens of thousands of victims—most sources speak of approximately 40,000 casualties.²¹⁰

As seen, both the government and the LTTE committed atrocities. To this day, no one has been charged with war crimes, and the Sinhalese government refuses to take responsibility for its actions. Genocide Watch declared, “Instead, the Sri Lankan government has relied upon one of the typical forms of denial: substituting reconciliation efforts that do not address the crimes committed on the denial of genocide.”²¹¹ After twenty six years of brutal armed conflict in which thousands lost their lives and thousands more became refugees in their own country, the civil war ended in a government victory.

3.6 Post-war (2009) to the Present

²⁰⁹ Genocide Watch, March 12, 2012: <http://www.genocidewatch.org/srilanka.html>

²¹⁰ Genocide Watch, March 12, 2012.

²¹¹ Genocide Watch, March 12, 2012.

Although the civil war officially ended in 2009, forced disappearances, random arrests and physical extortion, including murder and torture, of Tamils and journalists continue.²¹² Because of these abuses, Human Rights Watch has called upon the British government not to deport Tamils to Sri Lanka.²¹³ In an interview, Jehan Perera, Executive Director of the Colombo-based National Peace Council (NPC), reports that after six years of war and genocide, the people are still wounded, and in the north the presence of the military still interferes in the lives of the civilian population. Most of the lands that belonged to the Tamils were confiscated and used as military camps. The cases of the thousands of civilians who went missing or who died during the war have yet to be investigated. Consequently, the Tamil people from the north and the east continue to suffer physically, emotionally and psychologically.²¹⁴ The people of Sri Lanka would like to move forward, but it is a challenge and a struggle to overcome the past, to obtain justice, accountability, to forgive and to reconcile.

In this section, I shall briefly describe some of the significant changes that took place after the end of civil war. In March 2012, the UN Human Rights Council approved a resolution insisting that Sri Lanka investigate war crimes committed during the final stage of the conflict.²¹⁵ The Lesson Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) report was heavily criticized by the international human rights group.²¹⁶ In November 2013, a Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) was held in Sri Lanka, and the leaders of Canada, India and Mauritius

²¹² Genocide Watch, March 12, 2012. <http://www.genocidewatch.org/srilanka.html>

²¹³ Human Rights Watch, "UK: Halt Deportation of Tamils to Sri Lanka" February 25, 2012.

²¹⁴ Jehan Perera. Interview by DW. January 13, 2015: <http://www.dw. /en/catholics-build-bridges-between-sri-lankas-ethnic-groups/a-18187563>

²¹⁵ BBC News, "Sri Lanka Profile," September 12, 2016: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-12004081>

²¹⁶ Human Rights Watch, "Sri Lanka: Report fails to Advance Accountability," December 16, 2011: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2011/12/16/sri-lanka-report-fails-advance-accountability>

refused to attend because of Sri Lanka's human rights record.²¹⁷ In 2015, a new government was elected under Maithripala Sirisena in a surprise victory²¹⁸ and in 2016, for the first time, the Sri Lankan government admitted that 65,000 Tamils went missing during the decades-long civil war. It also declared that Sri Lanka would become demilitarised by 2018, and see the end of the military's involvement in civilian life.²¹⁹ Recently, the U.S. declared that it is willing to assist the government of Sri Lanka in its efforts to "broaden and accelerate economic growth, develop democratic institutions, and promote the reconciliation of multi-ethnic and religious communities in Sri Lanka."²²⁰

In 2015, Fr. Emmanuel, the president of the Global Tamil Forum²²¹ was interviewed by Thomas Kaiser, to explain his assessment of the situation after the election of the new president. He observed that the new government had promoted constructive changes in the country. Some of the land taken from Tamils during the war had been restored, and the national anthem was now allowed to be sung in Tamil. For the first time in over thirty years, the government appointed a Tamil as parliamentary opposition leader. The Tamil National Alliance (TNA) now has 16 seats in the national assembly. The fact that the new president invited me to Sri Lanka, to help in the reconciliation process is a significant sign that the new President is interested in building a relationship with the Tamils. On Independence Day, on February 4, 2016, the

²¹⁷ Human Rights Watch, "Sri Lanka: Report fails to Advance Accountability," December 16, 2011:

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2011/12/16/sri-lanka-report-fails-advance-accountability>

²¹⁸ BBC News, "Profile: Sri Lanka's Maithripala Sirisena" August 14, 2015,:

<http://www.bbc.news.com/news/world-asia-30708899>

²¹⁹ BBC News, "Sri Lanka Profile" September, 12, 2016.

²²⁰ U.S. Department of State, U.S. Relations with Sri Lanka, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, April 6, 2016. <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5249.htm>.

²²¹ Global Tamil Forum (GTF) is an organization created after the end of the civil war, dedicated to justice and non-violence, and to a political settlement of the Tamil nationalist question through dialogue. It is the largest Tamil diaspora organization in the world. <http://www.globaltamilforum.org/media.aspx>.

president said for the first time, “We had won the war, but it was a cruel war.” It was a courageous act on the part of a Sinhalese president to say that to the Sinhalese people.²²²

The pope’s visit in 2015 conveyed hope and healing to the Sri Lankan people. Upon his arrival at Colombo airport, he said: “The process of healing also needs to include the pursuit of truth, not for the sake of opening old wounds, but rather as a necessary means of promoting justice, healing and unity.”²²³ Marking the occasion, Perera, Director of the National Peace Council (NPC) affirmed in an interview that the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka is comprised of just about equal numbers of Sinhalese and Tamils, and because they share and practice a common religion, they can play the role of religious peace builders and have a better prospect to engage with one another.²²⁴

From what I have heard and observed since the end of the civil war in 2009, fear is the one thing that characterizes the climate among the general population, church leaders, and the government. Elected officials and ordinary citizens are afraid to express their honest opinion because of the consequences they may face; yet it is necessary to speak out. Regarding this issue, the foreign minister Samaraweera said,

Government leaders plan a major effort to build support in coming months. The first step would be to raise awareness among the Sinhalese about what really happened in the civil war, something they have been largely shielded from.²²⁵

When Maithripala Sirisena was elected president in 2015, a new relationship was established between the United States and Sri Lanka. Under this U.S. – Sri Lankan partnership,

²²² Emmanuel. S.J., “The Identity of Sri Lanka Must Be Redefined” *Current Concerns* No. 26 (October, 2015); <http://sangam.org/the-identity-sri-lanka-redefined>

²²³ Pope Francis greeted the Sri Lankans upon his arrival at Colombo airport January 13, 2015.

²²⁴ Jehan Perera. Interview by DW, January 13, 2015. <http://www.dw.com/en/catholics-build-bridges-between-sri-lankas-ethnic-groups/a-18187563>

²²⁵ Geeta Anand and Dharisha Bastians, “Can a New President Lead Sri Lanka Into an Era of Peace?”: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/13/world/asia/sri-lanka-maithripala-sirisena.html>

the U.S. urged the Sri Lankan government to deal with some controversial issues in relation to democratic reform. One among them was that the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) supported the federal system for the Tamils, whereas the Sinhalese Nationalists supported the unitary system. Commenting on this, Lisa Curtis, a Senior Research Fellow at the Heritage Foundation, giving testimony before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia and Pacific on the subject of Sri Lanka's Democratic Transition, said:

Steps toward devolution—which lie at the heart of the ethnic question—will be impossible unless the government engages in a major campaign to build public support for the constitutional changes, especially among the Sinhalese population in the south... There is tremendous resistance from nationalists, who still hold a large chunk of parliamentary seats, to the idea of international judges determining the fate of Sri Lankan military officials.²²⁶

Fr. Emmanuel was asked in an interview: what contribution could the Tamils make to the reconciliation process? His response was that the Tamils must explain to the Sinhalese population the truth about their struggles and their suffering. In the past, Tamils have only communicated with their own through Tamil newspapers. They have never appeared in any Sinhalese or English newspaper, so the majority of the population have never heard what their needs are.²²⁷ It is time for the Tamils to communicate with the Sinhalese, either through newspapers, radio or other media. However, they must also have the freedom to do this and, given the harassment of journalists, fear remains a prohibiting factor.

This fear exists in the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka. In the late 1970s the Church was actually split between the Tamil-speaking Church in the north and a Sinhalese-speaking Church in the south. Deborah John affirms that “today the Church remains divided and some Tamil

²²⁶ Lisa Curtis, “Sri Lanka’s Democratic Transition: A New Era for the U.S.–Sri Lanka Relationship,” June 9, 2016, <https://democrats-foreignaffairs.house.gov/legislation/hearings/sri-lanka-s-democratic-transition-new-era-us-sri-lanka-relationship>

²²⁷ Emmanuel, “The Identity of Sri Lanka Must Be Redefined,” *Current Concerns* No. 26 (October 2015): <http://sangam.org/the-identity-sri-lanka-redefined>

Catholic leaders report feeling fundamentally betrayed and abandoned.”²²⁸ This tension between the two groups can be found even in its leadership.²²⁹ The Sinhalese bishops have supported the government; whereas before the civil war, the Tamil bishops defended the LTTE²³⁰ and they continue to support the Tamil victims of the conflict. In Colombo, the Roman Catholic authority has criticized international attempts to intervene in Sri Lanka’s internal affairs, referring to the diplomatic pressure to implement the LLRC recommendations as “undue meddling in the sovereignty and integrity of Sri Lanka.”²³¹ On the other hand, a Tamil bishop and thirty other clergy from the north sent a letter to the UNHRC affirming the importance of an international monitoring system to address liability issues not dealt with by the LLRC. Kshama further states:

Christians are called upon to speak up against injustice and oppression, to see beyond colour and creed; not to unite to give the oppressor a free ride. How does the Church hierarchy in Sri Lanka reconcile itself with the manner the government conducts itself and the stand she takes to support it?²³²

This internal discord among the Catholics in Sri Lanka also impacts the diaspora Roman Catholic communities in Toronto. Though they are aware of the tensions, many deny the fact that there is division among the Sinhalese and Tamil Catholics through fear and loyalty to the Church. During the welcoming ceremony in Colombo, the Pope said:

It is no easy task to overcome the bitter legacy of injustices, hostility and mistrust left by the conflict. It can only be done by overcoming evil with good and by cultivating those virtues which foster reconciliation, solidarity and peace.²³³

²²⁸Deborah John, “Sri Lanka – a Divided Church in a Divided Polity: The Brokerage of a Struggling Institution,” *Contemporary South Asia* 20, no. 1 (2012) 77–90:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09584935.2011.646076>

²²⁹ Ranawana Kshama, “Catholic Church in Sri Lanka is Deeply Divided on the Proposed Resolution at the UNHRC, March 2012”: <http://dbsjeyaraj.com/dbsj/archives/4851>

²³⁰ Many Tamils, including Catholic priests and nuns, supported the LTTE before the war. Later on when the LTTE used violence, they withdrew their support.

²³¹ Kshama, “Catholic Church in Sri Lanka Is Deeply Divided on the Proposed Resolution at the UNHRC”

²³² Kshama, “Catholic Church in Sri Lanka is Deeply Divided on the Proposed Resolution at the UNHRC”

²³³ Mary Rezac. “Pope Francis: Sri Lankans Can Learn to Live As One Family” *Catholic News Agency*, January 12, 2015: <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/pope-francis-sri-lankans-can-learn-to-live-as-one-family-36353>

According to J. Perera, regardless of whether an investigation comprises an international inquiry or an internal Truth and Reconciliation Commission, it cannot achieve success unless it has the support of different ethnic communities in Sri Lanka. A hybrid national inquiry created according to international standards could be an acceptable compromise.

In his article “Understanding the Sinhala Buddhist Doctrine of ‘Holding On’” Samaranayake, a Buddhist, summarises a philosophical shift that must take place before any fundamental change can achieve a lasting effect.

There is no merit in living in a dead past; and no virtue in the unnecessary suffering created by this stubborn act of ‘holding on’ to narrow identities of class, caste, family, race, and religion. Under the cover of these convenient umbrellas we are seeing the final devastation of the free and sovereign individual self and witnessing the emergence of a stupid, shameless arrogant ego. This is the same for all communities and all religions . . . The war was the result of an empty, heartless self. Post-war reconstruction is the spiritual reconstruction of this same self—a transformation of our collective shadow into a shining spirit.²³⁴

Conclusion

The Catholic Church has played a decisive role in Sri Lanka since its introduction under the Portuguese. Through mass conversions and political or material favours issued to converts, Catholicism has been a marker for success and acceptance while Buddhism suffered. A division between Sinhalese and Tamil became a division between Buddhism and Christianity. Under the Dutch, Roman Catholicism was banned and the Sinhalese were favoured. Under the British, the Tamil community was favoured and the Catholic Church was used to establish schools and other institutions. The Buddhist revival in the late nineteenth century re-established some of the prominence of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism, which has shaped governmental attitudes since

²³⁴ Sajeeva Samaranayake. “Understanding the Sinhala Buddhist Doctrine of ‘Holding On.’” (2003)
<http://groundviews.org/2013/07/25/understanding-the-sinhala-buddhist-doctrine-of-holding-on>

*Transforming the Deep-rooted Conflicts between Diaspora Sinhalese and Tamil Roman Catholics in Toronto:
A Forgiveness Framework Based on the Theology of Miroslav Volf*

independence. The ethnic division between Tamils and Sinhalese, which colours most of the Sri Lankan political landscape, is also perpetuated within the Sri Lankan Catholic Church.

Chapter 4

Sri Lankan Religious Conflict as Deep-rooted Conflict

In the previous chapter, I discussed the practical theological interpretation of “What is going on” in the Sri Lankan context. In this chapter, Osmer’s second core task of practical theological interpretation “Why is this going on?” will be developed. The role of religion, as it emerged already during the early history of Sri Lanka, has been identified as one of the main causes of the *problematique*. The pairing of religion and ethnic identity was a particularly potent agent in fuelling the antagonism between Tamils and Sinhalese. The expression and consequence of this dysfunction took the form of a deep-rooted conflict. This chapter explores other contributing causes of this deep-rooted conflict. The concept of deep-rooted conflict will be examined first, followed by the discussion of the role of Christianity in causing the deep-rooted conflict in Sri Lanka.

The chapter is divided into four parts. First, deep-rooted conflicts will be explained as well as the framework for understanding the structure of violence and the elements of deep-rooted conflict. Second, the relationship between deep-rooted conflicts and human identity needs, and how it has influenced the Sri Lankan churches, will be explored. Third, scapegoat function, hegemonic structures, ethnonationalism, self–other dynamics, mimetic desire and rivalry, and mimetic structures of violence will be introduced. These concepts have all impacted Sri Lankan society during the colonial period and since. Fourth, mimetic structures of blessing will be presented.

4.1 Deep-rooted Conflict

The term ‘deep-rooted’ implies that the conflict is protracted and intractable. Burgess and Burgess define intractable conflicts “as those that lie at the frontier of the field—the conflicts

that stubbornly seem to elude resolution, even when the best available techniques are applied.”²³⁵

Beyond intractability, the Conflict Information Consortium of the University of Colorado agrees that some conflicts are difficult to deal with,²³⁶ for instance the Israeli–Palestinian struggle, the Sinhalese–Tamil conflicts in Sri Lanka, the genocide of the Tutsis in Rwanda, and race conflict in South Africa. According to Louis Kriesberg, those who are engaged in this type of conflict are incapable of resolving the conflict by themselves or with the help of others. The reason is that coming out of the situation costs more than staying in.²³⁷

Burgess and Burgess describe that the outcomes of intractable conflicts are numerous, causing devastating damage. Human lives are cruelly affected—families are separated, relationships are broken, and property is destroyed. These conflicts generate deep social, emotional and psychological effects such as resentments, fear, and guilt. While the conflict exists, it is challenging to attend to these emotions and after the crisis is over it is difficult to heal them.²³⁸ This is what happened in the civil war in Sri Lanka. Parents who witnessed their children raped and killed, wives who saw their husbands tortured and killed live with psychological wounds that have not yet healed and perhaps never will.

According to Burgess and Burgess, it is possible for the parties concerned to take positive action at the grassroots level to minimize the destructive effects and reduce violence.²³⁹ For example during the Black July riots in Sri Lanka in 1983, when the Tamils were tortured and

²³⁵ Burgess, Heidi and Guy M. Burgess, "What Are Intractable Conflicts?," *Beyond Intractability* Eds. Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess, Conflict Information Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder. Posted: (November 2003): <http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/meaning-intractability>

²³⁶ Beyond Intractability Project Conflict Information Consortium, University of Colorado, 2016: <http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/meaning-intractability>

²³⁷ Burgess, Heidi and Guy M. Burgess, "What Are Intractable Conflicts?,"

²³⁸ Burgess, Heidi and Guy M. Burgess, "What Are Intractable Conflicts?,"

²³⁹ Burgess, Heidi and Guy M. Burgess, "What Are Intractable Conflicts?,"

killed by Sinhalese mobs, many Sinhalese Catholics and Buddhists risked their lives to save their Tamil neighbours from the marauding rioters. A few among those who were saved participated in my research seminar; they shared their gratitude and how these experiences had touched them and changed their attitudes towards the Sinhalese people. This kind of personal transformation has been seen recently in post-war countries such as Ireland and Rwanda. For example, in Ireland, a woman whose son was shot by Loyalists went on television to ask that there be no reprisal and that she is willing to forgive those who murdered her son. This courageous and heroic gesture encouraged inter-group peacebuilding.²⁴⁰

Burgess and Burgess maintain that even though intractable conflicts may not be easy to resolve, they are not hopeless. Attempts can be made to try and coexist side by side in spite of antagonism and violence. The willingness to work with the other side fosters understanding and respect even if dissimilarities remain.²⁴¹ Mutual cooperation is still possible, and the two sides can stop the cycle of conflict together.²⁴² In order to achieve workable peace building, an understanding of the causes of deep-rooted conflicts and its psychological aspect are fundamental and necessary.

Vern Neufeld Redekop, an expert on deep-rooted conflict examines and dissects the foundations of this type of intransigent structure of violence, and how it is an impediment to peace.²⁴³ His framework includes: human identity needs, hegemonic structures, ethnonationalism, self-other dynamics and mimetic theory.

²⁴⁰ Kenneth David Bush, "Cracking Open the Ethnic Billiard Ball: Bringing the Intra-Group Dimension into Ethnic Conflict Studies—with Special Reference to Sri Lanka and Northern Ireland" (Kinston, ON: Queens University, 1995), 14.

²⁴¹ Burgess, Heidi and Guy M. Burgess, "What Are Intractable Conflicts?,"

²⁴² Burgess, Heidi and Guy M. Burgess, "What Are Intractable Conflicts?,"

²⁴³ Vern Neufeld Redekop, *From Violence to Blessing*, 19–29.

Human Needs: Burton's Pioneer Work

John W. Burton identified deep-rooted conflict as a threat to the satisfaction of identity needs.²⁴⁴ Redekop describes identity by needs; they can be human needs, or ontological needs.²⁴⁵ Deep-rooted conflict concerns identity, way of life, meaning, relationship, spirituality and the ability to build and shape the core of one's being. The particular identity of an individual or a group is shaped by the unique satisfiers of human needs.²⁴⁶ In order to understand deep-rooted conflict, first and foremost it is necessary to know what human identity needs are.

Abraham Maslow, one of the founders of humanistic psychology, developed a hierarchy of needs. At the heart of the hierarchy pyramid are the essential basic needs found in nature, such as the need for food, water and shelter; gradually as needs are satisfied, an individual can move up from one level to another, seeking to meet new social, emotional and self-actualizing needs. According to Burton "the needs most salient to an understanding of destructive social conflicts are the needs for identity, recognition, security, and personal development."²⁴⁷ Marie Doucey, an associate in International Security Policy, affirms that these four needs are "universal and nonnegotiable and therefore, should be primarily addressed as a basis for negotiating peace settlements."²⁴⁸ Sandra Marker points out that "human needs theorists argue that one of the primary causes of protracted or intractable conflict is people's unyielding drive to meet their

²⁴⁴ Redekop, *From Violence to Blessing*, 23.

²⁴⁵ Redekop, *From Violence to Blessing*,

²⁴⁶ Redekop, *From Violence to Blessing*,

²⁴⁷ Richard Rubenstein, "Basic Human Needs: The Next Steps in Theory Development" *International Journal of Peace Studies* 6, no. 1 (March 2001): www.gmu.edu/academic/ijps/vol6_1/Rubenstein.htm.

²⁴⁸ John W. Burton, *Conflicts: Human Needs Theory* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990) cited in Marie Doucey, "Understanding the Root Causes of Conflicts: Why it Matters for International Crisis Management" *International Affairs Review* XX, no. 2 (2011): 4.

unmet needs on the individual, group, and societal level.”²⁴⁹ An example would be the civil war in Sri Lanka where the minority Tamils felt that their legitimate identity was denied on both an individual and national level. When human identity needs are not met by the government or any other group, or there is a perception that these needs are under threat, violence can arise and people will do anything to satisfy them. As Burton puts it,

Human needs theory argues [...] that there are certain ontological and genetic needs that will be pursued, and that the socialisation process, if not compatible with such human needs, far from socialising, will lead to frustrations, and to disturbed and anti-social personal and group behaviors. Individuals cannot be socialised into behaviors that destroy their identity and other need goals and therefore, must react against social environments that do this.²⁵⁰

According to Burton, if individuals cannot satisfy their basic human needs within the existing system they will try to create their own radical systems to satisfy them. For example, Sri Lankan Tamils first used non-violent means to attempt to gain a national identity; when that failed, the Tamil youth created an underground movement called the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to satisfy their needs. It is an illustrative reminder of the longer-term consequences of majority groups attempting to marginalise, eliminate, or constrain minorities.²⁵¹ A pioneer in the related field of peace studies, Johan Galtung, has conceptualised “that the more intense the cause of gaps between potential and actual fulfilment of somatic and mental needs, the greater the violence inflicted upon the actors concerned.”²⁵²

²⁴⁹ Sandra Marker, “Unmet Human Needs.” August 2003: <http://www.beyondintractability.org/about/citing-beyond-intractability-resources>

²⁵⁰ John W. Burton, *Deviance, Terrorism and War* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1979), 33 cited in Redekop, *From Violence to Blessing*, 23.

²⁵¹ Dennis J.D. Sandole, “John Burton’s Contribution to Conflict Resolution: A Personal View” *The International Journal of Peace Studies*: http://www.gmu.edu/programs/icar/ijps/vol6_1/Sandole.htm.

²⁵² Johan Galtung, “Violence, Peace and Peace Research” *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no. 3, (1969) 167–191, cited in Sandole, “John Burton’s Contribution to Conflict Resolution”: http://www.gmu.edu/programs/icar/ijps/vol6_1/Sandole.htm

Although there are other theories such as Critical Theory,²⁵³ and Psychoanalysis²⁵⁴ that may have pertinence to my study, I have chosen Needs Theory because one of the pioneers of human needs theory, John Burton, discusses the similarity of the dynamic between needs and conflict. Burton states that when human identity needs “are threatened, people will fight,”²⁵⁵ and this can be applied to all countries where the minority groups’ needs are not met by the governing majority and where civil wars have erupted. Needs Theory has been perceived as a cornerstone in conflict resolution scholarship by Burton and other researchers in the field.²⁵⁶ Basic human needs, such as the need for identity, recognition and security can influence our beliefs, the values we place on them, and the emotional impact of the frustration of those highly valued beliefs.²⁵⁷ Therefore, Needs Theory is a suitable framework for my research.

Following Burton’s Needs Theory, Redekop situates the causes of deep-rooted conflict in unmet human identity needs. The heart of the matter is the abnormality in a relationship between two individuals or groups. Such a relationship is governed by an imitative or mimetic structure of violence, i.e. it is “a relationship that builds up in such way that the parties in the relationship say and do things to harm one another.”²⁵⁸

Human Identity Needs: Redekop’s Framework

Building on Maslow, Needs Theory has evolved with the influence of anthropologists, sociologists and political scientists, to include such needs as security, safety, connectedness,

²⁵³ Agnes Heller, “Can ‘True’ and ‘False’ Needs be Posited?” In Katrin Lederer, ed., *Human Needs: A Contribution to Current Debate*, Cambridge, MA: Oelgeschalger, Gunn, and Hain, 1980.

²⁵⁴ Psychoanalysis, as articulated by Sigmund Freud, Herbert Marcuse and Paul Ricoeur, cited in Laureen Park “Opening the Black Box: Reconsidering Needs Theory through Psychoanalysis and Critical Theory” *International Journal of Peace Studies* 15, no. 1, (2010), 1-21.

²⁵⁵ Redekop, *From Violence to Blessing*, 23.

²⁵⁶ Researchers such as Richard Rubenstein, Mary E. Clark, Oscar Nudler, Dennis Sandole, Johan Galtung.

²⁵⁷ Sandole, “John Burton’s Contribution to Conflict Resolution” *The International Journal of Peace Studies*: http://www.gmu.edu/programs/icar/ijps/vol6_1/Sandole.htm

²⁵⁸ Redekop, *From Violence to Blessing*, 161.

belongingness, love, actualization, recognition, stimulation, meaning in life, freedom, respect and transcendence.²⁵⁹ There is a common understanding that while human needs are universal, their satisfiers depend on the specifics of culture, values and experience. Redekop has organized these needs into five categories needed to achieve an integrated sense of self: meaning, connectedness, security, action, and recognition.²⁶⁰

Oscar Nudler recognises, in his approach to needs theory that he left out one essential need that Viktor Frankl insisted upon: the need for meaning. He describes the need for meaning “as the need which every human being has for building – and living in – a world . . . As with all living beings, the human being requires an environment but with the help of symbolic devices he transforms such an environment into a world.”²⁶¹

Connectedness is related to meaning and consists of our community as we define it. It consists of belonging, community, language, tribe, land and nature. By sharing the same world, members bond with each other. “Language” may have the sense of a particular language used by an identity group, but it can also be used to characterize those with shared experience; for example, victims may feel that those with similar experiences “speak their language” in that they truly understand what they are talking about. Connectedness to land can be historical and also spiritual. Most people have the conception that they belong to the land rather than the other way around. This sense can be expanded to a feeling of connectedness to nature and the earth more generally.

²⁵⁹ Redekop, *From Violence to Blessing*, 32.

²⁶⁰ Redekop, *From Violence to Blessing*, 33–48.

²⁶¹ Oscar Nudler. “On Conflicts and Metaphors: Toward an Extended Rationality,” in *Conflict: Human Needs Theory*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990), 187.

Security needs involve physical, emotional, spiritual, and economic safety. The physical security of an individual consists in having adequate access to food, shelter and clothing, which are basic human needs, and it also implies safety from physical attack. Emotional security is linked to the need for kinship or connectedness. Being part of a community and sharing the language, experiences, feelings and values of that community gives a sense of emotional security. When a country is divided into two ethnic groups, this emotional security is threatened by fear and mistrust on either side.

Action is based on personal authority and the power of choice. It is the freedom to chart and implement a course, to control and influence one's environment and, so, one's destiny. According to Emmanuel Levinas, removing one's power of action is "the worst form of violence.

Violence does not consist so much in injuring and annihilating persons as in interrupting their community, making them play roles in which they no longer recognise themselves, making them betray not only commitments but their own substance, making them carry out actions that will destroy every possibility for action.²⁶²

Forcing someone to act in ways contrary to their values or desires is another means of disempowering them. For example, in countries dominated by colonial powers, the subjugated people have limited opportunities to act in meaningful or decisive ways, to the point where it sometimes becomes difficult to exercise a capacity for initiative even when the condition changes.²⁶³

Finally, the need for recognition includes acknowledgement, appreciation, dignity and self-worth. It is a validation of who one is, what one has achieved or contributed, and of how one

It is the part of the personality which is the fundamental source of the emotions of pride, anger, and shame and is not reducible to desire, on the one hand, or reason on the other.

²⁶² Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 21.

²⁶³ Redekop, *From Violence to Blessing*, 42.

The desire for recognition is the most specifically political part sees the world. According to Fukuyama, when one does not receive recognition, one's self-worth and self-respect [are] wounded, of the human personality, because it is what drives men to want to assert themselves over other men.²⁶⁴

Referring to the Sri Lankan consciousness, it is well known that it is written in the *Mahavamsa* that Buddha dedicated the island to Sinhalese Buddhists for whom this is important by way of recognition. However, it places the other minority groups and their contribution to the nation and its history in a subsidiary position. In the case of the Sri Lankan Tamils, their rights and identity needs have been violated systemically since independence, threatening their need for recognition. At the beginning, legislation was tolerated, then non-violent means were attempted to bring about change. Finally, as Burton predicted, the people organized themselves to fight. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) fought for freedom and independence for their people.

In the above section I have described Redekop's framework of human identity needs. Each category includes other related needs as described in the human needs literature. When these needs are not satisfied, it leads to conflicts. According to Burton, identity needs are even more fundamental than food and shelter: "Individuals are prepared to go to extreme lengths to defy systems in order to pursue their deeply felt needs, even death by suicide bombing or hunger-strikes."²⁶⁵ These identity needs are so fundamental that they could supersede religious beliefs. For example, Buddhist monks who believe in non-violence burned Christian churches; the Sri Lankan Catholic Church, which is supposed to unite the faithful, is divided along ethnic lines.

²⁶⁴ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and The Last Man*, (New York: Avon Books 1993),163.

²⁶⁵ John Burton, *Violence Explained: The Sources of Conflict, Violence and Crime and Their Prevention*, (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997) 19, cited in Sandole, "John Burton's Contribution to Conflict Resolution Theory and Practice": www.gmu.edu/programs/icar/ijps/vol6_1/Sandole.htm

4.2 Identity Needs and Sri Lankan Churches

In this section I shall illustrate how identity needs and religion play a role in the Sri Lankan conflict, particularly with regards to Catholicism.

Meaning

As mentioned above meaning is the most significant of human needs. It includes: insights, root metaphors, justice, paradigms and worlds of meaning. As Nudler describes it,

Personal worlds are to some extent unique. Sometimes the uniqueness is so deeply built-in that they may remain essentially closed to anyone else. . . However, language and culture provide a common framework to which most of the people within its range share a great deal of their worlds.²⁶⁶

Take, for example, how a root metaphor can be unique to individual cultures, nations, organizations, or groups. In Sri Lanka there are four major religions. Each religion has a different root metaphor informing its deepest concepts of how to live a good life. Christians and Muslims use the root metaphor of God-as-person. For Buddhists and Hindus the root metaphor is dharma. The word dharma comes from the Sanskrit and means a path to righteousness. For Hindus, it indicates the moral law of the universe that guides one's life, and is based in spiritual discipline. In Buddhism, it represents cosmic order, and is applied to the teaching of Buddha.

Before Christianity came to Sri Lanka, in spite of their different cultures and languages, Sri Lankans tolerated each other's religious beliefs and lived together. When the Portuguese arrived, and began to convert the Sinhalese Buddhist and Tamil Hindus to Christianity, it gave rise to enmity, competition and rivalry. As Redekop observes, the worlds of meaning collide

²⁶⁶Oscar Nudler, "On conflicts and Metaphors: Toward an Extended Rationality," in *Conflict: Human Needs Theory*, 177.

because of different ways of understanding reality, and create deep-rooted conflict, which is difficult to control.²⁶⁷

The world of meaning also includes the concept of justice. Any injustice experienced is seen as a risk to the satisfiers of the human need for meaning. This need requires communication with others, creating a community of shared values. The human need for meaning relates closely to another need, the need for connectedness.

Connectedness

Deep in our minds and hearts we know that all human beings are connected to one another. We are individuals, with the free will responsible for our own judgments but nonetheless we are part of something larger, the universe or the life force. Connectedness includes belonging, community, language, tribe, land and nature.²⁶⁸ Connectedness is a feeling of belonging to or having kinship with a person or group. When we are connected, we believe that we are not isolated but influence each other and are therefore mindful of protecting and not harming others. Social bonding is an indispensable physiological and psychological need. Those who lack social connection are more vulnerable to ostracism, anxiety, depression, and falling into antisocial behaviours. Connectedness gives people support, gratification, and a sense they belong and have a role to play in society.

In the Sri Lankan context, people often connect with others on an individual level without difficulty. But when it comes to the community level they are divided. The Tamils and the Sinhalese, though they live together, are divided by ethnicity, culture, language and religion. The Tamils are also divided within themselves as Tamils from the north, Tamils from the east and the

²⁶⁷ Redekop, *From Violence to Blessing*, 33.

²⁶⁸ Redekop, *From Violence to Blessing*, 36.

Indian Tamils who work on the tea estates. The Sinhalese are also divided politically. The Roman Catholic Church is also divided. For example, before the Black July riots of 1983, there was only one seminary in Kandy, which both ethnic groups helped form. After the riots, a new seminary was established in the north for the safety of the Tamil seminarians. Similarly, the Holy Family Sisters had one province for the whole congregation before Black July, but after the riots they established a new province in the north. As Burton states, when people's basic needs are menaced, they turned to their group in order to safeguard them.²⁶⁹

Security

The need for security relates to a person's overall welfare, their human rights, and their physical, emotional, spiritual and economic needs. According to Ramashray, for a person, self-identity and security are not two separate or distinct bodies: they presuppose each other. Nevertheless, it is the self-identity that gives value to the sense of security.²⁷⁰ During the period the majority Sinhalese Buddhists and the minority Tamil Hindus were under the power of the Portuguese kings. On their arrival, the Portuguese began to propagate Catholicism. According to Perera, the Portuguese used two different methods in their conversions, namely "inducement by offices and other temporal favours, and brutal punishment where inducement failed."²⁷¹ In this situation, the security and identities of both Sinhalese and Tamils were threatened. When one group dominates another, the outcome is fear and members break away from their own group because of the pressure. Some may have acquiesced to adopting the new faith because of fear, to earn the goodwill of those in power or for economic security. This would have changed their world of

²⁶⁹ John W. Burton, "Conflict Resolution as a Function of Human Needs," in *Conflict: Human Needs Theory*, 192–93, cited in Redekop, *From Violence to Blessing*, 39.

²⁷⁰ Ramashary Roy, "Social Conflicts and Needs Theories," in *Conflict: Human Needs Theory*, 135.

²⁷¹ H. R. Perera, "Buddhism in Sri Lanka: A Short History" (2007), under the section "The Arrival of the Portuguese and the Persecution of Buddhism,"

meaning, their sense of belonging, connectedness and their actions, which takes us to the next category of needs, the need for action.

Action

Meaningful actions originate in the human mind. Action includes control of environment, power, autonomy and agency. In order to meet these needs, our actions must be a matter of choice. Paul Sites asserts, “if it is truly a matter of choice, it implies some control over the immediate social and physical environment.”²⁷² When Sri Lanka was under colonial power, Christianity was on the rise, but the Sri Lankan Christians were nevertheless subjected to a foreign authority. Samaranayake observes that when the British took over the country, the Buddhist society and culture simply copied the English language and the Western culture. When the British government took over the educational system and entrusted its management to Christian missionaries, the nucleus of future conflict and hostility were born. The Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims created their own sectarian schools in opposition to protect their own threatened identities. Samaranayake suggests “that a civilization ends when cultural symbols cease to be used for rightful purposes but are actively abused for egoistic sectarian or private ends.”²⁷³ Colonialism implies entrapment and lack of choice.

Recognition

Recognition signifies a person’s self-worth; the accepting of their uniqueness and valuing who they are and what they’ve done. It includes: acknowledgment, appreciation, significance, dignity; it contributes to self-worth and to saving face. Fukuyama alludes that when individuals have low self-esteem, shame can follow. But when they are valued fairly according to their self-worth they

²⁷² Paul Sites, *Control: The Basis of Social Order* (New York: Dunellen Press, 1973) cited in Redekop, *From Violence to Blessing*, 41.

²⁷³ Sajeeva Samaranayake, “Understanding the Sinhala Buddhist Doctrine of ‘Holding On.’”

take pride in it.²⁷⁴ Primarily, recognition originates with self, but this self-evaluation can be affected if one belongs to a group that is degraded.²⁷⁵ For example, during both the Portuguese and British reigns, Christianity was favoured and promoted while Buddhism and Hinduism were denounced. The Dutch, on the other hand, assisted the Buddhists in improving their religion. Regarding the activities of the British, Perera remarks, “the teaching of the Buddha was criticised and condemned and the Buddhist practices were ridiculed. Buddhism was held up as a religion of the vulgar masses as opposed to the Christianity of civilized people.”²⁷⁶ The consequence of these activities provoked indignation and debasement that later (after the independence) lead to ethnic and religious conflicts.

To summarize, human needs must be met in order for human beings to flourish. For Nudler, among all the human needs, meaning is the most significant one. Delved into this need we build our “worlds” that concerns us here, a world of everyday life. Connectedness and social bonding are physiological and psychological needs that are essential to human existence. Identity needs and the need for security are very closely related, because one can be made vulnerable because of what group one belongs to. As humans, we need to take meaningful significant action and be recognised and appreciated for who we are and what we do. So far I have illustrated how identity needs played a role in Christianity in Sri Lanka. The following section introduces René Girard and other dynamics of deep-rooted conflicts.

²⁷⁴ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Avon Books, 1993), 165.

²⁷⁵ Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, 171–72

²⁷⁶ H. R. Perera, “Buddhism in Sri Lanka: A Short History” (2007, under the section “Christian Missionary Activities.”

4.3 Other Dynamics of Deep-rooted Conflict

Rene Girard, in his initial studies on masterpiece literature found that our desires are not spontaneous but are copied from the desires of others. He called this mimetic desire or an imitation of desires. As he studied this, he described that the more intensively we are involved with the mimetic model who models the desire for us, the closer we relate to that person and the more intense will be the mimetic desire. When we cannot have the desired object, or be the other person, deep resentment and hatred pervades us. During the British period, the Sinhalese had mimetic desire for the Tamils who had better education, more prestige, higher income, and better positions—all seeming to make them superior to the Sinhalese. The Sinhalese had great resentment and reacted to this later, after the independence, by establishing Sinhalese as the official language of the country, thereby showing that they were in control of the country. In effect, the mimetic desire was inspired by what they saw in the Tamils and they wanted to indicate that how they could be even better than the Tamils. The Tamils, for their part as they began to lose their language, their position, and their prestige, developed intense mimetic desire to have the same kind of recognition in the society as the Sinhalese. In both sides there were profound emotions that are exactly the emotions what Girard pointed to.

René Girard's work focused on mimetic conflict. Redekop develops the Girardian notion further and argues that we not only copy the external behavior of others, but we also imitate the internal desires of others.²⁷⁷ Some of the elements of deep-rooted conflict that he examines are the scapegoat function, the hegemonic structure, ethnonationalism, and self–other dynamics.

²⁷⁷ Redekop, *From Violence to Blessing*, 62.

Scapegoat Function

Scapegoat theory originated from René Girard. He describes the scapegoat effect as a process in which individuals or groups are reunited at the cost of an intermediary who is perceived to be the cause of the troubles. United by their common fear or revulsion of the scapegoat, and by their joint motivation to banish or kill him, the community regains harmony and peace is re-established.²⁷⁸ Scapegoating is one of the ways that the community can resolve present and avoid future mimetic violence, because all their frustrations are projected onto another individual or group, and then that person or group can be expelled or killed.

Scapegoating is widespread in Sri Lanka. Buddhist nationalists claim that Sri Lanka is a Buddhist country and therefore any conversion to Christianity is condemned and contested. Central to the controversy is accusations of so called “unethical conversions.” According to Asoka Ekanayaka, there have been attacks against Christians since March 2002, such as: physical attacks, burning, acts of sacrilege, death threats, disruption of worship, stoning, illegal restraint, and even interference with funerals.²⁷⁹ Ekanayaka suggests that the cynicism created by the apparent corruption and falsehood of Buddhism today in Sri Lanka – could be the reason triggering people to drift away at this time. The practical solution for the Buddhist establishment is to put their house in order, instead of scapegoating the Christians.²⁸⁰ Gunawardena quotes that “Christians say that one reason they are being targeted is that they are accused of being Tamil sympathizers.”²⁸¹ In any crisis the LTTE or the Christians are made to bear the burden. The Rene Tamils have been the scapegoats for Sinhalese Buddhists and this is a way of understanding why

²⁷⁸ Rene Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1988), 83.

²⁷⁹ Asoka Ekanayaka, “Legislation Driven by Conversion Phobia,” *Sri Lankan Christian*, (July 6, 2004): <http://www.island.lk/2004/07/06/featur01.html>.

²⁸⁰ Asoka Ekanayaka. “Legislation Driven by Conversion Phobia” *Sri Lankan Christian*, (July 6y, 2004)

²⁸¹ Gunawardena, “Buddhist Nationalism and Religious Violence in Sri Lanka”: <http://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/ngier/slr/htm>

this conflict is so difficult; the people were united within their own separate groups through scapegoating each other by saying all their problems were caused by the other. Obeyesekere confirms that such pervasive misconception is common in times of social instability and disorder.²⁸²

Hegemonic Structures

In a hegemonic structure, there is a dominant group and a subjected group. When one group dominates another, the dominant group rules overall and the subjected group assumes feelings of inferiority and subservience. The system becomes internalised: the dominant group becomes accustomed to asserting its authority, and the people who are controlled feel they have no choice but to comply.²⁸³

Redekop suggests that “hegemonic structures involve a web of physical, economic, political and discursive factors working together to keep the powerful in their positions and those who are subjected in their places.”²⁸⁴ Physical pressure could involve using power or violence to hurt people of any minority group, or restricting certain groups to a specific space. In Sri Lanka economic pressure was brought to bear on the minority Tamils by nationalizing the tea estates and taking away the land that belongs to them. Control of education, health, and language were some other ways that the Sinhalese maintained their hegemony over the Tamil Hindus and Christians; Christian schools and the hospitals run by the religious nuns were e.g. taken over by the Sinhalese.

²⁸² Gananath Obeyesekere, “Buddhism, Ethnicity and Identity: A Problem of Buddhist History.” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 10, (2003), 6: <http://www.buddhistethics.org>

²⁸³ Redekop, *From Violence to Blessing*, 115.

²⁸⁴ Redekop, *From Violence to Blessing*, 115.

The north (Jaffna) had been considered the land of the Tamils for centuries. For the majority Tamils, it was their homeland. Since 2009 the government began to populate it with Buddhist Sinhalese. I mentioned in the previous chapter that the Tamils were part of the hegemonic structure where they were dominant as a result of how the British having provided them with economic and educational opportunities. The Buddhists having felt subjected to the British all those years now wanted to take charge so they completely reversed the situation by disempowering the Tamils exercising hegemony over them. This is an example of mimetic behaviour, one does it first and another imitates it later. According to mimetic theory, rivalries develop between groups that identify with one another. An important aspect of the hegemonic structures relates to language and identity. Sri Lanka changed the official language after independence from English, a language common to all ethnic groups, to Sinhalese. As a result, entire communities of different ethnic origin were marginalized.

Ethnonationalism

The concept of ethnonationalism was developed by Walker Connor. He defined ethnonationalism as a sense of belonging to a group of people based on a belief of common ancestry, without this necessarily manifesting itself as loyalty to one's country.²⁸⁵ He emphasized the imperceptible stance of a "self-differentiating ethnic group."²⁸⁶ According to this definition, the label of Sri Lankan Sinhalese Buddhist could function as a distinctive characteristic from other social groups such as the Hindu Tamils and the Muslims.

Explaining nationalism, Gunnar Stalsett points out that "Nationalism can be justified by the belief that no other group of people is as 'right', as 'human', as 'worthy', etc. as one's own.

²⁸⁵ Walker Connor's *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding* includes a collection of his writings from the late 1960s to 1994, cited in Redekop, *From Violence to Blessing*, 126.

²⁸⁶ Connor, *Ethnonationalism* cited in Redekop, *From Violence to Blessing*, 126.

The ‘otherness’ of another people may provide the basis for discrimination, exclusion and racism.”²⁸⁷ Michael Levin defines the strongest form of ethnonationalism as the call for a state for every ethnic community.²⁸⁸ The Tamils in Sri Lanka have a strong sense of ethnonationalism and some want a separate state. Another option would be consociation, which is a way of acknowledging separate groups in the governance of the country. At the time of independence, the Tamils would have expected some acknowledgement to this effect. Nevertheless, the Sinhalese ruled as though Sri Lanka was a unitary state with everyone speaking the same language.

The reason ethnonationalism is strong in Sri Lanka is that the Sinhalese and Tamils are separated by ancestry (the Tamils come from the south of India and the Sinhalese from the north of India) as well as separate mythology around their ancestry. Each group also has its own ethnicity, language, culture, religion, land, and politics. The dominant kind of ethnonationalism among the Tamil is Hindu-based and this is what separates them from Sinhalese who are Buddhist. The Tamils, who call themselves Roman Catholics, nevertheless have a Hindu dimension to their religion, just as the Sinhalese Roman Catholics have a Buddhist dimension to their religion. The reason is that there are so many written and unwritten aspects of religious cultures. There are many elements deeply embedded within the language and culture that are passed on, and when people convert from one religion to another they carry with them all of this tacit knowledge and understanding that they received from childhood. Even in their Christian expression, their cultural elements get passed on and modified through a kind of syncretism.

²⁸⁷ Gunnar Stalsett, “Religion and nationalism” *Bulletin of Peace Proposal*, Vol. 23 (1): (1992), 3-10.

²⁸⁸ Michael D. Levin, *Ethnicity and Aboriginality: Case Studies in Ethnonationalism*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 5, cited in Redekop, *From Violence to Blessing*: 127.

The difference between ethnoculturalism and ethnonationalism is that there is a claim to political control over a territory with the latter. The Tamils would like to have their own territory in the north which is now politically controlled by the Sinhalese. But some of the Tamil Catholics may not be quite comfortable with that position. Likewise, the Buddhists feel that way back they were given the whole island; they have a sense of vision, justice and religious entitlement based on that, translating into an ethnonationalistic vision that says the whole island is to be united and officially be a Buddhist country. In ethnonationalistic identity there is a coming together of religion, ethnicity, language, ancestry and political control. In the case of the Sri Lankan Roman Catholics it is more complex, because their Catholic identity may be at odds with the other elements of their identity.

Mimetic Desire and Mimetic Rivalry

I have already introduced Girard's theory of Scapegoating in the previous section. In this segment, I shall develop his theory of desire grounded on the idea of imitation and "mimesis." For René Girard, "imitation" represents copying what is noticeable, while "mimesis" involves what is interior and observable only through its outcomes.²⁸⁹ Non-human animals imitate one another's behaviour, but humans also mimic one another's desires; it is through this that we are able to learn and come to live in a culture. He suggests: "If human beings suddenly ceased imitating, all forms of culture would vanish."²⁹⁰

When basic needs are satisfied, human beings seek out and attempt to satisfy other intense desires, sometimes without knowing what they are looking for. For Girard, this is the

²⁸⁹ Redekop, *From Violence to Blessing*, 65.

²⁹⁰ René Girard, *Things Hidden from the Foundation of the World*, translated by Stephen Bans and Michael Metteer, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987a) 7, cited in Chris Fleming, "Mimesis and Violence: An Introduction to the thought of René Girard," *Mimesis and Violence* 15, no. 1 (2017) 58: https://www.academia.edu/1089598/Mimesis_and_Violence.

starting point of “acquisitive mimesis.” He illustrates this by describing a situation in which two individuals desire the same object and while trying to acquire it their behaviour turns hostile as they compete with one another. As a result of acquisitive mimesis, violence is generated. In other words, “violence is the process itself when two or more partners try to prevent one another from appropriating the object they all desire through physical or other means.”²⁹¹ Conflict will always occur, because acquisitive mimesis is one of the core human traits.²⁹² There is a rivalry over the legitimate claim to the land. I mentioned about the Buddhist narrative on page 49, how the Buddha went to Sri Lanka and consecrated the island where Buddhism will flourish. There are many historical points of rivalry that built up the mimetic rivalry over who is more legitimate or better. Another example would be during the British period, most of the Sinhalese say that the Tamils got all the better jobs. The Sinhalese Buddhists felt inferior that they were second class citizen. Fear would have played a role too. If Tamil was given equal status as a language given how the Tamils had achieved high positions through so much of the history, the Tamils will take over everything. After the independence when the Sinhalese established their government they paid back by retaliating; “You were favoured by the British but now you suffer.” It is a kind of justice or revenge. As Girard says if violence enters the situation it is payed back with interest.

In the Sri Lankan context, during the British era, the Tamils and the Christians were favoured and the Sinhalese experienced mimetic desire for a similarly favoured position. This

²⁹¹ René Girard, “Mimesis and Violence: Perspectives in Cultural Criticism” *Berkshire Review* 14 (1979): 9–19, cited in Jeremy Townsley, “René Girard’s Theory of Violence, Religion and the Scapegoat” (December 2003): <http://www.jeramy.org/papers/girard.html>

²⁹² René Girard, “Mimesis and Violence: Perspectives in Cultural Criticism” *Berkshire Review* 14 (1979): 9–19, cited in Jeremy Townsley, “René Girard’s Theory of Violence, Religion and the Scapegoat” (December 2003): <http://www.jeramy.org/papers/girard.html>

mimetic desire influenced the way in which they structured the governance of the country once they were in power, making them dominant in the same way that the Tamils had been under British rule. As a result, it was now the Tamils' turn to desire what the Sinhalese had acquired.

When the model becomes the problem to obtain what is desired, it can lead to mimetic rivalry. The minority Tamils desired to have what the dominant Sinhalese government had: power, equality, recognition and respect. These are the satisfiers of the Tamils' identity needs. They feel they have to have them in order for their identity to be complete. When the government neglected these needs, the Tamils looked for more violent ways to obtain their objects. The LTTE wanted to have an army just like the government, so they acquired illegal arms and recruited men, women and child soldiers. The conflict intensified, with one side becoming increasingly hostile in response to, or imitation of the other. Each party became a model to the other. The situation escalated into mimetic violence, which led to civil war.

Mimetic Structures of Violence

Redekop defines mimetic structures of violence as something bigger than any individual at play in terms of driving people toward violence in such a way that they wind up hurting others against their basic beliefs and morals.²⁹³ As individuals, the Sinhalese and Tamil Catholics are kind-hearted and hospitable people, but if I bring up the Sinhalese with the Tamils or vice versa they become different. The reason is that the relational system of Sinhalese/Tamil has been overtaken by the mimetic structures of violence.

All of the above-mentioned elements of deep-rooted conflicts feed into the mimetic structure. Because the elements are oriented toward violence the mimetic structure is also oriented towards violence. This orientation perpetuates and exacerbates attitudes of mistrust,

²⁹³ Redekop, *From Violence to Blessing*, 164.

stereotyping, resentment and anything else that justifies the orientation, which in turn results in certain behaviours. The Sinhalese and Tamil Catholics not coming together to celebrate Eucharist is one end result of this orientation.

There is something demonic about these attitudes in that they create deep division. So, the mimetic theory of violence, like the theological concept of the devil or Satan, shows a deep process that overtakes our thinking to orient us toward hatred and violence.²⁹⁴ As one side starts to demonstrate this orientation and these attitudes, it isn't long before, the other side does the same. As they do harm to one another, as Girard points out, it is always returned mimetically with interest. It keeps growing and everything that goes wrong reinforces it. It becomes a pattern and a structure.

This mimetic structure of violence has a long history in Sri Lanka. The pattern of ill feeling and distrust has been built up over centuries. Here are some of the key junctures at which this sense of antagonism intensified in the history of Sri Lanka. There was a war between the Sinhalese King Dutthagamani and the Tamil King Elaara in 161–137 BCE, the former defeated and killed the latter. Periodically, similar wars have recurred between the two ethnic groups until the fifteenth century. This demonstrates that there has been anti-Tamil sentiment for centuries during these periods. After independence from British rule in 1948, the division surfaced again. Within two years, the government stripped thousands of mostly Tamil tea plantation workers of Indian origin of their citizenship and right to vote. That provoked fears among Tamil leaders, who demanded a federal form of self-rule in the north and the east of the country where they form a majority. In 1956 the Sinhalese Buddhist government abolished English as the language of the government, establishing Sinhala as the only official language. This was the starting point

²⁹⁴ Redekop, *From Violence to Blessing*, 310-311.

of an ethnic conflict that in 1983 sparked into a civil war that killed at least 100,000 people, according to U.N. estimates. Tamil villages were burned and hundreds were killed, and hundreds more fled the country, and many of those who survived joined Tamil militant groups.

Mimetic structures of violence create meaning, identity, and power over the other, either by direct mimetic rivalry or indirect, pervasive domination of an oppressed group. The Sri Lankan deep-rooted conflict is complex but the theory of mimetic structures of violence helps in analyzing and interpreting the causes and progression of the conflict between Sinhalese and Tamils.

The mimetic rivalry described is hence multidimensional and they may create animosity. In their respective narratives they ask: who came to Sri Lanka first, and on what basis do they have any claims to the land? So there is a rivalry over the legitimate claim to the land. I talked about the Buddhist narrative showing how the Buddha went to Sri Lanka and consecrated the island as a place where Buddhism would flourish. There are many historical points of rivalry that built up the mimetic rivalry over who is more legitimate or better. Another example would be during the British period, most of the Sinhalese say that the Tamils got all the better jobs. The Sinhalese Buddhists felt inferior and considered as second-class citizens. Fear would have played a role too. If Tamil was given equal status as a language and given how the Tamils had achieved high positions through so much of the history, it was feared by the Sinhalese that the Tamils would take over everything. After independence when the Sinhalese established their government they paid back by retaliating: “You were favoured by the British but now you

suffer.” It is a kind of justice or revenge. As Girard says if violence enters the situation it is payed back with interest.²⁹⁵ This is also an indication of mimetic rivalry.

To summarise, deep-rooted conflict occurs in response to unmet human needs. When a community is caught in a cycle of mimetic violence, it can resort to scapegoating to project and then eliminate its tensions through the sacrifice of a third party. In a hegemonic society, one dominant group subjugates another, usually a minority, who then can turn to violence to claim their rights. The majority group may be defined according to ethnicity. Ethnonationalism can become part of one’s identity and be used as an excuse to justify hostility towards others. This can also impact the Self–Other dynamic, where one sees oneself as different from another, and can lead to exclusion and oppression as the divide widens. Mimetic desire is a basic competitive instinct that can lead to conflict by creating structures of violence as one party seeks to acquire what another has. Violence caused by deep-rooted conflicts is intentional and it destroys and disempowers entire communities.

Understanding mimetic structures of violence heuristically led to the idea of mimetic structures of blessing. Studying violence and its consequences for many years brought Redekop to discover the paths to blessing in the situation of continuing conflict. He explains the difference between the mimetic structures of violence and mimetic structures of blessing through this story. A man died and went to the other world and was taken on a tour of the site. The starting point was hell where he saw famished and depressed people standing around tables of food. They were holding forks longer than their arms so they couldn’t put any of the food into their mouths. On the other side was heaven, where there were well-fed happy people similarly standing around

²⁹⁵ Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 300.

tables of food. The man observed that these people also had the same long forks as in hell, but they were all feeding each other.

The story illustrates the mimetic structures of violence symbolic of hell. ‘Mimetic’ means that all of them were copying each other. ‘Structure’ means that it was an ongoing pattern of behaviour. ‘Violence’ suggests that they were refusing each other the one thing indispensable to the happiness of each. Those who were in heaven exemplify a mimetic structure of blessings. Mimetic, because they copied each other by feeding one another, structure because the helping spirit and actions were constant, and blessing because the behaviour promoted and contributed to the happiness of everybody.²⁹⁶ Deep-rooted conflict draws people to mimetic structures of violence which are blocked, confined, limited, acquisitive and death-oriented. Conversely, reconciliation or forgiveness leads to mimetic structures of blessing which are open, creative, unlimited, generous and life-oriented.²⁹⁷

4.4 Mimetic Structures of Blessing

Reconciliation can be understood as a transformation of mimetic structures of violence to mimetic structures of blessing. The process of reconciliation consists of transformative, discursive and symbolic activities such as truth telling, expressions of emotion, and symbolic rituals, and attitudes including repentance and the desire to forgive. All these elements are meta-requisites that bring about transformation which leads to transcendence, personal healing, a change of structures, new relationships, and a sense of justice.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁶ Redekop, *From Violence to Blessing*, 256.

²⁹⁷ Redekop, *From Violence to Blessing*, 256.

²⁹⁸ Redekop. “A Hermeneutics of Blessing as a Meta-Requisite for Reconciliation: John E. Toews’ Romans Paradigm as a Case Study” *Peace and Conflict Studies* 17, no. 1, Spring (2010) 235–66.

One other meta-requisite associated with reconciliation in Redekop's framework is the notion of teachings of blessing and its transformative power. In my thesis, I use the term 'teachings of forgiveness' in a similar vein. Forgiveness also helps to transcend; it is essential for healing and it gives a sense of justice. Redekop adopts the Hebrew Bible's meaning of blessing. The word *berakhah* in Hebrew is translated as "blessing." Blessing is understood as bearing good wishes or wishing for the well-being of another. For Redekop "blessings were a way of introducing an ethical vision of flourishing that would extend well into the future."²⁹⁹ The origin of the word blessing is the verb *barakh* which means kneeling, as people would kneel while receiving a blessing.³⁰⁰ I experienced this in my family: whenever we would receive a blessing from our parents or older relatives, we would kneel down as a sign of respect and openness. Others have a different interpretation of the meaning for the word, such as Heschel, for whom "just to be is a blessing: just to live is holy."³⁰¹

The notion of blessing progressed through the Torah (the teachings) that was given to the Israelites in the desert to provide them with guidance on how to live a good life.³⁰² In the Old Testament, God said to Abraham: "I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name so famous that it will be used as a blessing" (Genesis: 12:2).³⁰³ Blessing is also connected with the land, signifying the necessity to maintain nature and the environment.³⁰⁴ In the context of the Hebrew Bible, those who receive God's blessings shall prosper and enjoy

²⁹⁹ Redekop, "Blessing-Based Reconciliation in the Face of Violence" in Redekop and Ryba, *René Girard and Creative Reconciliation*, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014) 68.

³⁰⁰ Redekop, "Blessing-Based Reconciliation in the Face of Violence," 68.

³⁰¹ Redekop, *From Violence to Blessing*, 257.

³⁰² Redekop, "A Hermeneutics of Blessing as a Meta-Requisite for Reconciliation," 235–66.

³⁰³ Alexander Jones, General Editor, *Jerusalem Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1968).

³⁰⁴ Brueggemann, W. *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise and Challenge in Biblical Faith* 2nd ed.) (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), cited in Redekop, "A Hermeneutics of Blessing as a Meta-Requisite for Reconciliation"

abundance, and they in turn give this blessing to their children and subsequent generations. It was Jacob who first passed on this blessing to others.

Both the Old and New Testaments are filled with blessings received from God and passed on to others to enrich the well-being of those involved. Redekop writes that blessings are “empowering, lead to creative and ever-expanding options and are oriented towards life.”³⁰⁵ He quotes Matthew Fox who relates the concept of blessing to graciousness, beauty, connectedness, insight and desire. We embody these qualities when we bless others, and each of us becomes a blessing to one another.³⁰⁶

In analysing the story of Exodus, Redekop developed the concept of “teachings” and its importance in the story of liberation.³⁰⁷ Liberation means escaping oppressive structures and gaining freedom. Exodus describes the fate of the Israelites, the chosen people of God, who were enslaved in Egypt and then freed from their oppression, after which they entered the Promised Land where they finally had control over their own lives. Redekop was intrigued by the question: Is it possible that oppressed people, once they acquire positions of power, can avoid implementing the same oppressive structures that once held them prisoner? In examining this question, Redekop focused on the lapse of time between oppression and freedom: the forty years in the wilderness described in the Old Testament and how the Hebrew community evolved.

According to Redekop’s interpretation, “Torah in the Hebrew Bible has the sense of setting out the direction of the path and enabling one to live a good life.”³⁰⁸ Its teachings are

³⁰⁵Francis Brown et al., *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Lafayette, LA: Associate Publishers and Authors. Inc.,1980) cited in Redekop, *From Violence to Blessing*, 257.

³⁰⁶ Matthew Fox. *Original Blessing* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 2000), 7, cited in Redekop, *From Violence to Blessing*, 258.

³⁰⁷ Redekop, “The Centrality of Torah as Ethical Projection for the Exodus” *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture*, No. 2

³⁰⁸ Redekop, “The Centrality of Torah,” cited in Redekop, *From Violence to Blessing*, 292.

comprised of the Ten Commandments as well as customs and stories that have a moral outlook that encourage the reader to make wise choices. This includes when faced with any conflicts or issues that might emerge, the lived aspect of the teachings. Moses was teaching a new way of being and he appointed a number of judges to help the people sort out their problems and make decisions. Through that process, they acquired a new mentality, which included values and directions on how to live. One area where this was seen concerned the issue of slavery. The liberated people might have encountered slaves on their journey to the Promised Land and they were cautioned against becoming oppressors. In Deuteronomy (5:14-15),³⁰⁹ they were reminded on every Sabbath that they were slaves in Egypt and Yahweh brought them out. The implication seemed to be to remember that they had been slaves, and not to inflict this misfortune on others. Central to the story of Exodus and the liberation is the role of the teachings of the Torah.³¹⁰ The main preoccupation of Exodus is not only the escape from slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land but how a group of people journeying together in the desert could live together through the Torah teachings and the training they received during the forty years.

According to Redekop, the transformation necessary for reconciliation to happen occurred during the forty years in the wilderness under the teachings of Moses. It was this experience that shaped and prepared the Israelites. Similarly, Volf's concept of forgiveness is the beginning of a process of personal transformation that could last days and months, or could be for a life time. For some it will be easier than for others; forgiveness cannot be forced, it is a personal choice that needs time, space and respect.

³⁰⁹ Alexander Jones, General Editor, *Jerusalem Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1968).

³¹⁰ Redekop, "The Centrality of Torah as Ethical Projection for the Exodus," 113–43.

Just as the Israelites had the Torah as a guide, Christians have the New Testament where Christ is our model. Jesus followed the Torah and its teachings, but reframed the concepts bringing a new way of living. He demands a lifestyle of forgiveness and love for one another. In the Gospel of John, he says the world will know that you are really my disciples if you have love for one another. It is this love that makes forgiveness possible.

Conclusion

Chapter 4 examined the second core task of Osmer, the interpretive task of “Why is this going on?” Redekop’s framework of deep-rooted conflict and mimetic structures of violence can be used to interpret the events that unfolded during the history of Sri Lanka. Basic human and identity needs were jeopardized, and this led to social, political and religious unrest, and ultimately to violence and civil war.

This pattern of violence is known to have existed since at least the sixth century when the *Mahavamsa*—the great chronicle of Sri Lanka—was written. It contains myths and legends and is the fundamental source for the early history of Sri Lanka.³¹¹ There were constant battles between the Sinhalese and Tamil kingdoms until the thirteenth century. The violence and rivalry between the two kingdoms brought destruction and great damage to the country.

With the arrival of the Portuguese and the introduction of Catholicism, the rivalry began between Christianity and Buddhism. The colonial hegemonic structure dominated the Sinhalese Buddhists and the Tamil Hindus. The colonial powers favoured Christian converts, rewarding them with material gain and political advantages. The Portuguese wished to unify the island under the Catholic faith. The Protestant Dutch in turn persecuted Catholics while maintaining good relations with the Buddhist Sinhalese. Under the British, Christian missionary activities

³¹¹ Perera, “Buddhism in Sri Lanka: A Short History”, under the section “The Pali Chronicles,”

were given strong support, and in retaliation a Buddhist revival began. Mimetic rivalry meant that the hardship that Buddhists had suffered was in turn inflicted on Christian institutions and leadership. After independence, the Sinhalese claimed the country as their own, making the Tamil community voice their need for equality or their own separate state. The Self–Other dynamic that developed meant that neither community felt that it could share the island equitably with the other.

Mimetic structures of violence were manifested in all these events. However, the path to reconciliation is possible and Redekop develops the notion of mimetic structures of blessing to explain how this can occur. This transformative process is based on the Old Testament idea of blessing, as something given people and communities by God and in turn passed on to one another. The teaching of blessings opens up new ways of living in a community torn by conflict; the practice reaches out to others, seeking the common good. This teaching of blessing is similar to Volf's theology of forgiveness and his metaphor of embrace, which will be explored next.

Chapter 5

Forgiveness

Forgiveness is neither a common routine gesture, nor an everyday habit; rather it is a hidden original flower that blooms anew each time from the soil of pain and self-control.

Miguel Rubio

This chapter examines the normative task of practical theological interpretation, focusing on theological concepts to explain specific events, and context involving those in which we are participants, using ethical norms to reflect on and guide our practice.³¹² As members of the Christian community holding different responsibilities what are we to do in response to our experiences in the world? The purpose of this chapter is to explore this question, which is at the heart of the normative task.

Osmer attempts to find an answer to the question of “What ought to be done?” through:

- 1) theological interpretation, i.e. focusing on theological concepts to explain different events and situations in a given context. In other words, what is our response in human situations to God’s words or to his plan?
- 2) ethical reflection, i.e. engaging with the ethical principles, rules, and guidelines that are applicable to the situation and lead action towards a moral outcome; and
- 3) good practice, i.e. focusing on providing a model of good practice from the past or present in order to transform the present practices of the congregation and create new interpretations of God and the world from within the framework of the given tradition.³¹³

³¹² Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008) 4.

³¹³ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 161.

All three approaches can be applied to the normative task of interpretation in various situations. For the purpose of my study, the focus will be on theological interpretation. The research involves the legacy of civil war—the suffering of its victims, both Sinhalese and Tamils—and questions relating to forgiveness, justice, and suffering. The victims question the presence of God and his redemptive justice in all these events. They feel that God should punish the perpetrators. Theological interpretation provides a way of answering their questions and translating these events and situations using theological concepts such as God’s generosity, forgiveness and the cross of Christ. This will be explained in detail in the discussion of the concept of forgiveness below.

Osmer further explores the normative task of what ought to be going on, as prophetic discernment.³¹⁴ This prophetic function is recognised in the Judeo-Christian tradition as a covenant, a relationship between God and the community. The Chosen People often broke the covenant and therefore, were in need of forgiveness and atonement. The prophets served not only as God’s messengers, but also, in Osmer’s words, “played an active role in shaping the message they delivered.”³¹⁵ For Heschel, the role of the prophet is to absorb the essence of the message received from God, to understand its meaning, and to integrate that meaning with knowledge they already possessed.³¹⁶ Volf extends the principle of this prophetic role to the theological enterprise claiming that the role of a theologian is centered on fostering social agents competent in creating just and peaceful societies where these agents will thrive.³¹⁷

³¹⁴ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 132.

³¹⁵ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 133.

³¹⁶ Abreham J. Heschel, *The Prophets*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1962), 2:2, cited in Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 133.

³¹⁷ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 21.

The prophetic discernment is based on the understanding of God's suffering with the covenant people as well as with all of creation.³¹⁸ Volf's conception of God's divine revelation lies in God's self-giving to humanity and in how this shapes human self-giving to one another.³¹⁹ This concept is very important and appropriate to my study because it is comforting for the victims to hear and understand that they are not alone; that God is suffering along with them. This theory of God's suffering with humanity has consoled and strengthened me in moments of despair and anxiety. I have not suffered atrocities like the victims of the civil war, but even for those who have experienced brutality, injustice, and heavy losses; this thought could bring strength and a different perspective. This concept of divine grief was expressed thus by Abraham Heschel:

God does not reveal himself in an abstract absoluteness, but in a personal and intimate relation to the world. He does not simply command and expect obedience; He is also moved and affected by what happens in the world, and reacts accordingly. Events and human actions arouse in him joy or sorrow, pleasure or wrath... This notion that God can be intimately affected... basically defines the prophetic consciousness of God.³²⁰

The notion of God suffering with humanity is also found in Moltmann's concept of Christ's solidarity with the suffering of the poor and the oppressed.³²¹ During his ministry, Jesus' humanity was shared with the people; the sick, the social outcasts, and the disreputable. His compassion for those who stood up to injustice ultimately led to his own torture and execution. Jesus did not condemn his adversaries; on the contrary, he says "love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who mistreat you" (Luke 6:

³¹⁸ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 136.

³¹⁹ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 24.

³²⁰ Heschel, *The Prophets*, cited in Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 136.

³²¹ Jurgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, Trans. by Margaret Kohl, (Minneapolis, MI: Fortress, 1992), 130, cited in Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 22.

27–28) and “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23: 34). His ministry is based on forgiveness and on loving one’s enemies; this lies at the heart of the Christian message.

In my case study research, the main emphasis is on interpersonal forgiveness rather than self-forgiveness or forgiveness in the socio-political realm. Though I am aware of the importance of self-forgiveness, it is the interpersonal aspect that I will focus on, because it seems more directly pertinent to my research on the division between the Sinhalese and Tamil Catholics. Forgiveness is also needed on the socio-political level where the minority Tamil group is demanding an apology and an admission of accountability from the Sinhalese for the atrocities committed against them; however, this broader aspect of forgiveness will be developed only where necessary.

5.1 The Need for Forgiveness

The world in which we live is not a perfect place; violence and hostility encroach on all sides. In the media, every day we hear news of ongoing conflicts and suffering. Nowhere in the biosphere does there exist a country without war or violence. I remember my childhood and youth in my native village in Sri Lanka, where I could go alone freely without any protection enjoying the beauty of nature, the singing of the birds, watching the fishermen throwing their nets for a catch, and enjoying the sight of children playing. In 1984, when I returned to the same village, everything was different. I was with my family, we were praying together, when a group of men entered the house with guns asking for money. The whole atmosphere of peace changed; the room was filled with fear, anxiety and violence. After Black July 1983, life was never the same.

My country is one among other countries such as Syria, South Sudan, Iraq, and Israel facing ongoing conflicts and suffering. The political and religious leaders in South Africa, a country that still struggles to overcome civil strife, have raised forgiveness as the only way to

develop a just society. Archbishop Desmond Tutu rightly said in the foreword of *Exploring of Forgiveness*, “Forgiveness is one of the key ideas in this world... It has to do with uniting people through practical politics. Without forgiveness there is no future.”³²²

For centuries people have studied and practiced forgiveness, with or without religion as a guide, in their own lives. Forgiveness has a history, with roots in the Hebrew Scriptures. Nevertheless, only recently has the scientific study of forgiveness begun to develop. According to Robert Enright for nearly 1,600 years the study of forgiveness was neglected.³²³ However, between 1985 and 1998 more than 55 scientific research projects have been carried out to help people understand the importance of forgiveness and learn how to forgive.³²⁴ At the invitation of the John Templeton Foundation in 1997, more than 40 researchers participated in a scientific study on forgiveness, and, as a result, 100 proposals were submitted for funding. Since then, research on forgiveness has only grown.

According to Worthington, one of the factors that motivated the scientific study of forgiveness was the collapse of communism, an event that may have inspired the notion of forgiving long-time adversaries. Another factor, he believes, could be the need to manage increased ethnic and racial violence in communities and around the world.³²⁵ This is evident today in areas such as the Middle East, Kenya, Sri Lanka and elsewhere. The interest in forgiveness is increasing as a result of political events.

³²² Robert D. Enright and Joanna North, eds., *Exploring Forgiveness* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), xiii.

³²³ Enright and North, *Exploring Forgiveness*, 4.

³²⁴ Everett L. Worthington, Jr. *Dimensions of Forgiveness: Psychological Research & Theological Perspective* (Philadelphia, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 1998), 1.

³²⁵ Worthington, *Dimensions of Forgiveness*, 2.

5.2 Definitions and General Understanding of Forgiveness in the Multi-Faith Context

Forgiveness is a concept that is rooted in many cultures and most major religions. Devotees of these religions maintain that forgiveness generates emotional and spiritual benefits and transforms people. Since Sri Lanka is a multi-faith, multi-cultural society composed of Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and Christians, it is important to define the concept of forgiveness within these religions. For the purpose of this thesis, the following presents a brief overview. In all these religions, forgiveness plays an important role, though the word forgiveness itself may not be used in the same way as among Christians. For example in Buddhism and in Hinduism, several words signify forgiveness. The following section will explain each concept of forgiveness according to the different faiths.

Judaism

The common Hebrew words for forgiveness are *mehillah* and *selimah*, though they are frequently used alternately in both classical and modern Hebrew, *Mehillah* means the removal of, whereas *selimah* implies reconciliation.³²⁶ According to Judaism, humans should forgive each other as God forgives humans. Forgiveness depends on the remorse of the offender, but if the offender asks for forgiveness and is refused, the victim commits a sin.³²⁷ Here are some of the examples we read in the Torah: These are the ways of the Holy One: “Yahweh, a God of tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in kindness and faithfulness; for thousands he maintains his kindness, forgives faults, transgression and sins.. .” (Exodus 34:6).³²⁸ The same notions are found in the Psalms: “Just as God is merciful you too must be merciful... Just as God is

³²⁶ Michael E. McCullough, Kenneth I. Pargament and Carlo E. Thoresen, eds., *Forgiveness: Theory, Research, and Practice* (New York/London: Guildford Press, 2000), 216.

³²⁷ Robert D. Carlisle and Jo-Ann Tsang, *The Virtues: Gratitude and Forgiveness* (APA Handbook of Psychology, Religion and Spirituality: vol. 1, (2013), 424.

³²⁸ Alexander Jones, General Editor, *Jerusalem Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1968).

compassionate, you too must be compassionate. “The Lord is righteous in all he does, merciful in all his acts.” (Psalms 145:17).³²⁹

Forgiveness—both God’s forgiveness and human forgiveness—plays a central role in Judaism. Forgiveness prepares people for reconciliatory measures, although, in Judaism, forgiveness is also possible without reconciliation.³³⁰ Forgiveness can be offered unilaterally by the victim, while reconciliation is possible only if both sides decide to rebuild their relationship.³³¹ Unlike Christianity, Judaism believes that some sins are inexcusable and unforgivable.³³²

Islam

One of Allah’s 99 attributes is Al-Ghafoor, which means the Forgiving One.³³³ The Qur’an emphasises forgiveness as a higher value and admonishes the followers to forgive when they are angry: “Those who avoid major sins and indecencies; and if they become angry, they forgive.”³³⁴ It promotes a genuine forgiveness as an ideal choice to build peace on earth: “Whoever pardons and makes reconciliatory his reward lies with Allah. He does not love the unjust.”³³⁵ According to the Qur’an, after many years of war with Mecca, Muhammad forgave his enemies: “There is no censure from me today on you (for what has happened is done with), may God, who is the

³²⁹ Good News: New Testament Psalms (Toronto, On: Canadian Bible Society, 19995).

³³⁰ Worthington, *Dimensions of Forgiveness*, 35.

³³¹ Worthington, *Dimensions of Forgiveness*, 35.

³³² A. B. Cohen et al., “Religion and Unforgivable Offences,” *Journal of Personality* 74, (2006), 85–117, cited in Carlisle and Tsang, *The Virtues*, 424.

³³³ Mark S. Rye et al., “Religious Perspectives on Forgiveness”, cited in Michael E. McCullough, Kenneth I. Pargament and Carlo E. Thoresen, eds., *Forgiveness: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 21.

³³⁴ Talal Itani. *The Qur’an* (Dallas, Beirut: Clear Quran, 2012), 42: 37.

<https://www.clearquran.com/downloads/quran-english-translation-clearquran-edition-allah.pdf>

³³⁵ Talal Itani. *The Qur’an* (Dallas, Beirut: Clear Quran, 2012), 42:40.

greatest amongst forgivers, forgive you.”³³⁶ This disposition of forgiveness was the starting point for his reconciliation struggles, to bring about peace between the Muslims and the Meccans. This helped him to win supporters among his previous enemies and made possible for an Islamic community that prevented the desire for revenge.³³⁷ It is equally noted that in Islam a victim may participate in taking revenge for an offence but must be aware of not exacting a disproportionate retribution which would be a sin.³³⁸ One of the general teachings of forgiveness in Islam states:

Keep to forgiveness, and enjoin kindness, and turn away from the ignorant. And if it should happen that a prompting from Satan stirs thee up (to anger), seek refuge with Allah: behold, He is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.³³⁹

Buddhism

Buddhism does not apply the word forgiveness directly, but the Sinhala word *samava*, derived from Sanskrit *ksama*, means “tolerance,” “patience,” “endurance,” and “forbearance,” and is employed as a synonym for “forgiveness.”³⁴⁰ Buddha encouraged his followers to practise compassion and forbearance toward all those who suffer victims as well as perpetrators. The Buddhist notion of forbearance encompasses both the experience of an action done against someone and the surrendering of resentment toward the one who has caused the wrong. Both forbearance and compassion can help decrease suffering, which is the goal in Buddhism.³⁴¹

³³⁶ *Ibd Sad Al Tabaqa al Kubra* 11:142 (Beirut, 1957), cited in K. G. Saiyidain, *Islam: The Religion of Peace*, 2nd ed. (New Delhi: Har Anand, 1994) 93, cited in Mohammed Abu-Nimer and David Augsburg. *Peace Building by, between, and beyond Muslims and Evangelical Christians* (Lanham, New York: Lexington Books, 2010), 24.

³³⁷ Karl-Wolfgang Troger. “Peace and Islam: In Theory and Practice,” *Islam and Christian Muslim Relations* no. 1 (1990): 17, cited in Mohammed Abu -Nimer and David Augsburg. *Peace-Building by, Between, and Beyond Muslims and Evangelical Christians*, 24.

³³⁸ Carlisle and Tsang, *The Virtues*, 424.

³³⁹ Talal Itani. *The Qur’an* (Dallas, Beirut: Clear Quran, 2012), 7: 199-200.

³⁴⁰ Aloysius Pieris, “Christian Notions of Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Some Doctrinal Clarifications Helpful for Buddhist-Christian Collaboration in National Peace Building,” *Dialogue* XL – XLI (2013–2014), 84-85.

³⁴¹ R. Higgins, “Buddhists Practice Forgiveness: Mindful Suffering,” *Christian Century*, 118, (2001) 9–10, cited in Carlisle and Tsang, *The Virtues*, 424.

In Dharmapada,³⁴² there are some verses that speak about karma, hatred, kindness and forbearance. Verses (1) and (2) explain that the absolute law of Karma that all actions good or bad, come back to the doer: “Mind precedes all mental states. Mind is their chief; they are all mind-wrought. If with an impure mind a person speaks or acts, suffering follows him like the wheel that follows the foot of the ox.”³⁴³ Verse (5) highlights that there is no happiness through hatred: “Hatred is, indeed, never appeased by hatred in this world. It is appeased only by loving kindness. This is an ancient law.”³⁴⁴ Verse (399) explains the strength of forbearance as a true Brahmin (holy man): “Whoever, being pure, forbears with punishment, bondage, abuse, having the strength of endurance, and having an army of strengths, that one I say is a Brahmin.”³⁴⁵

Regarding hate and love of enemies in Buddhism, the Dalai Lama maintains:

...the Bodhisattva affirms the importance of acquiring the right attitudes towards your enemy. If you know how to develop a just attitude, your enemies become your spiritual masters, because their presence gives you an opportunity to grow in tolerance, patience and understanding. As you acquire more patience and tolerance, it will be easier to develop your capacity for compassion, and, thanks to that, altruism.³⁴⁶

Hinduism

In Hinduism, the words *ksama* or *ksamata* are the main words used to describe forgiveness but there are other words such as *kripa*, *prasada*, *daya*, or *karuna* (compassion), which also mean forgiveness. These terms are found in prayer form in Sanskrit texts or in everyday language.³⁴⁷

³⁴² In the sacred scriptures of Theravada Buddhism, Dharmapada has been viewed as the succinct version of the Buddha's teaching.

³⁴³ “The Dhammapada: The Buddha's Path of Wisdom,” translated from the Pali by Acharya Buddharakkhita, with an introduction by Bhikkhu Bodhi. *Access to Insight* (November 30, 2013): <http://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/kn/dhp/dhp.intro.budd.html>

³⁴⁴ “The Dhammapada: The Buddha's Path of Wisdom”

³⁴⁵ Dhammapada. Edited and translated by Anandajoti Bhikku, (2nd edition, November 2017), <https://www.ancient-buddhist-texts.net/English-Texts/Dhamma-Verses/Dhamma-Verses.pdf>

³⁴⁶ Dalai Lama, *Le Dalai-Lama Parle de Jesus* (Paris: Editions Brepols) 44–45, cited in Jean Vanier, *Becoming Human* (Toronto: Anansi Press, 1998), 147.

³⁴⁷ Rye et al., “Religious Perspectives on Forgiveness,” cited in McCullough, Pargament and Thoresen, eds., *Forgiveness*, 23.

The many traditions and beliefs that exist within Hinduism make it problematic to describe the theological basis of forgiveness. Nevertheless, the concept of forgiveness as found in epics and *dharma sastras* (treaties on righteousness), can take the form of duty, righteousness, forbearance, compassion and patience.³⁴⁸ In order to follow the path of dharma, it is important to practise all these virtues along together with Karma, which permeates Hinduism:

The doctrine of Karma is a moral law, which controls existence favoring morality and discouraging immorality. Karma is an ethical force, which tends to improve the world by bringing its spiritual elements to perfection. In penalizing the wrong and rewarding the right it treats virtue as coincident with happiness.³⁴⁹

There is a strong belief among Hindus that lack of forgiveness as well as negative feelings such as resentment, anger and revenge, can be emitted into future incarnations.

Christianity

Christians believe that since God forgives them, they are likewise called to forgive others.

Forgiveness is considered central to Christianity. Jesus highlighted the significance of forgiveness when he cautioned his disciples to forgive “seventy times seven” times (Matthew 18:21–22).³⁵⁰ Forgiveness is mostly understood as an act of mercy, the freeing of someone from an offence or debt. The forgiving subject needs to extend compassion to the wrongdoer, while the forgiven subject usually is required to show signs of repentance for the wrong suffered.³⁵¹

According to Miroslav Volf, for Christians, forgiveness involves three people: the wrongdoer, the wronged person, and God, and if God is absent, then the ground of forgiveness becomes

³⁴⁸ Rye et al., “Religious Perspectives on Forgiveness,” cited in McCullough, Pargament and Thoresen, eds., *Forgiveness*, 29.

³⁴⁹ Rupa Menon, “Changing Trajectory: The Role of Karma within a Framework of Reconciliation,” Vern Neufeld Redekop and Thomas Ryba, *Rene Girard and Creative Reconciliation*, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014), chapter 13, 248.

³⁵⁰ Good news: New Testament and Psalms (Toronto, ON: Canadian Bible Society, 1995).

³⁵¹ Michael E. McCullough, Kenneth I. Pargament & Carlo E. Thoresen, eds., *Forgiveness: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 21.

unstable and may even collapse.³⁵² An exploration of Volf's theology of forgiveness will be discussed later in this chapter.

This topic of forgiveness ties in with theology, yet my purpose is also to explain how the lives of ordinary people can be touched and transformed by practicing forgiveness regardless of their religious faith. The most satisfactory way to understand forgiveness is in terms of complementary viewpoints. No one single description is sufficient to comprehend the experience completely. Therefore forgiveness needs to be studied through a multi-disciplinary approach in order to describe it effectively. It can be studied or perceived as a moral issue from the point of view of ethicists and philosophers, conceptualized as a therapeutic response as seen in the work of therapists and psychologists, or examined from a theological and spiritual perspective by theologians. The following section presents definitions of forgiveness from different perspectives and explores their significance.

5.3 Understanding of Forgiveness in a Multi-Disciplinary Perspective

Each discipline has its own definition and view of forgiveness. However, concepts and similar terms reoccur, for there is also much common ground. We will examine forgiveness in philosophy first.

Philosophy

Jean Vanier, humanitarian, philosopher, and founder of L'Arche,³⁵³ uses the Greek word for forgiveness, *asphesis*, meaning to release, to free from burden, liability, guilt and retribution.³⁵⁴

Working with severely disabled people, he explores ways of finding freedom from those inner

³⁵² Miroslav Volf, *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 131.

³⁵³ L'Arche is an international organization founded by Jean Vanier in France, in 1964, for people with developmental disabilities and for those who assist them.

³⁵⁴ Jean Vanier, *Becoming Human* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1998), 135.

hurts that govern our actions and make us behave inhumanly towards others. He speaks about the love that transforms people; for him to forgive is to offer this transformative love that frees us from moral and emotional guilt, from the pains of the past that prevent us from living abundantly and loving others.³⁵⁵

He maintains that in order to find inner freedom and peace one needs to free oneself from hatred toward others and hatred toward self. He suggests five steps to forgiveness: 1. refusing to take vengeance; 2. hoping that the offender be liberated; 3. yearning to apprehend the wrongdoer; 4. accepting our own sinfulness, the fact that we, too, can hurt others; and 5. endurance, giving time for the oppressor to change and grow.³⁵⁶ He concludes that the unearthing of our humanity frees us from our egocentric impulses and inner hurts, eventually leading to happiness in forgiveness and in loving those who have hurt us. “It is the process of truly becoming human.”³⁵⁷

Joanna North, influenced by Immanuel Kant and other philosophers, believes that human beings are spiritual and their desires, aspirations, and fears are experienced and communicated through one another. Though forgiveness is closely connected to the spiritual, and as such transcends the beliefs of particular religious groups and sects. She first describes what forgiveness is not: it does not take the wrong doing from the offender, nor does it waive the punishment that he/she deserves, nor condones the offender’s wrongdoing. The offender still remains responsible for all his/her wrongdoings.³⁵⁸ If forgiveness is to be genuine and significant it is necessary that the perpetrator takes responsibility for the wrongdoings.

³⁵⁵ Vanier, *Becoming Human*, 139.

³⁵⁶ Vanier, *Becoming Human*, 155.

³⁵⁷ Vanier, *Becoming Human*, 5.

³⁵⁸ Enright and North (eds.), *Exploring Forgiveness*, 16.

North goes on to define genuine forgiveness as “a matter of a *willed* change of heart, the successful result of an active endeavor to replace bad thoughts with good, bitterness and anger with compassion and affection.”³⁵⁹ To replace the destructive feeling of revenge and hatred with positive emotions of compassion and kindness necessitates a spiritual and mental effort on the part of the victim, while acknowledging an injury has been committed by the offender. This “active psychological endeavor” in North’s words is to heal the wrong done to the victim and the harm brought to the relationship between the victim and the wrongdoer.³⁶⁰

Similar to Enright et al., who have proposed four-phase process of forgiveness, North, too has developed a strategy for the process of forgiveness into number of stages. These stages may not be experienced sequentially and may not be discrete and clear.

Stage 1: Generally, the injured party (IP) goes through negative emotions which may be repressed or not fully acknowledged at this stage. However, identifying such feelings and their legitimacy is of importance in working through the process.

Stage 2: The IP wants justice and retribution. Negative emotions are alleviated when wrongdoings are confessed publicly. Nevertheless, if there is no justice (as conceptualized by the IP), negative emotions will increase.

Stage 3: Although negative feelings still persist towards the wrongdoer (WD), the IP is willing to forgive him/her in order to feel better. The readiness of the IP depends on the severity of the offence, the relationship with the WD, how long ago the offence was committed, and the intensity of the emotions experienced currently by the IP.

³⁵⁹ Joanna North, “Wrongdoing and Forgiveness” *Philosophy* 62 (1987): 499–508, cited in Enright and North (eds.), *Exploring Forgiveness*, 20.

³⁶⁰ North, “Wrongdoing and Forgiveness,” cited in Enright and North (eds.), *Exploring Forgiveness*, 21.

Stage 4: The IP starts to look outside of him/herself and recognises the wrongdoer as a fellow human being and one of God's creatures. The IP may hold ethical convictions, which motivates him/her to forgive, recognising that both are sinners in need of God's forgiveness. Consequently, the IP forgives because he/she wants to receive God's forgiveness.

Stage 5: At this stage the IP is going beyond the impersonal to the personal in his/her forgiveness. This may be determined by the previous relationship between the two parties or the relationship that they have built after the wrongdoing. For example, the IP and the WD may be family members or close friends; these close ties often provide the desire and the incentive to forgive.

Stage 6: The IP experiences the desire to forgive at this stage, moving from *ought* to forgive to fully *wanting* to forgive. His/her feelings towards the WD shift from negative to positive; these emotions may include compassion, empathy, and love.

Stage 7: The IP makes a decision to attempt to forgive the WD. The positive emotions which the IP experienced at stage 6 can enrich and foster the process of "reframing" (as noted by Enright and others). Reframing is a process through which the WD is considered as more valuable than and separate from the wrong he/she has committed. According to North, this is the most important stage in carrying out forgiveness.

Stage 8: At this stage the IP will usually extend a public gesture of forgiveness to the WD.

Where the two parties have close ties, they may shake hands for example. At this stage the public gesture of forgiveness may help to bring closure to the internal process of forgiveness referred to in stage 7.

Stage 9: The IP has changed his/her negative feelings into positive feelings; this is the final stage of forgiveness for the IP whether or not the WD is still around. This is because forgiveness is

primarily an internal process on the part of the IP. If the WD is still around reconciliation may be attainable. However, there may still be a need for healing and additional work to create trust and reconciliation. The future relationship may be different than the previous one.³⁶¹

North emphasises that “reframing” is essential for the whole process of forgiveness. It is a way of understanding the wrongdoer in his/her context—his/her background, environment, beliefs and feelings—in short, trying to understand the whole situation of the person, by putting oneself in his/her position, in order to facilitate feelings of compassion and empathy on the part of the victim toward the wrongdoer.³⁶² North’s approach to forgiveness, to “restoring the wrongdoer to his original place as well as overcoming estrangement,”³⁶³ is contested by philosopher Douglas Stewart. From his point of view, the requirement for a complete change in attitude, although obtainable in some cases, may be in general too demanding for the forgiver. He believes that it is still beneficial to forgive by setting aside resentment for the sake of integrity, for the victim may either not know the perpetrator, or not be able to offer renewed affection even if they do. Further, North’s notion of “overcoming estrangement” includes reconciliation as a necessary part in the process, rather than a possible but uncertain result of forgiving. Forgiving is not the same as reconciling with the wrongdoer. While a new relationship and trust may develop between the victim and the wrongdoer as the outcome of forgiveness, forgiveness is possible without reconciliation, and reconciliation without forgiveness

Jeffrie Murphy and Jean Hampton take two different positions in defining forgiveness.

Murphy, taking a secular perspective on forgiveness, describes it as an overcoming of resentment

³⁶¹ Joanna North, “The ‘Ideal’ of Forgiveness: A Philosopher’s Exploration,” in Robert D. Enright & Joanna North *Exploring Forgiveness* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 21-24.

³⁶² Joanna North, “The ‘Ideal’ of Forgiveness, 23.

³⁶³ Joanna North, “Wrongdoing and Forgiveness,” *Philosophy* 62: (1987): 507. Cited in Douglas Stewart, “Thinking About Forgiveness: A Philosophical Preamble to its Cultivation in Schooling” *Journal of Thought* Spring (2012):70. <http://journalofthought.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/10stewart.pdf>

on moral grounds. He argues that it works mainly in defence of certain values of the self, such as self-esteem. Though resentment is an unhealthy element, yet to a certain extent he believes that it is positive, its principal value being to protect one's self-respect. A lack of resentment when one is harmed can be a sign of a lack of self-respect.³⁶⁴ He also argues that forgiveness is not always a good thing; being too ready to forgive can be a vice because it may be an indication that one is lacking in self-respect. It is a given fact that forgiveness re-establishes relationships, but to sacrifice one's own human dignity to pursue restitution cannot be a virtue.³⁶⁵ Murphy maintains that overcoming resentment in order to forgive can at times be morally inappropriate.

Hampton on the other hand is not satisfied with Murphy's definition of forgiveness as the "overcoming of resentment for moral reasons."³⁶⁶ She defines forgiveness as a *process* of overcoming anger and resentments, of achieving a transformed heart toward the offender (which is different from condoning their actions), and which is generally followed by an offer of reconciliation.³⁶⁷ Hampton argues that Murphy attempts to describe the change of heart that forgiveness requires as centering on "what the forgiver must overcome in order to have it."³⁶⁸ According to Hampton, this way of thinking empties forgiveness of its essence. In other words, overcoming resentments is not the same as willingly desiring to reach out with compassion and generosity to the other.

³⁶⁴ Jeffrie G. Murphy & Jean Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 16.

³⁶⁵ Murphy & Hampton, 17.

³⁶⁶ Murphy & Hampton, 42.

³⁶⁷ Murphy & Hampton, 42.

³⁶⁸ Murphy & Hampton, 43.

In Arendt's view, some actions dwell outside the horizon of forgiveness, and therefore to grant forgiveness for them would be unacceptable. Gobodo-Madikizela summarizes Arendt's³⁶⁹ account of witnessing the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem:

These acts transcend the realm of human affairs, and are therefore neither punishable nor forgivable. The radically evil are unpunishable because no amount of punishment can restore a sense of symmetry that would balance what they have done. They are unforgivable because no yard-stick exists by which we can measure what it means to forgive them and there is no mental disposition we can adopt towards them that would correct the sense of injustice that their actions have injected into our world.³⁷⁰

Conversely, according to Derrida, forgiving the unforgivable is the heart of forgiveness. It has to be challenged for forgiveness to be genuine and meaningful. He exemplifies his notion of forgiveness as "the madness of the impossible."³⁷¹ Further he argues that when an offender commits indescribable brutalities, the victims are dehumanised and lose their humanity, including the capacity to decide whether to forgive or not.³⁷² Their very power to choose is deeply compromised. Gobodo-Madikizela embraces the language of Derrida and his notion of "pure forgiveness" and suggests that "the emergence of forgiveness is deeply embedded in the capacity for empathy."³⁷³

The contrast between Arendt and Derrida is an interesting one and illustrates the differences that can be found between philosophers. On the one hand, Arendt believed that there

³⁶⁹ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report of the Banality of Evil*, (New York: Viking Press, 1965) cited in Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, "Trauma, Forgiveness and the Witnessing Dance: Making Public Spaces Intimate" *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 53 (2008), 170.

³⁷⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998) cited in Gobodo-Madikizela, "Trauma, Forgiveness and the Witnessing Dance," 170.

³⁷¹ Jacques Derrida, *Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, translated by Mark Dooley and Michael Hughes, (New York: Routledge, 2002) cited in Gobodo-Madikizela, "Trauma, Forgiveness and the Witnessing Dance," 172.

³⁷² Derrida, *Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, cited in Gobodo-Madikizela, "Trauma, Forgiveness and the Witnessing Dance," 172.

³⁷³ Gobodo-Madikizela, "Trauma, Forgiveness and the Witnessing Dance," 172.

were unforgivable sins, beyond human comprehension, that cannot be redeemed; for Derrida, the essential character of forgiveness expresses itself most clearly when forgiving the unforgivable.

Psychology

There is an increasing interest in the psychology of interpersonal forgiveness. Here, most of the material is developed from the perspective of the victim. Robert Enright and his colleagues in the Department of Educational Psychology in Wisconsin-Madison have contributed significantly to the work in forgiveness studies.³⁷⁴ Enright asserts that diligence in defining and describing forgiveness is essential and necessary in order to give the correct understanding of it to the person trying to forgive another.³⁷⁵ According to Worthington, there is no universal definition for forgiveness.³⁷⁶ However, it seems that most researchers and theorists agree with Enright and Coyle,

that forgiveness should be differentiated from “pardoning” (which is a legal term), “condoning” (which implies a justification of the offence), “excusing” (which implies that the offender had a good reason for committing the offence), “forgetting” (which implies that the memory of the offence has simply decayed or slipped out of conscious awareness), and “denying” (which implies simply an unwillingness to perceive the harmful injuries that one has incurred).³⁷⁷

If it is not any of these things, what then is forgiveness? Enright and his associates define forgiveness as “a willingness to abandon one’s right to resentment, negative judgement, and indifferent behaviour toward one who has unjustly hurt us, while fostering the underserved

³⁷⁴ Richard Fitzgibbons, “Anger and the Healing Power of Forgiveness: A Psychiatrist’s View” in Enright and North, *Exploring Forgiveness*, 63.

³⁷⁵ Enright & North, *Exploring Forgiveness*, 6.

³⁷⁶ Worthington, E. L., Jr. *Dimensions of Forgiveness*, (Radnor, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 1998a) cited in Michael E. McCullough, Kenneth I. Pargament & Carl E. Thoresen, *Forgiveness: Theory, Research and Practice*, 7.

³⁷⁷ Robert D. Enright and Catherine T. Coyle, “Researching the Process Model of Forgiveness within Psychological Interventions” in Worthington, *Dimensions of Forgiveness*, 140–41, cited in McCullough, Pargament and Thoresen, *Forgiveness: Theory Research and Practice*, 8.

qualities of compassion, generosity, and even love toward him or her.”³⁷⁸ In this definition of forgiveness, there are three significant points to be noted. The first is that the wounded person has the ability to acknowledge the real injustice done to him/her; second, that the injured person chooses to forgive willingly and without any pressure; and third, that negative emotions such as resentment, anger and revenge are replaced with positive emotions of compassion and generosity.³⁷⁹

In his article, “An empathy-humility-commitment model of forgiveness applied within family dyads,” Worthington describes forgiveness as desiring to have empathy for the perpetrator, humility to accept oneself as imperfect and capable of doing wrong as the offender, and to have the capacity to pledge openly to forgive.³⁸⁰ He maintains that forgiveness is not forgetting, nor excusing, nor restoring justice, nor reconciliation.³⁸¹

There is disagreement between psychologists and Christian theologians regarding forgiveness. In the past years, many psychologists agreed that forgiveness and reconciliation are two distinct processes; either one can occur without the other. The argument is that forgiveness is an internal unilateral process and reconciliation is an external bilateral or relational process.³⁸² According to the theologians, forgiveness is complete only when reconciliation occurs. For example, in Volf’s theology, forgiveness is one of the essential elements in rebuilding relationship between God and human beings. In Christianity we forgive, because we love those

³⁷⁸ Robert D. Enright and Joanna North, *Exploring Forgiveness*, (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 46-47.

³⁷⁹ Enright and North, *Exploring Forgiveness*, 47.

³⁸⁰ Everett L. Worthington, Jr., “An Empathy-Humility-Commitment Model of Forgiveness Applied within Family Dyads” *Journal of Family Therapy* (1998): 20: 59-76.

³⁸¹ Worthington, “An Empathy-Humility-Commitment Model of forgiveness, 60.

³⁸² J. N. Sells. & T. D. Hargrave, “Forgiveness: A Review of the Theoretical and Empirical Literature” *Journal of Family Therapy* 20, (1998): 21-6 cited in Nathan R. Frise and Mark, R. McMinn, “Forgiveness and Reconciliation” 84.

who hurt us and even our enemies. This same love that stimulates forgiveness, urges one step further to reconciliation, in Volf's term the "embrace."³⁸³ Therefore it is understood that the fruit of forgiveness is reconciliation. On the other hand, within the psychological community, forgiveness can be considered as a unilateral act of clemency granted to the perpetrator by the victim.³⁸⁴ Since forgiveness is an autonomous gesture made by the victim, regardless of the wrongdoer's behaviour, it is therefore different from reconciliation, which necessitates bilateral actions such as remorse and renewed relationship.³⁸⁵ It is in this respect that the psychological perspective of forgiveness differs from the theological perspective.

Forgiveness operates on the level of human relationships and is also fundamental to religious life. For many years forgiveness was reflected upon solely within a theological framework. Recently it has evolved as an active research area also for psychology. Fraser Watts discussed the connection of theology and psychology in regard to forgiveness and found that both approaches are valuable. They are not independent of each other, but compatible, emphasising different aspects of the same process.³⁸⁶

Theology

Offering and seeking forgiveness is a fundamental aspect of Christian life and community.

Martin Marty, a historian of the Christian tradition, described forgiveness as a dominant theme in the ethos or character of Christian spirituality. He adds that the Christian concept of forgiveness

³⁸³ Volf, *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace*, 189.

³⁸⁴ Enright, R. D., Fitzgibbons, R. P. *Helping Clients Forgive: An Empirical Guide for Resolving Anger and Restoring Hope*. (Washington,DC: American Psychological Association, 2000), cited in Frise and McMinn, "Forgiveness and Reconciliation," 84.

³⁸⁵ Frise, & McMinn, "Forgiveness and Reconciliation," 84.

³⁸⁶ Fraser Watts and Liz Gulliford *Forgiveness in Context: Theology and Psychology in Creative Dialogue*, (London and New York: T&T Clark International A Continuum Imprint, 2004), 2.

although related to “redemption,” “atonement” and “reconciliation,” is central to Christianity.³⁸⁷

Frise and McMinn argue that the theological perception of forgiveness has deep roots in Christianity, where forgiveness and reconciliation appear to be an interrelated process. Taking a Christian theological perspective, God forgives humanity for the purpose of reconciliation.³⁸⁸

For Gregory Jones, genuine forgiveness brings about the healing of what has been broken. He argues that the ‘God who lives in Trinitarian relations’(self-giving communion) is willing to accept the cost of forgiveness for the sake of renewing the whole humanity into his communion. By leading us toward reconciliation through the way of costly forgiveness, we are called to exemplify this forgiveness by repairing the brokenness, healing the division, reconciling and building new relationship. It is a labour in which guilt and wrongdoings are reflected and eventually defeated by the renewal of community.³⁸⁹ This indicates that the goal of forgiveness is not to feel better in oneself, but to expand, enrich and build community. It is a way of life, creating a space for living with others. Rodney Petersen notes³⁹⁰ the significant contribution of the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer who built the foundation for a theology of forgiveness, what he called “costly grace”³⁹¹ and a form of spirituality that pledges us to healing relationships.³⁹² The same author notes that “in the history of the church the practice of

³⁸⁷ Martin E. Marty, “The Ethos of Christian Forgiveness” cited in Worthington, *Dimensions of Forgiveness: Psychological Research & Theological Perspectives*, 11.

³⁸⁸ Frise & McMinn, “Forgiveness and Reconciliation,” 84.

³⁸⁹ L. G. Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids, MI:Eerdmans, 1995), xii.

³⁹⁰ Rodney L. Petersen, “A Theology of Forgiveness,” in Raymond G. Helmick & Rodney L. Petersen, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Religion, Public Policy & Conflict Transformation* (Philadelphia:Templeton Foundation Press, 2001), 7.

³⁹¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. R. H. Fuller (New York: Macmillan, 1964)

³⁹² Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans, with Introduction by John W. Doberstein (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1993).

forgiveness has been clearly tied to penitence, most often privatized as a part of individual religious practice since the early medieval period.”³⁹³

This individual practice of forgiveness still exists in the present Sri Lankan Catholic diaspora in Toronto. But it seems that forgiveness is often removed from the practice of everyday life: the horizontal aspect of forgiveness is often forgotten. They seem to forget Jesus’ words: “if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift” (Matthew. 5:23–24).

Petersen shares his experience of coming to understand the terms of forgiveness while teaching in Geneva, Switzerland. Most of his students had come from different parts of the world affected by situations of violence, trauma and suffering. Many of them were stuck in forms of behaviour shaped by their past. Many believed there was no hope for the future. Often the theme of forgiveness came up and he was reminded of Hannah Arendt who pointed out “that we were created with the power to remember the past, but left powerless to change it; and that we are created with the power to imagine the future, left powerless to control it.”³⁹⁴ For Arendt, the only power we have is in forgiving the past; therefore Petersen concludes that in order for his students to move forward and build a future, they would have to learn to forgive.³⁹⁵ This same situation could be applied to the Sri Lankan Sinhalese and Tamils all over the world.

Jeffrey Brandsma suggests that the theological perspective can add a helpful dimension, when in extreme instances, such as in the case of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi regime, forgiveness

³⁹³ Rodney L. Petersen, “A Theology of Forgiveness” in *Forgiveness and Reconciliation* (Templeton Foundation Press Philadelphia, 2001), 4.

³⁹⁴ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, (University of Chicago: Chicago Press, 1998) cited in Raymond G. Helmick, S. J. and Rodney L. Petersen, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation* (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 2001), 11.

³⁹⁵ Petersen, “A Theology of Forgiveness,” in Helmick and Petersen, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, 11.

seems impossible.³⁹⁶ Another example of this seemingly impossible task is found in the work of Marietta Jaeger who describes how she fought to overcome the hatred she felt at the murder of her daughter Susie:

Though I readily admit that I wanted to kill this man with my bare hands, by the time of the resolution of his crimes, I was convinced that my best and healthiest option was to forgive... Anger, hatred, resentment, bitterness, revenge—they are death-dealing spirits and they will “take our lives” on some level as surely as Susie’s life was taken. The only way we can be whole, healthy, happy persons is to learn to forgive... Though I would *never* have chosen it so, the first person to receive a gift of life from the death of my daughter... was me.³⁹⁷

Volf’s theology of forgiveness, which will be dealt with in the next section, offers insight into the extra dimension offered by a theological perspective.

Thus far we have explored the concept of forgiveness in the disciplines of philosophy, psychology and theology. Notwithstanding differences in points of view, the basic concepts are interconnected and reoccurring. Philosophers disagree as to whether forgiveness is always the right moral position and whether it must be completed by reconciliation or not. It is described as an act of will. Psychologists agree that it is a choice that at its core means letting go of one’s right to resentment and replacing it by viewing the wrongdoer through a lens of compassion. In Christianity, God in Christ who died on the cross for our sins, enables and inspires human beings to forgive. Jesus’ death was an act of forgiveness for our sins. Because we have been forgiven, we in turn need to forgive others. It is essential that the forgiver has compassion and releases wrongdoers of their guilt, and that there be repentance on the part of the wrongdoers.

³⁹⁶ Jeffrey Brandsma, “Forgiveness: A Dynamic, Theological and Therapeutic Analysis,” *Pastoral Psychology*, vol. 31(1), Fall 1962, 45.

³⁹⁷ Marietta Jaeger, “The Power and Reality of Forgiveness: Forgiving the Murderer of One’s Child,” in Robert Enright and Joanna North, *Exploring Forgiveness*, (University of Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 14.

The following section continues the examination of the theological definition of forgiveness, through the work of Miroslav Volf.

5.4 Volf's Theology of Forgiveness

Before I explore Volf's theology, it is necessary to explain why I chose Volf over other theologians such as Worthington, Petersen, Helmick, Bonhoeffer or Enright, to mention a few. In the preface of *Exclusion and Embrace*, Volf offers an account of how he was challenged by his professor, theologian Jürgen Moltmann. Volf had just delivered a lecture on the Christian call to embrace the enemy. Moltmann asked him a question: "But can you embrace a 'cetnik?'"³⁹⁸ A *cetnik* was a Serbian fighter who had brutalized the population of Volf's native Croatia. This question was the starting point of the personal reflection that motivated his spiritual journey in finding the answer.

Volf felt torn between the victims crying out to God and the Lamb of God immolated for the guilty.³⁹⁹ How to resolve the cry of the oppressed for justice and the gift of forgiveness offered by Christ to the offenders? On one hand, he was drawn to the need to obtain justice for the oppressed; on the other hand, the invitation to embrace the offender. As a Christian, he had an internal conflict: the need to follow the cross and, in doing so, to allow himself and others to be crucified.⁴⁰⁰

Volf offers a powerful reflection on his painful personal stories in light of the giving and forgiving God. His personal and family life in a country troubled by violence gives a depth to forgiveness both on God's part as well as on our part. As with Arendt, Volf also asserts that

³⁹⁸ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 9.

³⁹⁹ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 9.

⁴⁰⁰ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 10.

forgiveness can be unbearable and even perhaps unachievable.⁴⁰¹ Volf's authenticity, his personal experience, and the conflict-ridden context in which he lived relate very closely to my own context. Many of the Sri Lankan victims of war raise the question: Is it possible to forgive and embrace the enemy who had tortured and murdered men, women and children? At the centre of his theological analysis of forgiveness and reconciliation, Volf, places the notions of "identity" and "otherness" as the fundamental factors in the ethnic cleansing of his own country. This concept was introduced in Chapter 4 under the heading "Deep-rooted Conflicts." The following section will present Volf's interpretation of the concept of identity and otherness.

As Volf observes, the root of ethnic and cultural conflicts may stem from broader issues of identity and otherness.⁴⁰² Ethnic cleansing in many forms has a long history. An obvious example is Nazi Germany's calculated plan to eliminate the Jewry. Colonialism is another example; it was a quest to impose European identity on other peoples and cultures, seeking to reproduce itself in the destruction of others and their way of life.⁴⁰³ These ethnic and cultural conflicts necessitate giving importance to identity and otherness in the theological reflection on the everyday existence. According to Volf, human rights, justice, and even ecological well-being should not be subordinate to the concepts of identity and otherness; the latter concepts must still retain a place, for there is interplay between all of them.⁴⁰⁴

Charles Taylor differentiates the "politics of equal dignity" (human rights) from the "politics of difference" (identity). He defines the latter as follows:

What we are asked to recognize is the unique identity of this individual or group, their distinctiveness from everyone else. The idea is that it is precisely this

⁴⁰¹ Volf, *Free of Charge*, 126.

⁴⁰² Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 16.

⁴⁰³ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 17.

⁴⁰⁴ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 18.

distinctness that has been ignored, glossed over, assimilated to a dominant or majority identity. And this assimilation is the cardinal sin against the ideal of authenticity.⁴⁰⁵

In a similar vein, Volf focuses his notion of identity on the impact of the social surroundings into which an individual is born. An individual identifies with parents, teachers and community leaders not only as people but also as models of an attachment and commitment to culture, language and customs.⁴⁰⁶

Volf's understanding of otherness engages the metaphors of "exclusion" and "embrace." In exclusion, there are two correlated features. The first involves the breaking of the relationship that connects, removing oneself out of the model of interdependence to take on a position of independence. As a result, the other is driven away and seen either as an adversary or as a nonentity that can be ignored and forsaken. The second is a form of denial of any separation, when the other is either absorbed by being made more like the self or subdued by the self. Instead of a relationship of mutual sharing, exclusion creates a relationship of violence that takes the form of assimilation, domination or rejection.⁴⁰⁷

To develop the concept of embrace, Volf takes the words of Paul, "Accept one another for the glory of God as Christ has accepted you" (Romans 15:7),⁴⁰⁸ which the Apostle then interprets as "Welcome one another, just as Christ has welcomed you." To describe the process of "welcoming," Volf engages the metaphor of "embrace" which enhances some of the main themes central to his theology: the total self-giving love in the Trinity (the doctrine of God), the

⁴⁰⁵ Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition" in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, edited by Amy Gutmann, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 38.

⁴⁰⁶ Vamik Volkan, *A Need to Have Enemies and Allies: From Clinical Practice to International Relationships*. (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1988) 49f., 90ff., cited in Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 19.

⁴⁰⁷ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 67.

⁴⁰⁸ Good news: New Testament and Psalms (Toronto, ON: Canadian Bible Society, 1995).

crucifixion of Christ on the cross for sinful humanity (the doctrine of Christ), and the open arms of the “father” welcoming and embracing the squandering son (the doctrine of salvation).⁴⁰⁹

Volf uses the metaphor of embrace to represent the dynamic relationship between the self and the other. He explains the drama of embrace in four movements. The first one is opening the arms, the second movement is waiting, the third is closing the arms, and the final movement is opening the arms again. In order to create the embrace, all four gestures must be present and in sequence. If the movement ends after the first two gestures, opening the arms and waiting, the embrace will not happen; if the embrace stops with the third gesture, closing the arms, then the act of love would turn into an act of restraint and a return to exclusion.⁴¹⁰ Volf explains these gestures in detail. In the first step, one opens one’s arms, which is an invitation and a sign of desire for the other. The second step is to wait to allow the other to respond and open their arms. Hegel described this as “a desire held in check.”⁴¹¹ Such waiting can also be interpreted as desiring to respect the integrity of the other. He sees the open arms as having their own power to move the other toward the self. It is significant that the self makes the initial movement toward the other.⁴¹² The third gesture, of closing the arms, is the actual embrace. According to Gurevitch, “each is both holding and being held by the other, active and passive.”⁴¹³ What is essential in this movement is that each must enter the space of the other, be present, and experience the presence of the other. The embrace must be mutual. The final step is the opening of the arms again; it is the sign of letting go. The embrace did not merge two people into one but

⁴⁰⁹ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 29.

⁴¹⁰ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 141.

⁴¹¹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of the Spirit*. Translated by A. V. Miller, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 118 cited in Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 142.

⁴¹² Hegel, *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, cited in Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 143.

⁴¹³ Gurevitch, Z. D. “The Embrace: On the Element of Non-Distance in Human Relations.” *The Sociological Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (1990): 194.

maintained the identity of each and brought them together to share. The self retains the impression of the presence of the other.⁴¹⁴ Paradoxically, the end of the embrace is the beginning of the next.⁴¹⁵ Volf concludes that the open arms that issued the invitation to embrace are the same ones that release the other and so issue an invitation to return.

Volf relates this self-motivated energetic relationship between the self and the other to God's acceptance of human sinfulness into divine communion. This is Volf's theology of embrace. His dominant theme, the "embrace," covers exclusion, repentance, forgiveness, justice, truth and peace.

Though forgiveness is only one of the elements in the act of reconciliation, it is very important, for it is rooted in Volf's theology of the cross and his theology of the Trinitarian God. This synthesis draws on Moltmann's theology as expressed in *The Crucified Christ*,⁴¹⁶ *The Spirit of Life*,⁴¹⁷ and *The Trinity and The Kingdom*.⁴¹⁸ Volf, summarizes the main theme of Moltmann's theology of the cross in the concept of solidarity: Christ suffered not for his own sake but for those who were oppressed and sinful; by taking upon himself their suffering and dying on the cross. Through his death Christ brings into this human world God's eternal fellowship, divine justice, and righteousness through which humankind is given new life.⁴¹⁹

While Moltmann emphasises the social aspect of God's solidarity with the victims as he suffers with them, Volf further elaborates the theme that Christ's death on the cross was a divine

⁴¹⁴ Walzer, Michael. *Thick and Thin: Moral Arguments at Home and Abroad*. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994) , 83 cited in Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 145.

⁴¹⁵ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 145.

⁴¹⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, (London: SMC, 1973).

⁴¹⁷ Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*. Trans. by Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis MI: Fortress, 1992).

⁴¹⁸ Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*. Translated by Margaret Kohl (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1981).

⁴¹⁹ Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 13, cited in Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 23.

self-donation for the other, for humanity. He claims that we as Christians must try to imitate this self-donation through solidarity with those who are suffering—not merely “suffering on the side of” but “suffering together with.” This exemplifies the divine act of receiving the other in our humanity and reaching out to our enemies.⁴²⁰ Volf argues that while all those who suffer can find consolation in the Christ crucified, only those who live according to his example will find communion with him. Seeking the comfort of the crucified, not fighting against evil, is to “advocate not only cheap grace but a deceitful ideology”.⁴²¹ Thus, the theme of God’s self-donation for humanity and human self-giving for one another is so central to Volf.

Speaking of cheap grace, Bonhoeffer reminds us that forgiveness itself is a form of suffering.

The law of Christ, which it is our duty to fulfil, is the bearing of the cross. My brother’s burden which I must bear is not only his outward lot, his natural characteristics and gifts, but quite literally his sin. And the only way to bear that sin is by forgiving it in the power of the cross of Christ in which I now share. Thus, the call to follow Christ always means a call to share the work of forgiving men their sins. Forgiveness is the Christlike suffering which it is the Christian’s duty to bear.⁴²²

Volf’s theology and relationship to the Trinitarian God is well described in the context of his understanding of Christ’s death on the cross. He writes that the very nature of the Trinity is echoed on the cross of Christ; conversely, the cross of Christ is engraved in the heart of the triune God; “Christ’s passion is God’s passion.”⁴²³ This Trinitarian theology of the cross raises the question of our response and relationship to one another, including our enemies. We are all embraced by the Trinity with the same love with which they embrace each other; they create a

⁴²⁰ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 24.

⁴²¹ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 24.

⁴²² Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 80.

⁴²³ Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, 21ff cited in Volf. *Exclusion and Embrace*, 127.

space for us “within their eternal embrace.”⁴²⁴ This making space for us, and inviting us in, takes place in the Eucharist. Having been embraced by God, we also need to make space for others and invite them into this embrace, including our enemies.⁴²⁵ In reference to the Sri Lankan Sinhalese and Tamil Catholics, it is poignant that they cannot bring themselves to celebrate mass together. It is in the Eucharist that we celebrate the giving of the self to the other and the receiving of the other into the self of the triune God, that we are called and enabled to do likewise; to live this experience of giving and receiving in the conflict-ridden world.

Unlike Volf and the other theologians who emphasise on what forgiveness is about, Dietrich Bonhoeffer offers his theology of forgiveness in loving the enemy based on the Sermon on the Mount.⁴²⁶

You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your friends, and hate your enemies.’ But now I tell you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may become the children of your Father in heaven. For he makes his sun to shine on bad and good people alike and gives rain to those who do good and to those who do evil. (Matthew 5:43-45).

For humans the very thought of loving their enemy is an impossible offence, and it is beyond their ability. Bonhoeffer suggests that a Christian must consider his/her enemy as brother and sister and redress that hostility with love. He says:

If out of love for our brother we are willing to sacrifice goods, honor and life, we must be prepared to do the same for our enemy. We are not to imagine that this is to condone his evil; such a love proceeds from strength rather than weakness, from truth rather than fear, and therefore it cannot be guilty of the hatred of another.⁴²⁷

His understanding of loving the enemy does not guarantee when we bless our enemies and do good to them, they in turn will be good to us. It may not be so. Even if they persecute us it will

⁴²⁴ Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom* cited in Volf. *Exclusion and Embrace*, 129.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁴²⁶ In Bonhoeffer’s work until 1939, the theme “love your enemies” was predominant.

⁴²⁷ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 133.

not hurt as long as we pray for them. When doing so, we are taking on ourselves their guilt and suffering, and praying to God for them. We are doing this indirectly what they are unable to do for themselves.⁴²⁸ He distinguishes the natural and the Christian love. The ordinary or the natural love is when we love those who love us which the nonbelievers and the publicans do. But the Christian love asserts that we must love our enemies.

Lori Hale points out, that Bonhoeffer acknowledged before God that all human beings are equal, there is no distinction between “Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and free people, between men and women; you are all one in union with Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). He maintains that in the sufferings of Christ on the cross, we are all connected and belong to one another and in need of hope, “bound together by the same destiny.”⁴²⁹

In his second book, *Free of Charge*,⁴³⁰ Volf illustrates how to live his theology and spirituality of forgiveness in practical life. The dominant theme is God’s unceasing giving and forgiving. He describes Christian faith as a way of life exemplified by Jesus, and how giving and forgiving are at the heart of this faith. Merging together theology and spirituality, he is inviting us to imitate in our own lives God’s generous giving and forgiving.

As I mentioned earlier, Volf acknowledges that forgiveness is painful and at times appears utterly impossible. That is why he explores some of these questions: Why should we give a gift of forgiveness when our broken bodies cry out for justice or revenge? How should we

⁴²⁸ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 134.

⁴²⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer. “On God’s Message of Love to Germany and the community of Nations” (Autumn 1930), in *A Testament to Freedom: The Essential Writing of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly and F. Burton Nelson (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 187-193 cited in Lori Brandt Hale, “From Loving Enemies to Acting Responsibly: Forgiveness in the Life and Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer” *Word & World* 27, no2 (2007), 81.

⁴³⁰ Volf, *Free of Charge*, 126.

forgive? What are the resistance to forgiveness? Where do we get the strength to overcome resistance to forgiving? These are questions to which I now turn.

5.5 How Should We Forgive?

Most of us have experienced anger, while acknowledging that the desire for revenge born of that anger is ethically wrong. According to Volf's interpretation, revenge does not mean "an eye for an eye," but rather "you take my eye, and I'll blow out your brains."⁴³¹ In other words, the passion to punish is so strong it demands more than what is due from the wrongdoer. Volf maintains that following the example of Christ and Paul, we need to put on generosity in place of revenge, to "ask God to bless those who persecute you—yes, ask him to bless, not to curse" (Romans 12:14, 20).⁴³² In the case of the Sri Lankan context, one might ask why not give up both vengeance and justice and choose forgiveness? Volf's response is that it is difficult to differentiate between vengeance and justice; what appears just to one may seem like pure retaliation to another. There is the danger of repaying evil with evil in the name of justice. As Paul writes, "do not let evil defeat you; instead, conquer evil with good" (Romans 12:21).⁴³³ On the other hand, Volf gives another explanation:

The very idea of forgiveness implies an affirmation of justice. The Lord's Prayer makes this plain. When we pray "forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matt 6:12), we imply that we *owe* God something and that other people *owe* us something. What we owe and what is owed to us can be established only by applying the principle of justice. Hence: no justice, no forgiveness.⁴³⁴

If we receive justice, do we need forgiveness? To Volf, even restorative justice cannot fully wipe away the crime.⁴³⁵ It may be worth pointing out that Volf does not get into restorative justice in

⁴³¹ Volf, *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace*, 159.

⁴³² *Good News: New Testament and Psalms* (Toronto, ON: Canadian Bible Society, 1995).

⁴³³ *Good News: New Testament and Psalms* (Toronto, ON: Canadian Bible Society, 1995).

⁴³⁴ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 122.

⁴³⁵ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace* 122.

depth. But, he does critique the idea of *strict* restorative justice. In other word, if someone has lost a loved one or has been brutally exploited or injured, there is no way of restoring what was lost. But, it is different if there has been a theft and the wrongdoer returns what has been stolen. Hence, Volf is simply making the claim that somethings cannot be restored and that we cannot look to restoration as the means to find a sense of justice. He concludes that the victim can lay the deep pain before God, who is a God of justice and trust in his mercy.

Is it possible for sinful human beings to forgive the way we should? In *Free of Charge*, Volf explains how it is difficult to even simply give, to give cheerfully and graciously. True giving takes strength; often we give for our benefit rather than for the benefits of others. Motivated by pride and selfishness, giving can demean and control the receiver.⁴³⁶ We give because we perceive the intended recipients to be deprived, or we simply want to give and to take pleasure in it. In contrast to the recipients of gifts, the wrongdoers are not simply waiting to receive. They have offended; sometimes their hands are tainted with blood. The abusiveness of the offenders connives with the victim's self-love making it very difficult to forgive.⁴³⁷ Volf observes that one of the biggest obstacles to forgiveness is the question of the power and right to forgive. He maintains that forgiving means to blame the offender while at the same time releasing them from the wrongdoings and from the guilt, and in the end letting the wrongdoing leave our consciousness altogether. Eliminating guilt is an essential factor in forgiveness. If one experiences guilt, then forgiveness has not happened.⁴³⁸ It is difficult to wipe out guilt, only God can do that. Jesus, because he is God, can remove our guilt. However, we have no power to take away the guilt for any offence, even the wrongs done to us, except to the degree that we

⁴³⁶ Volf, *Free of Charge*, 89–120.

⁴³⁷ Volf, *Free of Charge*, 194.

⁴³⁸ Volf, *Free of Charge*, 195.

collaborate in God's forgiveness. It is Christ who forgives through us; "our forgiveness is but an echo of God's"—that is how we are able to forgive.⁴³⁹

Volf does not agree that we live in an unforgiving culture where forgiveness is unreasonable. He affirms that as social beings we belong to a particular group of our own choosing, shaped by the environment and culture in which we live. In order to practice forgiveness, it is necessary to have a milieu where forgiveness is valued and cultivated.⁴⁴⁰ For example, in a Christian community, we come together to pray, to celebrate the sacraments and Eucharist; we can also learn to forgive. God works in the life of the forgivers through the community that facilitates and supports the practice of forgiveness. As a religious-based peacebuilder my hope in my future ministry is to build communities where the Sri Lankan Sinhalese and Tamil Catholics can learn and experience the gift of forgiveness that Jesus himself taught us and practised in his own life.

5.6 What Do We Do with Memories of Severe Wrongdoings After We Forgive?

Volf answers this question in *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a World of Violence*. He demonstrates what he has learnt through imagined conversations with "Captain G," his primary investigator during the eight years he was imprisoned for being a Christian and Western sympathizer in the former communist Yugoslavia.⁴⁴¹

We live in a world where memories of past wrongs are accepted and encouraged, for example, the World Wars, the Armenian genocide, the Holocaust, the Rwandan genocide, Black July, to mention a few. These memories are often very intense and can be passed down from generation to generation. But Volf argues that "it is important not merely to remember, but also

⁴³⁹ Volf, *Free of Charge*, 202.

⁴⁴⁰ Volf, *Free of Charge*, 212.

⁴⁴¹ Volf, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World*, 3-10.

to remember rightly.”⁴⁴² In other words, he urges the radical idea of letting go of such memories. Remembering the experience of wrongdoings is often an unpleasant and painful struggle. Sometimes, these memories provoke suffering in others. Does this way of remembering sustain human well-being or the flourishing of our humanity? Why not instead center our attention on how to remember rightly?

The question that Volf poses is “How should I, as a person committed to loving the wrongdoer and overcoming evil with good, remember abuse?”⁴⁴³ Volf explicitly claims that it is not an easy path to follow, but it is indeed the one that Jesus demands us to follow; it is the cost of discipleship. We hear in the gospel over and over again Jesus calling us to be his disciples. Avoiding that call would be to let down the One who is the source of our life and the goal of our desires.”⁴⁴⁴

Volf describes the consequences of recalling unpleasant memories when he writes that “to remember suffering endured is to keep one’s wounds open,”⁴⁴⁵ and “if in memory we are re-experiencing evil committed and suffered, we are not yet fully freed from its effects.”⁴⁴⁶ Like Wiesel he believes that “in spite of the past and its horrors, the world is worthy of salvation; and salvation like redemption can be found only in memory.”⁴⁴⁷ But, Volf argues that memories of wrongs suffered are ethically vague. On the one hand, they can help to rebuild one’s dignity and

⁴⁴² Volf, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: B. Eerdmans, 2006), 10.

⁴⁴³ Volf, *The End of Memory*, 11.

⁴⁴⁴ Volf, *The End of Memory*, 17.

⁴⁴⁵ Volf, *The End of Memory*, 22.

⁴⁴⁶ Volf, *The End of Memory*, 23.

⁴⁴⁷ Elie Wiesel, *From the Kingdom of Memory: Reminiscences* (New York: Summit, 1990), 201 cited in Volf, *The End of Memory*, 19.

motivate one to pursue justice; on the other hand, such memories can degrade people and lead to wrongdoings of one's own.⁴⁴⁸

Volf stresses the negative consequences of too much remembering, especially the potential wrongs done to individuals and groups. Memory is a way of keeping the dead. When wrongs are never forgotten, they cannot be forgiven, thus possibly creating animosity that lives for ever. To remember rightly is to remember truthfully, thereby rendering justice to both victim and offender.⁴⁴⁹ It leads to inner healing. The wrongdoers' actions are not condoned, yet they are freed from being held to account. The victims do not have to recall the wrongdoers as villains or themselves as victims; wrongdoers do not have to carry their feelings of guilt as part of their identity. This releases both parties from the experience of wrong. To remember rightly is also to learn from past memories. The final stage of remembering rightly is letting go of the wrongs. This kind of letting go turns out to be life enhancing, benefitting not only the individual who has been wronged, but also the wrongdoer and the community.

If I did not hope in the world to come, I would embrace the 'eternal' remembering of wrongs suffered. But I do hope in the world to come. I believe that we will be living with those who have died not as with the dead but as with the living, looking into their eyes and not just remembering their past. Given this conviction, what moral obligation would there be to eternally remember wrong suffered? After full justice has been done and final reconciliation accomplished and after the dead are raised, will we need memory to keep victims 'alive' and attend to their suffered wrongs? ... I do not think so.⁴⁵⁰

Volf's conviction is: "When we forgive those who have wronged us, we make God's miracle of forgiveness our own."⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁸ Volf, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World*, 39.

⁴⁴⁹ Volf, *The End of memory*, 58.

⁴⁵⁰ Volf, "Letting Go: The Final Miracle of Forgiveness," *The Christian Century*, December 12, (2006).
<https://www.questia.com/magazine/1G1-156553188/letting-go-the-final-miracle-of-forgiveness>

⁴⁵¹ Volf, "Letting Go: The Final Miracle of Forgiveness,"

Before I conclude on Volf's theology of forgiveness, I would like to emphasise the importance of qualitative research and practical theology. Qualitative research is a valuable tool that empowers the practical theologian to obtain deep insights in questioning and reflecting theologically on complex situations. But there is a tension between the two disciplines regarding epistemology and the way they define 'reality' (nature of truth and knowledge). Theology assumes that truth is available through revelation. But for some epistemologies, knowledge has to be objective and gained through perceptual experience.

One of the models used to integrate practical theology and the social sciences in Swinton's definition is the *mutual critical correlation*.⁴⁵² This method brings together the understanding of the religious experience and the current situation to engage in critical and possibly transformative dialogue. In the case of my research study, the question arises, how does the teaching of forgiveness fit into the social cultural problem? In other words how do the findings obtained through qualitative research correspond to the Christian teaching of forgiveness in practical theology research?

Mutual critical correlation perceives the practical theological task as bringing together events and experiences in dialectical conversation with Christian tradition and social sciences. Tillich's method of correlation is: culture raises the questions and theology answers them from Christian tradition.⁴⁵³ His method is a uni-directional model of reflection, providing Christian truth to the world and not giving the world the opportunity to question that truth. His model was revised, and a dialectical component was integrated to be mutually correlative and critical.⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵² Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 74.

⁴⁵³ Graham, Walton, and Ward, *Theological Reflection*, 158.

⁴⁵⁴ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 78.

Stephen Pattison presents a helpful model of mutual critical correlation. His model of theological reflection is built on the metaphor of a conversation between friends: Christian tradition, social sciences, and the situation that is being addressed.⁴⁵⁵ For example in my research study this conversation took place with the focus group of the Sri Lankan Sinhalese and Tamil Roman Catholics. The concept of forgiveness according to Volf was presented to them. The participants began the conversation among themselves by sharing their reflections from what they have learned from the teachings, and from the sharing of others' reflections and conversations. This was possible because of their openness to listen and the willingness to learn.

This was the first time that both ethnic groups were together face to face to listen to each other's stories. There were different views and opinions, the conversation was difficult because of the context and the subject matter but there was no conflict. The friendly dialogue and sharing of experience created an atmosphere of seeking truth within the focus group. This is a dialectical approach for truth in both experience and theology. The initial presentation of Volf's theology of forgiveness played a crucial role in beginning the dialogue between members of the two groups who engaged that theology in their own complementary ways.

Conclusion

I have captured some of Volf's reflections, which give hope in a culture devoid of grace and in desperate need of reconciliation and peace. He argues that "to keep liberty we need grace, to live humanely, we must learn to forgive."⁴⁵⁶ God's forgiveness is universal; God forgives all people and all sins; there are no unforgiveable sins and there are no unforgiveable people. God loves us and forgives us before we ask forgiveness, a forgiveness that does not depend on our repentance.

⁴⁵⁵ Stephen Pattison, "Some Straw for the Bricks: A basic Introduction to the Theological Reflection," *Contact* 99:1, 2-9, [Doi:10.1080/13520806.1989.11759678](https://doi.org/10.1080/13520806.1989.11759678).

⁴⁵⁶ Volf, *Free of Charge*, 126.

It is original, preceded and conditioned by absolutely nothing on our part. Even prior to our existence, God's giving and God's forgiving are already there, free of charge. Christ's death embraced all, no one is excluded.⁴⁵⁷ God forgives with justice and authentic love. We can venture into this journey of forgiveness by making our forgiving transparent to God's.

The above reflections sought to respond to Osmer's normative task of "What ought to be going on?" According to this approach, we found that we need forgiveness, both the giving and receiving of it, because we value relationships; without forgiveness, there is no communication. Forgiveness is a concept that is found in many religions, expressed in slightly different ways. Forgiveness has also been studied in several disciplines. In theological terms, forgiveness cannot exist outside of God. The theology of Volf, reflecting his personal journey as well as his Christian theology, emphasises the all-embracing character of forgiveness, centered on the cross and the Trinity.

After having researched the normative task of practical theological interpretation of forgiveness in Christianity and its relationship to other disciplines, we now turn to the final task which is the pragmatic task of "How might we respond" – the practical application of Volf's theology of forgiveness.

⁴⁵⁷ Volf, *Free of Charge*, 179–180.

Chapter 6

Field Research Methodology

In Chapter 5, I introduced Volf's teachings of forgiveness and briefly explored how these might affect a change of attitude in people and move them in the direction of forgiveness. Volf's personal journey and his emphasis on the Cross as a symbol of God's forgiveness—a concept that is deeply related to my people—made his theology uniquely appropriate for this research. The practice of forgiveness is core to the Christian message and Volf shows how forgiveness can be a way to personal freedom. Volf's theology of forgiveness, as discussed in the previous chapter, will now be implemented in a research design that adapts his concepts to a teaching instrument.

6.1 Description of the Problem and the Research Methodology

My hypothesis is that teachings on forgiveness based on the theology of Miroslav Volf could motivate personal change in a group process with members of Sinhalese and Tamil Roman Catholic communities. This research is more exploratory and tentative than to be the verification of a hypothesis. The different stages of the research utilize a questionnaire, a one-on-one interview, and focus groups, one involving a teaching session.

The problem is that the Sinhalese and Tamil Roman Catholics in Canada (particularly in Toronto) cannot come together to celebrate religious or cultural activities because of the legacy of violent civil war in Sri Lanka. The deep-rooted conflicts and their elements (ethno-nationalism, hegemonic structure, scapegoat function, identity needs and mimetic rivalry) have led to the two groups being deeply divided. An ontological rift has been created, a dehumanizing split between people. Each group blames the other for the problems and the violence. They are

stuck in the past and cannot move forward. In spite of their common Christian faith, they find themselves unable to forgive.

This research is based on my ministry and is founded on Practical Theology. In its search for God's action in the world, practical theology addresses particular situations in the real world, through e.g. Osmer's four core tasks.⁴⁵⁸ Osmer's fourth, pragmatic, task implements Volf's theology and is for Osmer an example of servant leadership.⁴⁵⁹ The pragmatic task is creating and employing good practices to achieve a particular objective and bring about change; this is practical theology.

Practising spirituality of presence is a challenging task. Often we are preoccupied with everyday responsibilities; little attention is paid to listening and giving consideration to finding out who others are and what is going on in their individual and community lives. In the course of ministry, we encounter the poor, those who suffer from mental illness or are rejected because they are different. We can be indifferent to these people in need; Osmer compares this to the priests who walked by the wounded traveller in the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:31).⁴⁶⁰

Spirituality of presence entails a sensitive awareness of what is happening and allows us to make the deep observations necessary to provide a thorough description of what is happening. These observations can be informed by psychological and sociological understandings as appropriate to the given situation. In practicing spirituality of presence, we may encounter obstacles and challenges, but being open to the renewing Spirit of God who constantly re-creates us in Christ, we can be confident that the Spirit will guide us and enable us to listen and to attend

⁴⁵⁸ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 4.

⁴⁵⁹ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 176.

⁴⁶⁰ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 34.

to others.⁴⁶¹ Although spirituality of presence engages others in individual interactions, it also involves using more formal means to explore the situations and cultural contexts of people.⁴⁶²

Osmer points out that empirical research by congregational leaders might end up the reverse of a spirituality of presence. There is a danger that such research turns people into objects by questioning them for the purpose of collecting information. He, however, assures that:

When the methods of qualitative methods are used, empirical research is a disciplined way of attending to others in their particularity. It allows leaders to deepen their understanding of what is going on in particular episodes, situations, and contexts and is a genuine expression of a spirituality of presence.⁴⁶³

In my case study, the spirituality of presence applies to my observation of and interaction with the Sinhalese and Tamil Roman Catholics in Toronto. However, they are nested within the larger Sri Lankan diaspora in Canada, which, in turn is nested within the Sri Lankan context worldwide.

Swinton suggests it may be helpful to reflect on qualitative methods as contributing a specific way of seeing and discovering.⁴⁶⁴ It explores the complex dynamics of actual situations to enable the growth of a transformative and instructive understanding of what is going on.⁴⁶⁵ It connects in this way to the broader realm of social sciences:

The social sciences have offered practical theologians vital access to the nature of the human mind, human culture the wider dimensions of church life and the implications of the social and political dimensions of society for the process of theological reflection.⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶¹ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 34.

⁴⁶² Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 37.

⁴⁶³ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 39.

⁴⁶⁴ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 31.

⁴⁶⁵ John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2007)

⁴⁶⁶ John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, vi.

Historically, the main approach to data collection and analysis for practical theology has developed from a continuing dialogue with social sciences. My research relies on the relationship between theology and the social sciences, particularly as it relates to qualitative research methods for the purpose of theological reflection.

6.2 Qualitative Research Methodology

John Creswell observes that there has been, in recent years, an increasing acceptance and recognition of the contribution that qualitative research provides to the understandings of social behaviour and health sciences.⁴⁶⁷ He proposes five different approaches to qualitative inquiry: narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case studies. He argues that these five approaches reflect the types of qualitative research that he often sees in social, behavioural, and health science literature.⁴⁶⁸ Among the five approaches, the one that is applicable for my research methodology is the case study method. The rationale for choosing the case study method is that it is well suited to exploring relationships and circumstances within a community, in my case, a church community.

Case study method can be differentiated from other approaches to a research problem. Cronbach calls it “interpretation in context.”⁴⁶⁹ By focusing on a single entity, the case study approach reveals the interaction of important factors typical of the phenomenon. According to Yin (1984), “Case study is a design particularly suited to situations where it is impossible to

⁴⁶⁷John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA, and London: Sage Publications, 2007), 2.

⁴⁶⁸ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 2.

⁴⁶⁹ Cronbach, L. J. “Beyond the Two Disciplines of Scientific Psychology,” *American Psychologist* (1975): 123 cited in Sharan B. Merriam, *Case Study Research in Education: A Qualitative Approach*, (Oxford: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1988), 10.

separate the phenomenon's variables from their context."⁴⁷⁰ John Best and James Kahn also suggest that the case study explores deeply and analyzes interaction between the factors that influence change or growth.⁴⁷¹ Judith Bell points out that "the case study approach can be particularly appropriate for individual researchers because it provides an opportunity for one aspect of the problem to be studied in some depth."⁴⁷² She suggests that not all case studies require months or years to complete. This study is conducted in a short time frame even though the transformation it addresses may occur over a longer period. Thus, the case study approach is appropriate for my research of a small group of diaspora Sri Lankan Catholic Sinhalese and Tamils.

I considered doing Participatory Action Research (PAR), but the degree to which the participants would have had to own the whole research project did not seem quite appropriate for the following reasons. The nature of the research was exploratory, tentative, and experimental—testing out a theologically driven approach to forgiveness. In PAR, the participants are regarded as co-researchers therefore they shape and inform the whole research process. According to Peter Reason, "In 'full blown' co-operative experiential inquiry a group of co-researchers engage in every point of the cycle in a fully collaborative fashion."⁴⁷³ In the process of recruiting participants for the research I observed a lack of willingness or an awareness of the need for forgiveness particularly among the Tamils. The research itself was to address this issue.

⁴⁷⁰ R. K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Research* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1984), cited in Merriam, *Case Study Research in Education*, 10.

⁴⁷¹ John W. Best and James V. Kahn, *Research in Education*, 8th edition, (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon 1998), 248.

⁴⁷² Judith Bell. *Doing Your Research Project: A Guide for First-time Researchers in Education, Health and Social Science*, (UK: Open University Press, 2005), 10

⁴⁷³ Peter Reason. *Human Inquiry in Action* (London: Sage Publication, 1998), 9.

The characteristic of case study resembles more or less the Participant Action Research (PAR) approach with the exception that the researcher has the power and the control of the research activities such as determining the process, data collection, and data analysis.⁴⁷⁴ However, the participants were still actively involved in the research process. The research was done not on the participants but with the participants,⁴⁷⁵ which is one of the characteristics of PAR. Though my research could have benefited from this methodology, it was also not manageable and applicable because of the logistics. In the future, as the research process is replicated, it could open up possibilities for ever more participation from the participants.

In the case study, the element of typicalness rather than uniqueness is the centre of attention.⁴⁷⁶ According to Bromley, “A case study is an exemplar of, perhaps even a prototype for, a category of individuals.”⁴⁷⁷ Case studies can apply to all kinds of individuals and groups, such as immigrant workers, ethnic groups, drug addicts and religious sects and are not restricted to specific persons and their behaviour. All these groups of people have been studied using case studies to understand the culture and the progress of variable relationships.⁴⁷⁸ Part of the case study is to determine the general situation within these communities.

In Chapter 2, I described briefly and in general terms what was going on in the Sri Lankan diaspora in Toronto. Now, I would like to situate my case study on the diaspora Catholic Sinhalese and Tamil communities within the larger Sri Lankan diaspora in Toronto. The case study involved an intervention in this small community: the recruitment of the participants, the

⁴⁷⁴ Fran Baum, Colin MacDougall and Danielle Smith, “Participatory Action Research” *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 60, no 10 (2006), 854-857.

⁴⁷⁵ Peter Reason, *Human Inquiry in Action*, 1.

⁴⁷⁶ Best and Kahn, *Research in Education*, 248.

⁴⁷⁷ D. B. Bromley, *The Case Study Method in Psychology and Related Disciplines* (New York: Wiley, 1986), 295 cited in Best and Kahn, *Research in Education*, 248.

⁴⁷⁸ Bromley, *The Case Study Method in Psychology and Related Disciplines*, cited in Best and Kahn, *Research in Education*, 249.

administration of the questionnaire, the performance of the interviews, the presentation of the teaching of forgiveness, and the leading of focus group sessions, through which the data collection took place. Part of the data collection involved field work with community leaders as “human living documents,”⁴⁷⁹ whom I interviewed for historical information and current conditions. The reason for gathering materials from the community leaders was the lack of literature found at the academic level on the diaspora Sinhalese and Tamil Roman Catholics in Toronto. I had to depend on the information provided to me by the community and religious leaders, and on my personal experience and observation.

6.3 Research Ethics in Qualitative Case Study

All research is required to follow ethical guidelines and meet criteria for validity and accuracy, and the qualitative case study is no different. Every single researcher aims to proceed according to an ethical approach, and produce an effective study with consistency, and this is especially important when dealing with human subjects. This is supported by Maxwell who maintains that the purpose, process, analysis and final findings all fall under ethical guidelines that must be respected throughout.⁴⁸⁰ Trust between the researcher and the participant is a key factor. Hatch recapitulates a number of crucial ethical questions to which all researchers should attend, for example, not inadvertently exploiting the vulnerable, such as children or the marginalised, when studying their issues or concerns, and maintaining respect for the individual even as we focus on their importance as members of a group.⁴⁸¹ In my research case study on two minority ethnic groups in Toronto who were in conflict, it was important to not aggravate the situation or

⁴⁷⁹ “Human living document” is a term coined by Anton T. Boisen when training students in the context of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE); it signifies learning from people who talk of their experiences. Cited in Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 33.

⁴⁸⁰ J. Maxwell, *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005)

⁴⁸¹ J. A. Hatch, *Doing Qualitative Research in Education Settings*, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002) cited in Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design*, 44.

provoke repercussions within the group. Hatch continues that every participant should be respected individually, without identifying them by their names, using the procedures of the *American Psychological Association* (APA 2001). In the study, participants were referred to by a number, and not by their name. Another point Hatch stresses is the power imbalances that we project, which could additionally downgrade the subject under study.⁴⁸² The participants have significantly less power, therefore they are in a position of vulnerability, a fact the researcher needs to remain vigilant about.

As this qualitative case study involves two ethnic groups—the Sinhalese and the Tamils, I as a Tamil researcher had to be critically self-aware of my own biases and was required to concentrate on maintaining my objectivity. The experience I brought to the research could naturally have influenced my research decisions. For example, I had heard and to some extent personally experienced the sufferings that the Tamil victims had endured, and this could potentially have made me more sympathetic toward my Tamil interlocutors than toward the Sinhalese. By thinking reflexively⁴⁸³ throughout the research, I decreased the risk of being misled by my own experiences and interpretations. Further, the presence of a Sinhalese assistant made this process of awareness much easier.

Another method of ensuring that biases and misinterpretations do not occur is to have members outside of the research team challenge the coding and final results. According to Merriam “the question of internal validity—the extent to which one’s findings are congruent

⁴⁸² Hatch, *Doing Qualitative Research in Education Settings*, cited in Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design*, 44.

⁴⁸³ “Reflexivity is the process of critical self-reflection, carried out by the researcher, throughout the research process that enables her/him to monitor and respond to her contribution to the proceedings.” Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 59.

with reality—is addressed by using triangulation.”⁴⁸⁴ The final analysis and review of the findings were reviewed by the researcher and two others⁴⁸⁵ who had experience in social science and education.

Potential Risks

As I was formulating my request for Ethics Board approval, it was evident that some questions might make some participants feel anxious or uncomfortable. They were assured that they could be free to share as much or as little as they wished in the interview and the focus group process. This research aimed to bring about positive personal transformation, but for some it could instead end up a potentially painful and damaging experience. Because there were a number of participants, confidentiality could be compromised by others, but all were free to speak up as they saw fit, and confidentiality was always respected according to the rules of ethics on the part of the research team. A mediator was present for the final focus group, to intervene if conflict or serious disagreements occurred.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality was respected throughout the process. Information obtained from participants and all written records were kept locked and secure at Saint Paul University. All data will be shredded, and all audio tapes erased five years after the completion and publication of the research. No participant will be named in any form in the published record. Participants were advised as to the importance of confidentiality for themselves and for others. They, both as participants and members of a cultural group, were treated with the utmost respect. Their

⁴⁸⁴ Sharan B. Merriam, *Case Study Research in Education: A Qualitative Approach*, (London: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1988), 183.

⁴⁸⁵ One reviewer has a B.A. in psychology, has worked as a writer with a non-profit organization specializing in spiritual care and is familiar with the researcher’s doctoral studies and the purpose of her research. The other is a retired professor of English with a Ph.D. in Education He is a practicing Catholic with a solid knowledge of the teachings of the Church. Both are Canadians.

experiences, both as member of a community and as private individuals, were not to be misrepresented in any way.

Participation

Participation in this study was entirely voluntary. If participants chose to be part of the research, they were free to withdraw at any time without penalty or consequence, without any questions asked, even after signing the consent form or having begun the research process. They had the right to ask any questions they wished about any part of the study at any stage.

After all these issues were taken into consideration, the research proposal was submitted to the Research Ethics Board of Saint Paul University. Clarification was requested concerning the recruitment and the researcher produced more details to their satisfaction. The study was approved (Appendix A). Documents included the recruitment procedures (Appendix B), the letter of information (Appendix C), the letter of consent (Appendix D), a copy of the questionnaire (Appendix E), the structure and general content of the interview questions (Appendix F), and the teaching instrument (Appendix G). An additional submission was made at a later date because the recruitment procedures had to be amended and this was also approved.

Preparatory Work with Community Leaders

Having successfully presented my research proposal to the Ethics Committee, I then went to Toronto⁴⁸⁶ to prepare the ground for the research. I knew several Sri Lankan Tamil Catholics and Hindus from Toronto; however, my experience with the Sinhalese community was limited. I first met with a few persons who assisted me with recruitment and enabled me to make the necessary connections in the two communities.

As discussed in Chapter 2, I had already gathered general information on the subject of the Sinhalese and Tamil diaspora community in Canada from online news reports from Sri Lanka and from Canadian sources, however there was no scholarly literature on the Sri Lankan Catholic diaspora in Toronto. A member of the clergy who was a student at Saint Paul and who was also a Eucharistic celebrant for the Sinhalese and Tamil Catholic communities in Toronto provided me with information on what he had learned and observed regarding the two communities. I also relied on my own experience and observation.

In keeping with the approval of the Research Ethics Board (Appendix A), four community leaders were recruited through the Senior Tamil Centre of Toronto (STC),⁴⁸⁷ and committed themselves to an initial meeting. The meeting took place at the STC. The research was explained step by step and the letter of information (Appendix C) was presented. I explained what motivated me—the purpose, the hypothesis, and the methodology—and all the four stages in the study. Questions were asked and further details given. This gave me the opportunity to

⁴⁸⁶ Though the study was initially to be conducted within the Tamil and Sinhalese communities in Ottawa, they turned out, on the one hand, to be too small a group and, on the other, they were not refugees but rather well-educated people who had come to Canada to improve their lives. Toronto has the largest diaspora Tamil community in the world as well as a significant Sinhalese community and the tensions were more evident and of longer standing in that city.

⁴⁸⁷ The mission of the Senior Tamil Centre of Toronto is: The total well-being of the ageing population among the Tamil Community of Ontario: Improve individual well-being and remove barriers of language and culture.

clarify why the focus was only on the Catholic population. I explained that I, as a Christian, had a sense of calling to do this work with a Christian community, as forgiveness was at the core of our faith. I also emphasised the importance of personal transformation rather than asking others to change. One person raised the objection that he felt that the study should involve the Sri Lankan government authorities, that forgiveness was less important than justice for the victims of the civil war, and that the focus should have been on political reform. Finally, he chose not to participate. The meeting concluded shortly afterwards. One month later, the second meeting was held. New team members had been recruited and there were eight of us. There were four Tamil Catholics, two Tamil Hindus,⁴⁸⁸ my assistant who was a Sinhalese Catholic, and myself.

The meeting consisted of reading the letter of information and discussing the focus and the objective of the study. The recruitment method originally scripted had to be modified because the Sinhalese and Tamils were from different areas in Toronto and there were never any communal gatherings where the majority could be contacted. The ethics committee was informed of this and approved the necessary changes. The new strategies involved efforts to inform potential candidates through word of mouth at prayer groups, and the creation and distribution of a brochure that was passed on to people and advertised in the Catholic Register. The recruitment brochure was drafted and finalized (Appendix H). It explained that the study concerned the subject of forgiveness within the context of Catholic teaching in order to develop a teaching tool that would help open a path of forgiveness between Sinhalese and Tamil Roman Catholics. Participation was voluntary and involved focus groups and an interview. Candidates had to be twenty-five years or older, be part of the Sri Lankan diaspora, be of the Roman

⁴⁸⁸ One of the Hindus was a woman who was a community leader deeply interested in the reconciliation process who volunteered to help me in the study, and the other was the director of STC who wished to follow the proceedings.

Catholic faith, and live in the Greater Toronto Area. Special effort was made to increase the Sinhalese involvement, and eventually the Sinhalese prayer group “Community of the Risen Lord” was contacted.

A month later the third meeting took place. An open discussion ensued and the two Tamil Catholics still in opposition to the focus of the study voluntarily withdrew. One Tamil prayer group and one additional Sinhalese prayer group were identified and subsequently contacted, and each community appointed a leader to help with recruitment. Another Tamil Catholic community leader agreed to be part of the recruitment process and distributed brochures; however, his efforts did not produce any participants in the end. Eventually, the Sinhalese prayer group leader found twelve participants and the Tamil found only two.

Regarding the participants’ recruitment, a common experience for the researchers and community leaders was that several people would agree to participate and then drop out later, so new candidates were constantly being sought. Many interested candidates referred friends and family who were then contacted. My assessment was that the Tamil community was more resistant to the idea; they were of the opinion that they were the victims of violence and wanted justice before anything else. Others expressed the fear that they would be seen as traitors to their community if they participated. The Sinhalese community was more cooperative and open. A few of them said that they were willing to participate because it was the Sinhalese people who had brought about the pain, and it was now their turn to reach out to the Tamils. Paradoxically, the Tamils who had not wanted to participate would have heard exactly the admission they were looking for had they been willing to be part of the group.

6.4 Final Recruitment Process

At this juncture, meetings with community leaders were finished and the next step was to finalize recruitment. Past experience demonstrated the difficulty in bringing the two groups together. Therefore, two recruitment methods were used in order to maximize the number of participants (Appendix B).

The first method was to recruit participants through the community leaders. The leaders were to communicate to all those interested that volunteers were being sought for a study, and the purpose of the research and the different stages involved would be explained. Contact information would be taken and then the researcher would follow up with the interested parties by phone, email, or in person to present and explain the letter of information step by step (Appendix C). The letter explained the purpose and description of the research, the theme of the study, the process and the framework. Confidentiality was assured. The letter also described the credentials of the researcher, introduced the team members, and issued an invitation to participate. Subjects were then asked to attend an initial meeting where they would fill out a questionnaire (Appendix E) after which they would have a one-on-one interview, and then participate in two focus groups in the days following that. A time frame was set for the signing and submission of the consent form (see Appendix D).

The second method was that the researcher would request the opportunity to speak about the research to the Sinhalese and Tamil groups at their regular prayer meetings and invite volunteers to participate in the research project. The researcher could also put out an appeal asking for volunteers to participate in the research study on “forgiveness” in an email distribution list or a newsletter. The researcher then would follow up as above with details about the letter of information step by step and the presentation of the consent form (Appendix D). Recruitment for

this study aimed for two groups of 12 of each ethnicity, in order that any dropouts would not unduly impact the size of the focus groups.

Research Participants

There were seventeen participants, all born in Sri Lanka, but having arrived in Canada at different times and for different reasons. The Sinhalese had immigrated to Canada to better their life. Of the Tamils, all but three came to Canada because of the painful experiences due to civil unrest. On a personal level, most of these members of the Sri Lankan diaspora had normal relationships with members of the other ethnic group back in their mother country. Most of the participants were university-educated and had had good employment before emigrating. Since arriving in Canada, the Sinhalese had developed strong connections within their faith community by being active in their parish and partaking in retreats, prayer groups, and reconciliation sessions. From what I observed, the Tamils participated mainly in the celebration of the Eucharist, in the saying of the rosary and in following the rituals.

Of the seventeen participants, eight were Sinhalese and nine were Tamils. Of the nine Tamils, two were women and seven were men. Three Tamils were from the north (Jaffna) but had lived in Colombo for many years and later immigrated and settled down in Canada. One had lived in the north and, because of the difficulties he endured, had left school and then continued his education in a university where the majority of students and professors were Sinhalese. Four were from the eastern province (Batticaloa), and one participant was born in Sri Lanka, but had moved to India as a child, and come to Canada as an adult, so she had not experienced the ethnic troubles in Sri Lanka but only become aware of them in Toronto.

Of the Sinhalese, there were three women and five men (one man was absent for the final focus group and for the final questionnaire). One participant had been employed in the eastern

province (Batticaloa) and had suffered from the ethnic conflicts and lost all his possessions. Three Sinhalese had lived in a Tamil area and reported no problems living in that region. The youngest participant had lived in a Sinhalese area until age 12, before his immigration, and did not experience the civil war except remembering hearing echoes of bombs. The remaining participants had lived in Sinhalese areas and had not been affected by the unrest.

The age range of participants was to have been from twenty to seventy five years, but ended up being between twenty two and eighty five with the majority being between the ages of thirty and seventy five. The youngest participant had heard of the study through his parents who were recruited. He was accepted into the research to represent the younger generation and because of his eagerness to take part. The eldest participant was a Tamil from the north, who had lived in Colombo during the 1983 riots when he had been saved from harm by some Sinhalese. He shared that after being in Canada for twenty years he had only one Sinhalese acquaintance and was eager for the opportunity to meet the Sinhalese participants. In terms of occupation and education, of the women participants, one was a registered nurse and the other four were homemakers. Among the men, one was a student, one was a non-professional, and the other ten worked in a profession or in management. An important point worth noting is that all the seventeen participants knowing the whole process of the project willingly chose to participate in the study. There was positive energy and enthusiasm before, during and after the sessions. In fact, some of them suggested to organise similar sessions for the future. Before I deal with research design and implementation I shall describe briefly the role of the researcher.

The researcher playing the role as a co-participant in the research necessitates viewing the participants not as objects to be explored but as people worthy of respect, composure, and reciprocity.⁴⁸⁹

Most of the qualitative researchers, regardless of the approach they take, encounter issues of subjectivity and biases when trying to prove the authenticity of their findings. And so, it is important for the researcher to have the ability to reflect back and forth on the research process and challenge their own perceptions that influence the research. This is known as reflexivity. Swinton and Mowat define reflexivity as: “the process of critical self-reflection carried out by the researcher throughout the research process that enables her to monitor and respond to her contribution to the proceedings”⁴⁹⁰ including the researcher’s social back ground, personality, assumptions and biases.

Kleinman and Copp concur that no matter how the researchers try to be objective during the research, they influence and are influenced by the participants, data collection, final analysis, and other factors. In qualitative research, the researcher is considered as the primary instrument in the data collection and the analysis process. Therefore, they say that being objective seems to be impossible and idealistic. The authors maintain that the researcher will always be influenced by subjectivity, and it cannot be detached nor reduced by some means.⁴⁹¹ As I mentioned earlier, throughout the research process, reflexivity and self-awareness guided me to bracket my own biases to minimise their influence on the research process.

⁴⁸⁹ Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, Oregon: WIPF & Stock Publishers, 2011), 42.

⁴⁹⁰ Swinton & Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 59.

⁴⁹¹ Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research*: 44.

6.5 Research Design and Implementation

As noted, to explore what constituted forgiveness and what motivated people to forgive, the research model comprised four stages: Meet and Greet; Interview; First Focus Group; and Final Focus Group. The instruments used included a questionnaire during the Meet and Greet and Final Focus Groups, the one-on-one interviews during the Interview stage, and the teaching of forgiveness during the First Focus Group.

Stage 1: Meet and Greet

According to the availability of the participants, the researcher met the participants singly, in pairs or three together, at a designated place and had them fill out the questionnaire. Some participants preferred to complete the questionnaire in their homes, with guidance, as needed, from the researcher. The questionnaires were completed by the seventeen participants between June 1 and June 3, 2016.

The questions were formulated to elicit information on perceptions of their identity, how they characterised the relationship between the two groups, and their understanding of forgiveness. Patton suggests that if questions are created without considering the possible interpretation of certain words, or taking into account the understanding or background of the participants, then they may either not be answered at all or elicit an answer that is meaningless.⁴⁹² The questionnaire was designed to surface changes in the participant's beliefs, attitudes and understanding of forgiveness before and after the teaching. The questionnaire was given twice to see if there were changes in the way participants think about forgiveness. All

⁴⁹² M. Q. Patton, *Qualitative Evaluation Methods*, (Newbury Park, CA: Sage 1980), 227 cited in Merriam, *Case Study Research in Education: A Qualitative Approach*, 79.

questions were open-ended so that participants could share as much as they wished about themselves and their beliefs (see Appendix E).

The questionnaire consisted of eight questions and three emotional snapshots. The first three questions were related to identity, the description of friends, and the relationship between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. Questions four to eight were related directly to the definition of and attitude toward forgiveness. The emotional snapshots were employed to indicate the participants' feelings and attitudes towards forgiveness, pre- and post-teaching. In the first emotional snapshot, four emotions were listed (anger, revenge, fear, resentment) and the participants were asked to circle which feelings stood in the way of forgiveness, and rate them from one to ten, from indifference to the strongest intensity. For the second snapshot, they were asked to consider a situation of unforgiveness and how they would feel (anger, fear, revenge and shame). And for the third emotional snapshot, they were asked to rate emotions in a situation of forgiveness, how they would feel (relief, happiness, well-being, hope, joy).

Stage 2: The Interview

The interviews were done with each participant individually, based on the questionnaire. The rationale for the interview was to have an opportunity to clarify the answers given in the questionnaire. According to Best & Kahn "interviews are used to gather information regarding an individual's experiences and knowledge; his or her opinions, beliefs, and feelings; and demographic data."⁴⁹³ He/she may be reluctant to share their honest opinion in front of the whole group, from fear or lack of courage. Providing a safe environment one-on-one, the researcher would be able to get more in-depth data from the participants, particularly in relation to questions that had been left unanswered. The assistant Sinhalese recorded all the interviews and took notes.

⁴⁹³ Best and Kahn, *Research in Education*, 255.

Stage 3: The Teaching in the First Focus Group

The purpose of focus groups is to get a certain set of people to engage in a discussion on a particular issue. They can be structured, having prepared questions and topics for discussion, or unstructured with minimal involvement of the researcher. The main intention of the focus group is for participants to interact with each other. Eliot & Associates define a focus group “as a small group of six to ten people led through an open discussion by a skilled moderator. The group needs to be large enough to generate rich discussion but not so large that some participants are left out.”⁴⁹⁴

The teaching of forgiveness was presented to two separate groups of participants. The first focus group took place on June 4 at the Consolata Missionary Church in Etobicoke, Ontario. There were two identical sessions on forgiveness, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. The morning session had ten participants: four women and six men, seven were Sinhalese and three were Tamils. The afternoon session had seven participants: one woman and six men, one was Sinhalese and six were Tamils. Because of availability issues, the two ethnic groups were not seen separately as originally planned.

The sessions began with a prayer, followed by self-introduction by participants where they explained their motivation for getting involved. From what was said, it was evident that they were very keen and participated in the study for various reasons such as: “to experience and learn the teaching of forgiveness,” “to understand the dynamics between the two communities,” and “wanting to work together for reconciliation.” The researcher briefly explained the general idea of forgiveness from different religious points of view and asked the participants about their

⁴⁹⁴ Eliot and Associates, “Guidelines for Conducting a Focus Group” (handout, copyright, 2005): https://datainnovationproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/4_How_to_Conduct_a_Focus_Group-2-1.pdf.

own understanding of forgiveness. After a fifteen minute break, the concept of forgiveness according to Volf was presented (see Appendix F). After the teaching session, the researcher opened up a discussion on four questions (for questions and responses, see Appendix G).

Stage 4: The Final Focus Group

The final focus group brought all the participants together for the first time. Fifteen participants attended; two Sinhalese were absent. A mediator was included as a preventative measure in case the group entered into serious conflict. In addition to the researcher, a research assistant and a volunteer observer were also present.

The second focus group took place on June 5. The session opened with a prayer and then the same questionnaire was administered for the second time, followed by self-introductions. The researcher posed the following questions to the group: What were they willing to take from the teaching of forgiveness from the previous day? What were they willing to practice or experience?

Then the Sinhalese and Tamil participants were paired up with one another, to discuss their hopes for the future and a possible action plan regarding the relationship between the Sinhalese and the Tamils based on their understanding of the previous day's teaching of forgiveness. After that exercise, the participants were reunited again in a group to share their insights, and they were very animated and enthusiastic (see responses, Appendix H). Contrary to expectations of possible conflict, the feeling in the room was one of desire for reconciliation and hope for the future.

The session concluded with a ritual. Each pair was given two planters with fertile soil and two runner bean seeds. Each planted their seeds and then exchanged pots. Each participant committed to nurturing the plant, symbolising the promise to practice forgiveness and to start the

process of personal transformation within. The session ended and the researcher thanked the participants for their cooperation and goodwill. In the week that followed, the researcher contacted the participants either by telephone or email to thank them and to verify whether there had been any emotional fallout following the study.

6.6 Data Analysis

Once the data was collected, I began the process of data analysis through the process of coding. Johnny Saldana defines a code as “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or valued data.”⁴⁹⁵ It organizes and groups data into categories and themes. Coding is an experiential, problem-solving method, with no precise rules to follow. It is followed by painstaking evaluation and interpretation.⁴⁹⁶ Coding is a procedure that connects data gathering and data evaluation.⁴⁹⁷ In this study, the raw data is comprised of the questionnaires, interviews, participant observation, documents, field notes and correspondence.

All interpretation, coding, and the analysis of the data were initially done by the researcher. However, as Saldana observes, quoting Sipe and Ghiso, we must keep in mind that “all coding is a judgement call,” since we “bring our subjectivities, our personalities, our predispositions, and our quirks” to the process.⁴⁹⁸ I was careful to maintain a distance from the material and I was critical of my own interpretations. I worked with other people so that I would be challenged and forced to justify my analysis. Without this additional critical review, it would have been difficult to justify my evaluation and findings.

⁴⁹⁵ Johnny Saldana, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researches* (London: Sage Publication 2010) 3

⁴⁹⁶ Saldana, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researches*, 8

⁴⁹⁷ Saldana, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researches*, 4

⁴⁹⁸ L. R. Sipe and M. O. Ghiso, “Developing Conceptual Categories in Classroom Descriptive Research: Some Problems and Possibilities” *Anthropology and Educational Quarterly*, 35, no. 4, (2004), 482–85, cited in Saldana, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researches*, 3

The interpretation and analysis of the data was done with my research question—whether the teaching of forgiveness would motivate personal transformation in the context of the deep-rooted conflict between the Sri Lankan Catholic Sinhalese and Tamils in Toronto—in mind. In order to determine if there had been a transformation after the teaching on forgiveness, the participants’ responses to the questionnaire, administered before and after the teaching, were compared and analysed.

6.7 Findings

Coding was applied to the participants’ responses on the pre- and post-teaching questionnaires as well as to the content of the interviews. Each participant’s pre- and post-teaching answers were analysed individually. For example, participant no.1’s pre-teaching answer to question 4 was compared to the same participant’s post-teaching answer to the same question. This was done for 16 participants (the data for one participant was incomplete). Several themes emerged into a preliminary code, and from there similar notions were grouped together in a final code. See Appendix J for the complete results of the pre- and post-teaching questionnaire and interview answers for each participant.

Summary of Results of Questions One to Three

Briefly, here is a summary of the results for the first three questions. These three questions were asked in order to know: 1. how the participants identified and located themselves in the context of the Sri Lankan diaspora; 2. if they had friends within their own ethnic group only or within both ethnic groups; and 3. how they generally related to the other ethnic group. The majority of participants identified themselves as Sri Lankans and made reference to their religion (Catholic or “child of God”), and four participants identified themselves as belonging to an ethnic group

(Sinhalese or Tamil). In response to the second question, most commonly friends were identified as like-minded people and people whom they trusted. The responses to these two questions did not vary significantly from the first and final administration of the questionnaire.

The third question asked about the relationship between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. Here again, there was no significant change pre- and post-teaching. There was only a variance of one in the number of those who saw the relationship as strained (one more post-teaching) and those who saw the relationship as tainted by politics (one more post-teaching). The number who defined their relationship as a positive one did not change.

Difference Between Pre- and Post-teaching Questionnaire and Interview Answers to Questions Four to Eight

Questions four to eight were followed up in interviews to provide a more in-depth assessment of how the concept of forgiveness was understood and expressed, and to discover if any personal transformation occurred as a result of the teaching on forgiveness. Comparing the two questionnaires pre- and post-teaching, and analysing the transcript of the interviews, I observed some significant changes as well as a few minor transformations. Of the original seventeen participants, numbered no. 1 to no. 17, one was absent for the final questionnaire and remained an incomplete (no. 5). Nos.1 and 4 indicated no change before and after the teaching, expressing both times the Christian concept of forgiveness.

Eight participants showed considerable personal transformation in the following ways.

- No. 2: When asked Question 8 (Under what conditions would you forgive?) his response changed from “I will forgive if the perception of the wrong doer and the religious and political system changes” to “unconditional.”

This was the same participant who, after the teaching of Volf's forgiveness, went home and embraced his wife with whom he had experienced some animosity. Moved to tears, he shared this experience with the group, speaking of the power of the four steps of embrace. In the emotional snapshot in the first filling out of the questionnaire, he ranked 8 for all the positive emotions, but in the final questionnaire, he ranked 10 for each of these.

- No.3 changed his definition of forgiveness from "Approaching the offender and confront him, and ask him for the reason for offending me," to "Letting go of the ill-feelings toward the offender and move on."

Some of the participants defined forgiveness using a religious reference, focusing on the vertical dimension pre-teaching, and including the horizontal dimension of forgiveness post-teaching:

- No. 8. defined forgiveness thus pre- and post-teaching: "as a divine grace from God, that is both wonderful and essential for the peaceful persistence of mankind," and this became, "Forgiveness is an act of love, inspired by the Holy Spirit, to let go of past hurts and see others and ourselves as God sees us."
- No. 8 also changed his attitude in response to Question 7 (What would motivate or encourage you to forgive?) from "The biggest motivator for me to forgive is rather selfish: it is so that I will feel peaceful, and I will make my Lord Jesus very happy. The secondary reason is that I will be back in good terms with the other person," to "Jesus set us the perfect example of how to forgive. I want to follow that example and strive for it. I want to forgive others as God has and continues to forgive me. When I consider my brokenness and sinfulness and how God can love me through all of that, it inspires me to love and forgive others in the same way."

A few of the participants confused forgiving and forgetting in the beginning. For instance:

- No. 7 pre- and post- teaching:
"Forgiveness means totally forgetting any harm or pain of mind caused, and restoring the original relationship." This became: "Forgiveness is a process of taking away the burden of 'hatred' from one by the other who caused the hurt, thereby releasing his own burden by carrying the attitude of revenge. It is a process of restoring the relationship that existed before the event that caused the 'grief'."
- No. 8 pre- and post-teaching:

“Forgive is to forget.” In her final questionnaire, her response was “I never knew that one word ‘Forgiveness’ held more than one meaning. After following this session my outlook on forgiveness has changed. I believe forgiveness is to embrace others, self-transformation, and self-healing process.”

Among the Sinhalese, one participant, no. 14, was influenced by Buddhist philosophy. Initially he described forgiveness as the removing of negative judgments. After the teaching, he defined forgiveness as:

“Changing our paradigm from hate to love, letting go the revengeful toxics and superimpose it with loving kindness and embrace.”

In response to Question 7 (What will motivate or encourage you to forgive?), he also changed his answer:

“the impermanence of our life...we live in this world for a short period of time. When we die, we can’t carry any earthly thing or our ego. So winning or suppression, or rule or dominate over someone is temporary.” After the teaching, he wrote: “The teachings of Jesus; once I encounter the love without borders, it widens my heart and emotional responses. When I recognise the way that Jesus created a space between the incidence and his response I get courage to do the same.”

It was the same person who, after the teaching in the focus group, shared that touching or embracing was not part of his personality and how he found it difficult. But after listening to the teaching, he felt he had learned the “essence” of the four steps of embrace.

Six participants had made progress in their understanding of forgiveness. For instance:

- No. 6 defined forgiveness at the beginning as reconciliation and letting go of the wrongdoing. After the teaching: “Letting go of the past hurts, anger, resentment, justice, or revenge without any conditions and on our own free will.”
- No.9: the initial understanding was if someone hurt him, not to get angry but to forget it. After he was presented with the teaching, his response was to let go of the hurt and forgive the wrongdoer unconditionally. When asked what will motivate him to forgive, he initially wrote that one must learn; but post-teaching, he emphasized the application of the four steps of embrace.
- No. 12’s first definition of forgiveness was to forgive the wrongdoing and completely forget the matter, loving the other person like before. After the teaching his definition

changed to “Unconditionally letting the past go and take no revenge or action. Forgiveness for our mind and soul, wishing no harm to others, and embrace the person.”

- When asked Question 8 (Under what condition would you forgive?), no. 12’s original response was: “If the other person or the parties try to understand the wrong doing and ask for forgiveness, then I’ll forgive.” After the teaching, he changed his position and responded, “unconditionally.”
- No.13’s answer to the same question changed from “When we realise that we have made mistakes, first we should admit, and if we feel guilty should ask forgiveness and also release the feelings of vengeance toward the person who harmed us.” to “leave behind the past and move forward.”
- No.16. defined forgiveness as “The key to enter into Jesus’ heart.” She found it much easier to forgive when she has God’s unconditional love. In her final questionnaire, she expressed that after the session, she understood forgiveness was “letting go of the hurts, judgments, ethnicity, colour and race, and not to judge.”

For Question 5 (Whom would you find it difficult to forgive?) there was very little change pre- and post-teaching. The most common responses were: “those who know that they are doing wrong and continue to do so,” “difficult to forgive those who are close to us,” and “no difficulty to forgive.”

For Question 6 (How do you feel when you don’t forgive?) the majority of participants both pre- and post-teaching said they experience “lack of peace of mind.”

For Question 7 (What would motivate or encourage you to forgive?) in both pre- and post-teaching, most of them responded with reference to God, and more frequently, to Christ, his suffering and dying on the cross for our sins. For instance:

- No. 10 responded: “God gave his Son to forgive us. Jesus has suffered a great deal to save us from sin.”

For Question 8 (Under what condition would you forgive?) pre-teaching, eight replied: “there is no condition for forgiveness”; and post-teaching, 13 responded: “unconditionally.”

As mentioned earlier, three emotional snapshots were included in the questionnaire and were taken pre- and post-teaching. However, it became clear during the interviews that some participants had difficulty understanding the questions in the snapshots. Clarifications were given but the results should be viewed with some caution. For the first snapshot pre- and post-teaching, 9/16 participants chose “All of the Above” rather than specifying one or other emotion. Of the emotions listed, there was very little change pre- and post-teaching. For the second snapshot, participants either rated their emotions as more intense or expressed no change in them pre- and post-teaching. For the third snapshot, the majority of participants gave the same rating pre- and post-teaching, and a minority rated their emotions as more positive.

Findings from the focus groups show that Volf’s concept of theology was repeated by participants in different ways. In response to the four questions after the teaching session (Appendix I, questions and answers), participants referred to: creating a space for the other, letting go of the past, God embracing human hostility, exclusion and embrace, releasing the burden of the wrongdoer and Christ suffering on the cross for humanity. And in all four questions, they echoed the concept of “embrace.” Some of them even expressed their vulnerability regarding embracing and identified with Volf’s own struggle to forgive.⁴⁹⁹ Regarding the relationship between Sinhalese and Tamil, some participants suggested “we need to take the initiative to forgive and reach out to others” and “open the arms and wait for others to open their arms.”⁵⁰⁰

During the focus group discussion, the majority of the participants, 11/15, referred directly to Volf’s concept of embrace, and I saw how deeply touched and influenced they had

⁴⁹⁹ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 9.

⁵⁰⁰ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 141.

been by this ritual. One participant mentioned how he realized physical gestures had always been difficult for him, but now understood the essence of embracing. The embrace is the core of Volf's theology.

For Volf, it was the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15: 11-32) that inspired the idea of a "theology of embrace." The two significant characteristics of this story are: first, the father's open arms in self-giving love to his distanced son, and second, welcoming and embracing that same rebellious son back into his family. Given the emphasis on the significance of "embrace" on the data, it functioned well to classify the codes and sub-themes. It provided a more defined discussion between the theme of "embrace" in Volf's teachings and the theme of "embrace" in the analysis and findings of the research.

As I discussed earlier there are four movements in the embrace, and these four movements must follow one after the other in sequence for the real embrace to take place. In my research findings, I claim that there was sufficient evidence in the effectiveness of Volf's teachings on forgiveness. But, the theme of embrace in Volf's teaching and the theme of embrace in the analysis and findings of the research differed. Let me explain this further.

I did not claim the full embrace in all its movements in the final analysis. My research showed that many of them to open their arms. The very fact of opening their arms already began the embrace. Volf, explains "in opening its arms the self makes room for the other and sets on a journey toward the other in one and the same act."⁵⁰¹ Opening the arms is also a sign of invitation. Here are some examples from the participants: after listening to the four movements in the embrace at the teaching session, one of them, deeply touched by it, went home and

⁵⁰¹ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 142.

embraced his wife with whom he had some negative resentment. The following day he attended the final focus group and shared his experience with a lot of emotion.

Another participant who had an aversion for touching and embracing shared openly that the ritual of embrace has changed him and he is ready to open his arms to embrace the other. One more participant said that her encounter with the other will be a smile and possibly more smiles leading to conversation and perhaps to forgiveness. A smile is an opening, an invitation. My claim around this embrace is to open the path at least for the first movement even the second movement, because she smiles and she waits, she is going to smile again and wait. These examples capture in some way the essence of the transformation, perhaps in a very smallest way. The releasing of a simple gesture of opening of the arms already says something about the readiness of the person to open them to the other.

I have allowed them to see the significance of the gesture of opening; and this is the key piece in my thesis. I am not asking that they need to reach to the third movement of the real embrace. But I am claiming that they can open their arms, which is the first gesture of the desire to forgive. This is the beginning. My research design itself is modeled after the four movements of embrace. I invited them, waited, held them together, and let them go. For my participants, if they have achieved only the first movement which for me is a significant evidence of their journey toward forgiveness.

During the pairing of the participants they were asked to come up with suggestions for how to better the relationship between the two communities (see Appendix K). Some of the suggestions were:

- teaching children that all people are equal;
- identity hinders reconciliation and must be overcome;
- transformation has to take place on a personal level;

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- “Father Make Us One” program could break barriers between the communities;
- Smile first when you meet a person from another community, and then begin a conversation.

Forgiveness is a process that we cannot measure, because it happens interiorly.

Therefore, it is difficult to find concrete evidence. My journey into forgiveness took four to five years of studying and understanding the whole history of Sri Lankan Tamils and Sinhalese. But the journey of forgiveness that the participants undertook was very short, a maximum of ten hours within three days. It was the first time the two ethnic groups gathered together face to face to listen to each other’s stories. For me, this in itself is evidence. They were aware of their identities as Sinhalese and Tamils who lived together for centuries in harmony, but now alienated and divided due to the civil war. They chose to participate willingly to get to know about each other and to learn and understand what forgiveness is about, they were ready to start the journey in spite of their biases, misconceptions and division.

There was good interaction between the individual and the collective in the research: the Sinhalese were part of the Sinhalese prayer group, and the Tamils likewise were part of their parish. So it is clear that all of them participated in their respective groups. For instance, two community leaders who were also research participants were networking with other church and community groups, in moving towards forgiveness and reconciliation. Considering their relationship in regard to the Sinhalese and Tamils, some of them suggested “we need to take the initiative to forgive and reach out to others” and “open the arms and wait for others to open their arms (p.174). Another example: An elderly man was motivated to participate in the research by the desire of meeting the Sinhalese people, because he so wanted to meet the Sinhalese participants and express his gratitude for saving his family. He was looking forward to continue his connections with other participants. A family from the other side reached out to this man, this

gesture had an impact on his thinking and attitudes, transformed him and gave him the desire to continue the relationship with the larger group of Sinhalese people in Toronto.

The interplay between the individual and the collective in the research itself was expressed in the final focus group as future plans, responding to the question; How to better the relationship between the two communities? Some of the responses were:

- “Father Make Us One” program would be another way to break barriers between the communities.
- Creating a blog on the internet on “self -transformation” using the books of Volf.
- Meeting and sharing with friends and facilitating events.
- Talk to people who are affected, start with a smile, sympathise with them and establish friendship. Then start talking about forgiveness.
- Expand the existing prayer groups within Catholics and share forgiveness.

The very structure of how I proceeded with the questionnaire, interviews, and focus groups are all set up to have a dialectical kind of approach: listening carefully and engaging personally with the participants’ experience and their understanding of forgiveness exemplifies the dialectical approach. In listening, showing empathy and referring to Volf’s story involves search for truth in both experience and theology. The idea of establishing points of resonance is important.

I have shown in my methodology that forgiveness is a multi-dimensional process. My understanding of forgiveness has been informed by all the researches I have done in other areas as well. Christian teaching, which is at the core of my research project, has been augmented by what I have learned from psychology, philosophy and other sources; all of the resulting understandings have been allowed to interact with experience. This particular dialectic has resulted in resonance between general articulations of forgiveness and personal experiences and observations of experiences of others. This includes Volf in a particular way, because his work

exemplifies this dialectic between his understanding of forgiveness and what he was going through personally.

As I explained earlier, forgiveness is a paradox. For some people, presenting the concept of forgiveness opens up a whole new window of opportunities; however, the same teachings will make some feel bad because they cannot forgive therefore they are bad Christians. The idea of figuring out both sides of the paradox and discerning what is appropriate for someone is a matter of empathy, intuition, and wisdom. If I can tell that somebody is not ready for teachings about forgiveness, then I go back to another mode of being which emphasises healing. It is better to do something than to do nothing.

This teaching and experience is an ongoing process that carries on back and forth. Process provides a dynamic context for teaching and experience to come together. It really comes alive when both groups actually meet together. Tamils listening to the Sinhalese realise that they have suffered as well. Sinhalese listening to the Tamils would invite them to tell their story and realized the context for actions that were taken. This is a dialectical approach. Theology and experience of Volf is always going back to the experience of the people involved.

6.8 Discussion

My field research constituted an exploration of how the teaching of Volf could be used in a process that would motivate people to forgive one another and embark on a new relationship. In the course of this research, I discovered a number of things, such as what it takes to get people interested in participating in such experiences as well as the logistics of the exercise. I have learned how to present the teachings of Volf and to compare and analyse the notes of the participants on how they imagine the future. This should in turn help me shape my future ministry.

I am engaged in religious-based peacebuilding and part of peacebuilding is the rebuilding of relationships, the re-establishment of trust, and the enabling of people to overcome their animosity and negative feelings. Forgiveness can play a huge role on an individual level, allowing people to let go and move on. These individuals can, in turn, inspire whole communities to let go and move on eventually. The teaching of Volf's concept of forgiveness didn't just impart information; it was an action-oriented participatory kind of exercise. It engaged people in a process and enabled them to explore things with others.

My personal learning from this process covered many areas. One thing I realized was that the Sinhalese had some previous experience that was relevant to reconciliation. They gathered together monthly as a community to share their life experiences, they took part in prayer groups which had prepared them to receive the teaching on forgiveness, and many had already taken part in a session on reconciliation. The Tamils had not benefited from a similar process. Even though they had a parish, many worshiped at different churches. It was a challenge to recruit Tamil participants; many wanted to talk about justice and accountability, especially at the

political level, rather than forgiveness. One lesson learned for when replicating the process is to do some preliminary work with the Tamil community.

Another factor that may have played into the findings was the relatively limited area of recruitment, namely Scarborough, Burlington, Mississauga and Markham. A wider catchment area for recruitment would perhaps increase the variety and quality of participants.

The scheduling of the sessions also had to be modified because of availability. If the participants had been separated into two ethnic groups as originally planned, they might have brought out new information and sharing, feeling perhaps more at ease without the other ethnic group present. There might have been a more detailed representation of their lives. Having them all together did produce some positive results, but the process would have to be attempted again to see if the results can be validated.

In the interview process, I learned to consistently be aware of my biases and to remain objective at all times. I relied on my patience and understanding because I realized that this was the first time that many of the participants had ever been interviewed. I also had to take into account the participants' varying degrees of education and levels of English. I learned to speak less and give more time to the participants to answer, and to not anticipate their responses or fill in the gaps for them. I had to be sensitive and respect how they needed to proceed.

Throughout the whole study, I demonstrated to the participants that forgiveness was possible and desirable because others had done it. The results show that the teaching of Volf did make a difference in their understanding of forgiveness.

In summarising the results of the research design, there seem to be themes that overlap between the frameworks of Redekop and Volf. The first aspect that I discovered was the similarity between Redekop's mimetic structures of blessing and Volf's teaching of forgiveness.

When Redekop describes the teachings of blessing, he explains the origin and meaning of blessing in the Old Testament quoting Genesis 12:3, “All the tribes of the earth shall bless themselves by you.” The promise is fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ (Gal 3:8–14). It is through Christ that his followers are called to be a blessing to the world mainly when they are unjustly persecuted (Luke 6:27–28).⁵⁰²

For Volf, being a true follower of Jesus is crucial and he emphasizes our self-donation to one another. Redekop’s teachings of blessing are creative and life-giving acts, characterized by opening ourselves to everyone who is involved and being generous, leading to love and joy.⁵⁰³ Volf’s four-step embrace is a highly creative interpretation of an act of trust and openness, starting with the offering of a space for the other, both physically and spiritually, and ending with the letting go of the other to share the blessing with the world. Redekop sees the teachings of blessing as leading to reconciliation. Similarly, in the concept of Volf’s theology of forgiveness, the four steps of embrace lead to forgiveness and reconciliation.

In this study, the teaching of forgiveness based on Volf did have an impact on the research group. An analysis of their understanding of forgiveness pre- and post-teaching showed a significant change among the majority of both Sinhalese and Tamils, and some transformation among the rest of the group. This was seen after a single 45-minute to one-hour teaching session; we can imagine the results if such a teaching were part of multiple sessions or a long-term program. As Judith Bell pointed out, not all case studies need take months or years to complete.⁵⁰⁴ This study was conducted in a short time frame, yet findings give evidence that

⁵⁰² William E. Brown, “Blessing: Favoured by God” <https://christianity201.wordpress.com/2016/07/05/blessing-favored-by-god/>

⁵⁰³ Redekop, *From Violence to Blessing*, 276.

⁵⁰⁴ Judith Bell, *Doing your Research Project: A Guide for First-time Researchers in Education, Health and Social Science*, (Maidenhead, Berkshire, UK: Open University Press, 2005), 10.

there was some change in the research participants' ways of understanding and expressing the concept of forgiveness. Transformation could also occur over a longer period of time. As illustrated in Redekop's framework of deep-rooted conflict and mimetic structures of blessing⁵⁰⁵ the Torah teachings of Exodus produced real transformation during 40 years in the desert.

As with all studies, this research presented some inherent challenges. As Volf stated, forgiveness is difficult and this was expressed by some of the participants. Bonhoeffer also mentioned that forgiveness is a form of suffering: experiencing the original hurt and also enduring the effort of overcoming the need for justice.⁵⁰⁶

The focus of my study was a small group of Catholic Sinhalese and Tamils. The Catholic diocese of Toronto did not provide any specific information about them, and the Sinhalese and Tamil clergy had to be contacted directly. They shared information regarding mass schedules and prayer groups; however, they were reticent about speaking of the two communities and their relationship. This resulted in research material mainly being gathered from my own observations and through the field work, and from discussion and dialogue with members of the diaspora community. These discussions confirmed that the Sinhalese and Tamil Roman Catholics in Toronto were as divided along ethnic lines as their compatriots were in Ottawa.

Aware of this division, I was deeply concerned from the very beginning about how to conduct this research without creating tension or hurt, and the danger of provoking increased conflict. In the case of the Tamils, it was a delicate situation because they were the primary victims of the civil war violence and were asking for justice, and instead, the study centered on forgiveness. To cope with the possibility of conflict between the participants, I enlisted the help

⁵⁰⁵ Vern Neufeld Redekop, "A Hermeneutics of Blessing as a Meta-Requisite for Reconciliation: John E. Toew's Romans Paradigm as a Case Study," *Peace and Conflict Studies* 17, no. 1 (2010) 235–66.

⁵⁰⁶ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 125.

of a mediator, who was present when the two focus groups were brought together for the first time for discussion. To my surprise, throughout the research, I witnessed an atmosphere of excitement, enthusiasm and positive energy. They talked together, laughed and expressed empathy. This was particularly evident in the pairings of Sinhalese and Tamils when sharing their ideas for a better future (see Appendix K). They came back after the discussion full of hope and excitement. The conflict mediator was impressed.

I was overjoyed by the desire of the participants to come together and try to get to know one another. They were committed to learning more about forgiveness and how to improve their relationship. When I contacted them after the study was done, they told me how the seed they'd been given had germinated, how delighted they were that the bean was growing, and how they were intent on nourishing it. Another interesting point for me was that the volunteer who was Hindu and who had been very supportive of the research, remarked that after observing the whole process, she had learned something of Christianity that she identified with: that if before communion, you realize that you have something against your brother, go and reconcile with them first, and then bring your offering. This helped her in resolving a similar situation.

Having spent three days with the participants, sharing and getting to know them, I discovered that on a personal level they had no animosity towards each other. This was well expressed in the questionnaire, the interviews, and the focus groups. I was astonished because of what I had seen in Ottawa, as well as because of the information I had received from the community leaders in Toronto, who had expressed negative expectations of my study as each group blamed the other for the problems in the diaspora community. It could be that, rather than being based on their personal experiences, the division stemmed from the participants' identity as a member of an ethnic group, from the negative experiences of relatives back home, from

information from the media, or from needing to conform to the social structure in place in the diaspora community.

In the introduction, I pointed out that the two ethnic groups, the Sinhalese and the Tamil Catholics, could not come together to celebrate Eucharist, because of the division or a gap that exists between them. It is agreed that both groups have the need to celebrate religious activities in their mother tongue. But when there is a reluctant or refusal to come together to pray occasionally I wonder what is preventing that. Here are some indicators to present the tensions and disharmony between the communities as deep-rooted conflict?

There can be deep-rooted conflicts without there being outright (open) violence. It can be dormant conflict beneath the surface where there are strong feelings of hatred, resentment and animosity. The fact that they are not having communion together has something to do with that. To recruit participants for the research I had several meetings with them to explain what I am about to do. In the second meeting two Tamil leaders were not happy with what I was suggesting, they said “we don’t want to talk about forgiveness, what we want is justice, accountability for the atrocities committed, and an apology.” They excused themselves and left the meeting. The same issues were brought up when I was talking to other Tamils on an individual basis. I observed the anger and the resentments in their conversation by the tone and the body language. I knew they were deeply hurt. Their anger and resentments were not directed specifically against the Sinhalese in Toronto but directed towards all the Sinhalese.

In the questionnaire, interviews, and in the focus group, participants confirmed that there is a division among the Sinhalese and Tamils. Another bit of evidence is that I myself have to struggle with the deep feelings against the Sinhalese based on what I have heard from the Tamil

community, even though I myself have not experienced violence as they did. This is part of my ethnographic contribution as I listened to the people talking about what they have gone through. In my thesis on page 16, I talked about how at an official level the responses of the Sinhalese bishops and the Tamil bishops in Sri Lanka in relation to the recommendation of the Lessons Learned and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC), were categorically different. I was trying to explain that at the level of the bishops, they were taking totally opposing sides and their positions were consistent with the broader Sinhalese Buddhist community and the broader Tamil community. My point is the Catholics on each side are representing their identity loyalty to the Sinhalese and the Tamils for whom there was an outright violent conflict and for whom it is now a latent deep-rooted conflict.

While listening to the interviews and transcribing the data, I was able to make some critical observations of myself. At times, I sounded as if I was preaching, a tendency that could be attributed to my religious background. Because of my inexperience as an interviewer, I also attempted to fill in silences by sharing stories of forgiveness, instead of allowing the participants to ponder and respond in their own time. I caught myself judging some of the participants' attitudes and was careful to not be influenced by this. I was conscious throughout of the need to be impartial and tried to practise self-awareness and self-reflexivity. A point worth noting is that the follow up with the focus group would have been meaningful to remind them the teachings of forgiveness or the experience they felt during the research process to enhance the practice of forgiveness in their day to day life. I do hope to follow up with those who have participated in the research design over a longer term to see if they can build on these initial steps and do more. This is a long-term process that I need to continue in my ministry.

I referenced my own experience throughout the study, because my doctoral work is about ministry; therefore, there is a reflection on my own ministry. Osmer says that “generally practical theology focuses on ministry such as pastoral care, preaching, and Christian education and neglects the interconnectedness of ministry in the system we are in and with the people.”⁵⁰⁷ Practical theology emphasises the importance of the web of life in which ministry takes place.⁵⁰⁸

To have authenticity, I myself have to face my own feelings and my own un-forgiveness. There are three levels to this. First, at a primal level I have to go through a process of forgiveness so that I can authentically invite others to do the same. Second, at a distal level, I am objectively looking at my life and asking how did I get to this point, how do I do this authentically? What did I go through in my own journey of forgiveness? How does forgiveness work personally? At a third level, I am looking critically at my own life asking where did my calling come from? How did I get to this point? I need to tell my story and reflect on my life as whole. While doing this I also realised that I was doing a ministry of religious peacebuilding, and my ministry illustrates this. Hence, the work on forgiveness fits into a bigger picture and enhances a vocation of peacebuilding that draws on my faith journey.

I consciously chose to examine forgiveness out of my own experience so that I myself would have the integrity of having worked it through. I would not be asking others to do anything that I had not done myself. In doing that, I developed a profound appreciation for how difficult forgiveness is, and the struggle that I went through. I also thought that from the point of view of leading the focus groups and doing the teachings it was important that would be able to

⁵⁰⁷ Osmer. *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: B. Eerdmanns, 2008), 15.

⁵⁰⁸ Osmer. *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, 17.

talk about that process myself. I also chose it from the point of view of Osmer's reflexivity, self-awareness and "The Web of Life" which is the interconnectedness of Ministry.

Discussion on resistance to forgiveness was not debated with the mixed group of Sinhalese and Tamil participants, because they were meeting as a group face to face for the first time. Topic such as this and what are some conditions that might help those who struggle with unconditional forgiveness; and what do people wish to hear that would make it easier to forgive are some questions that could be developed in the future sessions. These questions are addressed succinctly in the following section.

An important factor to resist forgiveness is the natural human tendency for revenge. In Marietta Jaeger's story she confessed, "Even if the kidnapper were to bring Susie back, alive and well, this very moment, I could still kill him for what he has done to my family."⁵⁰⁹ Volf says it well in describing this point, "Deep within the heart of every victim, anger swells up against the perpetrator, rage inflamed by unredeemed suffering."⁵¹⁰ This leads to another issue that generates a barrier to forgiveness is our sense of justice that the wrongdoer deserves punishment and not forgiveness. Volf adds, Retributive justice contains evil – and threatens the world with destruction."⁵¹¹

Why is forgiveness so beneficial for our life, yet, so hard to practice? Ian Williamson at New Mexico Highlands University and Marti Gonzales at the University of Minnesota have researched on the psychological impediments to forgiveness.⁵¹² In the research they discovered the first obstacle as "Unreadiness," an inner state of unsolved emotional upheaval; the wounded

⁵⁰⁹ Robert D. Enright & Joanna North, Eds., *Exploring Forgiveness* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 10.

⁵¹⁰ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 120.

⁵¹¹ Volf, *Free of Charge*: 161.

⁵¹² Williamson, Marti Hope Gonzales et al., "Forgiveness Aversion: Developing a Motivational State Measure of Perceived Forgiveness Risks," *Motivation and Emotion* Vol. 38, no. 2 (2014), 378- 400.

person can feel trapped in a victim state, ruminating on the harm caused by the perpetrator or by a life situation. As Volf suggests “the offences and the offensiveness of the wrong doers collude with the self-love of the wronged to make it difficult to forgive.”⁵¹³ In order to overcome this situation the research validates the traditional wisdom that “time heals all wounds” and verifies the importance of not hurrying the process of forgiveness.

The second barrier to forgiveness is “Self- Protection,” the fear, that forgiveness will rebound and cause the victim helpless, to further harm, hostility, exploitation, or abuse. The continuing action of the perpetrator is crucial here. If the hurtful behavior remains, if any sense of offense is denied, if the victim’s self-worth continues to be reduced, or trust continues to be broken, then, forgiveness can start to feel like an impossible thing to do. In the researcher’s opinion, “Victims may be legitimately concerned that forgiveness opens them up to further victimization.” Linda Graham, a psychotherapist, says that “People very often need to learn they have the right to set and enforce legitimate boundaries in a relationship. Forgiveness can also involve not being in a relationship with the offender any longer or changing the rules and power dynamics for continuing the relationship.”⁵¹⁴

The third obstacle is “Face” Concerns: As social beings, we are prone to protect our own public reputation; not to give the impression that we are weak or helpless in front of other people, as well as prevent risks to one’s own self-concept. Researchers have also found that holding on to resentment could give people a feeling of power in their relationships; they may be afraid that if they forgive they will lose this “social power.” If this is the case they may need to re-strengthen their inner sense of self-worth and self-respect before forgiveness can be an option.

⁵¹³ Volf. *Free of Charge*: 194.

⁵¹⁴ Linda Graham. “How to Overcome Barriers to Forgiveness” *Greater Good Magazine* (May 13, 2014), https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/overcome_barriers_forgiveness

Linda Graham offers tips to overcome the three barriers to forgiveness, drawing on the research of Ian Williamson and others and her own clinical experience. She says: Forgiveness is difficult; it requires genuine intention and hard working overtime. Particular aversions to forgiveness even rejection to forgive can be helped by recognising them and by applying strategies to address these obstacles efficiently.⁵¹⁵

Volf raises an interesting point in regard to the difficulty to forgive. The reason is that we live in a culture in which it doesn't make sense to forgive. We are social beings, profoundly influenced by the environment and the milieu in which we live. As independent human beings we have the capacity to choose with our own free wills, instead we follow the group to which we belong, and do as they do. It does not make any sense to forgive in a culture that continues to oppress the same people— the poor and the innocent. Volf says that “once a culture has become litigious, forgiveness starts making less and less sense.”⁵¹⁶

To make easier for Christians to forgive, they need to know why we should forgive. When someone is hurt by word or by action, a relationship is broken. This done deed cannot be taken back. Whatever said and done is irreversible. If the hurt could be taken away forgiveness would not be unnecessary. Therefore the only way to move on is to forgive. As illustrated earlier, engaging in Enright's process of “reframing”⁵¹⁷ may also help to ease the barrier to forgiveness. Solidarity with the sinful humanity that all people have the capacity to sin; I have sinned and I also need forgiveness therefore I need to forgive could enhance in the process of forgiving the wrongdoers. People need to know the benefits of forgiveness and the consequence of

⁵¹⁵ Linda Graham. . “How to Overcome Barriers to Forgiveness”

⁵¹⁶ Volf. *Free of Charge*. 212.

⁵¹⁷ Enright, R. D, E. A. Gassin, and C. Wu, “Forgiveness: A Developmental View” *Journal of Moral Education* 21 no. 2 (1992): 99-114 cited in Enright R. D and Joanna North, eds. *Exploring Forgiveness*. (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press,1998), 22.

unforgiveness in order to motivate them to forgive. The most essential thing to remember is that as Christians we are called to follow Christ and forgive others as he has forgiven us.

In a research study done with the group of religious people the result revealed that participants experienced an increase in positive emotions such as peace, joy, calmness, contentment and gratitude as well as improved relations with the offender as a result of practicing forgiveness.⁵¹⁸ Similarly, in my research study, in the in-depth interview when asked; How do you feel when you forgive, they responded with positive emotions and when you don't forgive? They responded with negative emotions such as: guilty, lack of peace, sleeplessness and a heaviness of heart.

There are also some conditions that might help those who struggle with unconditional forgiveness. 1) The wrongdoing must end before forgiveness is applicable. 2) The admission of the offender of his/her wrongdoing. 3) The need for repentance and 4) the willingness to make amendments. These are some of the ways the obstacles to forgiveness can be reached.

6. 9 Revised Practices for Future Ministry

Having studied deep-rooted conflict, mimetic structures of blessing, and Volf's concept of forgiveness, I am prepared to move forward in my ministry. The final pragmatic task of Osmer, that of how we should respond, is about learning from present practices and creating new practices that the whole community can benefit from. Building on what I have learned, here are some constructive things that I am starting to imagine as future possibilities.

⁵¹⁸ Julia E. Kidwell, Nathaniel Wade & Emily Blaedel. "Understanding forgiveness in the lives of religious people: the role of sacred and secular elements," *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 15:2, (2011), 121-140, DOI: [10.1080/13674676.2011.560598](https://doi.org/10.1080/13674676.2011.560598)

This study was done with participants from several areas in Greater Toronto: Scarborough, Burlington, Mississauga and Markham. My next step might be to replicate the process with a smaller group of diaspora Sinhalese and Tamil Catholics from just one area, for example Scarborough. This process could be repeated multiple times, or even performed on an on-going basis, to validate my hypothesis that the teaching of forgiveness could motivate personal transformation. Focusing on one locale can have a more profound community impact with participants influencing the larger community in the parish. Then this could be tried in different areas in Greater Toronto.

This model can be applied to different places in Canada where there are Catholic Sinhalese and Tamils, for example in Montreal, Ottawa or Calgary, where they may suffer a similar division between the two ethnic groups. By extension, the process could be replicated in other countries with a diaspora Sinhalese and Tamil Catholic presence experiencing the same problem.

One issue to be resolved is the need for more positive direction from the Sri Lankan religious leaders in Toronto, to encourage a coming together of the two ethnic groups. My first step is to meet the diocesan authorities and share the results of my research to demonstrate that personal transformation can occur within this context and ask them how they could help me to advance this ministry. This would be to gain their support and they in turn could enlist the support of the Sinhalese and Tamil clergy. Through this, new forms of ministry could be put in place to continue the work of mending the division, started in this research. A new practice could be to organize a Eucharistic celebration in English to which Sri Lankan Sinhalese and Tamil Catholics are both invited. If this is successful, then a mass could be planned to offer the celebration in both languages, Sinhalese and Tamil. With the approval and cooperation of the

diocese, the two communities would be able to worship together and begin the journey of healing.

The goal of this research was to promote personal transformation in these participants, but it did not allow me to learn much of the particulars of their life situation. I do not fully know the real situation of the diaspora Sinhalese and Tamil communities in Toronto. In order to better understand this group, one of the revised practices would be for me to visit them and get to know them. Although there are many community centres today set up for people in order to meet their needs, Jesus in his ministry reached out to the sick and the marginalized and visited them in their homes.

In the process of speaking of forgiveness, there is a need to help people to heal. Working with small groups in different areas, special rituals and activities could be organized to assist with this. They would be in part based on the work of John Paul Lederach, an experienced practitioner and teacher in conflict transformation, who illustrated creative approaches to encourage healing, such as the personification of the virtues of Mercy, Truth, Justice and Peace in dramatic form.

These ideas show how the research can be extended to a variety of activities that would expand the reach of the process on forgiveness and promote healing.

Now that the research has been performed, it has become a reality and has impacted the participants' lives as well as my own life. The understanding of deep-rooted conflict and the teachings of blessing in Redekop's work, the greater understanding of what conflict is in the Sri Lankan community both at home and in the diaspora, the themes of forgiveness I discovered in Volf, guided me and shaped my approach when working with the members of this small community of diaspora Catholic Sinhalese and Tamils. The analysis of the findings showed that

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there had been significant transformation in the understanding of forgiveness as a consequence of the teaching.

Now the research has shown not only that it can be done, but that the members of their own prayer groups formed the bulk of the people interested in pursuing forgiveness. There is a yearning at the heart of their own parishes that they have now been made aware of, and this is something for them to follow up on if they have the openness. In this the diocese could be enlisted as a willing partner to influence and encourage, so that the positive momentum will not be lost.

Conclusion

This whole process began because of my concern for the Sri Lankan diaspora, for people with whom I had become close; I saw their needs and their concerns, and I began searching for ways to bridge the gap between the Sinhalese and the Tamils and heal their wounds. I had made several attempts on my own, without success, so I decided to embark on a research project to get to the bottom of the issues and determine if anything could be done to remedy the situation.

I had studied theology and was familiar with the work of several theologians; but it was only on beginning my studies at Saint Paul University that I was introduced to practical theology, and specifically the work of Osmer. I chose his work as a guide because his methodology was based on four core tasks of practical theological interpretation that were simple, clear and applicable to real life. He wrote for congregational leaders, not limited to the clergy, and favoured a creative approach that emphasised the spirituality of leaders. His interdisciplinary perspective brought the social sciences together to interpret God's message.

What I set out to do was explore whether the teaching of forgiveness would motivate personal transformation for the diaspora Sinhalese and Tamil Catholics, and I set the study in Toronto, a city with a large diaspora Sri Lankan population.

The first step was to answer the question, what is going on? Chapters 2 and 3 developed the background to the situation, which was that the diaspora Sinhalese and Tamils were divided and they could not live together harmoniously. This was particularly evident for the Sri Lankan Catholics; although they were supposed to follow the gospel, they could not even come together to pray. The history of Sri Lanka was long and complex, with both groups emerging early to make a contribution to the culture; society and religion had played a defining role through the centuries. The country was steeped in Buddhist mythology until the introduction of Christianity.

The arrival of the Portuguese, the mass conversions of the Sri Lankan people and the new Catholic faith created inequities and rivalry, leading to the decline of Buddhism. The Dutch maintained good relations with the Sinhalese for purposes of trade, and Buddhism was not much affected. However, the British heavily supported Christian educational and missionary activities and offered opportunities to the Tamils, prompting a Sinhalese Buddhist revival that fused the religious and national identities into one. This promotion of Sinhalese Buddhism continued after independence when legislation was enacted to support their rights while marginalizing the Tamils. Eventually, civil war erupted and lasted 25 years.

Chapter 4 examined the next core task of Osmer: Why is this going on? Redekop's framework of deep-rooted conflict and mimetic structures of violence can be seen in the events that unfolded during the history of Sri Lanka. Basic human and identity needs were jeopardized and this led to social, political and religious unrest, and ultimately to violence and civil war.

From the sixth century onwards, there was a constant battle between the Sinhalese and Tamil kingdoms until the thirteenth century. With the arrival of the Portuguese and the introduction of Catholicism, the rivalry began between Christianity and Buddhism. The prevailing hegemonic structure dominated the Buddhists. Because the Christians were favoured, the identity needs of the Buddhists were neglected, and this led to the rise in Sinhalese Buddhist ethnonationalism, to refute Christian powers and preserve their identity. Mimetic desire and mimetic rivalry became evident in the Sinhalese Buddhists community; at independence, they came to power and the Tamils became marginalized as the Other, eventually turned into scapegoats for the rising tensions. All the activities that had been promoted under the British were taken away from the Christian authorities—schools and hospitals were nationalized, and missionaries were expelled. Sinhalese became the official language of the country.

Chapter 5 discussed what ought to be going on. Forgiveness is the heart of Christian belief. We live in a world of violence, therefore forgiveness, even though it is complex and difficult, is essential for the maintenance and flourishing of relationships. I explored the concept of forgiveness from the perspective of several faiths as well as different disciplines. To represent the Christian theological perspective, I chose Volf's concept of forgiveness. A profound theologian with personal experienced of war and trauma, he speaks from a perspective of intense personal hurt and sound Christian principles. He is in fact a shining example of the fact that it is possible to forgive even egregious wrongs. This was why I based the teaching of forgiveness on his work.

Volf's concept of theology is founded on Moltmann's theology of the cross. In tune with this theology is the notion of how Christ suffered not for his own sake but in solidarity with the suffering of humanity. Volf expands on this concept to include Jesus' self-giving sacrifice as a model for us to give ourselves to one another. He emphasizes that all those who suffer can find solace in the Crucified; however, it is those who strive to follow his example that will be united with him. Volf's metaphor of the embrace, consisting of four steps, illustrated the dynamics of forgiveness: the first step was the opening of the arms, an invitation, creating a space for the other; the second step was the waiting, evoking desire in the other; the third step was holding the other and being clasped in return; and the fourth step was the opening of the arms, letting the other go and potentially creating the opportunity to embrace again.

Then came the time to answer the task of how we might respond to the situation and implement the research process. Seventeen participants took part in the study, and over the course of four days, they filled in questionnaires, were interviewed, and took part in two focus group sessions. There were challenges and unexpected issues: changes had to be made to

recruitment and to the research design. In the end, the findings showed that some degree of transformation had taken place, and that the teaching had resulted in a change in the participants' understanding and definition of forgiveness. The process was met with openness on the part of the participants that was gratifying and humbling to me as a researcher. The potential conflict I had anticipated did not arise: the participants had embarked on the research willing to meet each other and take part to the best of their ability. It was a privilege to work with them.

In the process of this research, I encountered various limitations. As a Tamil, I knew more of the Tamil experience than that of the Sinhalese and had formed biases that I had been only dimly aware of. I am indebted to the work of several Sinhalese historians for their profound knowledge. Through rigorous preparation and self-scrutiny, I was able to continually challenge my attitudes and perceptions.

Another limitation was that there was very little academic literature available on the diaspora and none on the diaspora Sinhalese and Tamil Catholics in Toronto; therefore, I had to draw on mainly internet sources, and relied heavily on my own observations and on community leaders as "human living documents."

With regard to the validity of the findings, the study has not been replicated yet. The process would need to be re-done several times to demonstrate that the findings are consistent for a larger number of participants. This study demonstrates that the process is feasible, however not that it is certain and consistent. The results could be due to the participants being open-minded people already predisposed to getting involved, and the session might have had a unique impact on them. By reproducing the process, the results may in time be confirmed.

I have also made some conscious delimitations. For example, this research focuses on Catholics, who are a small minority within the Sri Lankan diaspora. Therefore, the study cannot

be extrapolated directly to the majority groups of the Sinhalese Buddhists, Tamil Hindus or the Muslims. It also did not include Christians of other denominations. Even though I provided a brief summary of the concept of forgiveness from different disciplines, I consciously avoided getting into social/political reconciliation.

This research makes several contributions to the field of forgiveness studies. I set out to bring together two communities with a history of trauma around the concept of forgiveness as developed by Miroslav Volf. Asking people living in a post-conflict situation to confront the issue of forgiveness was audacious, and the teaching tool of forgiveness was an innovative instrument.

One lesson learned was that the Tamils saw themselves as the victims of the events. It was difficult to talk to them about forgiveness when they felt the need to speak of justice and accountability. There is such a desire to be heard. Ministering to them, showing empathy, of being with them, had the effect of validating and acknowledging their experience. Once they felt understood and validated, they realized that they were stuck. It was then we could talk about forgiveness. And I could only ask them to forgive because I, like Volf, had myself struggled and learned to forgive. It is only by transforming myself that I can call others to do the same.

An important point worthy to note here is that the teachings are not only cognitive but teachings imply something deep at the personal, emotional, and spiritual level. The teachings that derived from Volf, are not based only on his ideas, which function at cognitive level, describing what is entailed in forgiveness, but part of the teachings that comes from Volf are in reference to his own story, which includes his own spiritual struggle and his own coming to terms with his emotional side. I am aware that when people are psychologically wounded or traumatized, that they cannot simply “will” to forgive on the basis of learning new concepts.

I shall explain this in different situations. The seventeen candidates who participated in the research were recruited through the brochure and accepted the invitation willingly knowing their involvement in the project. The questionnaire and the interviews at the beginning were multifaceted and were aimed at getting a good picture of where they stood in relation to forgiveness at the beginning and at the end. During the focus group, when asked what motivated them to participate in the research, some responded that they desire to know what forgiveness is about, some others said their desire was to learn more about forgiveness, a few others were motivated through curiosity, and some who belonged to the prayer group said they would like share this experience with their prayer group. There were five Tamils and one Sinhalese who were psychologically wounded and shared their stories with the group. I wondered if faith had to do with their healing.

In recruiting Tamil participants, especially the men, I found that they were interested in discussing justice, apology and accountability. Forgiveness was possible for them only when these issues were resolved. I was able to sense in their tone of voice anger, pain, hurt and resentment. When a person is psychologically wounded, they are not ready to hear anything about forgiveness. What they need is empathetic listening and time to heal their wounds. It is in that listening we are helping them to tell their stories perhaps over and over again. It is time, combined with support and wise guidance that will heal their pain and suffering.

When people are healed and ready, then it is best to talk about forgiveness in an impersonal manner: What does it mean to forgive? What are the benefits of forgiveness? What are the detriments of carrying the negative resentments? It is a different way of framing the purpose of forgiveness. Then people might consider and be open and willing to listen.

There needs to be “something more” than cognitive understanding on the part of the individual. In the history of Christianity in Sri Lanka, one of the major points I made was that Christianity was really limited to the observance of rituals. But there should be something more than the external rituals. There has to be an inner commitment to living out the teachings of discipleship, and part of this discipleship is forgiveness. It is not a cognitive thing of being able to say this is the definition of forgiveness. But there is a cognitive dimension and that is to understand that as Christians we are called to follow Christ, a part of following Jesus is to forgive. In relation to Christianity, the individual need to have the desire to forgive and be willing to take that path toward forgiveness.

On the other hand, if I present forgiveness as an imperative; something that they have to do, especially if I say that it is demanded in order to be good Christians, and to follow Christ, I re-victimize them because they are not ready and they do not quite understand what forgiveness is and they begin to feel that they are terrible Christians, and even feel not to be a Christian any more. They might even say of themselves, “I am a so horrible that I cannot forgive because what happened to me was inhuman.” They react this way in response to the impact of the psychological injury. When they have this kind of feeling they don’t hear anything else. Such people need to find healing first, have their stories validated, and be given time until they are ready to hear about forgiveness. The capacity to introduce this comes partly as I build trusting relationship with the individuals, and they open and begin to talk about their stories. Forgiveness is paradoxical; the same thing I say to two people could be received in two totally different ways. So forgiveness is not something that we master quickly or easily but it is a process.

My future ministry will be to continue this work of religious-based peace building; to continue the work of healing the diaspora Sinhalese and Tamil Catholics. It is my hope that this

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process could also be amended to apply to Sri Lanka itself, to the broader Sinhalese Buddhist and Tamil Hindu communities.

Appendices

Appendix A: Board of Ethics Approval

Appendix A



UNIVERSITÉ
SAINT-PAUL
UNIVERSITY

04-12-2015
dd-mm-yyyy

Bureau de la recherche et de la déontologie
Office of Research and Ethics

Ethics Certificate Research Ethics Board (REB)

REB File Number 1360.10/15

Principal Investigator / Thesis supervisor / Co-investigators / Student

<u>Last name</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>	<u>Role</u>
Lena	Mangalam	Faculty of Theology	PhD Student-PI
Redekop	Vern	Faculty of Human Sciences	Thesis supervisor

Type of project PhD Thesis

Title Opening Paths of Forgiveness in the Deep-rooted Conflict between Sinhalese and Tamil Roman Catholics in Toronto: A Case Study of Teaching Forgiveness Based on the Theology of Miroslav Volf.

<u>Approval date</u>	<u>Expiry Date</u>	<u>Decision</u>
01-12-2015 <small>(dd-mm-yyyy)</small>	30-11-2016 <small>(dd-mm-yyyy)</small>	1 (approved)

Committee comments

The Research Ethics Board (REB) approved the project.
The researcher is invited to use the reference number 1360.10/15 when recruiting participants.

In accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement, the Saint Paul University Research Ethics Board has examined and approved the application for an ethics certificate for this project for the period indicated and subject to the conditions listed above.

The research protocol may not be modified without prior written approval from the REB. This includes, among others, the extension of the research, additional recruitment for the inclusion of new participants, changes in location of the fieldwork, any stage where a research permit is required, such as work in schools. Minor administrative changes are allowed.

The REB must be notified of all changes or unanticipated circumstances that have a serious impact on the conduct of the research, that relate to the risk to participants and their safety. Modifications to the project, information, consent and recruitment documentation must be submitted to the Office of Research and Ethics for approval by the REB.

The investigator must submit a report four weeks prior to the expiry date of the certificate stated above requesting an extension or that the file be closed.

Documents relating to publicity, recruitment and consent of participants should bear the file number of the certificate. They must also indicate the coordinates of the investigator should participants have questions related to the research project. In which case, the documents will refer to the Chair of the REB and provide the coordinates of the Office of Research and Ethics.

Signature

Louis Perron
Chair
Research Ethics Board (REB)

1/1

Appendix B

Recruitment Procedures

Past experience demonstrates the difficulty in bringing the two groups together. Therefore, two methods will be employed to recruit the maximum number of potential participants.

The first method is to recruit participants through the community leaders. The purpose of the research and the different stages involved will be explained and the leaders will communicate to all those interested that volunteers are being sought for a study. They will collect contact information and then the researcher will follow up with the interested parties by phone or email, or one-on-one meetings, and explain to them the letter of information step by step. The letter will explain the purpose and description of the research, the theme of the study, the process and the framework. Confidentiality will be assured. The letter will also offer the credentials of the researcher, introduce the team members, and issue an invitation to participate. Subjects are being asked to attend an initial meeting where they will fill out a questionnaire. A week later, they will have a one-on-one interview, followed by two focus groups. A time frame will be given to sign the consent form.

The second method is: The researcher requests the Sinhalese and Tamil groups to give an opportunity to speak about the research project in their regular community gathering and invite volunteers to participate in the research project. Or if they have an email distributing list or a newsletter the researcher can put out an appeal asking for volunteers to participate in the research study on “Forgiveness”. The researcher then will follow up with the interested parties by phone or email or one-on-one meetings and explain to them the letter of information step by step (see Appendix C).

Appendix C



Letter of Information - Toronto

The Teaching of Forgiveness and its Impact on Personal Transformation

Researcher: Mangalam Lena

Faculty Supervisor: Vern Neufeld Redekop, Ph.D.
Saint Paul University
223 Main Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1S 1C4
613-236-1393, ext. 2369

Purpose of Study: Opening paths of forgiveness in deep-rooted conflicts between Sinhalese and Tamil Roman Catholics in Toronto; evaluating the efficacy of teachings of forgiveness based on the theology of Miroslav Volf, and to develop a teaching tool to bring about personal transformation.

My name is Mangalam Lena, from the faculty of theology of Saint Paul University in Ottawa, Ontario. I am conducting a study on forgiveness and am interested in the diaspora Sinhalese and Tamil Catholic communities of Toronto. I am a Tamil from Sri Lanka who has lived in Canada for many years, and I have ministered extensively to the Sri Lankan immigrant community. This experience and my background in theology led me to explore the impact of deep-rooted conflict and what motivates people to forgive. There are many who want to move on from the past, but are having difficulty coming to terms with traumatic events. My research focuses on the teaching of forgiveness according to the Christian theologian Miroslav Volf, and on the Sri Lankan community's potential for personal transformation.

I am seeking candidates who are willing to participate in this pilot project. The research team will be comprised of myself a Tamil and my research assistant, a Sinhalese. It will involve a

maximum of 10 hours of your time (apart from your travelling hours) in a two to three-week period. All confidentiality is guaranteed. All four stages will be recorded and transcribed for data analysis. This is an opportunity to share in a safe environment, to increase awareness about the process of forgiveness, and be part of positive change.

Procedures Involved in the Research

You will be participating in a four-stage study:

Stage 1: Meet and Greet

You will be invited to meet the researcher, assistant researcher and 10 other participants of the same ethnic origin. A circle process will follow where each of you will have three minutes to introduce yourself. If you wish you can use only your first name and share what motivates you to participate in this research project. In this way, the group will be at ease with each other for the following stages of the study. You will be given 30 minutes to answer a questionnaire on forgiveness. If you have difficulty understanding the questions, you can always get help from the researcher or the assistant researcher. One-on-one interviews will be set up for the following week, depending on mutual availability.

Stage 2: Interview

You will then have a one-on-one interview of 30 to 45 minutes with the researcher involving open-ended questions on the same topic as the questionnaire, to allow for a more in-depth or detailed response. You may ask any questions yourself and share your opinion, in a safe and confidential environment. The session will be recorded for data analysis.

Stage 3: First Focus Group

This will be the first focus group, when all participants of the same ethnic origin will be gathered together. A presentation on forgiveness will follow given by the researcher on the work of theologian Miroslav Volf, his contribution to the field and the relevance of his personal story to the Sri Lankan situation. The main message will be: a generous God who gives and forgives incessantly; how we need to embrace our enemies as God has embraced us in Christ; Christ's self-donation to humanity and the parallel of human self-donation to one another; and how to let

go of painful memories. You will be encouraged to interact and share openly and honestly. We will invite you to participate in the next stage, a focus group which will take place a few days later, where the Sinhalese and Tamil participants will be gathered together.

Stage 4: Second Focus Group

This is the second focus group. All participants, Sinhalese and Tamil, will come together. The same questionnaire will be given for the second time. An open discussion will follow and you are encouraged to share, discuss and dialogue. For example, Volf says the heart of Christianity is forgiveness, what do you think of that? And how did Jesus forgive, and what were his thoughts on forgiveness? Small groups will be formed of one Sinhalese and one Tamil, and you will be asked to discuss, what was the thing that struck you the most in Volf's message of forgiveness? With the openness that follows, you may have recommendations of your own as to how these concepts could be practised in your life or in your community.

Potential Risks:

Some questions may make you feel anxious or uncomfortable. You are free to share as much or as little as you wish in the interview and the focus group process. This research is to bring about personal transformation but for some it may be a potentially painful experience. Because there are a number of participants, confidentiality could be compromised by others, but all are free to speak up as they see fit, and confidentiality will always be respected according to the rules of ethics on the part of the research team. A mediator will be present for the final focus group, to intervene if conflict or serious disagreements arise.

Potential Benefits:

This experience will expand your knowledge and understanding of forgiveness. This could lead to personal transformation, and to being freed from the past. You will gain new self-awareness, of what forgiveness is for you, and be conscious of what you need to forgive. You will gain empathy towards others, and see changes in yourself that could lead you to be an agent of positive change in your community and be a religious peace builder.

Confidentiality:

Confidentiality will be respected throughout the process. Information obtained from participants and all written records will be kept locked and secure at Saint Paul University. All data will be shredded and all audio tapes erased once the research is final and has been published. No participant will be named in any form in the published record. Participants will be advised as to the importance of confidentiality for themselves and for others.

You as a participant and member of a cultural group will be treated with the utmost respect. Your experiences, both as a member of a community and as a private individual, will not be misrepresented in any way.

Participation:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. If you choose to be part of the research, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty or consequence, without any questions asked, even after signing the consent form or having begun the research process.

You will be participating in three group sessions and have one interview, one-on-one. You have the right to ask any questions you wish about any part of the study at any stage.

Sharing of Findings:

The results of the study will be open to you and to the public when the doctoral thesis is accepted and published. A special summary of the research will be sent to all participants and a small celebration will be held to thank you for your help.

Thank you very much for your interest. I look forward to having your input and your participation.

Mangalam Lena
Ottawa, Ontario

Appendix D



Consent Form

Title of the study: Opening Paths of Forgiveness in the Deep-rooted Conflict Between Sinhalese and Tamil Roman Catholics in Toronto: A Case Study of Teaching Forgiveness Based on the Theology of Miroslav Volf.

Name of researcher: Mangalam Lena

Name of supervisor: Vern Neufeld Redekop, Ph.D
Saint Paul University
223 Main Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1S 1C4
613-236-1393, ext. 2369

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the above-mentioned research study conducted by Mangalam Lena under the supervision of Vern Neufeld Redekop.

Purpose of the study: To transform deep-rooted conflict between Sinhalese and Tamil Catholics; evaluating the efficacy of teachings of forgiveness based on the theology of Miroslav Volf; and to develop a teaching tool to bring about personal transformation.

Participation: My participation will consist essentially in answering a questionnaire for 30 to 45 minutes, and undergoing a 45 minute one-on-one interview; and attending two focus groups, one

of 2 hours and the second of 4 hours. I will fill out the questionnaire again at the end of the second focus group. During each stage I will do the following to the best of my ability:

1. **Questionnaire:** I will fill out a questionnaire as honestly as possible.
2. **Interviews:** I will be open and attentive to the questions asked.
3. **First focus group:** I will listen to the teaching of Christian forgiveness and discuss.
4. **Second focus group:** I will share and participate in a general discussion with both ethnic groups and also share when paired with a member of the other ethnic group. I will also fill out the questionnaire at the end of the focus group.

The place, the date and time of each session will be at _____, on _____ at _____.

Risks: My participation in this study will entail that I share very personal information and this may cause me to feel anxious or bring up painful memories. I have received assurance from the researcher that I may give feedback during the one-on-one interview; that I may withdraw from the study without repercussions, no questions asked; and that a mediator will be present during the second focus group to intervene if needed.

Benefits: My participation in the study will deepen my knowledge of forgiveness, will motivate personal transformation, help free me from the past, and show me that each of us can be an agent of positive change in our own surroundings and for the future generation.

Confidentiality: I have received an assurance from the researcher that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the contents will be used only for this research on forgiveness and that my confidentiality will be protected. I understand I will be introduced to and be meeting other participants, and confidentiality may be breached, but that the research team will emphasize for all involved the importance of confidentiality, and that within the research team itself, my confidentiality is guaranteed.

Anonymity: I understand that I will be introduced to and be meeting other participants, but I will not be named in the published research. I understand that I can give only my first name to other participants.

Conservation of data: All recorded and transcribed data will be kept in a locked and secure place at Saint Paul University. All written data will be shredded and audio tapes destroyed after a five-year lapse after the end of the study.

Compensation: If funding is provided, public transit and parking expenses will be reimbursed.

Voluntary Participation: I understand that my participation is voluntary, and that I am under no obligation to take part. If I choose to participate, I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and may do so without suffering any consequences. If I choose to withdraw, then all the data gathered before the withdrawal will be protected and safeguarded along with the research data, and will be destroyed five years after publication of the research.

Acceptance: I, _____, agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Mangalam Lena of Saint Paul University, which research is under the supervision of V. Neufeld Redekop, Ph.D.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or her supervisor.

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Office of Research and Ethics, Saint Paul University, 223 Main Street, Ottawa, ON K1S 1C4 or telephone 613-236-1393.

There are two copies of this form, one of which is mine to keep.

Participant's signature: _____ date: _____

Researcher's signature: _____ date: _____

7. What would motivate or encourage you to forgive?

8. Under what conditions would you forgive?

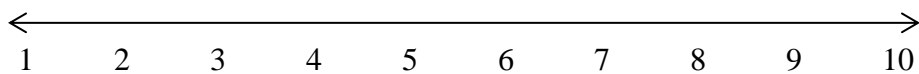
Emotional Snapshots

Which feelings stand in the way of forgiveness? Circle the one(s) that apply.

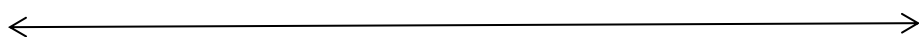
1. Anger
2. Revenge
3. Fear
4. Resentment
5. All of the above
6. Other: _____

In a situation of un-forgiveness, how do you feel? Rate on a scale of 1 to 10, 1 representing indifference and 10 representing the strongest intensity of feeling.

1. Anger



2. Fear



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1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. Revenge

←-----→
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. Shame

←-----→
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

In a situation of forgiveness, how do you feel? Rate on a scale of 1 to 10, 1 representing indifference and 10 representing the strongest intensity of feeling.

1. Relief

←-----→
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. Happiness

←-----→
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. Well-being

←-----→
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. Hope

←-----→
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

5. Joy

←-----→
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Appendix F

Structure and Contents of the Interview Questions

Semi-structured interviews based on the answers to the questions in the questionnaire. See Appendix E.

For example, if a question on the questionnaire is left unanswered by a participant, the researcher could gently probe deeper on the topic in the personal interview.

Another example would be, if the participant rates all feelings related to a situation of unforgiveness at the strongest intensity, the researcher may ask him/her to share an experience that relates to the source of their feelings.

Appendix G

Teaching Instrument – Culturally adapted to Sri Lanka

The teaching is done in a non-structured environment, in other words, not in a classroom or academic format, but in a type of sharing circle in a focus group. The instruction is given in two sections, one a descriptive narrative of Miroslav Volf, his life and struggles, and two, the theology and the concept of forgiveness based on Volf.

a) Narrative: The first section is the recounting of the life and struggles of Miroslav Volf in his war-torn country of Croatia. Volf struggled intellectually with the problems very close to his heart and to his identity. He had gone through and witnessed similar traumas to those experienced in Sri Lanka: of torture, rape, killing, the burning down of churches and the destruction of cities.

His theology was that as Christians, we should embrace our enemies. One day, he was challenged by his professor, “Can you embrace a Cetnik (his enemy), the evil other?” This question went deep into his heart. His immediate response was to say “No”, but as a follower of Christ, he accepted that he must say yes. He struggled between the truth of his theological argument and the reality of the atrocities that he faced. He says: “My thought was pulled in two different directions by the blood of the innocent crying out to God, and by the blood of God’s lamb offered for the guilty.”⁵¹⁹ He was living in a world of violence as a follower of Jesus Christ, and he wanted to find an answer as a follower of Christ. He took a spiritual Journey and the results were distilled in his writings, *Exclusion and Embrace*, *Free of Charge*, and *The End of Memory*. By his life and example, he has touched many people and inspired them to be peace builders.

b) The summary of Volf’s teaching of forgiveness based on his writings:

Exclusion and Embrace: The Cross as the centre

⁵¹⁹ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 9

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- Volf's main argument is that we must embrace our enemies as God has embraced us in Christ.
- The Cross is the centre for understanding forgiveness and our life in the world.
- A parallel is drawn between Christ's self-donation to humanity and the idea of human self-giving to one another.

Free of Charge: introduction of a generous God who gives and forgives incessantly

- God the forgiver
- How should we forgive?
- How can we forgive?
- Why forgiveness is difficult.

During the teaching on forgiveness, Redekop's teachings on conflict resolution will also be introduced briefly, specifically to address why forgiveness is so hard. This centers on such issues as how the Sri Lankans suffered from hegemonic structures of violence, the scapegoat function, the impact of deep-rooted conflict and the threat to personal identity needs. For example, they can be reminded of how at one time, the Tamils were favoured under the British, and how after independence, the Sinhalese became the privileged group.

The End of Memory: how should we remember the wrongdoing?

- Remembering rightly
- Speaking truth and practicing grace
- Volf also stressed the consequences of too much remembering. His radical position is of letting go of painful memories and of wrongs done to individuals and groups.

Appendix H



Reference Number 1360. 10/15

The Teaching of Forgiveness and its Impact on Personal Transformation

A research project has been initiated by a Doctor of Ministry candidate at Saint Paul University, Ottawa, Ontario to study the subject of forgiveness within the context of Catholic teaching. The research is to develop a teaching tool that would help open a path of forgiveness between Sinhalese and Tamil Roman Catholics. Participants are now being recruited for interviews and focus groups. Requirements are that they are part of the Sri Lankan Diaspora, that they practice Roman Catholic faith, and that they live in the Greater Toronto Area. They can be male or female but should be over the age of 25. A small remuneration will be given to eligible candidates for participation in the study to help with travel expenses.

If your answer is yes to one or more questions listed below, and willing to participate in the study, please contact the researcher whose contact details are given below:

1. Do you believe forgiveness is at the heart of Christianity? Yes / No
2. Do you think practicing forgiveness is difficult? Yes / No
3. Did you observe or experience anything that would show there are tensions between the Sinhalese and Tamil Catholic communities?

Your participation in the study is entirely voluntary. Confidentiality will be respected and privacy will be maintained throughout the research study. If you are interested in participating in the study, please contact the researcher at the following contact details.

mangalamlena@gmail.com or 613-421-9266

Appendix I

Answers to the Four Questions of the First Focus Group

1) What stays with you from today's session on forgiveness?

- I liked the four movements of embrace.
- The Cross of Christ and his call to follow him.
- When we don't forgive, we are imprisoned.
- Christ died for our sins.
- The four stages of embrace.
- Embrace, openness, creating a space for the other and not excluding others.
- God embracing human hostility.
- The four movements are the starting point.
- Letting go of the past, the importance of embrace and touching.
- The idea of remembering the right way, it is a kind of sacrifice.
- I liked the idea of exclusion and embrace, and through forgiveness we are releasing the burden of the wrongdoer.
- Extending compassion, forget the past and restore relationship.
- Freeing of animosity towards the person who hurt me.
- Forget and continue life without harming others. (4)
- Forget the past and move forward and look for opportunities where situation can be changed.
- Christian forgiveness is different from others. Being a Christian forgiveness becomes part of our Christian faith. It may be different for other faith groups.
- I like the idea of embrace. Most of the time we keep all our resentments inside us. What I learned was to let go of our resentments and embrace the other.
- The golden rule, "treat others as you treat yourself."

2) Where did you find yourself inspired, encouraged, challenged or angry?

- I was impressed by the explanation of exclusion and embrace, very insightful. I liked the idea of forgiveness as a process of lifting the burden of the harm from the others which gives relief to the person and to myself. Therefore, it is mutual.
- “Giving ourselves” to others challenges me, because if I give myself to others I am opening myself to lots of hurts that will perpetuate my hate. So, when I give myself I need to do prayerfully so that I do not expect anything on return, unconditionally.
- When others challenge us with questions such as “Why did God give us suffering?” I don’t know what to say.
- Regarding the question of embrace, I struggle like Volf.
- Practice forgiveness daily and how to practice it.

3) What is the image of Jesus that was present during this session?

- Love.
- Forgiveness.
- Unconditional love. (4)
- Unconditional love and mercy.
- Jesus reaching out to us.
- Jesus dying on the cross. (3)
- Taking our sins upon him.
- Turning the other cheek to the offender.
- Forgive your brother and then come to me.

4) What difference could it make now, after this experience or understanding in your life in regard to Sinhalese/Tamil relationship?

- We need to take the initiative to forgive and to reach out to others rather than waiting for them to ask forgiveness.
- We need to forgive without condition. (5)
- Opening the arms and wait for others to open their arms. (2)
- It is hard, but we can take small steps.
- Need for repentance before reconciliation.

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- Usually when we meet an Asian not knowing their identity, we ask them from which country they come from. Among the Sri Lankans we have the habit of asking another Sri Lankan from which part of Sri Lanka they come from. I will avoid doing this, because this is against the notion of embrace.

Appendix J

Difference Between Pre- and Post-Teaching Questionnaire and Interview Answers to Questions 4 to 8

Participant	Pre- and post-teaching questionnaire and interview answers to Questions 4 to 8
1	No difference pre and post. According to a Christian understanding of forgiveness.
2	Before the teaching session, forgiveness was defined as conditional. After the teaching, it became unconditional, taking on the burden of the wrongdoer as Jesus did for sinners, not excluding but embracing the whole of humanity.
3	Initially, forgiveness was understood to mean confronting the offender and asking for the reasons why. After the teaching, forgiveness was defined as letting go of ill-feeling towards the offender and moving on.
4	No difference pre and post. Had a trusting relationship with the other ethnic group and never had any problems.
5	Incomplete.
6	Original definition was that forgiveness was reconciliation and letting go of wrongdoing. After the teaching, forgiveness became letting go of past hurts, anger and resentment, without condition.
7	Definition of forgiveness was “totally forgetting any harm caused and restoring the relationship. “After the teaching, forgiveness was defined as a “process of taking the burden of the offender and restoring the relationship that existed before”.
8	Before, there was a religious basis for forgiveness, it was a divine grace, necessary for the “the peaceful persistence of mankind.” After the teaching, forgiveness was defined as letting go of past hurts and seeing others as God sees us. In terms of motivation, beforehand the purpose was for peace mind, and then after teaching, it was the example of Christ forgiving others.
9	Originally, to forgive was to not become angry when someone hurt you but to forget; and after the teaching, it was to let go of the hurt and to forgive unconditionally. Originally, for Question 7, learning from mistakes was important; after the teaching, the focus was on the four steps of the embrace.
10	Originally, forgiveness and forgetting was the same. After the teaching, forgiveness was to embrace others; it was a process of self-transformation and self-healing. Question 7: there was a religious motivation initially and then became self-orientation.
11	Defined forgiveness as pardoning those who had hurt. In the interview, the participant added: “if someone’s hurt me, I will take it up with him.” After the teaching, it was important to forgive and continue one’s own life.
12	Before the teaching, it was important to forgive and forget the matter, and the person was to be loved as they had been loved before. After the teaching, forgiveness was to let go of the past, taking no revenge, and wishing no harm to the other, to embrace the person.
13	Forgiveness was to release the feeling of vengeance towards the other; after the

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	teaching, forgiveness was to leave behind past hurts and move forward.
14	Initially, forgiveness was to remove all the judgmental components. After the teaching, forgiveness was changing the paradigm from hate to love, letting go of revenge “toxics” and superimpose “it” with loving kindness and embrace.
15	In the beginning, forgiveness was to have no ill-feelings towards the wrongdoer; after the teaching, forgiveness was understood as a conscious effort to release anyone who had offended them from any hurt, and by doing so, release one’s self of the hurt caused by the offence. Question 7: before the teaching, motivation was to set an example as a mother, and after the teaching, motivation was God’s unconditional love. Question 8: originally, stated that if the person asks for forgiveness and promises not to offend again; after the teaching, “if and when I receive a heart like Jesus, I would not wait for any condition.”
16	Before the teaching, forgiveness was the key to enter into Jesus’ heart; after the teaching, “now, after the session, I understand forgiveness as letting go of ethnicity, colour and race, and not to judge the others.”
17	Originally, forgiveness was to just let go, and forgive and forget. It could be practiced by sharing love to other persons and wishing no harm but wishing good. Same definition after the teaching, and adds that having taken the Lord’s path, it will be easy. However, Question 6: before the teaching, the response was that it would be difficult to forgive spouse and children; after the teaching, the participant said: “now I have realized it is nothing because he (husband) is doing greater things for me.”

Appendix K

Participants' Future Plans: Relationship Between Sinhalese and Tamils

- Educating children that all people are equal.
- Identity is another area which hinders reconciliation and this must be overcome.
- Transformation has to take place at personal level.
- “Father Make Us One” program would be another way to break barriers between the communities.
- Smile when you meet a person from other community first and start conversation.
- Creating a blog on the internet on “self -transformation” using the books of Volf.
- Meeting and sharing with friends and facilitating events.
- Talk to people who are affected, start with a smile, sympathise with them and establish friendship. Then start talking about forgiveness.
- Teach children about forgiveness.
- Expand the existing prayer groups within Catholics and share forgiveness.
- Pray for unity.
- We need to have the courage to open the door for others.
- When people share their stories, we can listen and empathise with them.
- This type of session (forgiveness session) should continue with guidance.
Believe in the power of prayer.

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