

A Response to the Biblical Question: “How many Times Shall I Forgive My Brother?” (Matthew 18:21– 22): Its Implications on Kenyan Communities.

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ABSTRACT

One of the questions that has become of a major concern among political and religious leaders is: How can we build strong community bonds? Shockingly, Kamaara notes, “While Christian values are expected to foster national cohesion and identity, more often than not Christianity has provided a convenient rallying point around which ethnic conflicts are mobilized.”² It is true that national cohesion in Kenya remains a challenge five decades after independence. This is due to a number of factors such as political, economic and socio-cultural challenges. These factors have hampered efforts towards building one nation as was envisioned by the founding fathers. Hence, the theological question: How many times shall I forgive my brother? This question needs an investigation in order to address the problem of disintegration of the Kenyan community.

The subject of forgiveness has attracted the attention of scholars in the recent years. Schaeffer-Duffy, for instance, writes “forgiveness began to attract attention of researchers in academia. Prior to 1985, the total number of forgiveness studies completed was five. Today there are approximately 55, and research continues, according to *A Campaign for Forgiveness Research*, a non-profit organization directed by Worthington.”³ This was, then, three decades ago. I am sure studies on forgiveness have burgeoned. The world today is in dire need of forgiveness. This is because forgiveness, peace and reconciliation constitute the very essence of community existence and cohesion. While forgiveness, peace-making and reconciliation are fundamental for the wellbeing of any society, they still remain a challenge in many societies.

This paper, therefore, assesses Kenya’s history since independence to ascertain some of its challenges to national cohesion. As a response to the identified challenges, the paper examines relevant biblical passages related to the subject of forgiveness. This is done within the biblical exegetical framework. Thus, the study is a historical, exegetical and

¹ Both of the universities, that is, AIU and PACU are in Nairobi, Kenya.

² Eunice Kamaara, “Towards Christian National Identity in Africa: A Historical Perspective to the Challenge of Ethnicity to the Church in Kenya,” *Studies in World Christianity* 16, no. 2 (July 2010): 1, <https://doi.org/10.3366/swc.2010.0002>.

³ Claire Schaeffer-Duffy, “Building a Future of Hope,” *National Catholic Reporter* 38, no. 25 (April 26, 2002): 24.

theological one aimed at providing possible applicable solutions to the challenge of cohesion in the Kenyan context and Africa at large.

Key words: brotherhood, building bridges, ethnicity, forgiveness, national cohesion, robust community, tribalism.

Introduction

It is evident that the Kenyan community is yet to heal from political, economic and social upheavals since her independence. These upheavals are mainly experienced especially during the electioneering periods. The periods seem to open up old wounds and hurts to the extent of almost tearing the nation apart. The worst of such periods was witnessed during the 2007/8 post-elections violence which saw many lives lost and many people internally displaced. Subsequent elections have neither been without their own skirmishes. In Kenya, after every election, the nation comes to a defining moment and everything seems to come to a standstill.

It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to highlight some of the problems believed to be the root causes to the challenge of unity and nation-building for a robust Kenyan community. A brief analysis of Kenya's history since independence suffices to show that there is a problem to cohesion. The paper responds to this situation by addressing the subject of forgiveness from a biblical point of view as a key modality for fostering a robust united Kenyan community. Despite the prolific writings that have sought to address the question of reconciliation there is little to demonstrate its impact. The question then is: what are we not doing right in addressing the problem?

For instance, in the practice of medicine, it is customary that diagnosis precedes prescription. Unfortunately, the reverse is true when it comes to finding remedy for societal illnesses. Many approaches that have been employed to address the challenges to cohesion in Kenya have in most cases offered a prescription prior to conducting a diagnostic procedure. This leaves the nation with the same problems as they keep recurring from time to time. It is my conviction that if we get to the root causes of some of these problems, and

with proper mechanisms in place, and the good will from the people, then the said problems will be greatly minimized. It has been argued that a solution that recognizes the need for structural change and manner in which group differences are managed stand any chance of success.⁴ The question, then, to ask is: Where do we go from here in order to have a workable approach?

The paper argues that forgiveness is an inevitable route towards peace and reconciliation. The study demonstrates this within an exegetical framework. This is to say that biblical exegesis is our primary task of addressing the questions raised. Therefore, our task involves analyzing relevant biblical passages in order to provide a workable solution to address challenges of national cohesion in the country.

This paper comprises of four sections. The first section investigates some of the root problems to national cohesion. The second section is an exegetical investigation of Matthew's question: How many times must I forgive my brother? This passage is investigated in order to provide a possible solution to Kenya's plight of attaining a robust united community for a stable political, economic and social environment. Other relevant passages are also investigated. Section three focuses on the presentation of some of the practical ways to fostering community cohesion in Kenya. Section four includes the paper's findings, summary and conclusion.

Challenges to Community Cohesion in Kenya

This section concerns itself with the investigation of some of the challenges to community cohesion in Kenya. It presents some of the problems believed to be the root causes of disunity. As earlier stated, it will be an uphill task to begin a treatment procedure before discovering the cause of an illness in question. This is to say that, this paper's proposition proceeds with an argument that a diagnostic procedure precedes that of prescription in order to deal with an ailment more effectively. There are a number of factors that have contributed to the derailing for achievement of Kenya's vision of building one strong community as was envisioned by the founding fathers. There are three main

⁴ Aquiline Tarimo and Paulin Manwelo, *African Peacemaking and Governance*, Studies on Social Change in Africa (Nairobi, Kenya: Acton Publishers, 2008), 11.

challenges to this end and they include; political, economic and socio-cultural challenges. Research has shown that the diversity of conflict sequence observed among 163 ethnic groups ranging 1945 to 1994 is portrayed in correspondence with political and socio-economic factors.⁵ Each of these factors are discussed briefly here below.

Political Challenges

One major factor posing a challenge towards national unity in Kenya is the political factor. Moibi considers politics as an “intruder hindering the progress of the search for national unity.”⁶ Before we delve further into the political challenges, I would like to give a brief background to the genesis of politically motivated factors in Kenya. Generally speaking, in the pre-colonial Kenya, most communities lived harmoniously with each other until the advent of the colonial powers that saw the disintegration of the same. Kenya lived so to say as one big community. There was unity and harmony among neighbouring communities as they interacted with each other through trade and intermarriage.

However, things took a different turn at the advent of the colonial powers. This witnessed a rapid disintegration of communities along tribal lines. For instance, Ojuka and Ochieng note, “In many instances the colonial authorities helped to create the things called ‘tribes,’ in the sense of political and economic communities.”⁷ This implies that the term ‘tribe’ was alien to Africans. It is until the arrival of the colonial powers that the term came into play and in the long run became a cancer that destroys community cohesion. It is notable that the British colonial government helped drawing up ethnic and administrative

⁵ Noël Bonneuil and Nadia Auriat, “Fifty Years of Ethnic Conflict and Cohesion: 1945-94,” *Journal of Peace Research* 37, no. 5 (2000): 563–81.

⁶ Kefa Onsando Moibi, *Biblical Teaching on Unity and Its Implications for National Unity in Kenya*, Thesis (M.A.) Christian Education (Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology(Kenya) (Nairobi, Kenya.): [NEGST, 1997], 20.

⁷ Aloo Ojuka and William Ochieng, eds., *Politics and Leadership in Africa* (Kampala: East African Literature Bureau, 1975), 254.

boundaries along tribal lines which have remained to date. Kanyinga and Okello regretfully note, “This is one of the colonial legacy that has baited the country to the extent it is repugnant to development.”⁸ This shows that tribalism is not only repugnant to development but also to cohesion as we shall see later in this study.

Before we proceed further, it is fundamental for us to understand the term tribalism as well as its counterpart term ethnicity. The term tribalism has been described variously by scholars. Ojuka and Ochieng have noted that according to J.S. LaFontaine, “tribalism entails, among other things, a clinging to traditional life, as opposed to rapid change. Tribalism has also been used to designate (and often to deplore) nepotism in modern African states where the ties of common ethnic origins may be given precedents over other, more Western, allegiance.”⁹ This study is inclined towards the second aspect of the meaning of the term and show how it has worked against consolidation of our nation.

In his book *Africa: A Biography of a Continent*, John Reader posits, “Tribalism is most pernicious of the traditions which the colonial period bequeathed to Africa.”¹⁰ Consequently, the introduction of tribalism by colonialists had far reaching implications. The consequences of tribalism did not only affect the young nation, but also the church as well. For instance, Faulkner notes, “Indeed, it is true to say that the church had taken ‘tribal’

⁸John O. Oucho “Undercurrents of post-Election violence in Kenya: Issues in the Long-Term Agenda” in *Tensions and Reversals in Democratic Transitions: The Kenya 2007 General Elections* (Nairobi: Society for International Development : Institute for Development Studies, University of Nairobi, 2010), 496.

⁹ Ojuka and Ochieng, *Politics and Leadership in Africa*, 255–56.

¹⁰ Cited in “Evangelizing Gone Awry: The Church in Kenya Has Fostered the Tribalism It n...: EBSCOhost,” accessed December 5, 2018, <http://web.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.aiu.ac.ke:2048/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=3&sid=a9846e79-f617-41af-a00b-7cee9c68d497%40sessionmgr101>.

identities to heart.”¹¹ The end result as noted by Faulkner is that “the dreams of a local church had been unwittingly reduced to a tribal church.”¹² On a similar vein, Maigadi argues, “Although the world is becoming a global village, at the same time it is also becoming fragmented ethnically, and the church does not seem to be exempted.”¹³ This clearly shows that tribalism is an enemy both of unity and development. A solution has to be found on how to deal with this monster. Otherwise, the effort towards fostering a robust community will remain limbo.

The next term to consider is ethnicity. The term “ethnicity” is derived from the Greek word *ethnos* meaning race, or group of people with common racial features and common cultural peculiarities. In sociology, ethnicity is a concept referring to a shared culture and a way of life. This can be reflected in language, religion, material culture such as clothing and cuisine, and cultural products such as music and art. Ethnicity is often a major source of social cohesion as well as social conflict.¹⁴ As the above definitions indicate, ethnicity is a neutral term and that in itself there is nothing wrong, it has however been turned into a tool of destroying one another. In modern African societies, for example, ethnicity is more a source of conflict than it is of social cohesion. On a similar vein, Kamaara views ethnicity as “the single major threat to national identity in Africa.”¹⁵ She further raises concerns with the role of the church in fostering national unity and identity

¹¹ “Evangelizing Gone Awry: The Church in Kenya Has Fostered the Tribalism It n...: EBSCOhost.”

¹² “Evangelizing Gone Awry: The Church in Kenya Has Fostered the Tribalism It n...: EBSCOhost.”

¹³ Barje Sulmane Maigadi, *Divisive Ethnicity in the Church in Africa* (Africa, 2006), 3.

¹⁴ Ashley Crossman, “The Definition of Ethnicity in Sociology,” ThoughtCo, accessed January 29, 2019, <https://www.thoughtco.com/ethnicity-definition-3026311>.

¹⁵ “Towards Christian National Identity in Africa: A Historical Perspective to ...: EBSCOhost,” accessed December 5, 2018, <http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.aiu.ac.ke:2048/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=15&sid=e06275f2-fc10-4400-8bac-8d292b054935%40sdc-v-sessmgr04>.

in contemporary Africa.¹⁶ Kamaara's concern needs to catch the attention of every Kenyan. This is because when the church remains silent in addressing the problem of ethnicity, then, it means inviting trouble.

Precisely speaking, tribalism is a baby of colonial powers who after birthing it, abandoned it to grow in the African soil. It is true to argue that the colonial administration in her tactful approach of divide and rule, divided the country along tribal lines, and thus introduced a new 'gene' of tribalism to a once communal society. This has birthed in our country the problem of negative ethnicity. While it is true that tribal conflicts existed even before the colonial era, the colonial period particularly aided in solidifying and deepening the inter-ethnic cleavages.¹⁷ Christian missionaries followed the colonialist ideology of tribalism by encouraging the emergence of tribal based denominations.¹⁸

Despite the negative effects of tribalism, sadly though, successful regimes have only helped perpetuate the same rather than eradicating it. For instance, Ojuka and Ochieng argue, "African politicians and elites whom they recruited into the civil and military services"¹⁹ helped to perpetuate it. This trend has continued to the modern Kenya. This, in return, has widened tribal animosities among Kenyan communities. Ojuka and Ochieng rightly assert, "Tribalism represents real divisions of the Kenyan people, and ways must be found to combat it."²⁰ Politics is now being used as a tool for gratifying selfish political ambitions rather than making the lives of Kenyans better. With such a situation, there is a general feeling that some communities are discriminated against, and thus leading to community polarization. Some communities no longer feel to have any space in the political arena. These communities play a spectator role with no place left for their participation. In such a situation, building bridges for a robust Kenyan community becomes an uphill task.

¹⁶ "Towards Christian National Identity in Africa: A Historical Perspective to ...: EBSCOhost."

¹⁷ Ojuka and Ochieng, *Politics and Leadership in Africa*, 258.

¹⁸ Ojuka and Ochieng, 258.

¹⁹ Ojuka and Ochieng, 276.

²⁰ Ojuka and Ochieng, 268.

Political profiling is another major enemy hindering the progress towards building a robust Kenyan community. This has divided the Kenyan nation into two camps famously termed in Swahili ‘wenye nchi’ and ‘wana nchi.’ In other words, there are certain communities perceived to be the “owners” of the nation, while others are considered as just belonging to the nation by statistics only. Some communities feel completely cut off as an equal partner of Kenya’s resources.

This has created bitter hatred among communities, especially those that feel oppressed or disenfranchized by dominant communities. In such circumstances, it becomes almost impossible to imagine of building the broken breaches so as to build a strong Kenyan community. Consequently, this kind of hatred that has been caused by political oppressors has been categorized among the ‘unforgivable sins’ by the victims of oppression. This is because there is lack of political good will, and that political emancipation is far from being realized.

Professor Wangari Maathai in her book *the challenge for Africa* has attempted to diagnose the challenge to national unity in African states. She has pointed out that “The modern African state is a superficial creation: a loose collection of ethnic communities or micro-nations, brought together in a single entity, or macro-nation, by the colonial powers.”²¹ Similarly, Nyasani describes Kenya as “a *sui generis*” meaning “nations in a nation.”²² This creation in itself poses numerous challenges to fostering national unity as Maathai points out:

Most Africans didn’t understand or relate to the nation-state created for them by colonial powers; they understood, related to, and remained attached to the physical and psychological boundaries of their micro-nations. Consequently, even today, for many African peoples, a threat to their micro-nation or those they consider their leaders within their micro-nation carries more weight than a threat to the nation-state. At the same time, each community hopes to have access to the resources of the nation-state should someone from their micro-nation assume political power

²¹ Wangari Maathai, *The Challenge for Africa*, 1st ed (New York: Pantheon Books, 2009), 184.

²² Joseph M. Nyasani, “The Meaning and Implication of Ethnicity” in *Ethnicity, Conflict and the Future of African States* edited by Aquiline Tarimo and Paulin Manwelo, (Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 2009), 17.

(particularly the post of president or prime minister). In this way, the community will have, as is said in Kenya, its “time to eat.”²³

What professor Maathai makes us to understand is that many African states are still far from getting fully integrated. The colonial powers who created the sham-bolic nation-states had nothing to care about the likely consequences that will follow as long as they got what they wanted (Africa’s resources). Even though the African communities were perceived as being community conscious, sadly though, the seeds that the colonial masters sowed seemed to have overridden the African agenda. This is why even at independence when the Kenyan government sought to retrace her roots, the effort ended being an exercise in futility. The light that began shining at independence soon became darkness. The founding fathers of our nation did their best to restore the rapid erosion of community consciousness. Some of the efforts that were put in place include the development of the philosophy of peace, love and unity.

In addition, the founding father Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, sought to fight against poverty, ignorance and diseases (the main challenges to progress). He promised to fight against these challenges in order to achieve Kenya’s dream of unity and prosperity. All these gave hope to the young nation. Unfortunately, as it will be revealed in this study the dream was a brief moment of “honey moon” as Meredith describes it. ²⁴ Meredith further asserts, “The march of African nationalism seemed invincible. Africa, so it was thought, once freed from colonial rule, was destined for an era of unprecedented progress. African leaders even spoke of building new societies that might offer the world at large an inspiration.”²⁵ All these aspirations only remained wishes that never became reality.

A number of factors earmarked Kenya to have started on the right footing. For instance, Kenya’s national motto ‘harambee’, itself speaks volume. The word ‘harambee’ is a Kiswahili word which literally means “pulling together”. What a sign of unity? This clearly shows that the young nation had sought to remain united as one community in the early years of independence. As a result of such great commitment to national unity and

²³ Maathai, *The Challenge for Africa*, 184.s

²⁴ Martin Meredith, *The State of Africa: A History of Fifty Years of Independence* (London: Free Press, 2006), 141.

²⁵ Meredith, 141.

integration, Kenya became a united community fostering togetherness in every front. Development activities were done in the spirit of unity. For instance, schools, hospitals and churches were built through communal initiatives. The community from which one came from did not quite matter. Everything was done in a communal manner.

Additionally, various national symbols were used to signify Kenya's commitment to unity, for instance, the national anthem. It should be realized that the Kenyan National anthem is actually a prayer for the nation. It recognizes God as the creator and progenitor of the universe. The anthem also acknowledges that blessings for the nation come from God, the creator of the universe. The National anthem is clearly a prayer for unity, peace and liberty. Indeed, these are key components towards fostering national unity for a robust Kenyan community. Generally, unity is the main theme of the National anthem. From this stand point, it can be deduced that Kenya's aspirations at independence began on the foundation of peace, love and unity. As also pointed out these are key components for developing a robust Kenyan community.

Sadly, though as earlier retaliated all these aspirations for the young nation were short lived. It did not take long before the nation started experiencing political and socio-economic instability that was advanced through negative ethnicity.

Economic Challenges

The *National Cohesion and integration Training Manual* published by the ministry of justice, National Cohesion and Constitutional Affairs and the National Cohesion and Integration Commission, shows that economic challenges have also worked in hampering national cohesion in many fronts. For instance, it cites inequality in access to and control of scarce resources such as finance, land, technology and communication as major impediments to national unity and cohesion. It is true that economic challenges have worked against the realization of a cohesive society in Kenya.

The manual identifies various components that depict elements of economic disadvantage of some groups. Topping the list is finance. This has been catapulted by the problem of corruption which has become one of the major vices posing a challenge to eradicate. Sadly, the problem of corruption has been politicized in Kenya, a situation that

has complicated efforts of its eradication. For instance, Tarimo and Manwelo argue, “Practices of corruption promote political disorder in the most extreme form. They amount to state capture so that individuals can control the state by manipulating the machinery of government to serve private interests.”²⁶ Corruption both at the individual and institutional levels has become an ‘elephant in the house’ in Kenya, and this has adversely affected the nation’s efforts to nation building. Kibwana, Wanjala and Owiti-Oketch argue, “While corruption affects all facets of society, it is in the economic arena where both the causes and effects of corruption are most pronounced and manifested.”²⁷ In a nutshell, corruption is an enemy of economic development, and in the long run affects national cohesion in a negative way because it creates a disparity between the rich and the poor.

It has become almost impossible to hold culpable victims of corruption since the suspects go behind their communities to seek refuge of their wrongs. This has made communities to point fingers at each other hence widening the gap of disunity. Consequently, the nation is left under the control of a select few who controls the economic power at the expense of the masses. The economic bigwigs enjoy the nation’s resources without regarding the state of their fellow countrymen. This has created animosity between the haves and the have not’s. For instance, Ogachi asserts, “One impact that the economic reforms have had in Africa has been the emergence of a ‘social underclass’ totally excluded from national society and economy.”²⁸

The other component that is mentioned in the manual is land. Land remains one of the thorniest issues ailing the country’s efforts towards achieving national cohesion. For instance, among other factors land was identified as one of the major factors that fueled the post-election violence of 2007/8. Maathai in reference to the aftermaths of 2007/8 post-election violence notes, “Communities fought each other over land and political power.” Land was one of the issues under “Agenda four item” of the Kenya National Dialogue and Reconciliation mediation team (KNDR), which comprised of members from the

²⁶ Tarimo and Manwelo, *African Peacemaking and Governance*, 29.

²⁷ Kivutha Kibwana, Smokin Wanjala, and Owiti-Okech, eds., *The Anatomy of Corruption in Kenya: Legal, Political and Socio-Economic Perspectives* (Nairobi: Claripress, 1996), 107.

²⁸ Oanda Ogachi, “Economic Reform, Political Liberalization and Economic Ethnic Conflict in Kenya,” *Africa Development / Afrique et Développement* 24, no. 1/2 (1999): 83–107.

government/PNU (Party of National Unity) and the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) the opposition party. The team identified land as one of the issues that needed urgent address. Unfortunately, it still remains unresolved ever since a peace deal was brokered to end the impasse that rocked the nation following the post-election violence of 2007/8. This state of affairs is an indicator that as a country we are still far from attaining brotherhood for a united Kenya.

The fight for limited sources is another source of conflicts in Kenya. Ogachi asserts, “Economic scarcity, therefore, seems to be the center of conflicts, within the context of gains and losses being counted by different communities. This situation is mediated through a series of political manipulations.”²⁹ The unequal distribution of the national cake has become of major concern among Kenyan communities. Hence, the push for communities to have their own for presidency is sought for as a solution. This has further divided the Kenyan nation along tribal lines at the expense of national unity.

Socio-cultural Challenges

In addressing socio-cultural factors, we again utilize the *National Cohesion and Integration Training manual*. Since we have already discussed the issue of ethnicity, there is no need to belabor on the same here. We, therefore, would like to mention two of the factors addressed in the manual for purposes of this paper. The first factor to consider is deterioration of morals and values. The second is cultural insensitivity.

It is evident that in the modern society morals and values are deteriorating at an alarming rate a trend that poses a challenge to national cohesion. It is against this backdrop that crime is on the rise. Today, the entire globe is gabbling with the issue of terrorism. Donald W. Wuerl rightly observes, “The context of our efforts to bring about unity includes some realities we all face: a culture that is losing respects for human life and dignity, family and sacrifice for others. Violence and terror in our world destroy lives, target people based on race, religion, sexual orientation or other differences.”³⁰ This is no different from the Kenyan situation where the issue of terrorism has become a major challenge towards

²⁹ Ogachi.

³⁰ Donald W. Wuerl, “Christian Unity in an Age of Social Division,” *Priest* 73, no. 1 (January 2017): 10–21.

achieving national cohesion and development. Many of our youths have become radicalized to join militia groups and this has greatly seen the disintegration moral values of our nation. Since majority of the Kenyan population are youths with no employment, this has greatly compromised their perspective of morals and values. It is such a danger when we lose the sense of human dignity. Many Kenyan youths, therefore, get easily lured to terrorism compromisers and financiers who promise them lucrative lifestyle at the expense of human dignity.

Social injustices also pose a challenge to national unity. It has been argued that injustices in the society may result to social disintegration in that it creates a division between those favored and those who are affected.³¹ The trend of social injustices did not end with colonial imperialism but has been carried over by neocolonialism being perpetuated by Africans against Africans. This is witnessed in many fronts including oppression of the poor, discrimination against marginal communities when it comes to the distribution of national resources. A retired Bishop of the Presbyterian Church of East, Rev, Dr, Timothy Njoya, on a Television interview said: “Kenya has become a fellowship of the rich for the rich.”³² This is a bitter truth of the situation in our country. In such a situation, then, one wonders of what becomes of the bunch of the poor population who are languishing in poverty.

Cultural insensitivity is another factor that has led to community disintegration in Kenya. It should be realized that cultures can never be the same and that there is no culture that is superior to the other. Sadly, our social and cultural differences have been wrongly construed, hence causing disintegration and erosion of the spirit of brotherhood. Social-cultural differences have been used negatively in Kenya and this has opened doors of conflicts among many communities in Kenya. It is true that we are different and diverse in many ways as a people, but this should not be used as a license for hatred. Jones correctly argues, “Throughout history, differences have been used to deny that one or another group

³¹ “Causes of Social Disintegration A Society Does Not Just Collapse on Its Own But,” accessed February 8, 2019, <https://www.coursehero.com/file/p1bem7c/CAUSES-OF-SOCIAL-DISINTEGRATION-A-society-does-not-just-collapse-on-its-own-but/>.

³² Timothy M. Njoya “On live Citizen TV inclusive interview” on 27th 9 o’clock News.

of people are human like ‘us.’”³³ As a result some communities based on their cultures have been considered not worth even to offer leadership of any sort. This is mainly witnessed when it comes to the office of presidency. It is against this backdrop divisive politics thrive. As a result, people end up selecting leaders on tribal basis as opposed to their qualifications.

A Detailed Analysis of Matthew 18: 20–35

Having looked at the various factors that have contributed to the disintegration of the Kenyan community, we now turn to the biblical text to seek for remedy of the same. We have selected Matthew’s text as the primary text for our consideration for the subject of forgiveness, peace and reconciliation. It is important to note the literary structure of our text within its wider context in order to interpret the present text. Matthew 18:20–35 is preceded by 18:15–18, a pericope on church discipline. It is important to briefly highlight on this pericope since it is connected to our text.

Settling of Disputes (Mat 18:15–20)

Matthew’s Jesus presents what could be described as a step by step procedure of settling disputes within the church context. Verse 15 begins with a subordinate conjunction Ἐάν a clear indication that this is a conditional construction. In this case, the condition in picture is a situation whereby a brother happens to sin against another. Majority of the manuscripts have ἁμαρτήσῃ εἰς σέ³⁴ (sins against you). The reading with “against you” is most likely the plausible one as it assumes that the conflict involves two brothers within a church setting. In this case, Matthew proceeds to suggest that the offended should go to his brother and point out the fault to him. There is a similar sentiment in Leviticus 19:17. In this case, it was expected that the offended was to show his brother his fault instead of showing hatred towards him in the heart. This should happen between the two brothers, the offended and the offender. This is clearly indicated by the objective genitive μόνου (alone). In other words, this should happen in seclusion, not involving other people yet. The main goal³⁵ for taking such a step is to show one his/her fault for the purpose of winning him/her

³³ L.g. Jones, “Unity and Diversity in Christ,” *Christian Century* 109, no. 18 (May 20, 1992): 540.

³⁴ The following mss have ἁμαρτήσῃ εἰς σέ such as D, K, L, X, Δ Θ Π

³⁵ The goal of this action is depicted vividly by the resultative aorist, ἐκέρδηςας.

back, probably to the church community. Schweizer correctly argues, “The expression ‘win back’ shows that what matters is the sinner, not a ‘pure community’.”³⁶ The offender is won back if he/she listens. Matthew uses the word ἀκούση³⁷ (may listen) to depict an action expected from the offender.

The second step in the process of mending a broken relationship is occasioned by the possibility whereby the offender may fail to listen (μὴ ἀκούση). In such a circumstance, the offended is advised to take one or two more brothers to serve as witnesses of the matter at hand. This suggestion is in keeping with the Jewish jurisprudence procedures whereby witnesses (whose minimum number was either two or three) were required for the confirmation of a matter.³⁸ Schweizer argues, “The presence of one or two of the brethren is meant to protect the sinner; the admonisher may well be wrong, or someone else may find the right words when he cannot.”³⁹

The next step is again occasioned by the possibility whereby the offender may as well fail to hear the witnesses (παρακούση αὐτῶν). At this point, the offended is advised to present the matter to the ἐκκλησίᾳ, the assembly. However, if the brother yet still fails to listen to the assembly as well, then he is to be treated like a gentile and a tax collector. Thus, Matthew’s Jesus presented his disciples a procedure of settling disputes in the church context.

Forgiving Repeatedly (Mat 18:21–23)

This part presents a higher relation of strengthening relationships. Peter who had been keenly following Jesus’ teachings on settling disputes, then raises a fundamental question on relationship among brothers: How often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?⁴⁰ Jesus had earlier taught about the necessity of forgiveness among his disciples (6:12, 14–15). Peter was thinking about the practicality of the whole issue of forgiveness. For his case, he had a tentative number – up to seven times? The basis of

³⁶ Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), 370.

³⁷ The verb ἀκούω to hear literally means heed or listen to.

³⁸ See Deut. 17:6; 19:15; 2 Cor. 13:1; 1 John 5:8; 1 Tim 5:19; Heb. 10:28;

³⁹ Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew*, 371.

⁴⁰ See Matt. 18:21, NKJ.

Peter's idea of forgiving an offender seven times is not certain. Blomberg, however, points out, "Peter's words allude to the sevenfold avenging of Cain; Jesus' reply contrast starkly with the seventy-sevenfold avenging of Lamech (Gen 4:24).⁴¹ Indeed, Jesus' reply made Peter's seven times more complex in a practical sense. Interestingly, Peter's suggestion to forgive up to seven times sounds good enough as it goes beyond the rabbinic maximum of forgiving three times (e.g., b. Yoma 86b, 87a).⁴²

Peter was considering the practicality of the whole issue, but Jesus was thinking of how to maintain healthy relationships. This needs repeated forgiveness – seventy times seven! Hagner rightly argues, " 'seventy times seven,' points not to a limit of literally seventy-seven or even 490 times but indicates forgiving an unlimited number of times (cf. Luke 17:4: 'seven times in a day').⁴³ Jesus's statement reveals that forgiveness should be a continuous exercise. It has to be rendered wherever an occasion to do so arises. Even though Peter had learned that forgiveness takes the place of vengeance, he was still asking about limits.⁴⁴ Peter had only departed quantitatively, not qualitatively from the Jewish principle that a man may be forgiven once, twice, or thrice, but not four times (albeit with reference to God's forgiveness).⁴⁵ There is a difference between the two gospel records of Jesus' words. For instance, Luke mentions the issue of repentance as the ground for forgiveness: καὶ ἐὰν μετανοήσῃ ἄφεξ αὐτῷ (but if there is repentance then you must forgive him). Matthew's gospel makes no mention of repentance on the part of the offender. The offended must forgive his brother up to seventy-times seven (Matthew), in one day (Luke 17:3–4). If we take Luke's gospel to be closer to the original source, it is then obvious that it is impractical for one to sin seventy –times a day. This then implies that there should be no excuse for failure to forgive one's brother. Indeed, he would not have sinned seventy – times a day!

⁴¹ Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary Vol.22 22 (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1992), 281.

⁴² Blomberg, 281.

⁴³ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14 - 28*, Word Biblical Commentary 33b (Word Books Publisher, Dallas, Texas, 1995), 537.

⁴⁴ Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew*, 377.

⁴⁵ Schweizer, 377.

Forgiveness Illustrated (Mat 18:24–35)

The parable that follows serves as an illustration of what Jesus had been teaching about, that is, forgiveness. Luz has identified the structure of the parable which reveals three main scenes. The first scene takes place between the king and his slave (vv24–27), the second between the slave and his fellow slave (vv27–30), and the third once again, between the king and his slave (vv31–34).⁴⁶ This is clearly indicated by Διὰ τοῦτο (on account of this or for this reason). In these three parables, God is presented as the king⁴⁷ who desired to settle accounts with his servants. This is reemphasized with the repeated use of ὁ κύριος (cf. vv 25, 26, 31, 32, 34). The parable goes on to tell us that one of the servants who owed the king a sum of ten thousand talents was ‘brought in.’ Schweizer indicates, “That the servant was ‘brought in’ might mean that he is already lying in prison, having been unmasked as a swindler.”⁴⁸ Some scholars view the parable as an exaggeration especially with the mention of such a huge sum that the servant owed the king.⁴⁹ Hagner rightly argues, “The use of μυρίαί, ‘myriad’ or ten thousand talents’ which itself could mean ‘beyond number’, is a deliberate hyperbole pointing to a debt that was so high it was practically incalculable.”⁵⁰ I do not intend to pursue the debate here either. My understanding of this is that the debt owed by the servant was great that he could not settle it. Indeed, as Hagner indicates, “parables by nature often employ hyperbole for effect, and there is no reason to require that every point correspond to historical reality.”⁵¹ This is supported by the next phrase whereby the servant was supposed to be sold together with his wife, children and possessions in order to settle the debt. Schweizer has pointed out that this action was not in keeping with the Jewish law. However, foreign kings acted in this

⁴⁶ Ulrich Luz and Helmut Koester, *Matthew: A Commentary*, Hermeneia--a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2001), 468.

⁴⁷ Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary Vol.22 22 explains that this parable mirrors the most common form of rabbinic parable – a story involving a king with servants or sons. The king almost stands for God; the servants, for God’s people. Often obedient and disobedient servants provide a contrast between righteous and wicked behaviour. Settling accounts is a natural metaphor for judgment.

⁴⁸ Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew*, 377. T.W. Manson, *Sayings of Jesus*, 213, Davies Allison

⁴⁹ See Schweizer, 377.

⁵⁰ Hagner, *Matthew 14 - 28*, 538.

⁵¹ Hagner, 538.

manner (2 kings 4:1 [children, but not the man's wife]; cf. Isa. 50:1; Amos 2:6; 8:6; Neh. 5:1–13).⁵²

The servant on realizing that this would be too much fell down and “prostrated himself” (προσεκύνει), which implies worship may be taken in a lesser manner here since it refers to a king). The servant went ahead and begged his master to be patient with him and that he would pay back everything (πάντα). Is it true that the servant was going to pay back everything he owed the king? No at all, it was merely a petition of desperation. The master “moved with compassion” (σπλαγχνισθεὶς)⁵³ decided to release that servant and forgave him his debt. Two actions by the servant's master are critical for the current study. First, is that the king released that servant perhaps from prison. Second, he forgave him his debt. The verb ἀφίημι literally means “to let go.” It is the verb used regularly to refer to “forgiveness” pertaining to sin (cf. 6:12 [where the word for sins ὀφειλήματα, is literally “debts”], 14–15; 9:2; 5–6; 12:31–32).⁵⁴ In other words, the king simply treated the debt as though it never existed. The king's action is unparalleled as Schweizer notes, “He grants not just postponement but total remission of the debt.”⁵⁵ The phrase ὁ κύριος τοῦ δούλου ἐκείνου, “the lord of that servant,” occurs again in 24:50 in the context of eschatological judgment.⁵⁶

The next following verses 28–35 repeat the scene, but the reaction of the servant is different from that of his master. The demonstrative pronoun ἐκείνου (of that) of v 27, refers to the same servant of v 28 (ἐκεῖνος). It would be expected that the forgiven servant will handle the other servant with that same compassion he had received but the reverse is true. He instead began to pressure his fellow servant to pay a relatively small debt of a “hundred denarii” (ἐκατὸν δηνάρια). This was a far smaller amount compared to the amount he himself had owed his master, that is, ten thousand talents. Again, the hyperbole nature of parables here should be taken to cognizance. The disparity in the amounts between the huge amount forgiven of the first servant and the smallness of the amount of the other slave

⁵² Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew*, 378.

⁵³ Hagner observes that all the occurrences of the word compassion in Matthew refers to Jesus: 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 20:34.

⁵⁴ Hagner, *Matthew 14 - 28*, 539.

⁵⁵ Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew*, 378.

⁵⁶ Hagner, *Matthew 14 - 28*, 539.

is the point of focus here. The implication here is that if the large debt was cancelled then the small debt should have definitely been cancelled as well. Surprisingly enough, the forgiven servant even resorted to physical violence in his demand to be paid ἔπνιγεν “he began to choke him.” What a forgetful servant he was? He had just been forgiven of a huge debt and now here he was choking his fellow servant because of the debt he owed him. In a parallel text 24:49 “the wicked servant began beating his fellow servant as well.” This showed how wicked the first servant was and, that he had never learnt the lesson of reciprocation (of mercy). Jesus had earlier declared in His teachings of the Sermon on the Mount that ““Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.”⁵⁷ The obstinate servant never learned from Jesus’ proposition.

The fellow servant pleaded (παρεκάλει) for mercy just like the forgiven servant did, but his pleas landed on deaf ears. Matthew uses παρεκάλει here instead of προσεκύνει which he had used in the previous scene. Hagner argues, “‘pleaded’ is more appropriate in reference to a fellow servant than the προσεκύνει, ‘prostrated,’ of v 26, used in reference to the master).”⁵⁸

In the fellow servant’s plea the word πάντα is omitted here in v 29. The reason for this is probably to depict the ingenuity of the first servant’s claim to settle the debt fully. He wanted to justify himself of being willing to pay back his debt. It reminds us of the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18:9–14. The Pharisee who sought to justify himself is contrasted with a tax collector who humbly asks God for mercy. This probably explains the reason for the omission of πάντα with the second servant. The first servant made his threats good and went ahead and threw the servant into prison (εἰς φυλακὴν)⁵⁹ until he would pay back the debt. This demonstrates the degree of cruelty with which the first servant handled his fellow servant. How fast he forgot the kindness shown him by his master!

The action that the first servant took made his fellow servants indignant and they therefore went ahead and reported everything to their master. The master summoned the

⁵⁷ See Matthew 5:7 NRS.

⁵⁸ Hagner, *Matthew 14 - 28*, 539.

⁵⁹ εἰς φυλακὴν is an accusative of termination with the focus on the place, in this case prison.

servant at once and reprimanded him sharply: Δοῦλε πονηρέ, ([you] evil servant!). The verb πονηρεύομαι literally means to “act wickedly” or to “play the rogue.” Indeed, the servant had acted wickedly towards his fellow servant. The reason why the servant’s master calls him a wicked servant is because he forgave him his debt in full yet he himself was not willing to forgive his fellow servant. Despite the pleas made by the fellow servant, the servant ended incarnating his fellow servant. This is what agitated the master of the first servant. The servant was accused of having no mercy upon his fellow servant; οὐκ ἔδει καὶ σὲ ἐλεῆσαι τὸν σύνδουλόν σου, ὡς καὶ γὰρ σὲ ἠλέησα; (was it not necessary you have mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you? Matthew often emphasizes the need to show mercy to one another. Mercy is a virtue expected by those who belong to the kingdom of God (Mat 5:7). Jesus puts mercy above sacrifice (Mat 9:13). According to Matthew’s Jesus, mercy is among the mightier matters of the law Jesus (23:23).

The virtue of mercy is a serious matter of the kingdom of God. Since the servant lacked this fundamental virtue he attracted his master’s displeasure on him. Hence, he was handed over to be tortured until he would pay the entire debt. The parable concludes in a summary statement that God will likewise deal with those who do not forgive their fellow brother or sister from their hearts. Matthew in a characteristic way uses the term heart in discussing issues of life. Earlier in the Sermon on the Mount he had demonstrated that every action emanates from the human heart (5:28). It is probably the reason why he states, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” (Mat 5:8 NRS). The servant in question does not portray purity of heart and so is expunged from the presence of his master. Matthew believes that the heart is the Centre of our emotion and for this reason it governs our actions. In others words, whatever we do as Christians is a reflection of our hearts.

The last verse clearly serves as an interpretation of the parable. Talbert has made some fine concluding remarks on this parable: first, the parable’s language functions together with 18:21–22, to enable disciples to see that being a forgiving servant is rooted in the nature of God. Second, the parable reveals that forgiving of others is rooted in God’s

forgiveness and thus we should pass it on! Third, the parable aims to shock the disciples into realizing the seriousness of failing to show mercy to other disciples.⁶⁰

Some of the Ways to Enhance Community Cohesion

The statement by Nieves and Priest is insightful: “Forgiveness is a vital practice because it is an absolute necessity if there is to be genuine healing and transformation regarding race and ethnicity.”⁶¹ This means that forgiveness is a vehicle through which societies can experience true healing and reconciliation. The inner desire to forgive those who have wronged us should be cultivated. On a similar vein, Robinson argues, “Forgiveness is not so much an act as an attitude.”⁶² This statement by Robinson is an important one for our consideration in the Kenyan context. As I have already indicated in this paper, the Kenyan community is facing an impasse to cohesion a situation that has seen its disintegration. This as we saw is fuelled by a number of factors including political, economic and socio-cultural. In this chapter, I suggest a number of ways I deem important to help us build a strong bond of unity among ourselves. Following our exegesis, the subject of forgiveness is primary for the realization of peace and reconciliation. I, therefore, begin this chapter by discussing the importance of forgiveness irrespective of the wrongs done on any one of us.

Developing an Attitude of Forgiveness

Many a time when people discuss the subject of forgiveness they focus mostly on discussing the right actions that should be undertaken. While that is not wrong, it should however, be realized that right actions begin with right attitudes. Since forgiveness is a matter of right attitudes, therefore, it is a matter of human heart. Ntamushobora retaliates that problems related to conflicts like that of Rwanda genocide lie in the “human heart.”⁶³

⁶⁰ Charles H. Talbert, *Matthew*, Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2010), 224.

⁶¹ Vincent Bucote, “Church as a Lifestyle: Distinctive or Typical?” in *This Side of Heaven: Race, Ethnicity, and Christian Faith* edited by Alvaro L. Nieves and Robert J. Priest, (Oxford Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 208.

⁶² Theodore H. Robinson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Moffat New Testament Commentary (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1947), 156.

⁶³ Faustin Ntamushobora, *Transformation through the Different Other: A Rendezvous of Giving and Receiving* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2013), 1.

Forgiveness, therefore, as Robinson stated is not so much an action as an attitude. It is having an attitude to forgive those who offend us that we can take the next action to actually tell them that we have forgiven them. The attitude towards forgives should be informed by the fact that none of us is perfect. Today, it could be my neighbor who is in the wrong, tomorrow I could be the victim of offense. It is against this backdrop then that as humans we need to take forgiveness seriously. We do not need to hold grudges against each other both at the individual and communal levels. Instead, we need to develop an attitude of forgiveness towards one another.

Robinson has indicated that the greatest creditor in the universe is God; all the wrongs affect Him; and all sin is sin against Him. And he forgives the whole, freely and without stint or reservation.⁶⁴ It should, therefore, be realized that when we wrong one another, it is God whom we ultimately wrong. Lack of forgiveness complicates our lives and makes cohesion an uphill task. For instance, when we choose not to forgive others, it then means that God will withhold His forgiveness from us as well.⁶⁵ Forgiveness in this case should be reciprocal, but not a blame game. We should make it a choice to forgive. Nelson Mandela once said, “We may never forget, we must forgive.”⁶⁶

It is high time communities aggrieved to realize the need for forgiveness. Of course, this must begin from top leadership down to the common citizen. I must applaud the efforts of both the President, Uhuru Kenyatta and the opposition leader, Raila Odinga have taken by agreeing to come together and unite the country. The famous “handshake” which was witnessed early last year on March 9, 2018 is a good gesture that forgiveness is possible even for perceived great enemies. Tutu correctly observes:

There is hope that a new situation could come about when enemies might become friends again, when dehumanized perpetrator might be helped to recover his lost humanity. This is not a wild irresponsible dream. It has happened and it is happening and there is hope that nightmares will end, hope that seemingly

⁶⁴ Robinson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 156.

⁶⁵ See Mat.6:14

⁶⁶Cited by Brian Frost, *Struggling to Forgive: Nelson Mandela and South Africa's Search for Reconciliation* (London: Harper Collins Pubs, 1998), 2.

intractable problems will find solutions and that God has some tremendous fellow workers, some outstanding partners out there.⁶⁷

Tutu's statement shows that all is not lost when it comes to building bridges even in the worst of scenarios involving potential enemies. That God can use certain people to foster unity is a possibility, but not a fantasy. On his part Mandela adds, "To make peace with an enemy, one must work with that enemy."⁶⁸ It is very possible to have a situation whereby a government works with the opposition. For instance, as we know the famous "handshake" came after the disputed Kenya's presidential election in August 2017. The Supreme Court of Kenya nullified Kenyatta's victory, citing flaws in the process, which ordered a re-run. This was the first of a kind in Kenya's history of having an election of an incumbent president nullified. Subsequently, the opposition leader boycotted the elections which he said would not be free and fair. This led to protests and political violence that left at least 92 dead. However, as soon as the two leaders chose to forgive and come together peace returned into the country.

It is not possible to talk about peace and reconciliation without forgiveness. Forgiveness creates an avenue towards peace and reconciliation. As we saw in our textual analysis of Matthew, forgiveness is expected as much as there is a need. The leaders have a major role to play when it comes to political, economic and social –cultural upheavals in the country. They should find a way of working together in unity for the common good of every citizen. Indeed, leaders at all levels should borrow leaf from the president and the opposition leader to begin building bridges for a robust Kenya community. One of the areas they should work hard to sanitize is the political environment. Divisive politics must be averted by all means and instead concentrate on building one strong nation as was envisioned by our forefathers. Verkuyl and Smedes rightly observe, "The Bible, as profoundly as it does simply, as divinely as it does humanly, reveals that the human family is in principle one."⁶⁹ This of course will mean that forgiveness is not an option but a must in order to build one strong nation.

⁶⁷ Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, 1st ed (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 158.

⁶⁸ Cited by Frost, *Struggling to Forgive*, 2.

⁶⁹ Johannes Verkuyl and B. Lewis Smedes, *Break Down the Walls: A Christian Cry for Racial Justice* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1973), 22.

The second step in forgiveness is taking an action of forgiveness itself. The action of forgiveness here should move beyond words. Sometimes, it can involve retribution for the wrong committed. It should be noted that forgiveness does not mean trampling justice underfoot. Matthew himself alludes to the idea of justice as a proper indication of repentance.⁷⁰ For instance, when it comes to cases of corruption, the offender should not only ask for forgiveness alone, but also be willing to return the stolen public funds or property. This kind of action will reveal a true repentant heart and its implications are far reaching. This, however, has to be done voluntarily out of willingness of a repentant. It was revealed in our text that what angered the master was the action the first servant took against his fellow servant. The first servant took for granted the forgiveness he received from his master. He thus ended up harassing his fellow servant an action that reveals his unrepentant heart. Forgiveness is not and it cannot be one-sided. It is not enough for it to be offered by the injured party; it remains incomplete till it has been accepted by the wrongdoer.⁷¹ We are not here advocating for retributive justice, but restorative justice which demands the needs to forgive besides returning stole goods or funds. Someone needs to know that when public funds or property is stolen a large number of people hurts. So, then, by being asked to return the stolen funds or goods it meant to restore relationships which is of a far much importance for a nation to experience peace. It is afterwards that the need for forgiveness would have more weight.

Taking Part in the Process of Forgiveness

Forgiveness, peace and reconciliation is not a matter to be relegated to political leaders alone. In fact, the church has a mandate from God to spear head the process.⁷² The church is both to pray for peace and also work towards attaining the same.⁷³ This does not mean that the state is to play a spectator role, instead both the state and the church should seek to work hand in hand in order to make the process a success.

Desmond Tutu in assessing the situation in Rwanda after the genocide of 1994 which claimed almost a half a million lives saw the need to forgive. He says, “I told them

⁷⁰ See Matthew 3:8.

⁷¹ Robinson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 157.

⁷² See Mat. 5:9; Ps 34:14;

⁷³ See Ps 34:14; 122:6;

that the cycle of reprisal and counter-reprisal that had characterized their national history had to be broken and that the only way to do this was to go beyond retributive justice to restorative justice, to move on to forgiveness, because without it there was no future.”⁷⁴ The task of initiating forgiveness, reconciliation and peace should not be relegated to the state machineries alone, but it should be a corporate initiate between the church and the state. In other words, everyone must be involved. The reason for this is simple: all of us are in one way or another affected by the existence of peace or lack of it. The importance of forgiveness, peace and reconciliation must be emphasized in order to realize a robust community.

As a country we need to endeavor in building bridges of unity. This should not be viewed as a leadership role but a task for every well-meaning Kenyan. This can be achieved through dialoguing with one another. No one should exonerate him/herself from being a channel of forgiveness. As our exegesis shows, we must exhaust all possible options available to achieve forgiveness. Many a people give up too quickly and thereby jeopardize the process of reconciliation. This widens the differences and thus makes forgiveness even more difficult to attain. The parable that Jesus gave is to help us see the necessity of making it our priority to forgive others just as God has forgiven us. One of the challenges that we encounter is that many people do not realize how much God has forgiven them of their many wrongs. Understanding how much God has actually forgiven us even when we do not deserve should drive us towards forgiving others unreservedly. There are no perfect people; we only need to accommodate one another being driven by the spirit of brotherhood. A brother could be wrong but he remains a brother. A community could be wrong but we all belong to the same country.

One of the questions that arise when it comes to forgiveness is as to whether one can actually forget the wrongs done against him/her. The issue is not forgetting as to forgiving. This is because “to be a human being is to be a creature of history.”⁷⁵ Our history, however, should be utilized in a cautionary manner in order that it is not used against building a future of peace and harmony. Frost notes, “In this way the truth about the past

⁷⁴ Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, 260.

⁷⁵ Frost, *Struggling to Forgive*, 28.

is acknowledged, but forgiveness free people from the past for a new and hopefully different future.”⁷⁶ For instance, as Kenyans we should boldly face our past however painful it may seem, but choose to change every wrong around it for a bright future. Forgiveness though is not that easy as said. Augsburgsburger calls it “the hardest thing in the universe.”⁷⁷ Being the hardest thing to do means it requires a lot of sacrifice. Consider for instance, how much the master of the first servant had to forgo in order to forgive his servant. We are told that he owed his master ten thousand bags of gold! (Matt. 18:23). This was a huge sum to imagine that it could be cancelled as though it never existed. Shockingly enough, the master cancelled the huge debt and let the servant go in freedom. This ideally takes a real sacrifice to undertake. The sacrifice, however, was worth since relationships are more important than material things. In the case of our country, it should be realized that the nation is bigger than an individual.

It is high time as a nation we would arise to the realization that relationship is more important than things we value. It is for the sake of relationship that one should be willing to sacrifice whatever it takes for the sake of peace and unity. If things are gone we can recover them through hard work, if relationships are gone it will take genuine forgiveness to restore them. This is the path that we as Kenyans must be willing to walk in order to restore our lost vision of peace, love and unity. If we truly forgive one another and treat each other as equals before God then community disintegration will be a thing of the past.

Many a time we fail to forgive because we fail to treat each other as equals. This is a likely situation for the first servant in the passage we have analyzed. Indeed, the first servant could not have treated his fellow servant the manner he did if he realized that the two were equal before God. This is one of the challenges that we face in Kenya when it comes to working towards cohesion. As we saw earlier, some communities or individuals think of themselves superior to others. They think that it is their right to be treated fairly while they themselves are busy mistreating everyone around them. This definitely hampers the process of attaining peace and reconciliation for a cohesive society.

⁷⁶ Frost, 28.

⁷⁷ David Augsburgsburger, *The Freedom of Forgiveness: Seventy Times Seven*, Moody paperback edition (Chicago: Moody Press, 1973), 19.

Forgiveness can only be possible for people who are conscious of having been forgiven. Bash argues that “forgiven people become forgivers. If we are unforgiving, it will be because we ourselves have never properly received the gift of forgiveness.”⁷⁸ I can add to bash’s statement that some people fail to forgive because they are not even aware that they have already been forgiven. Sometimes this becomes another impediment to cohesion owing to the fact that many a people do not either realize or recognize that they have been forgiven through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross.

Recognizing that Forgiveness is a Process

Forgiveness is a continuous process. It is something that we must be willing to keep doing from time to time as the needs demand. We should not be tired of forgiving others. Bash points out that forgivingness is to be “lavish and generous.”⁷⁹ Indeed, this is what Jesus meant when he told Peter “seven times seventy.” Schaeffer-Duffy corrects asserts that “forgiveness is the necessary mortar for building a lasting peace.”⁸⁰ It is true that forgiveness is a vehicle to experiencing lasting peace. More often we have seen situations whereby even court trials have failed to deliver justice to the victims of perpetration than ought to be. It is against this backdrop that forgiveness becomes the only means of true peace and reconciliation. Schaeffer-Duffy rightly observes, “Many victims feel better knowing where the bodies of their loved ones are than knowing someone is going to jail.”⁸¹ This shows that forgiveness is the surest remedy to societal illnesses.

Conclusion

Through this study, we gather that there are a number of factors that militate against attainment of cohesion for a robust community in Kenya. These factors include political, economic and social-cultural. The factors are deeply rooted in our history and therefore require a careful study of their root causes. This follows from the proposition that diagnosis

⁷⁸ Anthony Bash, *Just Forgiveness: Exploring the Bible, Weighing the Issues* (Great Britain: SPCK, 2011), 74.

⁷⁹ Bash, 79.

⁸⁰ Schaeffer-Duffy, “Building a Future of Hope.”

⁸¹ Schaeffer-Duffy.

precedes prescription borrowing from the medical field. Once the root cause of an illness has been successfully identified then one would proceed to its treatment.

In the case of Kenya, the problems of cohesion are rooted in the country's history and goes back to the colonial period. Unfortunately, previous regimes have only helped perpetuating them rather than eradicating the same. This has made it difficult for the nation's realization of her dreams of peace, love and unity for a prosperous Kenya. Hence, the need to find an amicable approach of solving these challenges in order to develop a robust united Kenyan community. The surest approach is choosing forgiveness in place of revenge. Forgiveness is an attitude and it is a task for all and sundry. It is important also to note that forgiveness as a process takes time. It is not easy to wake up one morning and forgive your enemies. It takes time to restore peace and reconciliation where hatred has been reigning supreme. It, therefore, calls for concerted efforts, sacrifice and patience to see the fruit of forgiveness, which is peace and reconciliation.

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