

## **'Forgiveness and Reconciliation'**

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I start with a resume of my psychiatric training and work because it forms the background of my paper. I started my psychiatric training at the Maudsley in 1958, achieved my D.P.M. in 1961 and became consultant psychiatrist at the Central Middlesex Hospital and Shenley in 1964. After qualifying, I had a Jungian analysis but did not proceed to an analytical training. I read extensively the dynamic literature and in the last forty years have proceeded with an eclectic therapeutic approach, which includes a great deal of psychotherapy. My main specialised interest has been marital pathology and marital therapy, and it was with reference to my marital work that I became interested in forgiveness and reconciliation, apart from its centrality to the Christian faith to which I belong.

At the heart of forgiveness is the reparation of a broken relationship and as such it is crucial for human relationships and for those between states. It is in the interpersonal relationship of marriage and other intimate relationships that I am familiar with conflict, forgiveness and reconciliation. From the start of marital work, I was struck by the difference between couples who angered one another and yet resolved their conflict quickly and completely, and couples who, after a quarrel, sulked for days and weeks and who could not forgive.

Dynamically, I was, and am attracted by object relations theories and at the heart of these stands Melanie Klein. As some of you will be aware, central to her work are two early positions, covering the first six months of life. The first three months she calls the paranoid-schizoid position. Klein postulates that the baby goes through a range of good and bad feelings, identified with the full and empty breast. When the baby is fed and satisfied, it feels good and its anxiety abates. When the breast is empty, the baby too feels empty and bad. Klein postulates that the baby deals with its bad feelings by projecting them outside itself, hence the term paranoid, from whence the baby feels persecuted. At this stage the baby does not know what to do with these persecutory feelings.

In the following three months the baby experiences the breast and thus the mother as a whole and can tackle its bad feelings with reparation. The young child experiences repeatedly persecution, loss, guilt and reparation. I know many question the validity of Klein's theories on the early months but we can see it in adult life with the persistent projection of bad feelings in paranoid people and the capacity in mature people to deal with anger and hurt by making reparation.

For me, this Kleinian theory is at the root of one explanation of forgiveness. The young child, but all of us, have to juggle with the mixture of good and bad feelings in us and, on the balance between

the two, emerges our self-esteem. With the word self-esteem, I come to the main dynamic proposition of my understanding of forgiveness. Our capacity to forgive, the ease, speed and endurance of our forgiveness are related to our level of self-esteem. The more we love and accept ourselves, the greater is the psychological room inside us to adjust to the hurt, compensate for it and to forgive. The lower our self-esteem, then the room for compensation and adjustment is less, the bad feeling more intense and our capacity to forgive reduced. Self-esteem is the key to forgiveness in the sense that the balance of good and bad feelings within us determines our ability to accept hurt without being overwhelmed, and to have sufficient resources to support our ego.

Klein was not the only contributor to our understanding of self-esteem. Winnicott, her contemporary, stressed the nursing couple and the baby's experiences of being touched, held, caressed, talked to, fed and cleaned as a powerful source of good, affirmative feelings which enhance the child's self-esteem. Erikson described the second and third years as the autonomy phase when the child learns to talk, to feed and dress itself, to walk, all of which, if properly encouraged and executed, add to self-esteem.

Finally, I come to my own hero, John Bowlby, whose theories of attachment have revolutionised our understanding of the personality. Bowlby dismissed the libido theory and instead placed attachment at the heart of the child's growth. The mother is the secure base from which the child gradually separates, always returning to her for solace and comfort at times of distress. The security of attachment is a powerful source of self-esteem.

I have no doubt that this view will stand the test of time and will become one of the cornerstones of dynamic psychology. Self-esteem also grows at the cognitive level of progress at school and later on at work. We can surmise that self-esteem and the capacity to forgive is an amalgam of dynamic growth and intellectual development at school and at work.

I have concentrated on the positive development of self-esteem but we are all familiar with the many ways in which things can go wrong with this growth. The commonest pathology that influences self-esteem is of course depression, which affects one in four of us at some time in our lives. There is an intimate link between depression and anger. Anger can turn inward with an attack on self-esteem, leading at the extreme to the complete lack of forgiveness of self, an overwhelming sense of guilt and finally suicide.

In the Christian tradition, we are told to forgive in an unlimited way. What we are not told is that forgiveness is not enough. This can be observed in couples that are constantly arguing and then forgiving each other without examining the reasons for the conflict. Beyond forgiveness and reconciliation is the need to understand the underlying roots of the conflict and to do something about them. What spouses, partners and friends can do, and all therapists try to do, is to heal the underlying wounds.

I close my paper with an example that I wrote up as a book, entitled "One Like Us", a psychological study of Jesus. In it I postulated that the upbringing of Jesus in the hands of Mary and Joseph was so loving that, humanly speaking, the personality of Jesus was the most loving one the world has ever known. His love of himself was so complete and so was his self-esteem that He had a profound capacity to forgive and, from the cross, He forgave those who crucified him in a total act of forgiveness and reconciliation.

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