

Question of Forgiveness: Theological Perspective on the Process of Reconciliation in Post – War Sri Lanka

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Reconciliation is a societal process that involves mutual acknowledgment of past suffering and the changing of destructive attitudes and behavior into constructive relationships toward sustainable peace. Forgiveness is often spoken of as a condition for reconciliation. In same time against this opinion some of parties point out that the reconciliation and forgiveness as two separate processes. In recent years there has been increasing discourse concerning forgiveness as a post conflict measure for the prevention of further conflict. After ending of a civil war official apologies and forgiveness have become an almost routine element of post-war reconciliation rhetoric and practice in number of countries such as South Africa, Peru, Sierra Leone, Ghana, East Timor, Liberia and Rwanda. In the field of reconciliation in Sri Lanka also have diverse views as to whether forgiveness is part of reconciliation or not. Therefore objective of this research is finding out the possibility of the application of the forgiveness as a condition of post-war reconciliation in Sri Lanka.

Caritas' handbook *Working for Reconciliation*, "forgiveness is at the heart of reconciliation. This statement highlights that theological connotation in the process of reconciliation. In the secular literature there is no consensus regarding forgiveness. According to the definition of Bloomfield reconciliation does not rule out the possibility of forgiveness; it may occur in a long-term process, but forgiveness is not considered necessary for reconciliation (Bloomfield 2006; Staub 2006; van der Merwe 1999). Some writers adhere to the theological perspective, including forgiveness as a crucial step in the path toward reconciliation, while other scholars argue that forgiveness must be separated from reconciliation. Therefore my research question is based on this debate that; **is it possible to apply the concept of the forgiveness as a condition of reconciliation in post-war Sri Lanka?**

This research has been adopted the pluralistic research methodology. Therefore both primary and secondary data were used. Primary data refers to information and evidence gathered by research from primary sources such as field research that includes surveys, interviews, discussions, observations and group discussions. Secondary data obtained from the secondary sources such as published materials, news papers, reports and existing research studies. Collected data contains both qualitative and quantitative data; qualitative data collected from opinions, perspectives, ideas, stories, recollections and case histories. Demographic and economic information collected as quantitative data. Qualitative and quantitative data obtained from both primary and secondary data.

A survey was conducted in two districts namely, Gampaha and Colombo with a total sample of 50. This sample contains the respondents who belong to different ethnic groups (mainly Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim), both males and female, age categories of 20 – 30, 30- 40, 40-50 and 50+, religious diversity and education level etc. Interviews were conducted by using a structured questionnaire and face-to-face interviews.

According to the findings of the research 24% of the respondents agreed, 54% rejected and 22% did not have an idea about the application of forgiveness as a condition of the reconciliation in post-war Sri Lanka. Respondents who agreed with the forgiveness contained 75% of Catholics and Christians, 18.6% of Buddhists and 8.3% Islamic. 22.2% Catholics and Christians, 66.6% Buddhist and 11.1% Islamic respondents rejected the application of forgiveness. 27.3% respectively Islamic, Catholics and Christians and 45.4% Buddhist did not have an idea about the application of forgiveness in Sri Lankan post-war context.

According to these key findings it is clear that Christian and catholic majority willing to adopt the forgiveness as a condition of reconciliation. One respondent stated that “forgiveness to a deeper transformation based on God having forgiven mankind and that we thereby “can extend forgiveness to others”. Buddhists majority rejected the application of forgiveness in post-war reconciliation by considering it as a Christian concept. Furthermore 97% Buddhist respondents need to adopt a reconciliation mechanism under Buddhist context. A one respondent stated that Buddhism also contains the number of significant concepts which can be used to reconcile the post-war society in Sri Lanka. In the Buddhist tradition, compassion is stressed rather than forgiveness. The fundamentals of the Buddhist Middle Path are acceptance, tolerance, and above all, compassion.

One respondent explained that forgiveness would not be applicable to Sri Lankan tradition where, in accordance with Buddhism, people who have committed crimes will always be held responsible for them – there is no God who will ultimately forgive. Therefore no one can forgive to someone. Another Buddhist respondent argued on the same lines but drew the opposite conclusion, saying that it would be easy for people to forgive but is a useless thing because according to his believe the perpetrators will be punished in the next life. According to the Muslim majority their god Al-lah counts all good and bad deeds of the people and God is the one who makes the decision. Nobody can decide god and bad behalf of him. If somebody behaves against the teaching of God, he will be punished with the name of god.

With the key findings, it is clear that the majority of the sample is not willing to accept the forgiveness as a condition of the reconciliation in post-war Sri Lanka due to the following reasons; Being a Christian concept forgiveness is not matching with Sri Lankan Buddhist culture, Forgiveness is an ideological concept and nobody can practice it perfectly and Nobody can forgive others because it is a practice which

beyond the human beings. Therefore Sri Lanka has a less possibility of application of the forgiveness as a condition of post-war reconciliation.

Key words:

Reconciliation, Theology, Forgiveness,