

## Forgiving Is Fore-giving: Reaching out for Peace in Interpersonal Relations

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### INTRODUCTION

Peace, if it deserves the name, must be “perpetual peace,” said Immanuel Kant.<sup>1</sup> Any reservation, tacit or obvious, that may allow future wars would only amount to making a truce, a temporary suspension of hostility. The term “perpetual peace” itself smacks of pleonasm by this standard. Ever since the human race began living history east of Eden, there has never been peace in this fullest sense. Peace demands our recognition by its absence, and even more acutely so today than ever before. It is not something we have in hand to start with. Rather, it is something we crave, an ideal we never cease aspiring to create amid contrary situations.

Our stories thus begin with the recognition of the *lack* of peace. Inasmuch as any nation or community in today’s tightly interwoven world could be either an aggressor or sufferer, so could any individual in today’s multilayered society be on either side of injuries and wrongdoings, even without intention. It is for this reason that the issues of forgiveness and reconciliation have come to the attention of recent scholars from a range of disciplines, including politics, law, philosophy, psychology, ethics, and religion. What I present here is an analysis of the concept of forgiveness as it crystallizes in two legal cases from contemporary America: one conclusive and the other inconclusive. Despite the apparent difference in their outcomes, they both help us

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understand the nature of forgiveness and explore possible pathways to move from past resentment toward future restoration in interpersonal relationships.

### I. "SON, I FORGAVE YOU A LONG TIME AGO."

On a warm spring Friday night in March 1981, a nineteen-year-old African American, Michael Donald, went out to buy a pack of cigarettes in Mobile, Alabama. The town had just seen the trial of a black man accused of murdering a white policeman. The jury, composed of eleven blacks and one white, failed to agree on a verdict, resulting in the acquittal of the black defendant.<sup>2</sup> When the verdict was reported on the ten o'clock television news, Bennie Hays, second in the line of command of Unit 900 of the United Klans of America (UKA), reportedly grumbled, "If a black man could get away with killing a white man, a white man should be able to get away with killing a black man."<sup>3</sup> That Friday night, Bennie's son Henry and his buddy James "Tiger" Knowles cruised the town streets in a car and found Michael walking alone. They pretended to ask him for directions and, at gunpoint, forced him into the car and drove to a desolate place just outside the residential area. There they beat the pleading victim unconscious, strangled him, and, as if that had not been enough, slit his throat three times. They hauled his body into the trunk of the car, drove back to the town, and hanged him from a tree on Herndon Avenue.

A college student and part-time mailroom worker, Michael was Beulah Mae Donald's youngest son, her pride and joy. He lived with his mother, who raised him and six other children almost by herself after a divorce. When a call came to her early the next morning, Michael's body was still hanging from the tree by a rope with a thirteen-coil noose, a procedure that suggested a Ku Klux Klan lynching. Across the street, Bennie was standing on the porch and gloating, "A pretty sight. That's gonna look good on the news. Gonna look good for the Klan."<sup>4</sup> A perfunctory investigation was made, and the local police authority announced that it was a murder over a drug deal gone awry.

They misjudged—not the culprits, though they were wrong about that, too, but the victim's mother. Unlike docile blacks of past generations, Beulah Mae Donald was determined with all the power of her character to find out the truth that had cost her dear son's life. She knew her son had had no involvement in drug deals. She contacted Rev. Jesse Jackson to complain, who then came to the town and staged a protest march, urging the Federal Bureau

of Investigation to reopen the search for the perpetrators. Finally, the two men were arrested.

In federal court Knowles confessed to the heinous murder he and Hays committed that night. Knowles was informed that the state of Alabama was going to file a murder case against him, and in an effort to avoid a likely sentence of death, he agreed to cooperate in the civil rights court, because it carried only a life sentence at the maximum with the possibility of parole.<sup>5</sup> Knowles testified in a betrayal of his glaring accomplice Hays, and that parted their destinies: life sentence for Knowles and capital penalty for Hays. Knowles qualified for the federal witness protection program, thanks to his testifying against Hays.<sup>6</sup> Hays was executed in 1997 after appealing to the Alabama Supreme Court in 1986, becoming the first white executed for murdering a black in Alabama since 1913.<sup>7</sup>

It might have been a thorough victory for a black woman in the 1980s at this point. Beulah Mae Donald could have settled back to her deprived life with the rest of her children, and racial violence and discrimination would have continued as if nothing had ever happened to anybody. But she was determined, not to seek revenge or to receive reparation, but to put an end to the life of intimidation and injustice.

It was Morris Dees, cofounder and chief trial lawyer of the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), who saw in the Knowles case a leverage opportunity to dismantle the Klan organization itself. Under its “Imperial Wizard,” Robert Shelton, and “Titan,” Bennie Hays, the Mobile Klan chapter had been implicated in the beating of Freedom Riders in 1961, in the bombing of Birmingham Baptist Church in 1963, and in the murder of Viola Liuzzo in 1965. During his testimony, Knowles hinted that he was acting “to show the strength of the Klan, to show that they were still here in Alabama.”<sup>8</sup> These words inspired Dees with the idea of convicting the UKA itself.

The life of Morris Dees is a showcase of the history of Alabama’s civil rights movement. He never dreamed of becoming a civil rights lawyer when he was young: his first ambition was to become a farmer like his father. But he decided to enroll in law school to pursue his second ambition of financial success. Alabama was the heartland of the civil rights movement, starting with the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955. Dees spent his freshman year at the University of Alabama reading about the murder case of Emmett Louis Till; he watched on the very site a crowd of angry white students shout “Nigger go home!” at the first black student, Autherine Lucy, as she entered the campus with a federal court order in her hand. He stayed away from these events, opened a law firm, and made a fortune. He even defended, much to

his later regret, a white man who had beaten Freedom Riders. Then, after a soul-searching night in 1967, he sold his entire business and founded SPLC to help those suffering from racial injustice. In a sense, he did follow the spirit of his father, whom he remembered as always being respectful of the “hands” on his farm, drinking from the same bucket of water as they did.<sup>9</sup>

It was during the final session of the trial when something extraordinary happened. From his conversations with defendant Knowles, Dees knew that Knowles “truly regretted what he had done.”<sup>10</sup> During a break in court proceedings Knowles contacted Dees and asked if he could say something in court. When the court resumed, he began by saying, “Everything I said is true. I was acting as a Klansman when I done this. And I hope that people learn from my mistake.” A passage from the newspaper article describing the scene is worth quoting verbatim here:

Then Knowles turned to Beulah Mae Donald, and, as they locked eyes for the first time, begged for her forgiveness. “I can’t bring your son back,” he said, sobbing and shaking. “God knows if I could trade places with him, I would. I can’t. Whatever it takes—I have nothing. But I will have to do it. And if it takes me the rest of my life to pay it, any comfort it may bring, I hope it will.” By this time, jurors were openly weeping. The judge wiped away a tear.

“I do forgive you,” Mrs. Donald said. “From the day I found out who you all was, I asked God to take care of y’all, and He has.”<sup>11</sup>

Apology offered, and forgiveness granted—it was a rare moment of exchange. The guilty person sincerely confessed his past deeds, squarely faced the gravity of the pain he caused the victim’s family, and expressed his willingness to accept full responsibility for his crime and the penalty imposed by law. I shall return to this scene for analysis later.

The all-white juries of the past had repeatedly failed to convict Klansmen, but this time, after four and a half hours of deliberation, the jury came back with a verdict that stunned the entire legal community and changed the history of racial justice in the United States: it found the Klan itself guilty for its past misdeeds, with a damage award of seven million dollars to plaintiff Beulah Mae Donald. This meant that the Klan had to sell all its assets, including its national headquarters in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, dissolve the organization, and go bankrupt.

They did not appeal. Six weeks later, the deed and the keys to the headquarters were sent to Beulah Mae Donald. The property was valued at \$55,000, and, together with other liquidations, she was expected to collect a total of \$150,000.<sup>12</sup> It certainly was far less than the seven million dollars to

which she was entitled. But Dees and other lawyers who represented her said they did not intend to pursue the matter further because “it made a point” and because the penalty dealt “pretty much a death blow” to the organization.<sup>13</sup> Similar suits followed, putting a stop to Klan activities in other states as well.<sup>14</sup> Beulah Mae Donald sold the Klan property to buy a house of her own—the first house she had owned in her life, and, shortly after moving into it, she passed away.

To be sure, the verdict did not change much of the mother’s suffering. “Money don’t mean a thing to me. It won’t bring my child back,” Beulah Mae Donald said after the trial.<sup>15</sup> With or without that money, she had to live with the reality of her son’s death day and night. Nonetheless, the process of healing was on its way. At a news conference, she was quoted as saying, “I have no hatred in my heart.”<sup>16</sup> No one knows for sure what “forgiveness” meant for her during that court exchange, but it did help her overcome the acidity that could have eaten away at her post-trauma welfare.

One may argue that it was Morris Dees and his legal team who won the verdict. But the jury would not have reached that conclusion without witnessing the exchange of apology and forgiveness that had taken place in front of them. Their verdict assured peace to the mother by sending a message different from those of past all-white juries, showing the community’s will to support her quiet fight to put an end to the long history of discrimination and terrorization. Given the legal deals that Dees brokered for Knowles, one may also doubt the sincerity of the culprit’s confession. But when it came to that courtroom scene, it was exclusively and entirely Beulah Mae Donald’s call whether to grant him forgiveness or not. How could such extraordinary forgiveness happen? How could she forgive the unforgivable? And why was her forgiveness articulated in association with the past tense?

## II. “I DON’T KNOW WHAT FORGIVENESS IS.”

In 1970 Katherine Ann Power was a straight A student at Brandeis University in Boston. She came from Denver, Colorado, where she had graduated from her Catholic high school as class valedictorian. It was the heyday of student movements in urban cities like Boston, and the susceptible young girl predictably turned radical, joining protests against the Vietnam War. She developed a romantic involvement with an ex-convict who was enrolled in the inmate education program at her university. Somehow he managed to talk her into believing that robbing a local bank to get money for their revolutionary cause was a right way to end a wrong war in Southeast Asia.

On the fatal morning of September 23, Power was waiting six blocks away behind the wheel of a “switch” car and drove the robbery group to escape from the scene of the robbery. She did not know that during the act of the crime a police officer had been shot and killed. According to Massachusetts law, all who engaged in a felony are charged with the same crime, and thus she became a fugitive wanted for murder.

She fled and was on the run for twenty-three years, changing names and moving from one place to another. She was on the FBI’s “ten most wanted” list for fourteen years, but gradually she began to feel safe, and she settled in Oregon, on the other side of the continent. She gave birth to a son, lived with a local meat cutter, stole the alias “Alice Metzinger” from a dead infant, bought a house, and started a restaurant business. With diligence and deliberation, she earned a credible reputation and established herself as a decent tax-paying citizen.

Inside this well-established comfortable family figure, however, there was a growing struggle over suppressing her real self. The guilt and shame of feigning identity wore her out, and the desire to be her own self once again in clear conscience became difficult to contain. Suffering from deep depression, Power asked for professional help from a psychiatrist and lawyers. Finally, on September 15, 1993, she turned herself in, waived her right to a trial, and pleaded guilty to a reduced charge of manslaughter. The judge sentenced her to eight to twelve years in prison, and she began serving the time.

Prosecutors admitted that they had had no clue as to locating or identifying her. Even if she had been found and arrested, they would have had a hard time convicting her, since there remained hardly any evidence or credible witness after all those years. A district attorney admitted that “she certainly deserves credit for coming forward because we probably would never have caught her.”<sup>17</sup> Likewise, her lawyer wanted her to go to trial. “I was sure we’d win. But she didn’t want the divisiveness of a trial that was sure to be politicized. Katherine Power wanted to plead guilty, wanted to get her punishment and get it over with.”<sup>18</sup>

In order to “get it over with,” however, Power knew that she had to come out, face the consequences of her past actions, and accept her responsibility in public. In her surrender statement, she wrote: “I am surrendering to authorities today to answer charges that arise from a series of acts 23 years ago. I am here to plead guilty to these charges, and I am prepared to accept whatever consequences the legal system will impose. . . . Leaving my son, my husband, and my friends to enter prison is not easy. But I know that I must answer this accusation from the past, in order to live with full authenticity in

the present.”<sup>19</sup>

It was a clear acknowledgment of guilt and a sincere desire to be accountable. Just as Knowles was in our first story, Power was ready to take full responsibility for her past deeds. She did not have to turn herself in, and she could very well have walked out of a trial as a free person, but she chose to face the charges and go to prison. The *New York Times* carried an editorial with the headline “The Prodigal Daughter” and warmly welcomed her decision for societal return at the cost of a prison sentence.<sup>20</sup>

Again, it is possible at this point to question the real intent of her surrender. Power surely wanted to “get it over with” and regain her authentic life. She knew that counseling would not cure her of the chronic depression and the psychic trauma of living a lie. She sounded apologetic when it came to acknowledging her involvement in the murder: “My intention was never to damage any human life by my acts, and there is no accusation that I was directly responsible for the death of Walter Schroeder.” Was she really offering apologies to and asking forgiveness from the victim’s family? Or was she simply seeking her own peace of mind?

Apparently, her statement did not quite impress the other party involved. The victim of the armed robbery, Walter Schroeder, was a father of nine children. Four of them later became law-enforcement officers, following their much-beloved and admired father. On the day of the sentencing, Boston police officer Clare Schroeder, the eldest daughter who was seventeen when her father was killed, read a statement and vented her animosity: “Katherine Power stands before you as a media celebrity. Her smiling photograph has appeared on the cover of *Newsweek* magazine. She has been portrayed as a hero in newspapers from coast to coast.”<sup>21</sup> The Schroeder family was indignant at the news media that treated her as a nostalgic reminder of the bygone political subculture. In fact, the aforementioned *New York Times* editorial portrayed Power essentially as a misguided romantic product of those politically turbulent days.<sup>22</sup> A columnist described her as “our other self” that embodied “the chasm between the ‘60s and ‘90s.”<sup>23</sup> But to Sgt. Clare Schroeder, “murdering a policeman in Boston to bring peace to Southeast Asia was utterly senseless then, and it is just as senseless now.”<sup>24</sup>

The victim’s family was also outraged by the press report that Power was receiving “book and movie offers worth millions of dollars.”<sup>25</sup> The report must have informed Judge Robert Banks’s decision to impose on her an injunction not to profit from selling her story. Paul Schroeder, another son of the victim and a Boston detective, also criticized Power for getting “undeserved sympathy in the nationwide media blitz . . . like the second coming of

Mother Teresa.”<sup>26</sup> In Denver, yet another Schroeder son of the victim, Edward, commented, “I just can’t forgive. I’m not happy with her attitude, the way she was smiling when she went into court.”<sup>27</sup> To the Schroeder brood, it was hard to comprehend how the *Newsweek* column could compare the tragedy that befell the perpetrator with the pain that she caused the victim’s family. Katherine Power may have succeeded in gathering public sympathy, but she had clearly failed to secure sympathy, let alone forgiveness, from the victim’s side. Clare’s anger eventually found an audible repercussion in a *Washington Post* article that reminded the public that “she was an accomplice to murder, and her crime destroyed more than one life.”<sup>28</sup>

The family sentiments did not improve after five years when Power first became eligible for parole. In her statement to the parole board hearing, Clare Schroeder once again spoke against her. Parole should be granted, she argued, on the basis of the “unreserved and unqualified” expression of remorse and responsibility, which she did not find in Power’s court statement. Any inmate would look penitent and remorseful when his or her chance of parole comes close, but Power had not expressed those sentiments earlier. Schroeder also reminded the parole board members that Power surrendered only after she had negotiated a deal to her advantage and that it took twenty-three years for her to come out of hiding.<sup>29</sup>

It was this statement of Clare Schroeder’s that moved Power to an act that no one in the courtroom expected. Asked if she deserved freedom, Power answered, “No”: she withdrew her parole request. The withdrawal was unprecedented in court procedures. Clare recalls the moment in the court: “For at least five full seconds, this incredible silence covered the room. No one said a word.”<sup>30</sup>

Power herself had something different in mind. She had planned for this occasion for three months. She knew that the occasion, excruciatingly painful though it was, would be her only chance to be in the same room with the Schroeder family.<sup>31</sup> There she would be able to show her humanity apart from the media hoopla and convey her genuine remorse about the hurt she had inflicted on the family. After hearing Clare Schroeder’s reproof, however, Power realized that they did not really believe what she was saying because it was attached to her request to be paroled. “It became really clear to me that as long as those two things were joined, the communication that I intended to make was not going to be complete,” she said.<sup>32</sup> It is indeed difficult to think of anything an inmate would crave more than the personal freedom to go home. Power relinquished that opportunity in order to convey her apologies.

How did the victim’s side react to Power’s unexpected and unusual appeal?

Erin Schroeder, yet another police officer in Boston, commented that “I was very happy and I was very surprised. . . . It wasn’t what I expected. I have to say I respect it.”<sup>33</sup> Clare Schroeder was also impressed, though she remained callous. She could admit that she “got a window on her personality that I hadn’t seen before,” and through that window she could see that Power was sincere. Schroeder even admitted that there was “an unqualified acceptance of responsibility and apology” in Power’s withdrawal—a *sine qua non* for forgiveness according to her own earlier statement. Psychologist Janet Landman, who worked closely with Power, evaluated Schroeder’s comment as “not a full-fledged statement of forgiveness, but something close.”<sup>34</sup>

Perhaps so. Subsequent reports, however, do not quite uphold Landman’s evaluation. It may be more accurate to say that Clare Schroeder was not ready to give absolution. On October 2, 1999, another year and a half later, Power was finally released from prison, but Schroeder’s remarks were just as bitter as six years before. “I’m satisfied in that she’s fulfilled what the state requires of her. The length of time served is irrelevant. It doesn’t change anything.” It is worth noting that the length of time was in fact the point of contention in her earlier statement. Asked for more comments, she confessed: “I don’t know what forgiveness is in this circumstance. I’m not going to extract any vengeance. I don’t wish her ill will. Other than that, she has no significance for me.”<sup>35</sup> Her refusal to treat the inmate’s release as a meaningful event may well be an indication of her unresolved anger. It must end somewhere, she knew, and so she resolved that Power’s release be “the end of a chapter.” Bluntly put, forgiveness had not matured in her. It failed to ripen in her, even after admitting the sincerity of Power’s confession and apology. Clare Schroeder would not let her past sorrow and anger dominate her, but neither would she equate this renunciation of resentment with forgiveness.

Power accepted Schroeder’s bitterness, and issued a statement that read: “Today marks the payment of my legal debt for my role in the murder of Walter Schroeder. But I will always carry my human responsibility for the sorrow my actions have caused. . . . This is a time to acknowledge that a human life, once lost, is lost forever: that the death of a father, husband, and brother is a terrible event, and one for which I will always be deeply sorry.”<sup>36</sup> She was well aware of her accountability beyond the legal amends she had made. She took on the gravity of the sorrow her actions had caused and expressed her penitence, while knowing that it might not reach or ease the heart of those who had suffered because of her.

Under probation until 2013, Power now lives in Boston, working as a development manager of an AIDS relief organization. She sometimes appears

in that function as a public figure, but because of the stringent injunction not to profit from selling her story, the only noticeable indications of her turbulent past are the bachelor's degree she earned in the Boston University prison education program and the title of her chapbook, *Doing Time: Papers from Framingham Prison*.<sup>37</sup>

### III. FORGIVENESS AS A GIFT

For a long time, forgiveness has been a concept primarily in use within religious communities. It was only during the past two decades that it came out of those confines to a larger circle of discussion. At the same time, cautionary views have been advanced by psychologists, who point to the adverse effects of premature forgiveness. But what does "maturing forgiveness" mean?

In both of our stories, the exchange of apology and forgiveness was much publicized, but there are elements that caution us not to rush for an optimistic praise of forgiveness. Beulah Mae Donald's forgiveness was offered in religious terms, reflecting her lifelong church affiliation. There is no way, however, to know whether she was under societal constraint in what she said, religious or secular. She might have been under the racial power play that still held a strong grip on the psychology of the majority in the area. Underneath the seemingly reconciliatory gestures, she might have been acting out her role of a forgiving mother as required by societal norms. A well-meant advocacy of urging forgiveness based on Christian ethics can, in fact, further hurt victims. Pressuring for forgiveness when it is not ready can lead to the suppression of lingering resentment that is natural and justifiable, canceling the chance to deal with it on one's own terms.<sup>38</sup>

This is why our second story, with an inconclusive ending, is important in our discussion. Clare Schroeder did not want to remain captivated in the bitterness of past injuries, but she was not inclined to forgive the perpetrator. The whole process of verbal exchange between the two articulate women, despite their apparent failure to carve out a reconciliation, vividly illuminates the nature of forgiveness as a *gift*.

Three points deserve underscoring here:

(1) Forgiveness, in the first place, can only be granted on the victim's own terms and timing. No one can be forced to forgive. A forced forgiveness is a monstrous oxymoron. That is to say, forgiveness can be reserved for no reason. A gift is what it is only when there is a possibility of its being withheld.

One can give it only when one can also refuse to give it. Perhaps it was in this sense that Hannah Arendt said, “Men are unable to forgive what they cannot punish.”<sup>39</sup> Only those in the position to punish, albeit by substitutional law, can choose to forgive instead.

If it is a giving that depends entirely on the giver’s willingness, then it does not depend on the fulfillment of justice. Justice is often a requisite for forgiveness, yet the wrongdoer cannot demand forgiveness even after justice is fully served and the damage fully recompensed, for it remains an exclusive property of the wronged to give—or refuse. After all, forgiveness is a violation of justice. It was not a commendable practice at all in the classical period.<sup>40</sup> Forgiveness was considered a violation of the established legal order, associated more or less with a despot’s sovereign whim; only with the advent of Christianity did it begin to be viewed as a virtue.

Here is a twist. Justice calls for a sense of equilibrium between giving and receiving. Under normal conditions, this equilibrium would require that those wronged be in the position to *receive* something in recompense. But forgiveness is a gift that they *give*. Those who have suffered and lost their precious something are the ones that give. The wronged have already given the wrongdoer enormously, and yet it is they who have the power to forgive, that is, give again. In the first giving they gave against their will; in the second giving they give intentionally only at their own will. It is for this reason that radical orthodoxy theologian John Milbank interprets the prefix *for* of the verb *for-give* as an intensifier.<sup>41</sup> The same could also be said of the German *ver-geben* and the French *par-donner*. These words indicate that “forgiving” is a giving in the extreme. It is a “hyperbolic giving.”

Both of the guilty parties in our stories seem to understand that forgiveness is a gift. They knew that they had no right to ask for it. Knowles was acutely aware of the insurmountable gap between the victimizer and the victim. He acknowledged that whatever he might be able to offer Beulah Mae Donald would not ease her pain and sorrow. According to a news report, he asked for forgiveness with much hesitation, cognizant of the patent gap: “I know I don’t have the right to ask this of you, but I hope one day you’ll find it in your heart to forgive me.”<sup>42</sup> Power recognized Schroeder’s refusal and her right to refuse. Asked by Landman in an in-prison interview what she was hoping for from the Schroeder family, she responded without missing a beat that she had no right to ask anything of them.

I felt obliged to offer restitution. I did, and I have their answer, a refusal. I will always be open to any kind of reconciliation. But it would be out of line for me to

say to them that I need . . . anything; it would be out of line for me to say that they should . . . anything. I need to be respectful of them.<sup>43</sup>

She sought to “earn” forgiveness with sincere effort, but she also knew that no amount of effort can earn it. Even with the best of whatever she could offer, she would not be entitled to it.

Forgiveness must remain a gift for yet another reason: it symbolizes the sense of control that victims regain after their suffering. Victims often feel devastated by the fact that they have no control over the events that overwhelm them. They feel they are victimized not only by the perpetrator but also by a fate that has assigned them their unfortunate lot. Their restoration therefore must include regaining a sense of self-control over the course of events that affect their lives. The decision to grant forgiveness or not offers them a high point to experience that they are once again in control. Forcing them to forgive, through religious pressures or otherwise, by counsel or intimidation, will therefore deprive them of this precious experience, and will actually amount to revictimization.

(2) Forgiveness, secondly, is granted upon the victimizer’s sincere confession, repentance, and apology. They must formally confess their wrongdoing in public, willingly accept the penalty, and apologize directly and publicly to the ones they have wronged. How do we know that their words come out of genuine penitence? Psychologists propose to check it by seeing whether their remorse is “other-oriented” or not.<sup>44</sup> It must not be motivated by self-serving interest.

How does the confession in our stories measure up in this scale? Knowles struck a legal bargain to testify against his accomplice Hays in an effort to avoid the state’s death sentence. Was he sincere and other-oriented enough in offering that tearful apology? It is difficult to judge for those not on the scene, but at least to those in the court his remorse and apology seemed genuine, not self-serving; and that was how Beulah Mae Donald, the receiver of the apology and the granter of forgiveness, understood it. Our other defendant, Power, clearly came to realize the self-serving note of her own statements, if only after a face-to-face encounter with the victim’s family, and for that reason dropped her request for parole. She was criticized for cutting a deal with authorities prior to her surrender. But in an interview with Landman, she stated that her pleading guilty to the charge of manslaughter was not the result of negotiation in exchange for surrender. It was rather “a literal description” of her involvement in the crime according to her own understanding.<sup>45</sup> She was

implicated in the killing, but only unintentionally and away from the actual scene of the crime.

The confession and apology play an important role here: not only do the wronged need them, but the wrongdoer needs them, too. Katherine Power wanted to confess in order to reconcile her past with her present, to reunite her outer self with her inner. Confession works both ways, for the victim and for the perpetrator. She offered her apologies once again in 1998 after withdrawing her parole request, but this time it was not so much to receive forgiveness as to get her apologies across to the victim's family: "I have seen how my act tore a hole in the lives of a whole group of people, of family, friends, neighbors and fellow officers . . . I know it is late, and far too little, but today I offer again my sincere and humble apologies to those people."<sup>46</sup> She knew she would not be forgiven because of her apologies. Apologies must be offered in order to receive forgiveness, but apologies cannot secure or procure the gift of forgiveness.

Landman compares Katherine Power with Robert McNamara, the former secretary of defense who confessed his deep-harbored regret in his 1995 book *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam*. In both cases, their confessions were fatally belated and infinitely insufficient. Nonetheless, Landman argues, they showed "the ethical force of emotion" that has "the authority to restore the wrongdoer to community."<sup>47</sup> Naturally, their confessions must bear scrutiny. Are they not trying to excuse or justify their deeds, or avoid their responsibility? Are they not indulging in exhibitionism, under the spotlight of unavoidable media attention? The records of Knowles and Power seem to stand up to these tests.

A cautious caveat is due here. If one made forgiveness dependent on the offender's confession and atonement, it would once again make the victims dependent on the offender's will, inflicting "a secondary offence" on them.<sup>48</sup> Forgiveness must mature internally, but it does not hinge on any prior external condition. Those who want to forgive but cannot because the offender has not confessed and atoned have already forgiven in their mind. The forgiveness must be announced publicly to take effect, but that is the offender's benefit perspective. Those in the position to forgive are in no way inhibited from forgiving even prior to the offender's confession. Neither are they inhibited to forgive prior to full atonement. Beulah Mae Donald did not receive her monetary reparation in full. She was satisfied with the scathingly paltry amount of money, because in her view "it made a point."

(3) This brings us to the third and last element: forgiveness is granted on

the basis of the reality that is already established inside the forgiver. A citation variance must be noted here concerning the wording of the forgiveness uttered by Beulah Mae Donald in our first case. The *New York Times* article quoted above has it as “I do forgive you. From the day I found out who you all was, I asked God to take care of y’all, and He has.” Two documentary films that featured Dees and a speech he delivered at Penn State University on March 16, 1999, quote her as saying, “I’ve already forgiven you.”<sup>49</sup> A former colleague of Dees at SPLC writes that it was “Son, I forgave you a long time ago.”<sup>50</sup> These quotations, though at variance, coincide in pointing to the past or perfect tense of her wording.

Why past or perfect? It is because forgiveness, if given at all, is a gift that is prepared within the forgiving person. One can grant forgiveness only when ready inside. Beulah Mae Donald’s forgiveness had been ready before she gave it to Knowles. In other words, the forgiveness that she granted him was a reality inside her even before she was asked for it, and that prior forgiveness was the basis on which she could give the actual and verbal forgiveness. The inner readiness for forgiveness is expressed outwardly and completes the prospect of forgiveness. The outward expression is still necessary to perfect it, but she was already forgiving in the inside. Her forgiving does not depend on his asking for it. His asking did not initiate or generate forgiveness inside her. It was there before his asking, waiting for the occasion to spring out. This preexisting inner reality of forgiveness constitutes the person’s readiness for forgiveness. The outward expression brings the cycle of offering and receiving to its completion—hence it is always in the past or perfect tense.

Clare Schroeder was not ready to grant forgiveness, because it had not become a reality inside her. She would not have forgiven her had Power asked for it. According to an interview with Landman, Power did not ask for forgiveness because she thought it would only add insult to the family she had devastated.<sup>51</sup> It may be closer to the truth to say that she did not ask because she knew Schroeder was not ready. Asking for forgiveness from those not ready to grant it would indeed add insult to injury. Forgiveness needs to be slowly leavened to maturity at its own pace and timing.

In view of this prevenient nature of forgiveness, one can also interpret the word *forgive* as “fore-give,” that is, “giving before.” Forgiveness is a gift that is prepared prior to its actual giving. Offering apology cannot create the reality of forgiveness. Apology is indeed necessary for forgiveness, but it works rather as an occasion than as a cause. To use the Aristotelian theory of causation, the apology is the *efficient cause* of forgiveness, while the *material cause* is the prior reality of forgiveness that is within the person who forgives.

If one continues in this causation theory, the *formal cause* of forgiveness is contrition and remorse, and the *final cause* of forgiveness is peace and reconciliation.

Forgiveness in this last sense may be compared to entering a peace treaty. A peace treaty finalizes the peace process, but it can be concluded only when and where peace has in fact prevailed. There is no way of making a peace treaty when and where battles are still raging. At the same time, the factual reality of peace cannot be secure until the parties involved sign and ratify a peace treaty. The peace treaty caps and seals the state of peace. It legitimizes *de facto* peace and turns it into *de jure* peace. Likewise, forgiveness turns *de facto* forgiveness that is a reality within the person into *de jure* forgiveness declared interpersonally. Declaring it without waiting for the maturation of a prior reality, however, would not create the reality. The outward expression of forgiveness only perfects the inward reality of forgiveness. And it is for this reason that forgiveness needs a form of public or at least formal statement. The statement confirms and confers forgiveness on the basis of and in exchange for the apology clearly articulated.

#### CONCLUSION

“To err is human, to forgive divine,” said Alexander Pope.<sup>52</sup> Restoring what has been damaged to the complete satisfaction of the wronged is often beyond our human capacities. Demanding full justice in retribution would make this world a difficult place to live, a place where we would be perpetually captivated by past and ever-increasing enmities. To compensate for this painful inability to repair, human beings are endowed with the ability to forgive. In fact, it may be called “a power to change the past.”<sup>53</sup> Experience can be changed retrospectively. There is at least a way to break the spell, transcend past enmity, reenter human society, mend and recreate broken relationships.

After all, we may have to say to the venerable philosopher Kant that truce, not perpetual peace, could very well be the best we can hope for on this side of the eschaton.<sup>54</sup>

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Immanuel Kant, *To Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch*, trans. Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003), 2.

<sup>2</sup> See Carol Robinson, “Helping families find closure, justice drove him,” *Birmingham News*, Feb. 10, 2008, for subsequent details.

- <sup>3</sup> Morris Dees, *A Lawyer's Journey: The Morris Dees Story* (Chicago: American Bar Association, 2001; originally published as *A Season for Justice*, 1991), 232, 315.
- <sup>4</sup> Jesse Kornbluth, "The woman who beat the Klan," *New York Times*, Nov. 1, 1987.
- <sup>5</sup> Dees, *Lawyer's Journey*, 213.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 313.
- <sup>7</sup> Alex Duval Smith, "Electric chair closes case of KKK lyncher," *Guardian* (Manchester), June 7, 1997.
- <sup>8</sup> Dees, *Lawyer's Journey*, 214.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 51–85.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 316.
- <sup>11</sup> Kornbluth, *New York Times*, Nov. 1, 1987; "U.S. jurors award \$7 million damages in slaying by Klan," *New York Times*, Feb. 13, 1987.
- <sup>12</sup> "Paying damages for a lynching," *New York Times*, Feb. 21, 1988. The net amount she actually received in total was \$52,000. Alex Duval Smith, "Electric chair closes case of KKK lyncher."
- <sup>13</sup> "Black is handed deed to offices of Klan group," *New York Times*, May 20, 1987.
- <sup>14</sup> Obituary, "Robert Shelton, 73, leader of big Klan faction," *New York Times*, Mar. 20, 2003.
- <sup>15</sup> "Mother of Klan murder victim awarded \$7 million from United Klans," Associated Press, Feb. 13, 1987.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>17</sup> "DA quoted as saying state lacked evidence to convict Power," *Boston Globe*, June 6, 1994.
- <sup>18</sup> "Power's confession a lucky break for prosecutors," *Oregonian*, June 6, 1994.
- <sup>19</sup> Janet Landman, "Earning Forgiveness: The Story of a Perpetrator, Katherine Ann Power," in *Before Forgiving: Cautionary View of Forgiveness in Psychology*, ed. Sharon Lamb and Jeffrie G. Murphy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 243–44. Landman deserves special credit for her sustained effort to connect to the personality of Katherine Ann Power. Since Power is under a twenty-year probation in which she is forbidden, with the threat of life in prison, to profit by selling her story, no documentary or autobiography will be made available at least until 2013. Landman conducted audio-recorded interviews exclusively and extensively with Power in prison from 1995 through 1999. In addition to these and other personal communications, Landman made good use of Power's media appearances, once in a cable television program and another at Babson College, Massachusetts. Power had carefully obtained advance approval from the probation office for these speaking engagements (Landman, "Earning Forgiveness," 233, 261). The present article owes much to these documents provided in Landman's articles.
- <sup>20</sup> Editorial, "The Prodigal Daughter," *New York Times*, Sept. 18, 1993.
- <sup>21</sup> Clare Schroeder, "Remember My Father," *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, Oct. 8, 1993.
- <sup>22</sup> Editorial, *New York Times*, Sept. 18, 1993.
- <sup>23</sup> Anna Quindlen, *Oregonian*, Oct. 12, 1993 (originally "Our Radical, Ourselves," *New York Times*, Oct. 10, 1993).
- <sup>24</sup> Michael Cooper, "Victims don't forget," *New York Times*, Oct. 10, 1993.
- <sup>25</sup> Clare Schroeder, *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, Oct. 8, 1993.
- <sup>26</sup> Susan Bickelhaupt, "Schroeder family confides to Brokaw," *Boston Globe*, Oct. 6, 1993.
- <sup>27</sup> Barbara Kantrowitz et al., "The Fugitive," *Newsweek*, Sept. 27, 1993.
- <sup>28</sup> Opinion editorial, "Katherine Ann Power's Crime," *Washington Post*, Oct. 11, 1993.
- <sup>29</sup> Clare Schroeder, "Statement to the Parole Board," *Boston Globe*, Mar. 8, 1998. See Doris Sue Wong and Bob Hohler, "16 months of talk and drama produced Power's surrender," *Bos-*

ton *Globe*, Sept. 17, 1993, for details of the negotiation.

<sup>30</sup> Peter Gelzinis, "Encounter clarifies the price of freedom," *Boston Herald*, Mar. 8, 1998.

<sup>31</sup> Landman, "Earning Forgiveness," 256.

<sup>32</sup> Interview by Bob Ahearn, "the Murphy's Law," quoted in Landman, 257.

<sup>33</sup> Landman, "Earning Forgiveness," 257.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

<sup>35</sup> Cindy Rodriguez, "Two sides of Power's freedom," *Boston Globe*, Oct. 2, 1999.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> From a lecture announcement, Harvard University Memorial Church, Oct. 21, 2007, <http://www.memorialchurch.harvard.edu/ef/faithlife.shtml> (accessed Apr. 2, 2008).

<sup>38</sup> Jeffrie G. Murphy and Jean Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 17, 35, 90, 92. Murphy and Hampton also concur on the nature of forgiveness as a gift; see 154, 159, 161.

<sup>39</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 241.

<sup>40</sup> John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (London: Routledge, 2003), 48–49.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>42</sup> Pat Clark, "We welcomed him into the circle," *Fellowship* (May-June 2004), <http://www.forusa.org/fellowship/may-june04/pclark.html> (accessed Apr. 30, 2008).

<sup>43</sup> Landman, "Earning Forgiveness," 254 (ellipses in original).

<sup>44</sup> Joanna North, "The 'Ideal' of Forgiveness: A Philosopher's Exploration," in *Exploring Forgiveness*, ed. Robert D. Enright and Joanna North (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 30.

<sup>45</sup> Janet Landman, "The Confession of a War Maker and a War Resister," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 38, no. 3 (1999): 409–10.

<sup>46</sup> "Power could be freed in '99 with good behavior," *Boston Herald*, Mar. 7, 1998.

<sup>47</sup> Landman, "The Confession," 396.

<sup>48</sup> Mona Gustafson Affinito, "Forgiveness in Counseling: Caution, Definition, and Application," *Before Forgiving*, 109.

<sup>49</sup> Cory Shindel, "Crusading against hate," *Daily Collegian Online*, Mar. 17, 1999. The promotional video produced by the Southern Poverty Law Center is quoted in Mark L. Perlmutter, "Lawyers with Courage," *Proceedings of the 2004 Annual Conference of the International Alliance of Holistic Lawyers* 28; The History Channel, *Ku Klux Klan: A Secret History* (A&E Home Video, 1998). See also "Only love will bridge racial divide, activist says," *Virginian Pilot*, Jan. 24, 1997.

<sup>50</sup> Clark, "We welcomed him into the circle." See also Tom Smith, "Klan's Violent History Traced: Beulah Mae Donald v. United Klans of America Inc. et al: 1987." <http://law.jrank.org/pages/3408/Beulah-Mae-Donald-v-United-Klans-America-Inc-et-al-1987-Klan-s-Violent-History-Traced.html> (accessed Jan. 10, 2008).

<sup>51</sup> Landman, "Earning Forgiveness," 260.

<sup>52</sup> Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Criticism*, part 2, lines 322–25.

<sup>53</sup> Michael D. Cohen and James G. March, *Leadership and Ambiguity* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1986), 227; quote from Donald W. Shriver Jr., *An Ethic for Enemies: Forgiveness in Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 119.

<sup>54</sup> For further discussion on the theological import of forgiveness, see my articles: "Toward a Theology of Reconciliation: Forgiveness in Comparative Religion's Perspective," in *A Grand Design for Peace: Achieving Peace and Reconciliation for a Future World*, ed. Yoichi-ro Murakami (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2008), chap. 10; and "To Forgive is Human: A Theological Reflection on the Politics of Reconciliation," in *Building New Pathways to*

*Peace: Remapping of Peace, Security, and Kyosei as a Multidisciplinary Endeavor*, ed. Shin Chiba and Noriko Kawamura (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), chap. 11.