

"FACING EACH OTHER:" A PASTORAL THEOLOGY OF FORGIVENESS

BETWEEN MARITAL PARTNERS

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## INTRODUCTION

As a topic of academic discussion, forgiveness has received substantial attention in the last two decades. Freud and other early psychology theorists (e.g., James, Hall, Thorndike, and Allport) wrote little or nothing specifically about the topic. From the 1930s into the early 1980s, writers in pastoral care,<sup>1</sup> social psychology,<sup>2</sup> and human values discussed forgiveness a little, but from the early 1980s to the present, publications have increased substantially. Forgiveness has been discussed in reference to moral development, clinical psychology, and social psychology (McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, eds., pp 3-6). An increase in theological and pastoral theological works focusing specifically on forgiveness has also appeared (e.g., Patton, Brakenhielm, Muller-Fahrenheit, and Jones).

This rise in the academic treatment of forgiveness is matched by growing cultural awareness of and experiences with forgiveness. A web site out of Britain receives 16,000 visits a day from persons typing in their confessions of wrongdoing and requests for forgiveness.<sup>3</sup> National and social leaders in countries as diverse as the Soviet Union, South Africa, Canada,

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, the *Journal of Pastoral Care (& Counseling)* published only four articles on forgiveness from its start in 1947 through 2000. *The Journal of Pastoral Care Topical Index, 1947-2000*, p. 118. Only one of those named forgiveness in its title, Cunningham's "The Will to Forgive: A Pastoral Theological View of Forgiving," 1985 39:2, 141-49. The first article mentioned forgiveness in its discussion of "The Convergence of Psychotherapy and Religion," 1951 5:4, 4-14; Anderson's article was a book review article on Patton's book, 1986 4:2, 173-79; the only article in the '90s discussed forgiveness in the context of revenge, Durham's "The Therapist and the Concept of Revenge: The Law of the Talion," 1990 44:2, 131-37. Also, Emerson's book, *The Dynamics of Forgiveness*, and Lapsley's essay, "Reconciliation, Forgiveness, Lost Contracts," are among notable exceptions in the 1960s.

<sup>2</sup> Worthington reports that only five scientific studies of forgiveness occurred before 1985, but that 55 studies took place between 1985 and 1998, Worthington, ed., p 1.

<sup>3</sup> The site is [www.theconfessor.co.uk](http://www.theconfessor.co.uk). Cited in Browning and Reed, p 3.

Ireland, the Balkans, and others have publicly apologized for various human rights violations. Prominent religious bodies have confessed sins, publicly repented, apologized, and worked for reconciliation. Pope John Paul II led a Day of Pardon liturgy in March 2000, confessing to church sins of many kinds (not focused on clergy sexual abuse). The Southern Baptist Church and the United Methodist Church apologized to African Americans for their denominations' condoning of racism. The Episcopal Church held a reconciliation service in November 1997 to confess its colonial mistreatment of Native Americans (Browning & Reed, pp. 3-10).

Thus, from at least four arenas of current Western culture—the personal and interpersonal, the national and international, churches and other religious bodies—forgiveness is receiving significant attention. Churches and other religious bodies particularly interest me, arising out of my many years of providing pastoral care and counseling in those contexts. A particular focus on marriage and family preoccupied several of those years, and that focus still piques my interest today.

Because marital partnerships are intensely relational and forgiveness is a relational phenomenon (as I discuss later), I have come to highly value forgiveness as an essential component of marital partnerships. In the close proximity and sharing of resources that characterize many (if not most) marital partnerships, opportunities for forgiveness can emerge from numerous single actions or patterns of behavior. Some of the more serious actions or patterns include infidelity, substance abuse, financial irresponsibility, and domestic violence. Other actions or patterns might seem less serious yet erode the relationship and potentially benefit from forgiveness, such as disagreement about parenting styles, sharing of domestic tasks, use of money and leisure, choice of social activities and friends, type and frequency of

romantic/sexual activities, and attitudes and interactions with extended family. Still other actions or patterns might seem insignificant to some partners but highly significant to others and thus create the interpersonal tension that forgiveness might effectively address: the daily rhythm of activities, a misunderstood comment or action, increased defensiveness exacerbated by fatigue or worry, and so forth.

I do not contend that forgiveness is the “secret” to a successful partnership, but I do claim that it is an essential component. Thus, I wonder specifically about a pastoral theology of forgiveness between marital partners. How might such a pastoral theology be formed? What features might it involve? These questions guide my exploration and proposals. My conclusions do not at all exhaust the possibilities for a pastoral theology of forgiveness between marital partners, let alone between other intimate partnerships and between various forms of family relationships. Space limitations prevent a greater treatment than the one presented here.

My thesis is that a pastoral theology of forgiveness can function between marital partners as a grace-grounded ethos depicted as facing each other. The image of facing each other symbolizes three kinds of forgiveness that I propose later: inviting, clearing away, and enriching. Theologically, these facing images emerge from the notions of ethos and hope and from an anthropology of “forgiven and forgiving.”

Such a pastoral theology supports common notions of forgiveness as decision, event, attitude, process, and changes in emotions and attitudes yet also offers its own significant contribution for pastoral contexts. As such, this pastoral theology affirms pastoral caregivers, pastoral counselors, and marital partners as sharers in and mediators of divine grace more than as skilled technicians of modern therapeutic methods.



The focus here is on pastoral theology rather than pastoral practice: forgiveness can function between marital partners as a grace-grounded ethos depicted as facing. This claim attempts to provide theological ideas in a coherent and credible proposal that could be used as a conceptual foundation for drawing out implications for pastoral practice. The thesis is based on the belief that all practices arise from concepts and theories, whether those concepts and theories are implicit and explicit. It can provide explicit theoretical foundation for developing pastoral practices of forgiveness between marital partners.

I present my proposal in three sections, beginning with a section discussing three of the main concepts of my proposal: forgiveness, ethos, and grace. This discussion will help set up the conceptual landscape for my specific proposal, which I offer in the second section in the form of three assertions and which build conceptually toward the full thesis: a pastoral theology of forgiveness between marital partners can function as a grace-grounded ethos depicted as facing each other.

In this second section, I believe these assertions follow each other in a logical and progressive way. First, I begin with biblical covenant as ethos, in order to describe broadly my proposal about how forgiveness functions in marital partnerships; forgiveness functions as an ethos. Second, I move to ethos as grace-in-relationship, because the biblical notion of covenant inherently involves grace, and grace inherently involves relationship rather than some kind of action upon an object. That is, God's offer of grace is an offer to relate to God's creatures in love. Third, I finish with the facing metaphor as the practical yet theological depiction of grace-grounded forgiveness in marital partnerships.

I devote the third section to implications of this pastoral theology of forgiveness for three basic pastoral contexts: marital partnerships themselves, pastoral care, and pastoral counseling. First, I claim that, in spite of important differences among these three contexts, this pastoral theology implies the same kinds of perspectives and behavioral outcomes for all three of these contexts. Then I describe three applications of the facing metaphor to indicate three kinds of facing each other—that is, three kinds of forgiveness—that can occur between marital partners: facing that invites, facing that clears away, and facing that enriches. The discussion concludes with an extended generic example of a perceived offense between marital partners as a way to illustrate the three kinds of facing.

As noted already, this thesis does not at all exhaust the possibilities for a pastoral theology of forgiveness between marital partners. Space limitations prevent a greater treatment than the one presented here. One broad field that contributes significantly, for instance, is the social sciences, which here receive scant attention. This choice is an intentional omission, given space limitations. Beyond this project, what needs to be done is to explore how theological claims might interact with and affect the actual experiences between marital partners, an exploration that social sciences perform.

I will cite select ideas from social science, however, in the first section, which might seem like an ironic place to start given my focus on pastoral theology. Responsible pastoral theology, however, needs to respect the important work on forgiveness emerging from those disciplines, because pastoral theology attends to human experience and to non-theological

disciplines.<sup>4</sup> Then pastoral theology, as I hope to demonstrate, responds to and contributes its own theologically-funded ideas to the conversation.

In my conclusion, I offer a sampling of such social science topics—anger, appraisal theory, empathy, and transformative processes—which could enrich our understanding of the forgiveness phenomenon. I also mention some theological ideas which deserve further study: accountability, shame and guilt, repentance, justice, and reconciliation.

## PROLEGOMENA: DESCRIPTIONS OF FORGIVENESS, ETHOS, AND GRACE

### Forgiveness: Social Science and Pastoral Theology

#### Social Science: Basic Forgiveness Ideas

Social science provides valuable understandings of forgiveness which I will use as a springboard into my pastoral theological proposals. While forgiveness has been traditionally viewed as the domain of religion, it has been discussed and studied (as I noted above) in the public arena for the last 20 years or so. Much research, reflection, and publishing on forgiveness has occurred recently, and those results, containing some apparent agreements and other clear differences in opinion and theory, demand attention from anyone attempting to think theologically and pastorally about forgiveness. Later, I will note theologians Jones and Shults and pastoral theologians Emerson and Patton, who have cited and responded to common views

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<sup>4</sup> As Marshall (2004) describes, methods in doing pastoral theology have greatly expanded since the 1980s. Among the five constitutive elements of pastoral theology are the relationship to non-theological/religious fields and the role of human experience, both individual and communal, pp. 140-141, 143-146.

in their discussions of forgiveness<sup>5</sup> Their responses form the basis of my contention that a pastoral theology of forgiveness involves an ethos of grace, an idea not found in the social sciences but vital to forgiveness as constructed theologically.

Here are the basic forgiveness ideas from social science that inform my views. As Sells and Hargrave (1998) conclude, “The most common understanding of forgiveness involves some aspect of release or letting go over time” (p. 18). Actual definitions of forgiveness are the subject of continuous debate (Strelan and Covic, p 1061), but there is much agreement about what forgiveness is not: not pardon, not legal mercy, not leniency; not condoning and excusing; not appeasing, not justifying, not forgetting, not reconciling; not balancing the scales, not abandoning resentment, and not letting time heal the wound (Enright and Fitzgibbons, pp. 39-48). A clinical-sounding but concise definition is “intraindividual, prosocial change toward a perceived transgressor that is situated within a specific interpersonal context” (McCullough, et al., p. 9). A less technical definition that works well in clinical settings is “letting go of resentment and revenge.”<sup>6</sup> Forgiveness is a process, not a discrete event; many process models have been developed.<sup>7</sup> For example, I particularly value Enright’s four-phase model (uncovering phase, decision phase, work phase, and deepening phase) involving 20 separate units of

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<sup>5</sup> E.g., Patton, “The common understanding of human forgiveness is that it is an act to be performed and/or an attitude to possess,” (p. 178); also Patton observes that many of his clients seem to believe that forgiveness is an “impossible possibility,” at best (p. 11). Both Jones and Shults/Sandage note broad cultural views of forgiveness; Jones notes that many believe that forgiveness is mainly therapeutic (pp. 35-53) or that violence has overtaken forgiveness and rendered it impossible (pp. 71-83); Shults/Sandage also note the prevalence of therapeutic forgiveness, as well as what they term “forensic forgiveness,” (pp. 20-23). I will comment on these views later.

<sup>6</sup> Patton notes that the forgiveness article in Kittel’s *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* describes “the basic sense of the word as ‘sending off, releasing and letting go, especially in its legal aspects.’ The Aramaic which Jesus himself would have used is parallel in its basic meanings: ‘to let go, to leave, to leave behind’” (pp. 160-161).

<sup>7</sup> Strelan and Covic list 25 such models, p 1064.

attention (Enright & Fitzgibbons, p 68), though I will not cite it to any extent; it is one of the more heavily researched and empirically validated ones.

Forgiveness can reach into multiple relational arenas. It can operate unilaterally, that is, within an individual person, with little or no interaction with the offender about the offense. It can also operate interpersonally, so that offender and offended interact about the offense in positive ways; this interpersonal function of forgiveness can lead to reconciliation, which is the goal of forgiveness for some writers (e.g., Augsburger).<sup>8</sup> Forgiveness can also operate in the community arena, such as with a faith community's responses to clergy sexual abuse or other forms of violence and/or neglect.<sup>9</sup> Further, forgiveness can also operate in national arenas, such as with South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> In Augsburger's *Helping People Forgive*, the author discusses classic psychoanalytic theories from an interpersonal perspective and calls for "the reconciling community" (1996, pp 159-163). He seems to focus on interpersonal relationships, reflecting, I believe, his Mennonite valuing of reconciling and his training in family therapy theories. In so doing, he broadens Patton's intra-psychic outlook on forgiveness not only to include but to privilege the interpersonal instead of the intrapsychic aspects of forgiveness. Like Patton, he discusses shame, but does so relationally. Because Kohut is used heavily by psychodynamic writers, it is significant for Augsburger's argument to note that one of Kohut's basic beliefs was the need for relationships; in fact, "the norm for the human being is not independence but *empathic relationship*" (1996, p 75). Thus, forgiveness for Augsburger is viewed not merely as the result of a discovery prompted by the (intrapyschic) healing of shame. As shame heals, a person's capacity for empathy increases. Empathy leads to mercy and then to "a profound passion for justice, social transformation, and ultimately reconciliation" (1996, p 100). This sequence—healed shame to empathy to mercy to justice—demonstrates Augsburger's viewpoint that forgiveness is a step toward reconciliation.<sup>8</sup> His call for the reconciling community in light of chapter 18 of Matthew's Gospel indicates his valuing of the theological importance of community.

<sup>9</sup> Sometimes faith communities need to express contrition and repent for their silence, denial, and complicity. As Marshall writes (1999, p 56), "Communal silence encourages injustice by its lack of vocal and prophetic censure." Furthermore, faith communities are accountable for both "seeds of complicity that we sow in our communities and the denial we carry that we have any power to change the world around us" (Marshall, 1999, p 57).

<sup>10</sup> The Commission encouraged persons to tell their stories, whether they were perpetrators of or victims of violence. Later, the Commission recommended that the government to pay individual reparations to victims of violence. The TRC also recommended naming streets, schools, and community facilities after "fallen heroes" of the apartheid struggle. Though the government's economic condition discouraged it from acting on all of these suggestions, these attempts show us ways that restitution can be made (Tutu, pp 62-65).

As I previewed above, the notion of grace-grounded ethos will provide a perspective for larger meanings and deeper motivations for forgiveness. That is, I will not limit my understanding of forgiveness to the views in the paragraph above. The following section previews this other view, from pastoral theology. It does not develop a pastoral theological view fully; rather it provides a conceptual horizon that forms a backdrop for my specific proposals about forgiveness in marital partnerships.

#### Forgiveness in Theology and Pastoral Theology: A Preview and Sample

Theologians Jones and Shults critique common understandings of forgiveness as limited and even at times misleading. They also provide theological resources, primarily in the person and work of Jesus Christ, for enriching our understandings of and experiences in forgiveness. They expand our vision of forgiveness beyond the common focus on personal benefit to include the relational aspects of forgiveness for families, neighbors, communities, and even societies. They tend to retain the basic notion of forgiveness as letting go of resentment and revenge, but they deeply enrich the context and thus the motives for, the arenas of, and the processes for forgiveness. For them, therefore, forgiveness is not a legal/forensic transaction or a therapeutic exercise; it is a divinely-initiated offer of grace-full relationship. Jones and Shults note two prevailing views of forgiveness—forensic forgiveness and therapeutic forgiveness<sup>11</sup>-- and critique them, showing how they markedly differ from divine (or “redemptive”) forgiveness. To

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<sup>11</sup> Jones also describes and critiques another view of forgiveness, which he calls “forgiveness eclipsed,” in which some segments of some societies, including our own, speak and behave as if forgiveness has been eclipsed by evil. He raises the important question of whether or not evil and violence can be unlearned. See his chapter 3, “Forgiveness Eclipsed: Is Violence the Master of Us All?” pp. 71-98. Although this outlook on forgiveness is important, I do not include it in the discussion above, because it rejects forgiveness, whereas this discussion assumes that persons will enact forgiveness in some form.

sketch out the conceptual horizon of their work in forgiveness, I will now present a brief overview of these two prevailing views.

Both Jones and Shults discuss “therapeutic” forgiveness, which seems to dominate popular Western culture, even within faith communities. The focus of therapeutic forgiveness is on the personal psychological benefits of letting go of resentment and revenge toward an offender. This focus reflects the highly psychologized nature of Western culture (e.g., Jones, pp. 43-45). The value of forgiving someone is not interpersonal but personal—to achieve the release that will allow the person to resume their “normal” functioning with the bitterness and other negative results of the offense.<sup>12</sup> This kind of forgiveness involves at least two dangers: a tendency for persons to see themselves as victims and a myopia about the larger issues of accountability, justice, and reconciliation (Jones, pp. 48-52).

“Forensic” forgiveness is another prevailing view of forgiveness, discussed in some detail by Shults and Sandage. Based on a legal framework, it functions as releasing a person from required retribution; “a transaction occurs in which one party agrees not to exact what the law requires” (Shults and Sandage, p. 20). As with therapeutic forgiveness, forensic forgiveness is also common to some extent in Western culture, tracing its roots to the ancient Roman system of justice, in which an offense, to be forgiven, required some kind of payment. Theology adapted this system, which resulted in Anselm’s satisfaction theory of atonement and in the medieval practice of penance, a practice still embraced by many today in various ecclesial and secular forms (Shults and Sandage, pp. 140-143).

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<sup>12</sup> Sandage and Shults take a more positive view of therapeutic forgiveness, calling it “second order change” that transforms relationships, pp. 21-22.

I provide this brief overview of therapeutic and forensic forgiveness to underscore the importance of pastoral theology's distinct contribution of divine/redemptive forgiveness. Because this thesis offers a pastoral theology of forgiveness, it needs to remain theologically intentional and to point out these distinctions. Forgiveness in marital partnerships will involve both forensic and therapeutic kinds of forgiveness, but for partnerships wanting a pastoral theological foundation for their forgiveness experiences, divine/redemptive forgiveness rather than forensic or therapeutic forgiveness serves as the foundation.

#### Ethos: A Disposition of Values, Beliefs, and Practices

Lovin defines ethos as “the characteristic values, beliefs, and practices of a social group or a ‘culture’” (Lovin, p. 208). These values, beliefs, and practices are sometimes explicit, but they often develop implicitly and are not voiced unless and until they are challenged. The cumulative effect of these values, beliefs, and practices form a “disposition” or “character” of a group.<sup>13</sup> All these words mentioned above—values, beliefs, practices, disposition, character--are useful in understanding ethos; later, I will particularly employ the words “disposition” to describe my proposed attitude of marital partners toward each other.

To help describe ethos, we can contrast it with ethics, as Lovin does, in two ways. One contrast between the two involves reflection; whereas ethics is the practice of reflecting on choices and actions, there is seldom any reflection on one's ethos—it is a given. Thus, ethics seeks to reflect rationally and orderly on choices and actions, whereas in an ethos persons do not

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<sup>13</sup> From *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.), Boston: Houghton Mifflin 1992: 631; cited in Marty, 1998, p. 15: the “disposition, character, or fundamental values peculiar to a specific person, people, culture, or movement.”



reflect but usually speak and act out of the implicit values, beliefs, and practices of that group/culture.

A second contrast between ethos and ethics involves consistency. Because ethics seeks to function rationally and orderly, it also seeks to develop a consistent and unified morality; it wants to be predictable and reliable in its processes and conclusions. In contrast, because persons in an ethos speak and act out of the implicit values, beliefs, and practices of her/his group, that ethos might consist of “elements that conflict with one another” (Lovin, p. 208). The apparently humorous statement, “don’t confuse me with facts—my mind is made up,” illustrates this potential for conflicting elements. Moreover, any one person can experience conflict by participation in multiple ethoses; for instance, a person’s political views could conflict with her/his religious views, or a person’s ethnic heritage might include views that conflict with the prevailing culture.

Thus we can view ethos as a way of life, in a sense, a way of life absorbed and developed both implicitly and explicitly through regular relationships with other persons in that social group. This way of life evokes a disposition inherent to that social group, one that is familiar to it and likely familiar to persons outside that group.<sup>14</sup>

### Marital Partnership as Ethos

This view of ethos as the character or disposition of a social group can be useful in understanding the “culture” of any married couple. Any pair of marital partners develops a

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<sup>14</sup> An ancient example, found in the deuterio-Pauline corpus, is his citation from a Cretan “prophet” that “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons” (Titus 1:12), implying that Cretans value duplicity, sloth, etc. A positive example is the values of family togetherness and hard work often ascribed to active members of the Mormon church.

culture. It is a culture that reflects their own particular set of values, beliefs, and practices; it is a culture that develops both implicitly and explicitly as the couple shares in the many tasks, goals, challenges, and changes of their relationship. Later I discuss forgiveness as a value and belief that partners can share and put into practice.

Pastoral theologian John Patton illustrates marital partnership as ethos in his discussion of Christian ethicist Richard Bondi's notion of "special relations" in families. Bondi contends that general principles for human relationships do not work well with "special relations," such as family. He cites theologians Gene Outka's work on agape as justice, stating that an ethical principle applied to someone outside a family takes on a different meaning than when it is applied to one's spouse. This quandary about applying ethical principles occurs because, though family members share much in common with persons outside their families, their relationships with each other as family occur precisely because of the particular nature as family relationships, not as what they share in common with persons outside their families. Patton comments, "Special relations contain obligations and feelings not themselves contained in general principles" (p. 27). Bondi resolves this ethical dilemma through his use of the concept of fidelity, which he claims is different from covenant: Patton writes that fidelity is "not a legal bond or principle but a personal commitment to share in a common story with another person" (pp. 27-28). While we might want to dispute with Bondi's use of terms—fidelity, covenant, commitment—the point of citing Patton's use of Bondi is to illustrate marital ethos. That is, the marital partnership is an ethos of special relations marked by fidelity, a personal commitment. The fidelity is a value and/or belief that creates a characteristic disposition between the partners. The partnership is an ethos.

Moreover, each partner's views on and experiences with forgiveness contribute to that ethos. Because this project focuses on a pastoral theology of forgiveness, I now cite theological writings that, either implicitly or explicitly, discuss forgiveness as an ethos.

#### Forgiveness as Ethos: Theological Expressions

As I just stated, forgiveness is part of that marital ethos; each partner's views on and experiences with forgiveness contribute to the marital ethos, to that characteristic disposition between them. In exploring theological resources for a forgiveness ethos, I first note that a few theological writers, either implicitly or explicitly, have expressed the idea that forgiveness is an ethos. Though diverse in their social locations, these writers discuss forgiveness as ethos. The discussion is implicit in Willmer and Marshall; it is explicit in Williams, Emerson, and Marty.

Willmer writes (Willmer, p. 246), "The Church is a community constituted by the forgiveness of sins." Here is an implicit reference to ethos; forgiveness in Willmer's view forms the essential value of ecclesial communities.<sup>15</sup> Marshall extends the horizons of forgiveness when she writes that forgiveness functions not merely to release persons from anger and pain but also "so that we may change the world by the way we live" (Marshall, p. 33). Improving relationships not only within churches but also throughout the world is the implied value in her statement, a value that hints at ethos.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Willmer continues, "Forgiveness is the practice by which it [the Church] holds together as a community, facing and resolving conflicts, and including the awkward, strangers, and sinners as Jesus did in eating with them" (p. 246).

<sup>16</sup>As an example from Scripture studies, Schroeder implies forgiveness as ethos in his comments on the Gospel of John by contrasting Mosaic law with Christ's grace: "In John's Gospel that human ethos ["the ethos of nonsinner, children of God"] actualizes itself in behaviors that are in this Mosaic world but of the new world of *grace* and *truth*" (Schroeder, p. 196; italics mine).

Theological writers have also explicitly described forgiveness as an ethos. Two generations ago, Charles Williams stated that disciples in the early Church were called to lives of forgiveness: ““This then was the temper, the *ethos*, of the Church” (Williams, p. 68). In his book on forgiveness as central to theology and the Church, Emerson describes the context and atmosphere of a pastor/parishioner conversation as an ethos, “an ethos of rapport . . . [which] the minister . . . had helped create” and which allowed the parishioner to experience the freedom which Emerson believes forgiveness elicits (Emerson, p. 54). More recently, Marty contends that forgiveness is not so much a doctrine, “although countless have crystallized it as such” (p. 15) as it is an ethos. That is, because forgiveness is central to the Christian community’s experience; the community is called to become “the new creation” through forgiveness, and thus “the divine version somehow inspires forgiveness among humans” (p 11).

Marshall provides a penetrating and visionary theological example of forgiveness as ethos in her discussion of communal dimensions of forgiveness. In her call to broaden forgiveness to include not only individual but also community responses and participation, she describes forgiveness as ethos. She points out the need, for communities of faith in particular, to develop, foster, and nurture a characteristic disposition (i.e., an ethos) that includes forgiveness processes that are enacted by entire communities. These processes reflect such communal values (i.e., an ethos) as acknowledging their own wounding, admitting their accountability (in their complicity and denial), and speaking out against injustice. Written in the wake of the tragedy of Matthew Shepard’s violent death at the hand of two homophobic young men, Marshall calls on pastoral theology “to reflect with others on what it means to live out the beliefs of one’s faith” (p. 57). This reflection includes acknowledging sins, seeking forgiveness from those hurt intentionally and unintentionally, and working actively to change congregation’s attitudes and

behavior. Through these actions, “forgiveness liberates the body of Christ on individual and communal levels” (p. 60). Pastoral theology, then, serves as a resource for challenging and reforming the values and beliefs—the characteristic disposition—of faith communities: their ethos.

To summarize, then, I have cited a working definition of ethos as the characteristic disposition of a social group and then claimed that this definition of ethos can be used as one lens for viewing the relationship of marital partners. I have then noted a writer each from theology and from pastoral theology who express the idea, either implicitly or explicitly, that forgiveness is an ethos, suggesting that forgiveness can function as an ethos for marital partners.

#### Grace: From Objective to Relational

Grace is a vital part of my proposal, because grace is inherent in ethos. That is, to talk about ethos theologically also involves talking about grace; a pastoral theology of forgiveness as ethos involves grace essentially and naturally. As I will claim later in my first two assertions, ethos manifests itself in the biblical experiences of covenant, and covenant inherently involved grace. Furthermore, I contend that grace is relational, a divine dynamic that seeks human encounter, rather than a commodity acting upon an object; God’s grace is an offer to relate to God’s people in love. This contention of grace-as-relation informs my third assertion, that the image of “facing each other,” represents forgiveness between marital partners. These assertions depend on the relational nature of grace and thus of forgiveness; because both grace and forgiveness are relational, the “facing” metaphor is a natural choice for expressing the ethos of forgiveness between marital partners. I now provide a brief discussion of grace to prepare for those assertions.

Grace is a foundational topic in theology, not simply a byproduct of the important debates or an ancillary theme of theological discussion. One writer asserts, “The history of Christian doctrine and pastoral practice could well be written as a history of debates on the interpretation of grace” (Schwoebel, p. 276).

Martin Marty asserts that most Christians tend to agree with the Pauline stress, taken from his Roman letter (5:15), on the “free gift” of grace. It is viewed as “a needed remedy for something in the human situation, a sign of the divine favor, the agent of a restored relation” (Marty, 2003, p. 226. Furthermore, as Daniel Day Williams writes, “The foundation of the New Testament meaning of grace is given in the Hebrew *hesed*, God’s mercy and love” (p. 254). The covenant ethos of *hesed*, a Hebrew idea, was expressed in the dominant Greek culture through the idea of grace. The preferred word for forgiveness in the Pauline corpus is *charizomai*, which means “to manifest grace” (Shults, p. 136).<sup>17</sup> Forgiveness and grace are not identical; rather, forgiveness displays grace. Grace is manifested as persons forgive each other; forgiveness demonstrates grace.

The meaning of grace has suffered, however, from the influence of that Greek culture. Marty states that theologians throughout the centuries have argued “as to exactly how grace comes to humans and how they receive grace” (2003, p. 226). Does grace move only in one direction, from God to human beings? Or do humans do something as part of the gracing event and/or process?<sup>18</sup> Later I will cite Boff, who contends that the answers were hammered out on

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<sup>17</sup> Shults notes that *charizomai* is not always translated as “forgiveness;” it has a broader semantic meaning; it can refer to bestowing a gift (1 Cor 2:12; Rom 8:32) or can imply release (Acts 3:14). “In ancient Greece, *charis* was commonly attributed to a person or work of art that evoked a response of joy and gratitude” (p. 137).

<sup>18</sup> Kelsey has noted that such questions influence pastoral care and connect unavoidably to understandings of God; how we view the nature of God guides both *what* we express in pastoral care and *how* we express it.

the anvil of Greek philosophy, which treated grace and its effects on human beings in an objective way. Newer understandings of grace as subjective (relational), however, bypass the traditional problems and questions while opening up other possibilities. I will outline these newer understandings later, in discussing the second assertion of my thesis.

This traditional view of grace as objective is illustrated in John Wesley's classic three-part distinction of grace. Wesley highly valued grace as God's gift and saw it operating in three ways: as prevenient grace, as justifying grace, and as sanctifying grace.<sup>19</sup> Prevenient grace is grace that "comes before," grace that is already present with persons: "God becomes present *before* any action by us either deserves or resists it" (Kelsey, p. 463). It is present even before our awareness of it and "becomes the foundation for our ability to respond to God (Marshall, p. 62). Justifying grace is probably the kind of grace most commonly understood as grace—as Marty describes above, it is "a needed remedy for something in the human situation, a sign of the divine favor, the agent of a restored relation" (Marty, 2003, p. 226). It is linked to the experience of forgiving us of our sins, of "wiping the slate clean," of remitting the penalty for a transgression, based on our faith in God. Sanctifying<sup>20</sup> grace is the "what happens now?" grace:

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<sup>19</sup> Kelsey describes the nature of God as a mystery comprising two poles in tension: God *pro nobis* ("for us") and God prevenient ("comes before") both in "action and being" (Kelsey, in DPC&C, p 463). These two poles might add another perspective on the three operations of grace; that is, God as prevenient offers prevenient grace, whereas God as *pro nobis* offers both justifying and sanctifying grace.

<sup>20</sup> Pastoral emphases will vary, depending upon how justification and sanctification interact with each other. For instance, Hunter notes that classical Lutheran piety emphasizes justification, which then views sanctification as deepened awareness of sin and forgiving grace to the minimizing of growth in virtue. The focus reverses in Catholic and certain Protestant traditions, which emphasize spiritual and moral growth, thus minimizing justification to an early phase or a periodic need when a person lapses in their growth, DPC&C, p. 468.

the grace that brings forth a life of goodness towards others and self. It is empowering grace<sup>21</sup> that fosters opportunities for spiritual growth and service to others.<sup>22</sup>

These three kinds of grace provide a helpful way to understand how grace operates. In themselves, though, they do not provide enough focus on relationality to prevent them from being appropriated as objective. As a taxonomy, they can be used to perpetuate the idea of grace as objective. However, I suggest that they are at least neutral enough to be appropriated for a relational view of grace. I will demonstrate one such use in my implications section, proposing that prevenient grace is “facing that invites,” justifying grace is “facing that clears away,” and sanctifying grace as “facing that enriches,” each in the context of marital relationship.

To sum up this prolegomena, I have attempted to lay the groundwork for my proposal by discussing three key words: forgiveness, ethos, and grace. This discussion intended to prepare for the construction of my thesis, that a pastoral theology of forgiveness in marital relationships functions as a grace-grounded ethos depicted as facing each other. I will construct this thesis with three assertions that progressively build toward the full proposal. First, I begin with ethos, suggesting strong theological links with the covenant experiences of Israel and the early church. Second, I suggest that this covenant ethos inherently involves grace as relationship. Third and finally, I move from the general theology of covenantal grace-as-relationship to the specific context of marital relationships, suggesting that the experience of grace-funded relationship, depicted as “facing each other,” functions as a forgiveness ethos for marital partners.

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<sup>21</sup> Hunter uses the word, “forgiveness,” to describe “justifying grace” and uses the word, “empowerment,” to describe “sanctifying grace,” DPC&C, p. 468.

<sup>22</sup> For more discussion of these three aspects of grace, see Campbell, TA (1999), *Methodist Doctrine: The Essentials*, Nashville: Abingdon, pp. 54-63.



## ASSERTION ONE: ETHOS MANIFESTS ITSELF IN COVENANT

### *Chesed* Covenant: An Ethos for the People of God<sup>23</sup>

Covenant (*berith*) was an experience common to many ethnic groups of the ancient Near East. English translations have included the words, “pact,” “vow,” “promise,” “treaty,” even “contract” (Harris & Platzner, p. 11). Covenants could be enacted between persons, between political states, and between YHWH and Israel. The Hebrew notion of *chesed* is an integral part of the broader notion of covenant for the people of Israel. Hebrew Scripture witnesses to the initiative of God, known as YHWH, in choosing Israel as God’s people, whose task was to witness to the twin dynamics of God’s love and faithfulness (that is, *chesed*) to the world. Centuries later, the early Church saw itself as inheriting this election and mission, where the Greek word, “grace” (*xaris*) expresses the same twin dynamics. I shall speak more of grace in the next section, where I develop its importance for the experience of forgiveness. In this section, however, the focus is on explicating the meaning and importance of ethos theologically.

Covenant in the Hebrew Bible and Second Testament is set in the context of narrative. The Bible can be understood as “presenting a historical drama” with God not only as Author but also “as the Chief Actor—the protagonist” (Anderson, p. 15). This drama centers on God’s covenant with God’s people, first Israel and then the Church. Anderson outlines the drama in three acts: the formation of God’s people (the Exodus and Promised Land), the re-formation of God’s people (the exile and return), and the transformation of God’s people (Jesus’ ministry and the forming of his Church) (Anderson, p. 15). God makes a series of covenants with various

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<sup>23</sup> This discussion of covenant is theological rather than historical, which means that the view of some scholars that later authors imported the covenant idea into extant writings does not discount the theology itself; see, e.g., Barton & Bowden, pp. 58-61.

persons/people as the drama progresses and unfolds: with Noah (Genesis 9:1-17), with Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3; 15:1-21; 17:1-27; 22:15-18), with Moses (Exodus 34:1-32), and with David (2 Samuel 7:11-17; 23:1-5; Harris and Platzner, p. 11). The climax of this drama occurs in the coming of Jesus, whose ministry is “the sign of God’s decisive victory” (Anderson, p. 15) recounted whenever communities of faith gather for the Eucharistic meal (Oglesby, p. 47). Though various covenants occur, their purpose is singular and progressive; as Marshall notes (Marshall, p. 16), “In the Hebrew texts, God’s offer of forgiveness is tied to the covenant established with the people.” That is, God continuously and mercifully offers forgiveness to God’s people, in spite of their predictable waywardness. God is steadfast and merciful/loving.

The Hebrew Bible expresses God’s steadfastness and mercy in the word *chesed*.<sup>24</sup> Not reduced to a sense of obligation or duty, the word denotes grace in relationship, presupposing “an ongoing fellowship,” such as between a host and a guest (Genesis 19:19), between relatives (Genesis 47:29), and ruler and subject (2 Samuel 16:17; Zimmerli, p. 382). The word is also linked to covenant, especially between YHWH and Israel; for instance, YHWH is described as the God “who shows covenant grace to thousands of generations” (Exodus 20:5b-6), a grace that “is incomparably stronger than the burning wrath of the jealous God” (Zimmerli, p. 383). It is in the Psalms that the richness of *chesed* is found.<sup>25</sup> The earth is full of it (Psalm 33:5; 119:64) and

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<sup>24</sup> Zimmerli states that another Hebrew word carried similar denotations, but *chesed* emerged as the one linked to covenant and then later to the Greek *charis*, “grace;” Zimmerli, 1974, 376-378, 381.

<sup>25</sup> Of the 237 instances of *chesed* in the Hebrew Bible, more than half—127—occur in the Psalms.

it reaches even to heaven (36:5; 57:10; 103:11; 108:4); it evokes joy (31:7; 90:14; 101:1) and praise (138:2); YHWH's *chesed* lasts forever (103:17, 138:8), and it is better than life (63:3).<sup>26</sup>

The great loving mercy and faithfulness of God in this *chesed* covenant was at work even when Israel failed to remain faithful to God. Thus, as Marshall writes, "God offers forgiveness when people break God's covenant" (pp. 16-18). God moves to reestablish the broken relationships (Oglesby, 1980, p. 47), both between God and Israel and between person with person.<sup>27</sup>

This perception of covenantal relationship continued when Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God and the early Church was formed. The meaning of covenant reaches its fulfillment in the coming of Jesus, "God with us," (see Matthew 1:23; Oglesby, 1980, p. 47). The language of covenant is not explicitly there, but important features of covenant emerge as the early Christian drama, to use Anderson's term, unfolds. Anderson contends (as noted earlier) that Scripture witnesses to a three-act drama which reaches its climax in Jesus of Nazareth: "the biblical plot is the working out of God's purpose for the creation in spite of all efforts to oppose it". In Jesus, there occurs "God's decisive victory," which provides "deeper and larger meaning" to the preceding movements of this drama (Anderson, p. 15).

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<sup>26</sup> Psalm 89 is one of the richest expressions of YHWH's *chesed*; the words faithfulness, love, and covenant are used frequently, e.g., the opening lines, "I will sing of the LORD's great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations."

<sup>27</sup> Covenants are interrelated but also distinct from contracts. As seen already, covenants refer to "the element of trust and pledged faithfulness to one another," whereas contracts refer to the specific "mutual expectations," the "actual procedure" enacted by the parties to the covenant, Oglesby, 1990, p. 242. Furthermore, many contracts operate alone, without the broader setting of a covenant, e.g., teachers' contracts, house purchase, etc.

As Jones writes, “Christians learn to embody forgiveness as a baptismal community—indeed, as the Body of Christ” (Jones, p. 4). The communal feature of Israel’s *chesed* life is now expressed in the Church: “People learn to embody forgiveness by becoming part of Christ’s Body” (p. 4). Just as Israel’s way of life was shaped by YHWH’s *chesed* toward them, so now the Church, in its experience of forgiveness, involves itself in “a way of life to be lived in fidelity to God’s Kingdom” (p. 5).

To sum up, the dynamic of ethos manifests itself in the covenant experiences of Israel and the early church. Jones calls forgiveness “an embodied way of life” instead of merely “a word spoken, an action performed, or a feeling felt” (Jones, p. xii). This phrase, “an embodied way of life,” describes the meaning of ethos.

#### ASSERTION TWO: COVENANT ETHOS INVOLVES GRACE AS RELATIONSHIP

Thus far, I have suggested that the covenant experiences of Israel and the early church manifest ethos. I now move to the second aspect of my thesis, namely, that a covenant ethos involves hopeful grace as relationship. In other words, the grace that infuses a covenant ethos elicits hope in relationships.

As I indicated in the last section, an inherent part of the covenant experiences of Israel and the early church involved God’s grace, often called “mercy” or “love” in the Hebrew Bible. Now I identify this “mercy” and “love” with the word, “grace.” That is, the experience of grace was integral to the ethos of the biblical peoples; grace was part of the covenant, the *chesed*, that God initiated with Israel. The two cultures of biblical peoples expressed their perceptions of their relationship to God with these two words, both of which encompasses the twin dynamics of

God's steadfastness and God's love, which is gracious. For Israel, that word was the Hebrew *chesed*. For the early church, that word was the Greek word *xaris*, grace (Zimmerli, pp. 376-378, 381).

Furthermore, grace is to be understood as relational and/or subjective, not as objective. As Boff writes, "God does not just offer humans the gift of grace. He himself [*sic*] comes to dwell in humans . . ." (p. 12)<sup>28</sup>. Grace is not a commodity which persons receive; neither is it a "thing" that acts upon persons (that is, objective). Rather, grace is the very presence of God, who invites relationship, who clears away barriers to relationship, and who enriches relationship. As I will discuss in the implications section later, these three relational actions of God can be enacted by marital partners through the metaphor of "facing," an image found in Scripture and useful for expressing the relational nature of grace.

To develop this assertion, I will first cite Leonardo Boff, who advocates for a relational/subjective understanding of grace rather than an objective understanding. Then follows a theological discussion of grace as relational, which elicits two theological corollaries that are vital to relationships: grace as evoking an outlook of "forgiven and forgiving," and grace as reflecting hope.

#### Boff on Grace as Encounter (Relational)

Leonardo Boff contends that grace is inherently relational but that grace has been misinterpreted by major theologians for centuries. He critiques this theological history of grace

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<sup>28</sup> Boff also writes, "Grace is not a thing; it is God giving himself [*sic*] as a gift," (p. 14), and "Grace is essentially encounter and relationship. It is God communicating himself [*sic*] and human beings opening themselves up" (p. 15).

as starting from the wrong place, classical metaphysics. It employs Aristotelian metaphysics and works with abstract ideas, such as “substance” and “accident;” thus its conclusions reduce grace to a thing, not the gift of God. Boff believes that recognizing the existential experience of sinfulness helps to understand grace, but experience itself is inadequate, needing the ontological dimension. Boff proposes that grace needs to start with personhood and dialogue, “persons who establish a relationship with the Trinity in Jesus Christ” (Boff, p. 14). Sin breaks the relationship, and redemption restores it.

Boff states that understandings of grace suffer from an unfortunate polarizing between the divine and the human, which need to be balanced. The Greek theological tradition stressed God and thus emphasized deification. The Latin (Roman) theological tradition stressed human beings and thus emphasized sinfulness and justification. Both traditions overlooked grace as encounter, which Boff contends is essential. For him, grace “establishes an encounter, a dialogue, and a flow of mutual love” (p. 15). It does not refer only to God as infinite, omnipotent, and autonomous, or only to human beings as closed up and self-sufficient: rather, grace “is the encounter of the two, each giving of self and opening up to the other” (Boff, p. 17).

#### Relational Views of Grace

The idea of grace as rooted in relationship is not limited to Latin American theology, which Boff represents, but is also a part of feminist theology. For instance, Ross notes that feminist theologies offer more than one idea of grace (for they “all challenge the traditional tendency to define grace universally,” p. 134), but they share several emphases, which include ethics (as “communal action with sociopolitical consequences,” p. 134). She proposes that

possibly the “most significant” emphasis of grace that feminist theologies share is “the overall assertion that *grace occurs in connections between persons*” (p. 133; author emphasis).

Along with feminist theology, theological writings which focus on forgiveness also discuss grace as relational, either implicitly or explicitly. Emerson identifies a shift in thinking among biblical peoples away from forgiveness rooted in the cultic practices toward forgiveness as relationship.<sup>29</sup> Also, his focus on fellowship and Communion—forgiveness realized through ritual and through service to others—is a description of relationality evoked by grace (pp. 165-166). Patton’s use of the phrase, “reception into the community of sinners,” hints at his understanding that God’s grace evokes both forgiveness and communal experience (that is, relational grace; p. 176). Jones views grace as relational, for God’s grace prompts God’s forgiveness of humanity for the purpose of building relationships; forgiveness focuses on “the restoration of all human beings to communion—with God, with one another, and with the whole Creation” (p. 124).<sup>30</sup> For Shults, the relationality of grace and forgiveness is summed up in the phrase, sharing in divine grace: “believers are called to face one another in a way that manifests grace as they are faced by the gracious face of God” (Shults, p. 169). For each of these theologians, grace functions not objectively but subjectively—as a divine relational act to restore or nurture relationships.

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<sup>29</sup> E.g., Joel 2:13, “Rend your hearts and not your garments;” Paul’s objection to the Judaizers, “in Christ Jesus neither circumcision or uncircumcision has any value,” Galatians 5:6; Emerson, p. 102.

<sup>30</sup> Jones also writes of a “forgiving communion” that occurs through “God’s abiding presence,” p. 129).

## Grace as Relational: Pastoral Theological Implications

### Grace as Forgiven and Forgiving

Pondering and experiencing grace as relationship can elicit the outlook of “forgiven and forgiving.” We learn to forgive as we recall that we are forgiven. As Countryman writes, we forgive as we acknowledge “*we’re all in this together, whether we like it or not*” (p. 63; author emphasis). Forgiving others and forgiving ourselves arises from the awareness of “sharing in divine grace,” as Shults phrases it. Emerson links the two together inextricably: “the most clearly stated instrument for making forgiveness real is the act of forgiving others” (p. 92).

This idea of “forgiven and forgiving” forms the central assertion of Emerson’s work on forgiveness. He distinguishes between forgiveness as a context and forgiveness as an instrument, believing that the Western church and its theology have characteristically erred by focusing on instrument and ignoring the context.<sup>31</sup> Theology and the church need both in order to understand and experience forgiveness fully. The fullness of forgiveness, as Emerson perceives it, is this: “. . . forgiveness must be experienced as a context and expressed as an instrument by the forgiving of others” (p. 158). To be “forgiven” is to experience forgiveness as a context, the context of divine grace; to be “forgiving” is to express that experience in forgiving others. Emerson’s work thus provides us with a way to explicate the dual nature of forgiveness, this stance of “forgiven and forgiving.”

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<sup>31</sup> See his chapter, “Forgiveness in Search of Reality,” in which he critiques theology in the early centuries, in the Reformation, and in the modern (pre-1960s) era, concluding that theology errs by not maintaining the balance between context and instrumentality, resulting, since the fall of Rome centuries ago, in a focus on contextual forgiveness in the Eastern church and a focus on instrumental forgiveness in the Western church. In modern theology, Emerson continues, Catholicism has maintained the focus on instrumentation, while Protestantism (in Schleiermacher, Ritschl, and Rauschenbusch) never quite achieved its quest to focus on context, pp. 158-161.



Patton offers a nuance to this theological outlook through his emphasis on “more alike than different.” He claims that human forgiveness is a discovery, as opposed to an act or an attitude. The discovery is “that I am more like those who have hurt me than different from them.” This similarity, this “more like,” is a similar “reception into the community of sinners—those affirmed by God as his [sic] children” (p. 176). In other words, we learn to forgive as we recognize that we are like other persons in our common reception into God’s community.<sup>32</sup>

“Forgiven and forgiving” could be another subtitle to Jones’s *Embodying Forgiveness*. For Jones, forgiveness is a craft that Christians continuously learn in response to the God who forgives through the work of Christ. Forgiveness is funded by forgiving-ness. Because God offers forgiveness, we learn to do the same: God calls us “as those who have been forgiven—to seek forgiveness from those we have sinned against and to offer forgiveness to those who have sinned against us” (p. 127).<sup>33</sup>

Thus the “forgiven and forgiving” clause in the Lord’s Prayer, which some readers interpret legalistically (God won’t forgive me unless I forgive others), can be understood in terms of grace in relationship. Patton paraphrases the clause in this way: “Forgive us our sins—*as we are reminded of our relationship to you and to those with whom relationship has been most difficult*” (p. 147). That clause is not a demand on persons but a person’s declaration of, to

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<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, Patton’s chapter six is entitled, “Humanity Forgiven and Forgiving,” in which he discusses the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus’s parables, and the idea of kingdom of God as materials for understanding forgiveness.

<sup>33</sup> Jones also sees the sacraments supporting forgiveness. Baptism and Eucharist remind us of our call as “forgiven and forgiving.” Baptism initiates us yet also reminds us to live into the baptized life in communion with others, who help us learn to appropriate this new life; thus, in baptism we see “the priority of forgiveness to our forgivingness” (p. 174). The eucharist addresses the past, the present, and the future of our forgiveness. It calls to mind Jesus’s death and thus “relocates our lives as forgiven betrayers, as reconciled sinners,” persons whose failed pasts are transfigured by the hopeful future of God’s kingdom, releasing us to live sacrificial and redeeming lives in the present (p. 176).

use Emerson's language again, of the context which elicits our own instrumentation and thus realization of forgiveness (e.g., pp. 163-165).

### Grace Reflects Relational Hope

“Forgiveness, in the company of suffering, is the decisive act of hope” (Tinder, p. 70; in Sandage and Shults, p. 211 n. 65). The notion of hope was neglected in theology in the last 200 years and in the new fields of social sciences<sup>34</sup> but now has witnessed a resurgence, due to theologians such as Moltmann<sup>35</sup> and Pannenberg.<sup>36</sup> Jones links hope to the fulfillment of the kingdom of God, a future expectation that elicits practices leading to “a more human world” (Jones, pp 127, 299). God through Christ intends for persons to be forgiven, which creates a dynamic that pulls future freedom into the present (McFadyen, p. 118; in Sandage & Shults, p. 221, n. 74).<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Lester comments that most theories in the behavioral and social sciences have overlooked “the continuity of past, present, and future in human consciousness” and consider the future “as unknown or unpredictable at best” (Lester, p. 21). The result is psychoanalytic models, social learning models, and personality theories that focus only on the past and the present.

<sup>35</sup> For a brief example of Moltmann's theology, see his DPC&C essay, “Eschatology and Pastoral Care,” pp. 360-362.

<sup>36</sup> Greer (p. 7) contends that the Constantinization of the church and the later German idealism pushed hope out of Western culture. The Enlightenment challenged the traditional view of eschatology, which resulted in an ethical view dominating in the nineteenth century, modified by Weiss in the twentieth century. Barth and Bultmann, in responding to Weiss' view, eliminated the temporal nature of the eschaton. Moltmann sees the promised future as real but asserts that it involves destroying the present. By contrast, Pannenberg believed that eschatology does not destroy but fulfills the present. En route to the *eschaton* the Christian community lives in hopeful expectation of the final consummation of the lordship of God over the entire world, Grenz, p. 190.

<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, the sacraments represent and enhance hope. Baptism signals a transition “to the world of God's kingdom, a world marked by forgiveness, love, and new life;” it is a release from “patterns of sin and evil” so persons “can bear to remember the past in hope for the future” (Jones, pp. 166-167). The eucharist functions in a similar way. It sustains us in the present as an eschatological meal by recalling our past and anticipating the future; moreover, it transforms our past toward a future of hope and thus creates the church (Jones, pp. 175, 176).

We can view hope either as something to anticipate or as something in which to participate, yet I suspect that hope can involve both. That is, anticipation can fund participation. Just as Jones writes of embodying forgiveness, so he writes of embodying hope, exemplified in the lives of persons like Martin Luther King, Jr., Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Maximillian Kolbe, and Theresa of Lisieux, all of whom “absorb sin and evil without passing them on to others.” Hope is also embodied in communities, he further contends, such as Latin American base communities and Catholic Worker Houses, communities who “have refused to give in to the counsels of despair but have . . . witnessed to the redemptive power of God’s forgiving and reconciling love” (p. Jones, p. 299). This ideal to which we aspire is possible as we live into our identity as “citizens of the age to come . . . engaged in building the future” (Countryman, p. 60). Forgiveness is a gift that gives us “the ability to live and die in such a way that we can trust in the triumph of God’s grace,” (Jones, p. 302).

Hope functions in these optimistic ways because it directly addresses the human experience of temporality and thus provides a narrative that propels people into their futures with encouragement. We human creatures live with past tense, present tense, and future tense, and the future aspect of time contributes uniquely to human life. Drawing on Bloch and the theologian Moltmann, Lester asserts that temporality, especially the ability to anticipate and project ourselves into the future, is integral to our lives (Lester, pp. 22-23). This recognition of temporality leads naturally to the idea of story as a helpful way to understand how hope works. The past, present, and future of temporality is like the beginning, middle, and end of a story. We humans “story” into our futures, whether we recognize we are doing so or not. Lester quotes Alasdair MacIntyre: “there is no present which is not informed by some image of the future which always presents itself in the form of *telos*—or a variety of ends or goals—toward which

we are either moving or failing to move in the present (Lester, p. 36).”<sup>38</sup> This *telos* will vary, depending on one’s worldview, but for theologians such as Jones and Shults, it is the hope of God’s eternal presence and love.

Thus, a grace-grounded ethos enhances hope for marital partners. Through various enactments of forgiveness, detailed in the implications section below, partners demonstrate that they believe in a hopeful future for their relationship. They show that they expect their forgiveness enactments to contribute to improved interactions in the future. The forgiveness lets go of the offense of the past, anticipating an improved future, which casts its light back onto their present acts of relating, enhanced by healing emotions and a clear access to ones’ partner.

#### ASSERTION THREE:

##### “FACING EACH OTHER” ILLUSTRATES GRACE AS RELATIONSHIP

The image of “facing each other” provides a rich metaphor for illustrating a forgiveness ethos as relational grace between marital partners. Forgiveness is an ethos, a disposition and /or expectation toward forgiveness oneself and one’s partner. This disposition is grounded in grace and expressed through partners’ consistent availability to each other, an availability richly illustrated in the image of “facing each other.” This image emerges from theological explorations that I detail below. Shults outlines the Scriptures’ use of the facing image, and Volf’ metaphor of embrace enriches the facing image.

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<sup>38</sup> MacIntyre, A (1984). *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* 2d ed. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, pp 215-216; cited in Lester, op cit, p 36.

## “Facing each other”: theological explorations

Shults provides an overview of the facing metaphor in the Scriptures (pp. 106-124). In the Wisdom literature, wise and upright persons long to see God’s face, Psalm 31:16; 67:1-2; 80:3 (p 107). In Hebrew theology, the grace and peace of God’s facing presence is salvific (e.g., Psalm 41:12b; 16:11; 143:7b; pp 107, 108), which explains Moses’ request to see God’s face (Ex. 33:14), even though the divine countenance evokes both delight and terror (pp 110, 111). In the New Testament, Paul compares the glory of Jesus’ face with the glory of Moses’ face, which had to be covered (2 Cor 3:18; 4:6; p 114). At Stephen’s trial, everyone was looking at him intently, “for his face was like the face of an angel” (Acts 6:15; p 117). The presence of the Holy Spirit is linked with the face of God only implicitly in the New Testament (e.g., Romans 5:5; 8:9; 1 Cor 2:10-11; 2 Cor 3:6, 7, 8, 17) but explicitly in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Psalm 51:11; 104:29; 139:7; pp 119-121). Shults’ point is that God’s presence is often symbolized through God’s face, which provides a significant analogy for human relationships in general and for marital partnerships in particular. Later I will draw upon this image of facing to suggest that marital partners can face each in three ways as they enact forgiveness between each other.

I now draw upon Volf’s metaphor of embrace to enrich this biblical image of facing. Volf begins by suggesting that our relationship as fellow human beings, depicted in the metaphor of embrace, is the foundational reality of human experience, transcending any realities of culture; the embrace metaphor expresses the idea that “*the will to give ourselves to others and ‘welcome’ them, to readjust our identities to make space for them, is prior to any judgment about others, except that of identifying them in their humanity*” (p 29; author italics).

Theologically, embrace emerges from the meaning of creation. Volf asserts that God

created human beings to experience life both as separate beings and as relational beings.<sup>39</sup> To be human, we need to learn both *to be* and *to belong*, and a basic tragedy of human living is the tendency to exclude others instead of including them.

There is good news, though, in the crucifixion of Christ, Volf continues, which reveals a self-giving love that challenges humankind's tendency to exclusion. As Volf comments, "What happens to us must be done by us. Having been embraced by God, we must make space for others in ourselves and invite them in—even our enemies" (p. 129).

The parable of the prodigal son illustrates the embrace; in responding to the return of this wayward son and brother, the older brother was angry because he used moral categories. His father, in great contrast, used relational ones.

The act of embrace dramatizes this theology of the self-giving God, Volf contends. It is an integrated movement of four steps (pp. 141-147). Act one is opening the arms, which signals four things: a desire to share with the other, creating space for the other, a fissure to make the space/boundary passable,<sup>40</sup> and an invitation for the other to come. Act two is waiting, which shows respect for the other; the other cannot be coerced or manipulated but seems the freedom to act on its own. Act three is closing the arms, the embrace proper. It requires reciprocity and

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<sup>39</sup> "... creation as described in Genesis exists as an intricate pattern of 'separate-and-bound-together' entities."<sup>39</sup> Human beings need both experiences to be human. The self is not formed by ignoring or rejecting others: "we are who we are not because we are separate from the others who are next to us, but because we are *both* separate *and* connected, *both* distinct *and* related."<sup>39</sup>

<sup>40</sup> I'm not clear on the difference between the second and third aspects of opening the arms; creating space and making a fissure seem to be the same phenomenon to me.

gentleness (respecting each other). Act four is opening the arms again, which shows that the two persons have not merged but are still distinct. Each self is preserved.

The metaphor of embrace resonates closely with the “facing each other” image I propose for this thesis. Theologically, embrace and facing arise from similar places: the meaning of the work of Christ. Volf appeals to “Crucified One” as the model and means for embrace. As I quoted above, “What happens to us must be done by us. Having been embraced by God, we must make space for others in ourselves and invite them in—even our enemies (p. 129). This claim resonates with Jones, who writes, “Those who are forgiven by God must be transformed by that forgiveness into people who embody forgiveness and repentance throughout their lives” (p. 162). Volf’s claim also resonates with Shults’ theology: “As Christian lovers, we can be vulnerable in our relations to our neighbors because our life is infinitely secure in divine love” (p.197).

As a metaphor, the four acts of the embrace, as Volf describes them, delineate four aspects of human relating that marital partnerships can emulate: a desire to share; respect; gentleness and reciprocity; and preserving distinctness. They are acts of facing each other, not turning away from each other. They reveal an ethos of forgiveness grounded in divine grace.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR PASTORAL CARE AND COUNSELING AND FOR MARITAL PARTNERSHIPS

The pastoral theology I have sketched above, while discussed in the broader contexts of faith and ecclesial life, can be usefully employed to draw out implications for the specific context of marital partnership. There are likely several approaches to eliciting and expressing such

implications; my discussion below is only one such approach. It begins with a statement about theological resources for pastoral contexts--that is, for pastoral care, pastoral counseling, and marital partnerships--claiming that, in spite of important differences among these three contexts, this pastoral theology implies the same kinds of perspectives and behavioral outcomes for all three of these contexts. Then the implications discussion turns toward an explicating of three kinds of facing each other that can occur between marital partners: facing that invites, facing that clears away, and facing that enriches. The discussion concludes with a generic example of a perceived offense between marital partners as a way to illustrate the three kinds of facing.

### Theological Resources for Pastoral Contexts

I suggest that this pastoral theology influences forgiveness in the same basic way for marital partnerships, for pastoral care, and for pastoral counseling. That is, this pastoral theology implies elicits the same kinds of perspectives on self and partner and the same kinds of behavioral outcomes, whether the context is pastoral care, pastoral counseling, **or** marital partnerships themselves. Certainly the contexts of these three activities differ: pastoral counseling is the more specialized ministry than pastoral care, and most marital relationships function with little to no direct or sustained pastoral assistance. The desired overall perspectives and outcomes, however, remain the same.

In terms of perspectives, pastoral caregivers can feel confident in their ministry of care; their explicitly pastoral and/or ecclesial context implies an essential theological foundation for providing care for marital partnerships. They offer not marital counseling but a pastoral and theological perspective on relationships, a perspective resourced in part through this grace-



grounded ethos of forgiveness. As discussed above, this ethos of grace involves both a perspective of “forgiven and forgiving” and a perspective of hope for marital relationships.

Similarly, pastoral counselors share in this pastoral theology of forgiveness. No matter what other theories and techniques they might use in their specialized ministry to marital partnerships, they can also draw upon this hopeful grace-grounded ethos to guide them in assessing and assisting marital partners. The pastoral aspects of their ministry can be informed by this pastoral theology of forgiveness.

Marital partners themselves can also share in this pastoral theology as they seek to reflect on and live out their partnership. They might particularly appreciate the three kinds of facing each other, which are discussed in the next section, as ways to understand and recognize useful ways to relate to each other. These three “facings” provide partners with both a theological basis for their forgiveness enactments and specific (though overlapping) images for partnership that guide their concrete efforts.

In terms of behavioral outcomes, they are the same in the broadest sense. That is, marital partners, pastoral caregivers, and pastoral counselors can ask similar questions: how are partners facing each other? Are they growing beyond facing that clears away, probably the easiest facing to understand, to enact facing that invites and facing that enriches? What are they articulating about their growing awareness of these three kinds of facing and how the three kinds affect their partnership?

What might it mean to marital partners, then, and to pastoral caregivers and to pastoral counselors, to view forgiveness as a grace-grounded ethos depicted as facing each other? I offer

an answer by explicating three ways in which marital partners can face each other: facing that invites, facing that cleanses, and facing that enriches. These three ways of facing link theologically to the three aspects of grace discussed above (prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying) and thus provide a framework for elucidating various ways to enact forgiveness. Recalling that forgiveness arises from grace and that God's presence as grace is depicted in Scripture as facing, I suggest that each of these three aspects of grace can represent a distinct kind of facing of one's partner.

Each of these kinds of facing also draws upon a major theological idea from the three assertions that form my pastoral theology of forgiveness. These theological ideas are ethos, forgiven and forgiving, and hope. I do not contend that these theological ideas support the three kinds of facing rigidly and exclusively; I do not limit the applicability of any theological idea. In a sense, all three of these ideas—ethos, forgiven and forgiving, and hope—support all three kinds of facing. I do believe, though, that each one particularly supports one kind: ethos for facing that invites, forgiven and forgiving for facing that clears away, and hope for facing that enriches.

This pastoral theological claim about forgiveness as grace-grounded ethos between marital partners and the theological ideas that attend it—forgiven and forgiving; hope—testify to the particular significance of this outlook on forgiveness. Such a theology supports common notions of forgiveness as decision, event, attitude, process, and change in emotions and attitudes, yet its notion of grace-grounded ethos seems significant. The social sciences offer many insightful and effective ideas and methods which pastoral caregivers, pastoral counselors, and marital partners themselves can employ to good effect. This pastoral theology of forgiveness

provides a distinctly theological resource for partners, counselors, and caregivers with pastoral commitments.

### Forgiveness as Three Kinds of Facing Each Other

#### Facing That Invites (prevenient grace)

Recall that prevenient grace is the grace that “comes before.” It is present even before our awareness of it and “becomes the foundation for our ability to respond to God” (Marshall, p. 62). In terms of forgiveness as a grace-grounded ethos between marital partners, this dynamic describes “facing that invites.” A person consistently presents self to partner, inviting partner to relate. This presenting, this facing, is prevenient forgiveness, for it demonstrates, as God does, a person’s commitment to be relationally available to partner. It serves as the foundation for a person’s ability to respond to and interact with partner. Persons can enact “facing that invites” in myriad ways, seemingly small behaviors that signal the importance of the relationship to one’s partner.

Theologically, this invitation to relate rises out of the ethos of forgiveness. Ethos, as I discussed already, is the characteristic values, beliefs, and practices of a social group. Forgiveness is such a value and belief, with corresponding practices, between marital partners. This value and belief creates an expectation between the partners, an expectation—theologically funded-- that forgiveness will be a regular and also a normal dynamic in the partnership. Both partners understand and accept this expectation. Furthermore, it is an expectation that fosters a readiness to remain relationally available consistently to one’s partner, in spite of and particularly in the midst of the kind of conflict that might suggest forgiveness.

This openness, availability, and respect for partner that characterizes facing that invites occurs not simply as a response to an offense. This behavior characterizes their partnership; facing that invites takes place regularly. It does not wait for an offense to go into action; it is prevenient grace in action: it “comes before” any conflict and is the foundation of the relationship, the ethos of availability.

#### Facing That Clears Away (justifying grace)

Recall that justifying grace is the grace commonly linked to forgiveness of sins, “wiping the slate clean,” remitting the penalty for transgression. In terms of forgiveness as a grace-grounded ethos between marital partners, this dynamic describes “facing that clears away.” A person consistently clears away relational barriers and/or emotional residue from perceived or actual offenses. This dynamic is the act of forgiving partner and oneself for specific behaviors or patterns that have clogged or blocked access to each other. “Facing that clears away” is likely the most common way of understanding forgiveness, whereas I am suggesting that it is only one of three major ways to enact forgiveness between marital partners.

Theologically, facing that clears away rises out of the idea of relational grace, as I discussed in assertion two. This view of grace as relational contributes to a theological anthropology of “forgiven and forgiving,” also discussed in assertion two. Such an anthropology evokes an enduring disposition toward forgiving partner and self. That is, as persons assent to the theological anthropological status of forgiven human beings, they similarly learn to view partner as forgiven, which encourages the disposition to forgive partner. This disposition is a preparedness, a readiness to forgive as one has been forgiven, to share in the divine grace

together. Whereas facing that invites elicits an expectation toward forgiveness, facing that clears away elicits a disposition toward forgiveness.

#### Facing That Enriches (sanctifying grace)

Recall that sanctifying grace is the “what happens now?” grace: the grace that brings forth a life of goodness towards others and self. It is empowering grace that fosters opportunities for spiritual growth and just behavior toward others. In terms of forgiveness as a grace-grounded ethos between marital partners, this dynamic describes “facing that enriches.”

As Jones claims about the church in general, so, too, for marital partners: “there is a ‘craft’ of forgiveness that Christians are called to learn” (p. xii).<sup>41</sup> Partners recognize and live out both reactive and proactive enrichment between themselves: enrichment is reactive when it faces difficulty between partners and manages it, finding the growth inherent in the struggle. Enrichment is proactive when partners face each other in rest, relaxing, and sharing vision, thoughts, feelings, and humor. “Facing that enriches” sees marriage as a process and a pilgrimage,<sup>42</sup> a journey of shared and committed<sup>43</sup> life together.

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<sup>41</sup> Jones explicates his meaning of the craft of forgiveness, pp. 225-239).

<sup>42</sup> Wynn writes, “. . . a reawakened theology has been moving to view Christian marriage more in interpersonal than in functional terms. This had enabled couples to see their marriages as a process of growing relationship, their failures as potentially forgivable, and their life together as pilgrimage” (DPC&C, p. 678).

<sup>43</sup> MacQuarrie’s essay on commitment, “the acceptance of a continuing obligation to pursue some goal or policy of action” (p. 141), is particularly instructive. Theologically, commitment mirrors the “archetypal” commitment “not only to Israel but to the whole creation” (MacQuarrie, p. 151). God’s self-commitment to the world in creation and in the incarnation “bring a new hopefulness into the situation, in spite of all the fallibility of our human nature,” a hopefulness strengthened by God’s grace (MacQuarrie, pp. 152, 153). Thus, vows of commitment (e.g., baptism, marriage, and ordination) occur “in a context of grace—ultimately, the grace of God,” but also the supporting grace of the church (MacQuarrie, p. 153). Commitments are not heroic autonomous acts, then, but are responses “to a whole complex web of relations that evoke and then sustain his [*sic*] commitment” (MacQuarrie, p. 154).

Theologically, facing that enriches rises out of hope. Through various enactments of forgiveness, partners demonstrate that they believe in a hopeful future for their relationship. They show that they expect their forgiveness enactments to contribute to improved interactions, greater understanding, and deeper connection in the future. The forgiveness of facing that enriches involves all three aspects of human temporality: past, present, and future. It is not simply a letting go of the offense of the past; it is also an anticipating of an improved future, and this anticipation casts its light back onto their present acts of relating, enhanced by healing emotions and a clear access to ones' partner. This temporal-influencing hope helps create the vision of commitment<sup>44</sup> to partnership as pilgrimage, in which change, setback, surprise, disappointment, and struggle all occur against a backdrop of purpose and mutual growth. This forgiveness is facing that enriches.

#### Facing Each Other: A Generic Example

The following generic example demonstrates how the facing image can be used to understand forgiveness dynamics between marital partners. The example is not intended to be comprehensive but merely to provide samples of the kinds of internal and interactional processes which could occur as partners engage forgiveness.

A husband might become angry about a perceived offense from his wife. How will he respond? If the husband “gives her the silent treatment,” he is choosing not to face her in any

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<sup>44</sup> We can trace MacQuarrie's three aspects of commitment ( self-forming, self-transcending, and self-limiting) in the relationship of marriage. The commitment of marriage helps form the self of each partner “probably more than any other” commitment (p.155). Marriage helps transcend oneself by trading the solitary life for a special kind of communal one that reaches beyond itself into the families (and any progeny) of both persons. Marriage also involves limiting oneself, renouncing other such intimate relationships and requiring personal resources (e.g., time, energy, attention) that cannot go elsewhere.

way, a choice that damages the partnership. If he speaks to her but does so with blaming, humiliation, threats, etc., he is also choosing not to face her, even though he might be literally looking at her, because, when there is no respect for partner, there is no facing.

With facing that invites, he continues to relate to her respectfully even if he might not think he is ready to forgive her. Similarly, he could decide that he wants to forgive her but recognizes that some time and processing needs to occur in order for the matter to be resolved for him. The decision about forgiving this perceived offense is not the decision he makes with facing that invites; forgiving the discrete offense involves facing that clears away. Rather, the decision here is facing that invites, a decision to be consistently available to partner relationally, based on his valuing (from their marital ethos) of forgiveness.

His nonverbal behavior communicates such availability and openness to his partner. That is, an ethos of forgiveness, as an attitude or disposition toward expecting the need to forgive oneself and one's partner, enhances one's tone of voice, facial expression, bodily posture, physical movements, and other nonverbal behaviors. In tense moments between partners, nonverbal behaviors can be negative: one's voice sounding irritated and/or defensive, one's face showing a glare or displeasure; one's body stiff or turned away from partner. In marked contrast, a forgiveness ethos of facing can elicit a calm and inviting tone of voice, facial expression, and bodily posture.

Thus through nonverbal behavior, which could sometimes include verbal behavior, too, he continues to stay connected to partner, showing interest and respect of her in spite of a perceived offense. He recalls their ethos, the valued belief that offenses and perceived offenses will regularly occur in their partnership, thinking something like, "Forgiveness is important to us.

It's a big part of how we relate to each other. So, I won't let a hurt like this interfere with our relationship."

Facing that clears away would occur if and when the husband enacts a forgiveness process, when he lets go of the resentment and revenge that attends his perception of an offense. This facing that clears away can occur in two ways, both intrapsychically (within himself) and interpersonally, in which he somehow communicates to her—verbally and/or nonverbally; implicitly and/or explicitly-- that he perceived an offense and has forgiven it. He believes that many minor perceived offenses can be forgiven without explicitly telling one's partner about it.

This enactment of facing that clears away occurs as he ponders their shared status as "forgiven and forgiving." He recognizes not only that his partner will and does offend at times but that he, too, offends her regularly. He views neither one of them as morally and/or spiritually superior to the other; they share in divine grace. He might say something like, "I want to work at letting go of my resentment here, because I know that God forgives me when I do wrong. What's good for me is certainly good for her. I need to pass on the grace."

In this situation, he might also eventually perceive the incident of alleged offense differently than his first perception. He might recognize that no offense occurred, that a simple difference of opinion has surfaced. Or he might recognize that an offense did occur, and he was the offender! In this case, he has the opportunity to forgive himself and also to apologize to his partner, if he believes the nature of the incident warrants an apology. The tables are turned, so to speak: in seeing himself as offender, any annoyance he felt toward her turns toward him, which gives him a chance to be reminded once again that he forgives her because he, too, is forgiven.



These moments of awareness of personal offense and failure help partners by evoking the humility inherent in the “forgiven and forgiving” theology that funds facing that clears away.

Facing that enriches occurs as such incidents like this one accumulate and are used by partners to enhance growth in their partnership. The husband reflects on his initial and later perceptions of the incident in light of their shared ethos of forgiveness (facing that invites) and their shared experiences with discrete actions/processes of forgiveness (facing that clears away). In facing that enriches, the theological idea of hope functions to provide him with a temporal view of not only this one incident but of the potentially positive meanings of all similar incidents. He can say to himself something like, “This incident is just one of many on our journey through life together. Both of us will hurt each other at times, in big and small ways, on purpose and unintentionally. But we learn from our mistakes, learn to appreciate and respect each other in our weakness and in our strength. Our forgiveness helps us to grow, both as individuals and in our relationship.” This reflection addresses the past, the present, and the future of this partnership, and does so with hopefulness, the hopefulness elicited by forgiving one another.

One particularly challenging scenario for the facing of forgiveness occurs when the wife apologizes before the husband has decided to forgive or to enact a forgiveness process—facing that clears away. How will he respond? What effect will the apology have on him? Hopefully, the apology will enhance his enactments of facing that invites: remaining available relationally to his wife, even when he does not feel ready to enact facing that clears away. The apology might also provide a stark contrast to his avoidance of facing her, which, depending of the severity of avoidance, becomes itself an offense toward her.

In such a scenario, the husband would benefit from reflecting on, either explicitly or implicitly, the three theological ideas, all rooted in divine grace, which fund the three kinds of facing: ethos, forgiven and forgiving, and hope. The idea of ethos reminds him that divine grace imbues their partnership, so that they share that divine grace with each other. Thus he values their partnership, even while expecting to be offended by and to offend her, so facing that invites becomes possible. Divine grace also evokes the theological idea of forgiven and forgiving. The husband can recall that neither partner is morally superior to the other; the grace they have freely received is the grace that they freely give, so facing that clears away becomes possible. Divine grace also leads to hope, which positively affects the past, the present, and the future of their partnership. He can see beyond his current anger to letting go of resentment and revenge, which fosters healing and growth for him and for their partnership and makes possible the facing that enriches.

This scenario is a sample of the way that the three kinds of facing might function for a partner who perceives an offense. The scenario is not comprehensive but simply suggests some possible facing outcomes and the theology that evokes them.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis has attempted to provide a pastoral theology of forgiveness for marital partnerships. Because of their intensely relational nature, forgiveness is a basic dynamic in the ongoing maintenance and flourishing of these partnerships. Forgiveness is commonly understood as a decision, an event, a process, and a change in emotions evoked through the letting go of resentment and revenge. I have claimed that a pastoral theology of forgiveness can

view forgiveness in these ways but also view it as a grace-grounded ethos depicted as facing each other.

I presented my thesis in three sections, beginning with a section discussing three of the main concepts of my proposal: forgiveness, ethos, and grace. For forgiveness, I provided a brief overview and definitions from social sciences then noted that theologians and pastoral theologians contribute the important theological perspective of divine/redemptive forgiveness, a view not inherent in social sciences. For ethos, I cited a working definition of ethos as the characteristic disposition of a social group and then claimed that this definition of ethos can be used as one lens for viewing the relationship of marital partners. I then noted a writer each from theology and from pastoral theology who express the idea, either implicitly or explicitly, that forgiveness is an ethos, suggesting that forgiveness can function as an ethos for marital partners. For grace, I asserted that a newer understanding of the relational (subjective) nature of grace bypasses the traditional problems created by an objective understanding. I also proposed that John Wesley's theology of grace (as prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying) can be appropriated for a relational view of grace symbolized in the facing metaphor, which I detailed later.

In the second section, I developed my proposal with three assertions, which I contended follow each other in a logical and progressive way. First, I began with biblical covenant as ethos, in order to describe broadly my proposal about how forgiveness functions in marital partnerships; forgiveness functions as an ethos. Second, I moved to ethos as grace-in-relationship, because the biblical notion of covenant inherently involves grace, and grace inherently involves relationship rather than some kind of action upon an object. That is, God's offer of grace is an offer to relate to God's creatures in love. Third, I finished with the facing

metaphor as the practical yet theological depiction of grace-grounded forgiveness in marital partnerships.

I devoted the third section to implications of this pastoral theology of forgiveness for three basic pastoral contexts: marital partnerships themselves, pastoral care, and pastoral counseling. I claimed that, in spite of important differences among these three contexts, this pastoral theology implies the same kinds of perspectives and behavioral outcomes for all three of these contexts. Then I described three applications of the facing metaphor to indicate three kinds of facing each other—that is, three kinds of forgiveness—that can occur between marital partners: facing that invites, facing that clears away, and facing that enriches. The discussion concludes with an extended generic example of a perceived offense between marital partners as a way to illustrate the three kinds of facing.

I believe that this thesis contributes to a pastoral theology of forgiveness between marital partners in three interrelated ways. Most importantly, it offers an explicitly theological outlook for assessing forgiveness dynamics between marital partners. This outlook can assist persons as they explore their own views of and options for forgiveness with partners. This outlook can also assist caregivers, who often employ various social science theories and methods, whether implicitly or explicitly, in performing their ministries. This pastoral theology does not compete with social science but affirms caregivers' theological heritage by pointing to the distinctly theological vantage point of forgiveness as a grace-grounded ethos.

A second contribution of this pastoral theology of forgiveness is its potential for funding current pastoral and marital practices of forgiveness. For instance, partners and caregivers alike can reflect on the options and potential for forgiveness through asking questions such as, “What

do the careseekers/partner/I seem to understand and believe about the nature of forgiveness?”

“How do they/I use any theological views? Do these views restrain or help liberate them/me?”

In what ways do they/I face partner? How are/am they/I doing with recognizing not only the well-known kind of facing (forgiveness)--facing that clears away--to including the other two, facing that invites and facing that enriches?”

A third contribution is this pastoral theology’s potential to stimulate further theological explorations in forgiveness among marital partners. Much more work needs to be done to explore and develop fully a pastoral theology of forgiveness between marital partners. The work would involve both theological and social science ideas and research. The latter has received little attention in this thesis due to space limitations. I offer below a brief sketch of several topics that deserve discussion in other projects.

### Explorations for Social Science

An outlook of “forgiven and forgiving” might correlate with the psychological notions of appraisal, empathy, and the recent notion of transformative processes in marriage.<sup>45</sup> Also, appraisal theory, because it addresses emotions, relates to the experience of anger, which has not been addressed but is very much a part of experiences in which forgiveness is an option.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, Bowen’s concept of differentiation provides a way to understand how forgiveness

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<sup>45</sup> E.g., Scherer, K.R., Schorr, A., & Johnstone, T. (2001). *Appraisal Processes in Emotions: Theory, Methods, Research*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Cook, CJ (2006). “Empathy: A Bridge Between Worlds, A Landscape of Care.” *Journal of Family Ministry* 20:1 (Spr 06):29-38; Fincham, FD, Stanley, SM, & Beach, SRH (2007). “Transformative Processes in Marriage: An Analysis of Emerging Trends.” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 69:2, 275-292.

<sup>46</sup> E.g., Saussy, C (1995), *The Gift of Anger: A Call to Faithful Action*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox; Lester, AD (2003), *The Angry Christian: A Theology for Care and Counseling*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox.

might function relationally—by lowering anxiety to increase non-anxious presence.<sup>47</sup> John Gottman’s marital therapy uses the metaphor of “turning away” and “turning toward” to describe partners’ movements. This metaphor resonates well with “facing each other” and deserves exploration.<sup>48</sup>

### Explorations for Pastoral Theology

*Accountability.* A pastoral theology of forgiveness includes addressing the important place of accountability. Smith and Riedel-Pfaefflin write, “When therapy and/or pastoral care fail to deal with power, love and justice, it will also fail to adequately deal with forgiveness” (p. 295). These authors well express the best possible outcome for interpersonal, institutional, and community offenses. Challenging the many ways that power is abused must remain a critical part of pastoral theology, care, and counseling.<sup>49</sup>

Of particular concern is the distressing occurrence of domestic violence, which remains a significant abuse of power that must be challenged and stopped. Forgiveness is a complex matter in this context, for abused partners who forgive their abusive partner often return to them in a chronic cycle of violence, contrition, calm, and escalation to repeated violence. How can the abused partner respond to any apparent contrition (repentance?) from the abuser without

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<sup>47</sup> E.g., Kerr, ME, & Bowen, M (1988), *Family Evaluation: An Approach Based on Bowen Theory*, New York: WW Norton; Bartle-Haring, S, & Probst, D (2004), “A Test of Bowen Theory: Emotional Reactivity and Psychological Distress in a Clinical Sample,” *American Journal of Family Therapy* 32:5, 419-435.

<sup>48</sup> See Gottman, JM (1999). *The Marriage Clinic: A Scientifically-Based Marital Therapy*. New York: WW Norton; Gottman, JM (2001). *Marital Therapy: A Research-Based Approach. Clinician’s Manual*. Seattle, WA: The Gottman Institute.

<sup>49</sup> Jones writes, “. . . while I challenge the assumption that forgiveness does not involve accountability, I also insist that we can neither make repentance a prerequisite for forgiveness nor separate forgiveness from our understandings of justice” (p. xi).

endangering herself or her children further? For instance, Marshall writes that some relationships are harmful to us, our families, or our communities; persons have the option” to recognize these, grieve them, and move away from them” (2005, p. 49).

*Justice.* Justice is related to accountability but deserves its own focus. The Scriptures, particularly the Hebrew Bible, involve a strong and consistent plea for justice for the marginalized and oppressed. Justice thus is not merely a social concern but a theological one as well.<sup>50</sup> For instance, Jones writes, in the context of responding to the question, Is violence the master of us all, states that forgiveness functions as “an innovative gesture . . . that breaks apart those habits and forces that diminish and destroy” (p. 90). How does forgiveness affect justice, though? Some might think forgiveness nullifies justice, but Pope John Paul II’s forgiveness of his would-be assassin in his prison cell demonstrates that forgiveness and justice can function simultaneously.

*Repentance.* Repentance is significant in the biblical texts. For divine forgiveness, “our sins are covered over, atoned for, or released from debt by God, but humans are asked to be honest and forthright in approaching God” (Marshall, 2005, p. 19); that is, humans are asked to repent. Jones writes that, in contrast to the ancient Jewish view that repentance occurs before forgiveness, Christians assume “that repentance will become an indispensable component of the habit of forgiveness” (p. 121).<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> E.g., see Marshall, pp. 13-34. Justice, as well as reconciliation and wholeness, is both a biblical theme and a theological insight.

<sup>51</sup> Jones is a theologian, not a pastoral theologian; his view is distinct from some pastoral theologians, such as Marshall, Fortune, et al.

Important questions emerge: for instance, does repentance place a demand on the offended person to forgive? Can repentance occur without forgiveness? Or can forgiveness occur without repentance (e.g., psychologist Enright would say so)? Jones writes of “contingent reasons” in which “it may not be possible fully to forgive and be reconciled;” those reasons include an unwillingness to repent (Jones, p. 20).

*Reconciliation.* Forgiveness is essential to reconciliation, even though it will not always lead to reconciliation; for instance, as Coyle notes, Enright’s often-cited model<sup>52</sup> does not involve reconciliation (Coyle, p. 98). Reconciliation is a core theological theme (e.g., Marshall, pp. 13-34). For pastoral theologian Augsburg, the purpose of forgiveness is reconciliation. He contends that as shame heals, a person’s capacity for empathy increases. Empathy leads to mercy and then to “a profound passion for justice, social transformation, and ultimately reconciliation” (p. 100). Is reconciliation always needed, though? Again the context of domestic violence calls for nuanced responses. Coyle, for instance, believes that abuse victims could benefit psychologically from forgiving their abusers without reconciling with them (Coyle, p. 104).

*Shame and Guilt.* Forgiveness has been traditionally linked with guilt, but in recent years the importance of shame has received much needed attention. Guilt reflects a person’s sense of *doing* wrong, whereas shame reflects a person’s sense of *being* wrong, of facing a barrier between oneself and others, including God, “because at the very core of our being, we always feel as if we are unworthy of anything good” (Marshall, p. 61). Both Patton and Albers believe

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<sup>52</sup> Enright’s model involves 20 discrete units divided into four major phases: the uncovering phase, the decision phase, the work phase, and the outcome or deepening phase.



that persons who have internalized shame need to experience acceptance before they are able to address their guilt spiritually and thus allow forgiveness to remove their guilt.<sup>53</sup>

My wish is that this thesis will contribute constructively to the ongoing conversations about the importance of forgiveness in pastoral theology, particularly as that theology influences marital partnerships and the pastoral care and counseling of those partnerships.

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<sup>53</sup> Patton writes, “Shame is an issue which involves the whole self and its condition. The same is true of human forgiveness. . . . But we can find forgiving in ourselves only when we discover our relationship to one who calls us out of our hiding places” (p. 62). Albers writes, “People with shame-based identities cannot appropriate the gift of forgiveness because they cannot believe it is for them. They need first to experience God’s grace as unconditional acceptance. The core of the gospel is grace, understood as acceptance for shame and forgiveness for guilt” (p. 347). Marshall (p. 63) echoes this important distinction. For an important counterpoint, see McNish: “the Christ event is about our redemption from shame rather than being about atonement for sin” (p. 193).

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