

## In the Age of Terror, Is Reconciliation Possible?

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### Opening Scripture

**Leviticus 24:19-21:** <sup>19</sup> If anyone injures his neighbor, whatever he has done must be done to him: <sup>20</sup> fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. As he has injured the other, so he is to be injured. <sup>21</sup>

**Matthew 5:38-48:** <sup>38</sup> "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.'<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>39</sup> But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.

<sup>40</sup> And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. <sup>41</sup> If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. <sup>42</sup> Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

<sup>43</sup> "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor<sup>[a]</sup> and hate your enemy.'<sup>44</sup> But I tell you: Love your enemies<sup>[b]</sup> and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup> that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. <sup>46</sup> If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? <sup>47</sup> And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? <sup>48</sup> Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

### Narrative

One of the most difficult conflicts for any human being to resolve is the difference between the statements “*eye for eye, and tooth for tooth*” and the later assertion that “*You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth. 'But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.'*” It seems to defy all human instinct to refrain from retaliation. In the affairs of individuals or nations, this does not seem to be a common practice!

It is a paradox that has been argued out in essentially every religion. On the face of it the logic is elementary: in a dispute in which each side thinks they have the right, retaliation simply leads to further retaliation in an unending cycle of violence. Mohandas Gandhi summed this up neatly with his statement “*An eye for eye only ends up making the whole world blind.*”

Perhaps it is understandable that there is so much pessimism over the state of human affairs today. We find ourselves mired in a struggle in Iraq that seems to have no solution. Sectarian violence has reached the point of near civil war as Sunnis and Shiite vie for power. The recent war between Israel and Lebanon “ended,” for now, with militants empowered and feelings hardened on both sides. In Lebanon, the war exacerbated tensions between Christians, Druze, Sunni, and Shiite. Centuries old (even millennium old) animosities erupt in spasms of daily violence -both in this part of the world and many others.



One is tempted to ask that plaintive question: “Can’t we all just get along?”

Sadly, the answer seems to be “No.”

Must history be destiny? One must hope not.

This does not at all mean that one should not value and understand history. On the contrary, understanding the history is often the key to enabling change. It means rather that one cannot allow oneself to be mired in history and to assume that history is destiny. Yes, Santayana did say that “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it,” but he told only half the story. I would assert that those who allow themselves to be bogged down by history are doomed to failure. The truth of the negative side of that statement is amply born out by the world’s experiences in Ireland, the former Yugoslavia, the Middle East, Kashmir, and many other places.

However the positive side is demonstrated by the process of Truth and Reconciliation and the end of apartheid in South Africa, the rapid modernization of China, and the ability of Germany to face squarely the horrors of their past behavior and move to a new and very different society. In none of these examples has history been fully overcome, but in the latter cases, these countries have moved far beyond where anyone might have expected them to come. First, we face our history, and then we transcend it.

The example of the end of apartheid in South Africa has got to be one of the most impressive examples of overcoming history. I am no Pollyanna. I recognize just how much is yet to be done, but the story of Nelson Mandela’s leadership at the end of apartheid is an inspiring example.

Apartheid was a brutal policy of separation of the races that was enforced with violence. Nelson Mandela, Ahmed Kathrada, and many others were imprisoned for decades for their resistance. For Mandela it was 27 years. During their imprisonment they were rarely allowed to see their families and never officially allowed to see ANY children.

Apartheid fell in the 1990’s and many people expected a bloodbath of retribution. Instead we got a systematic system of “Truth and Reconciliation.”



Earlier this year, I had the opportunity to lead a delegation to South Africa to meet with Mandela and to confer honorary degrees upon him and his wife. The purpose of the trip was to support and enhance the relationship between the University of Massachusetts and South Africa. This relationship has deep roots and multiple aspects. Mandela’s daughter attended UMass. We have students there working on health issues in the poverty-stricken townships. We have nurses there training African nurses to work in the overwhelmed health care system. We are working on an AIDS vaccine. Our doctors developed the Nevirapine treatments that prevent transmission of HIV from mother to child. One of our faculty members has devoted much of his professional

career to a chronicle of the fall of apartheid with yearly interviews of participants from all sides of the conflict – from prison to Presidency.

We presented the honorary degree to Nelson Mandela and his wife Graca Machel at the Mandela Foundation in Johannesburg, South Africa. They were incredibly warm and friendly. They had just flown in from Mozambique, and we were already at the Mandela Center in Johannesburg when they arrived. Judi and I greeted them in the lobby, and then I said I had a surprise for them. I told him that I knew that he had always felt deprived during his imprisonment since he was not allowed to see children for 27 years! Thus, I had brought two of my own to share with him.



I then introduced John and Jessica. He loved the entire idea. Shaking John's hand, he observed that when he came in the door, he had "thought that John was the President!" John, uncharacteristically decked out in a suit and tie, got a kick out of that. Graca then bent down and took Jessica's face in her two hands and kindly kissed her on the head.

In his acceptance remarks, Mr. Mandela referred to the contribution made by UMass toward addressing South Africa's social challenges, especially in the fields of HIV/AIDS, youth education and technology. He also thanked the University for undertaking important historical work about the freedom struggle.



These kinds of ceremonies are quite formal, and this particular ceremony was besieged by the press since they had not seen Nelson Mandela for some time. Even the U.S. Consulate General was there and anxious for us to introduce him to Nelson Mandela. Nelson and Graca Machel are so very gracious, kind and unassuming. As Mandela and I conversed prior to the ceremony, he apologized for his "weakness in the use of the English language." I laughed in surprise and told him that I had read all of his books and listened to many of his speeches and I was "sure that he spoke English better than I."

While Mandela was physically frail, he was mentally very sharp and quick, with a wonderful sense of humor.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, with the world's press looking on and the cameras flashing, Mandela held up us hand and said "*Wait a minute! Wait a minute! Send the children up here to be in the picture with me.*" And with that he motioned John and Jessica to come forward onto the stage. The next day on the first page of the "World" section of the Boston Globe, there was the picture of Nelson Mandela and Graca Machel with their arms around John and Jessica.

A few days before, we made the visit to Robben Island, the prison where he spent so much time, with Ahmed Kathrada and his former prison guard Christos, I had had a chance to stand in both Mandela's and Kathrada's cells. Kathrada showed me how he would stand on his table, and then pull himself up to a tiny window high in his cell. All that work was just to catch a glimpse of the warder's (prison guard's) children who played outside the walls there. Imagine that, the prisoner and his guard standing arm and arm in the cell and remembering the decades spent in prison.



After we toured the prison, we sat in the yard on the spot where the famous picture of Nelson Mandela was taken during his imprisonment there - a picture taken to prove to the world that he was being well treated. I asked Kathrada: *“Kathy, how is it that you could be imprisoned here for 27 years, mistreated, even tortured, and your wife Barbara Hogan was treated even more savagely; and then you emerged from jail and were thinking about reconciliation rather than retribution? How could you do that?”*

*Oh Jack, that was easy,”* he replied, *“we had already decided that back in 1955 when we wrote the Freedom Charter. All we wanted was freedom, a non-racial society and, one person one vote.”*

Of course, I did not see that as easy at all, and I doubt that anyone else with us did. I pressed him a bit further on that, and he observed that perhaps the length of their imprisonment might have actually helped in that regard. *“Why?”* I asked. He replied that they had had to find methods of communicating and educating themselves and rededicating themselves to their founding principles. By the time they were released they had had decades to argue out issues like retribution versus reconciliation and black rule versus a non-racial society.

I asked Nelson Mandela that same question and got almost exactly the same response. One of his most famous quotes is *“If you want to make peace with your enemy, you have to work with your enemy. Then he becomes your partner.”*

Just this past week, I saw a new book on Mandela done by him and the others. They sent us an early copy with a very nice inscription. There, in the forward I saw that, apparently, I was not the only one to ask this question. President Clinton asked Mandela: *“I know that you are a great man. You invited your jailers to your inauguration. You put your persecutors in the*



*government. But tell me the truth. Weren't you really angry all over again?" Nelson Mandela replied: "Yes, I was angry. And I was a little afraid. After all, I'd not been free in so long. But, when I felt the anger well up inside of me, I realized that if I hated them after I got outside that gate, then they would still have me." Then he smiled and said, "But, I wanted to be free, and so I let it go."*

How did they do it?

There was one additional event that occurred during my visit that reinforced the feeling that there is indeed a possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation to overcome animosities.

We went to visit Linda Biehl at the Amy Biehl foundation. I had previously met Linda here in the U.S. Her daughter, Amy, a California university student, had gone to South Africa near the end of apartheid to help with the formation of a new society. She was savagely beaten to death by a mob of youths aligned with the Pan-African movement – a group that believed that all whites should be driven from Africa. This philosophy was in marked contrast to the non-racial society advocated by Nelson Mandela and African National Congress.

Linda took us to the place her daughter had died, and we were accompanied by one of her killers, who now works at the Biehl Foundation along with another of the killers. The story of how these two went to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and were there confronted by the Biehls and their own deed, is one of the most moving parts of the video "A Long Night's Journey into Day," that chronicles some stories of the Commission.



Today Linda Biehl continues her work in the poverty stricken and disease-ridden townships - doing the work that she and her late husband Peter began after her daughter's death. Working alongside them are two of the killers, who today consider the Biehls to be like parents to them.

While we could admire her ability to forgive, many of us worried that we would not have the same capacity as Linda to not only forgive, but to work together on a daily basis with the repentant killers.

These are examples that give us hope. If the prisoner can forgive his guards. If the mother can forgive her daughter's killer. If the oppressed can forgive their oppressors, then why cannot we see a path to reconciliation for Israel and Lebanon, for Sunni and Shi'ite, for Islam and the West?



Unfortunately, it is never easy. One of our professors arranged for leaders of the Irish Protestant and Catholic factions to come to South Africa during a period of peak tension to hear Mandela, Kathrada, and others tell the story of reconciliation. Mandela shook his head in despair as he related how the two factions refused to sit together with him. He had to meet them on two separate occasions! “*Jack,*” he said, “*We cannot tell them how to settle their differences. We can only tell our story and hope that they can learn from it.*”

The admonition in Matthew 43 may be one of the most difficult to follow: You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get?

History is not encouraging, but there are enough examples of reconciliation to give us hope and inspire the world to keep on trying. When you feel that anger welling up inside of you, no matter what the cause, remember Mandela's words: “*But, I wanted to be free, and so I let it go.*”

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### Scripture References

**Old Testament** Exodus 21:24; Lev. 24:20; Deut. 19:21

**Exodus 21:23-25:** <sup>23</sup> But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, <sup>24</sup> eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, <sup>25</sup> burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.

**Leviticus 24:19-21:** <sup>19</sup> If anyone injures his neighbor, whatever he has done must be done to him: <sup>20</sup> fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. As he has injured the other, so he is to be injured. <sup>21</sup>

**Deuteronomy 19:21** <sup>21</sup> Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

**Matthew 5:38-48:** <sup>38</sup>"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.'<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>39</sup>But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. <sup>40</sup>And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. <sup>41</sup>If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. <sup>42</sup>Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

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