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ARTICLE DE RECHERCHE

Efficacité du pardon dans la construction sociale

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Résumé

Cet article est une réflexion qui vise à discuter de la finalité du pardon dans une construction sociale et ainsi que de son efficacité. L'article se penchera également sur la perception que l'action du pardon a sur la victime ainsi que sur l'agresseur. Enfin, il abordera également les implications sociales de l'action du pardon.

Mots-clés : Pardon, perception, et structure sociale.

Abstract

This reflection paper aims to discuss the purpose of forgiveness in a social construct and its effectiveness. The paper will also look at the perception that the action of forgiveness has on the victim as well as on the perpetrator. Finally, it will also discuss the social implications of the action of forgiveness.

Keywords: Forgiveness, perception, and Social construct.

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Introduction

In general, forgiveness can be defined as "a process of letting go of the past and opening to the future..... it is done to free oneself from unhealthy pain, anger, and shame" (Cloke, 2001, p. 94). For Fairchild, "forgiveness is a choice we make through a decision of our will, motivated by obedience to God and his command to forgive" (Fairchild, About.com). Garrard and McNaughton (2003) indicate, "In analyses of the nature of forgiveness three factors are frequently mentioned. First, forgiveness involves the suspension or overcoming of hostile feelings towards the wrongdoer. Second, it involves or fosters reconciliation and restoration of relationships. Third, forgiveness involves, in some sense, the removal or bracketing off of the wrong, or of the guilt created by the wrong wiping clean of the slate". The first two considerations make forgiveness a social obligation sourced within the social construct. We are obligated to forgive. We are obligated by fear for our good and religion/our God/our faith to forgive. This awareness leaves the idea that the only time we are "free" of worries, is when we obey these obligations. Thus, putting the burden of choice between the pressure to forgive and vengeance exclusively on the victim's side. Nevertheless, the perception created by forgiveness is that when we forgive, we feel good about ourselves and that the action of forgiveness empowers us. On the other hand, however, the oppressor, the perpetrator, the person who caused the pain, and who expects to see his /her action forgiven, shares the same perception: he will be forgiven either by the setting of social construct or by the expected behavior of good Christian. When this is the case, people would then act with this expectation to be forgiven in mind. In our view, certain behaviors should not be forgiven. Especially when the "fear" of forsaken God is the main reason leading to forgiveness. During slavery, for example, slaves utilized religion as a way to forgive the wrongdoing of the slave masters. In social construct, the analysis of the behavior leading to an offense, the rationale of the offender should be seriously taken into account. We think for serious offenses, forgiveness should not be granted until the wrongdoer has at least repented and apologized, and perhaps offered reparation and evidence of reformation. Forgiveness is not given rather it should be granted on merit or it should be deserved. Otherwise, how could it be established that the wrongdoing behavior is not going to be recidivistic? Social behavior should respond to the requirements of the social construct. In Congolese culture, for example, rape brings

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shame in the person of the victim as well as in the family of the victim. Young women who have been raped are regarded with less respect because the victim in this case is always the first to be blamed [Congolese social construct]. Subsequently, in this mandominated society, social rules or cultural constructs are formatted in a way that cases like rape are not usually reported. Nonetheless, when listening to the narrative of these victims of rape, the first impression that one has is that they forgive their rapists because they believe that "one day, by His judgment, God will avenge them". This was also the rationale, the same mental process, by African Americans in earlier stages of slavery. God was supposed to always reward the victims and punish the culprit. For them, churches were the place of togetherness with God as they worshiped and submitted their grief. But in reality, the "fear factor" built within the social structure would be the main reason to bracket from reporting such a case of rape [social shame] or wrongdoing of the slave master [the social repercussion of such a report].

Literature review

Throughout the literature, there have been a few common threads woven into religious and neo-religious discussions taking place in the public and academic forum; that there is a kernel of goodness in the offender that bears consideration by a moral and virtuous jury. This kernel grows into a tree of morality and virtues gamed toward letting go of the need for vengeance (Freud, 1986). It is fed with what would appear later simply as a moral argument that hides the true meaning of the act of forgiveness as a calculated move toward social positioning on the part of the "moral actor." It is much more than simply separating a painful past and looking forward to a hopeful and productive future' as described by Pruitt and Kim (1983). The sociologist Georg Simmel (1964) once wrote, "Forgiveness possesses magical powers that rationally are not comprehensible." As a sociologist he knew that forgiveness was something that served as a major element in group cohesion but at the same time was disinclined to remove it from the realm of the mythological. Indeed, throughout the writings of many academic disciplines forgiveness has been relegated to the role of a competitor in some kind of moral deistic contest between good and evil with humanity attempting to stay in God's grace by prevailing in contests of virtuous action. St. Augustine reflected on the notion of forgiveness as a means for a victim to split the emotion of vengeance off of the utility of human function by hating the sin while loving the sinner as there was still an intrinsic worth equated to the sinner (Bens, 1996; Pruitt and Kim, 1983). Gingel (1974) goes so far as to equate humanity as a collection of individual moral agents, made in the image of God, who acts with 'perfect logical propriety' in granting a level of absolution to an offender heretofore restricted historically to the creator. They are, however, limited in their earthly endeavor to forgive only those from under whose hand they have suffered an offense, being unable to act as a proxy for others who have been so victimized by the same or other offenders. Group forgiveness therefore would be morally problematic unless the victim was at the mercy of that same offending group.

Message of forgiveness

Forgiveness creates instances in which a young woman has to deny being raped simply because she believed then that this was the only shameless way she has to "let go of that past part of her life". This kind of message creates a perception of "no wrongdoing" in the mind of the rapist who measures his action by the level of acceptance by the victim through the action of forgiveness, which is in this case a socially constructed obligation through a culture of "self blame and shame". In normal cases, this victim of rape could adopt one of the two classic responses, which are "avoidance and revenge". It means seeking distance from the transgressor or opportunities to harm the transgressor in kind. In the analysis of Stephanie Credle, looking at this concept of forgiveness from the standpoint of the African American Society, it can be viewed that God remains the only refuge and reparatory of grieves. Forgiveness is practiced throughout church ceremonies. Leaving all at the hand of The Lord. Thus, The African American church was born out of conflict, social injustice, and a need to inspire hope for change and redemption. A refuge for freedom, the early church attracted seekers to bush harbors and one-room wooden structures who were in desperate need of a place of refuge. Slaves looking to escape the inhumanity and misery of plantation life and much later, disenfranchised and marginalized citizens, needing an organization that would serve to galvanize a community to unity to oppose the tyranny of discrimination, would find an advocate in the African American church (Barnes, 2005). "In the South, the church was the symbolic and institutional center of black life" (Ellison & Gay, 1990, p. 126). Citing Lincoln & Mamiya, Credle goes on to say that: The African American church had a tremendous role and impact in the liberation of its people and on social and political reform in the African American community (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). The church sets an expectation that empowerment, liberation, protection, and advocacy are essential elements and benefits of church affiliation and membership. The African American church pulpit has been used to address injustice and the fight for civil rights (Harris, 1994). Traditionally and historically, the African American church has served as a place of self-actualization for its members, providing opportunities for leadership and improving the social standing of its leaders. "The church is the most historic, influential, and strongest institution in the black community. It has not, however, fulfilled its potential for economic, social, and spiritual leadership. Ii is believed that a principal cause of the shortfall is its failure to manage internal conflict creatively" (Newbold, 1980, p. 1). Thus, a collective effort is needed to address external conflict often making the presence of internal conflict counterproductive to the church's liberation mission. Members who join the church, have high expectations of church membership. The belief that members will be bettered through affiliation creates cognitive dissonance when conflict (especially destructive conflict) occurs. Members who more readily accept conflict in other contexts are opposed to any hint of conflict in their "church home". The African American church is more than a place of worship. It is the haven that wards off the reality of social constraints. Ellison & Gay (2000) found that the dependence on the African American church for social, economic, and political efficacy may differ due to geographic location, with northern blacks more likely to look to other community organizations for support, leaving the church solely for religious support. Research has found that the presence of conflict within the church can adversely affect the level of anticipated support that members expect from their church relationships and increase negative interactions among members (Ellison, Krause, Shepherd & Chaves, 2009). For Credle, The African American church is shored up and sustained by the underpinnings of community and family. (Cosgrove & Hatfield, 1994; Hoge & Faue, 1973; Taylor, Lincoln, Chatters, 2005). Names such as church home, sister, brother, church mother, and church family, move the church into a higher realm of relationship. It is within these constructs that forgiveness is practiced. The victims feel empowered and the wrongdoer is morally blamed. This is unique to the African

American church and is often not found in traditional white churches (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). The closeness of the relationships provides a great incentive for members to stay connected to the local church (Ellison, 1992). African Americans go to church to escape the world, to seek healing from their wounds from injustice and abuse, to get the encouragement to stand against opposition, and to connect with other believers in a way that inextricably binds them. The reasons for church membership and attendance are varied; however, many attend to escape the world of conflict. The mindset of the overwhelming majority of church members is that conflict should not occur in the church. If conflict does occur, the perception is that those who engage in it are not mature. Church conflict devastates members because the "parties' core identities are at risk in church conflict" Thus, to reach the thorough level of forgiveness, in the African American church, core identities are often reinforced by the use of common cultural and symbolic rituals, many of which are considered foundational aspects of worship (e.g., gospel music, preaching style, traditional programs, etc.) that, when altered or deviated from, can generate conflict. Barnes (2005) suggests that there were several aspects of the African American religious experience that were developed and appropriated from African religions and adopted to support social advances and improve identity formation. These normal and common responses could, however, "have negative consequences for individuals, relationships, and perhaps society as a whole" (McCullough, 2001). When referring to similar research, McCullough concluded that when people forgive, they counteract or modulate the motivations to avoid or seek revenge, so that the probability of restoring benevolent and harmonious interpersonal relations with their transgressors is increased. This is the case of a cultural dimension in a social construct. In the example above, a Congolese raped woman will prefer to keep quiet so that not only she would be kept off the radar of social judgment but also she would not be the cause of the social disturbance. In our view, forgiveness in this case is motivationally wrong because the victim is forced by the social construct to behave in a certain way. In the case, well described of African American society, the behavior that caused maltreatment was rationalized to be sometimes acceptable and justifiable. Forgiveness has to be a sincere and positively motivated decision so that when a victim indicates that she/he has forgiven a transgressor, it should be without doubt that what is indicated that his/her perceptions of the transgression and transgressor do not constitute any longer an incentive for avoidance and revenge. Alternatively, she/he exhibits a behavior of compassion and positive motivations regarding her/his perpetrator. This way, forgiveness becomes a process that leads to the need to heal, thus to a change in the behavior of the victim. It is a process because it has to take time, just like the economic rationality of the marginal utility that decreases with the importance of the needed object. The more time the victim takes to heal, the increased will be his/her motivation to forgive.

Forgiveness, by the healing process, becomes then the idea of change whereby the victim has become less motivated to feel, think, and behave negatively about her/his offender. This "genuine forgiveness" involves reconciliation and a fresh start. Although the fact that reconciliation adds something that is temporally distinct from forgiving; the restoration of trust, which necessarily involves the restoration of an agreement, cannot be just a unilateral affair because it involves two people: the victim and the perpetrator. If the act of forgiveness is sincere and positively motivated, both parties have to engage in a second stage, which is a tacit commitment to repent. The oppressor will then have a moral obligation to pledge that the victim will not experience similar behavior from him. The victim would then be empowered and could restore trust. The above conclusion seems very simplistic, however. The restoration of trust between the "past" victim and "former" aggressor may also lead to the ambivalence aspect that forgiveness may generate: "Forgive but do not forget". Let us assume that a raped woman had come to forgive her rapist, and by the same token, she is supposed to develop a benevolent and harmonious interpersonal relationship with the rapist. How far can she develop this new relationship without demonstrating some kind of "safeguarding" behavior? In marriage, for example, couples may develop negative and positive feelings toward each other. Take the case of a spouse who transgresses by violating the sanctity of the marriage bond, the other spouse may decide to forgive. Because of her/his ambivalent feelings toward her/his spouse, it would just be a matter of time before the transgression act is brought back into the next discussion. Notwithstanding, we believe when forgiveness is strictly related to the motivation of conflict resolution, its propensity to be effective is higher. In this case, the victim and the perpetrator would tell their stories and evoke the motivation for their action. When the victim is given a platform to narrate her story and retrace the pain she has gone through because of the action of the rapist, there is a higher probability that the forgiveness will be sincere and the rapist who witnesses the story as the victim tells it may modify his propensity to perpetrate the same action. In the same way, attribution or explanation of offending behavior can increase the healing process and lead to an earlier decision of forgiveness.

Conclusion

In concluding this reflection, we may say that in many cases, especially those involving serious wrongs, forgiveness is superficially. This is the case for example when deliberately a rational person decides to cause pain on another person. Rape, murder, and other cases where a perpetrator demonstrates the use of power to control the victim party by causing him/her physical or moral pain should not be easily forgiven without having the aggressor repent and offer some kind of apology. However, for reconciliation purposes, after a conflict or an argument, both parties (the victim and the oppressor) can negotiate a resolution that would guarantee that the painful behavior would not be repeated. In this case, forgiveness will be more valuable than in the case of unconditional forgiveness, since the latter stems from misconceptions about what is involved in forgiveness. Forgiveness should not be a simple act of "let us put this behind us", or "let us just consider this like it never happened". This would be the case of avoidance and the trust between both parties would be uneasily restored. Swinburne (1989, p.85) argues "Since forgiving is normally thought of as a good thing, the suggestion would be that a victim's disowning of a hurtful act is only to be called forgiveness when it is in response to at least some minimal attempt at atonement, such as an apology". However, as a conscious process in the change of behavior or change in motivation concerning the action that caused pain and to the oppressor's behavior, the victim would be able to forgive and move on with his/her life. We believe that the rationale for forgiveness is entrenched in what as human beings, we lack, what is deplorable in our behavior and corrupted envies. It should not be viewed as a rewarding act of our character or what is decent and venerable about us, as human beings.

What to retain from this discussion

On the eve of the establishment of capital punishment in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and in consideration of the

multiplicity of armed groups responsible for multiple mistreatments and human abuse, this paper aimed to reflect on the concept or practice of forgiveness as a way to unify society and move forward. Researchers have examined the effectiveness of forgiveness interventions and inventories to assist victims in overcoming resistance to forgiveness (Cosgrove & Konstam, 2008). Several inventories have been developed to measure the level of proclivity to forgive. Enright's Model and REACH are two of the many inventories that are employed to study the behaviors that indicate a willingness to forgive. Lundahl, Taylor, Stevenson, & Roberts (2008) examine process models versus decision models. Participants in process models who would attend a large number of group and individual sessions could be able to significantly improve their capacity to forgive and move toward reconciliation and restoration of relationships. Participants who would use the full inventories and attend at least six sessions could be able to improve their capacity to forgive. Toussaint & Webb (2005) found, in their research that women were more likely to attend forgiveness interventions than were men. Lundahl et. al. (2008) suggests that forgiveness is often impacted by the passage of time. The time that it takes for forgiveness to change the degree to which victims are willing to refrain from avoiding those deemed responsible for their pain varies according to the degree of harm. To fully recover from a traumatic situation, researchers legitimize a victim's right to feel hate toward perpetrators (Baures, 1996). Baures opines that allowing oneself to feel the fury of hate, especially when one has been abused by another person, is often a healthy part of the recovery process (Baures, 1996). Victims of traumatic events and evil acts are advised to embrace the pain of the experience fully, feel as much anger and animus toward the perpetrators of the act, and then when the terror of the experience in no longer intrusive [as result of healing process], move toward the light of forgiveness. The pathway to forgiveness is found when victims search for renewed respect for those whom they hold responsible for prior pain and suffering (Baures, 1996). Baures (1996) also recommends that victims find their recovery by helping other victims. The sharing of personal experiences and how one survives or copes with the individual situation. Forgiveness should not be a cultural obligation, it should be viewed as a reparation process that helps the victim [individual or country] to recover from the wrongdoing of a perpetrator. Forgiveness should also help to avoid the repetition of certain behaviors as certain other actions should remain punishable.

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