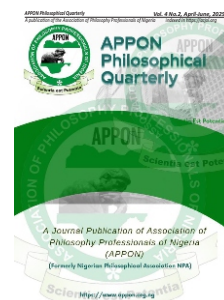


**AN APPRAISAL OF CHRISTIAN
ETHICAL PRINCIPLES OF
FORGIVENESS AND
RECONCILIATION IN SANKERA
AREA OF BENUE STATE, NIGERIA**



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ABSTRACT

This study critically appraises Christian ethical principles of forgiveness and reconciliation as tools for peace building in Sankera, Benue State, Nigeria. Drawing on biblical theology and African ethical perspectives, it examines the theological basis of divine forgiveness and its implications for communal violence. While forgiveness and Reconciliation are central to Christian ethics and essential for healing, their application in Sankera is complicated by issues of justice, accountability, and culture. The study argues that authentic Christian forgiveness must incorporate truth and restitution to avoid sustaining injustice. It concludes that a contextualized theology of reconciliation, rooted in scripture and African communitarian values, can help restore trust and social cohesion in Sankera.

Keywords: Christianity, Ethical Principles, Violence, Forgiveness, Reconciliation & Peace building.

Introduction

Forgiveness and reconciliation are core values in Christianity, essential for personal and communal healing, restoration, and peace building. These concepts are deeply rooted in the Bible, with Jesus' teachings emphasising their importance.¹ However, the application and understanding of forgiveness and reconciliation can be

complex, often influenced by cultural, social and theological contexts.

Christian ethics is fundamentally relational, concerned with restoring broken relationships between God and humanity and among human beings themselves. Forgiveness and reconciliation, therefore, are not peripheral moral ideals but central ethical imperatives rooted in the Christian

¹ Matthew 6:14-15, 18:21-22, *The Bible*, Revised Standard Version.

narrative of salvation. In African Christianity, these ethical principles acquire added significance because of the communal nature of African societies, where harmony and collective well-being are prioritised over individual autonomy.² Kanu Ikechukwu Anthony observes that African Christian ethics emerges at the intersection of biblical theology and indigenous moral consciousness, making forgiveness and reconciliation essential tools for social cohesion.³

This appraisal examines Christian ethical principles of forgiveness and reconciliation, exploring its ethical significance in restoring peace in Sankera area of Benue State. The discussion aims at providing insights into the complexities of these values and their application in contemporary contexts. This study therefore examines the biblical foundations of forgiveness and reconciliation, their ethical significance, and a critical evaluation of their application within Christian ethics in Nigerian society, with particular attention to the Sankera area of Benue State.

Historical Background of Sankera Area of Benue State

The geopolitical territory referred to as Sankera is made up of Katsina-Ala, Ukum and Logo Local Government Areas of Benue State, of central Nigeria. It is one of the major regions in Benue State of Nigeria. After Nigeria's independence and subsequent state creation, Katsina-Ala Local Government area was created in 1976 with the headquarters in Katsina-Ala town. Ukum Local Government was created out of Katsina-Ala in 1991 with the headquarters in Sankera while Logo Local Government area was created in 1996 out of Katsina-Ala Local Government area with the

headquarters in Ugba.

Sankera is home to people of diverse cultures and faith and the land is profoundly fertile, such that all manner of crop thrives on it.⁴ Until the last decade, which has seen crime and criminality reached a crescendo. Sankera was known to be a very peaceful place, hospitable, accommodating and a centre of attraction for business and several economic activities. In the good old days, people, mostly Tiv from other parts of Tivland, came in large numbers to settle in different parts of Sankera region, particularly for farming activities and business.

Civil servants virtually turned into farmers, going into the villages for farming activities, because of the fertility of the area. Other nationalities too came for commercial purposes, particularly for the abundant and cheap food crops and items. It was formerly a home for all manner of people because of the peace that prevailed in Sankera as many people were attracted to living in the area.⁵

Sankera area is part of the Tiv ethno-linguistic group, and within it, there are clans/kindred. Some of the major ones include: Ukum, Shitile, Tongov, Ikyurav, Ugondo, Turan, Tombo and Etulo who settle mostly at the bank of river Katsina-Ala. The Sankera area has been described as an agrarian society and a major farming zone of Benue State. The major crops grown in the three Local government areas include yams, maize, rice, groundnut, beans, beniseed (sesame), soybeans, millet, cassava and sorghum.

The major crops grown in the three Local government areas and those major markets that are located in the three local government areas of Sankera serves as the key economic profile of Sankera area and these have clearly defined Sankera area. If Benue State

² John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, (Ibadan: Heinemann, 1990): 17.

³ Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, *African Ethics: An Ontological Study*. (Nsukka: University of Nigeria Press, 2013): 48.

⁴ Sylvester Ugbegili, "Politics, Corruption and Insecurity in Contemporary Nigeria: Issues, Challenges and Prospects." In M. Terkura, C. T. Yange, and K. Adamgbe, ed., *Politics, Corruption and Insecurity in Nigeria: Issues, Problems and Prospects: A Book of Readings*. (Eagle Prints Nig., 2019): 44

⁵ Michael Mchia and Wilfred A. Atser, "Crime and the Development of Criminality in Sankera." In ., Bagu, M. Tyosenda, and D. Iornumbe, ed. *Catholic Diocese of Katsina-Ala at 10: Modest Achievements, Challenges and Prospects*, (Tomgraphiix Prints and Publishing Limited, 2023): 92.

could be described as "The Food Basket" of the nation (Nigeria), it is arguably because of the massive agricultural activities in Sankera. To affirm this, Mchia and Atser attested that, Sankera, was formerly a home for all manner of people because of the peace that prevailed in Sankera as many people were attracted to living in the area. All things went on well until in 2019 when the current wave of violence erupted creating series of conflicts in the area.

Sankera area has experienced anguish, a state of fear, suspicion, arson, murder, abduction and payment of ransom (even on dead bodies), due to internal and external forces and factors. But, in recent times, Sankera Area has witnessed a lot of sporadic conflicts, often related to land disputes, political representation and resource allocation. These conflicts have involved various parties, including the Tiv *militia*, herders' crisis, Tongov and Shitile conflicts, Ikyurav and Shitile, Tiv and Jukun and many others.

The level of crime, violence, kidnapping, killings and attacks has sporadically graduated from dark hours to broad daylight operations and with barely any resistance, even from the security agencies. There are several cases of abductions in Sankera area in public glare in a single week. It happened in such a dramatic fashion that at the very hour a victim was released, another was captured in their stead. The crises in Sankera Area of Benue State have devastating effects on the people both socially, politically, economically, educationally, health and religiously.

Sankera area has experienced anguish, a state of fear, suspicion, arson, murder, abduction and payment of ransom (even on dead bodies), due to internal and external forces and factors. This has resulted in loss of lives, destruction of property and heightened tensions among communities. The Tiv *militia* issue in particular, has persisted over the years, and the cycle of violence has perpetuated distrust and animosity between the Tiv community and

other ethnic groups, leading to a fragile security situation and hampering the potential for peace and development in Sankera. These armed thugs turned against the populace with attendant consequences including the closure of schools, hospitals and Churches in Sankera Area of Benue State.

The persistent conflicts in Sankera area of Benue State have created a cycle of violence with devastating sequences of mistrust, socio-political instability, hindering the prospects for peace and development in the region.⁶ Efforts to resolve these conflicts through traditional, governmental, and non-governmental mechanisms have yielded limited success, with tensions often escalating rather than diminishing. In many cases, the absence of a shared framework for reconciliation has exacerbated divisions, making the process of rebuilding trust and co-operation difficult. The application of ethical principles, such as forgiveness and reconciliation is often seen as a way to transcend ethnic and religious divisions, promoting an environment where conflicts are resolved peacefully and sustainably. Despite numerous efforts by government agencies, civil society organisations and international bodies to mediate peace, the resolution of these conflicts remains elusive.

Peace has given way to violence and bloodshed, life has become not only cheap but so short, disputes and disagreements are no longer settled on the dialogue table, but on the battlefield and by the barrel of the gun. Sankera, the "dream land in Benue State" which was once the desire of nearly everyone, has now become a dreaded land, even by its own indigenes.

Biblical Foundations of Forgiveness and Reconciliation

The biblical foundation of forgiveness and reconciliation reveals a coherent and sustained divine pattern in which God takes the initiative in restoring broken relationships, calls humanity to repentance, and seeks renewed fellowship. Forgiveness

⁶ Sylvester Ugbegili, "Politics, Corruption and Insecurity in Contemporary Nigeria: Issues, Challenges and Prospects." : 43

in Scripture is therefore not reactive but proactive, grounded in God's gracious disposition toward humanity. This divine pattern provides the ethical framework for Christian moral conduct, in which believers are called to mirror God's reconciling activity in their relationships with others. The Old Testament emphasises God's forgiveness and mercy (Exodus 34:6-7, Psalm 86:5), with sacrifices and rituals facilitating reconciliation between God and Israel (Leviticus 4:20, 1 Kings 8:30). In the New Testament, Jesus' teachings and sacrifice on the cross demonstrate God's love and forgiveness, providing a model for human forgiveness.⁷

Andrew Philips Adega observes that biblical forgiveness is "not merely a moral injunction imposed upon human beings but a theological reality rooted in God's own redemptive engagement with the world, an engagement that consistently privileges restoration over destruction."⁸ This understanding situates forgiveness and reconciliation at the heart of biblical ethics rather than at its margins.

Christian theologians have explored forgiveness and reconciliation through various lenses: these include;

1. Atonement Theory: Atonement theory states that Jesus' sacrifice atoned for humanity's sins, enabling forgiveness and reconciliation (Anselm, 11th century).
2. Love and Mercy: God's love and mercy drive forgiveness, with Jesus' teachings emphasising relational restoration.⁹
3. Kingdom Ethics: Forgiveness and reconciliation are integral to God's kingdom, challenging believers to embody these values.¹⁰

Old Testament Foundations of Forgiveness and Reconciliation

The Old Testament emphasises God's forgiveness and mercy (Exodus 34:6-7, Psalm 86:5), with sacrifices and rituals facilitating reconciliation between God and Israel (Leviticus 4:20, 1 Kings 8:30). In the Old Testament, forgiveness is inseparably linked to God's covenantal faithfulness. Despite Israel's repeated acts of disobedience, God consistently chooses restoration rather than annihilation. This is powerfully articulated in God's self-revelation to Moses: "The LORD God, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in goodness and truth" (Exod. 34:6). This passage establishes forgiveness not as an occasional divine response but as a defining attribute of God's character.

In the Old Testament, forgiveness is often associated with the Hebrew word "salach," meaning "to forgive" or "to pardon" (Leviticus 4:20, 1 Kings 8:30). Forgiveness was a key aspect of Israel's covenant relationship with God, emphasising the importance of repentance and sacrifice. Justin S. Ukpong argues that, this Old Testament portrayal of God resonates profoundly with African religious consciousness, noting that "the biblical image of a merciful and patient God corresponds closely with African perceptions of the Supreme Being as one who restores cosmic and moral balance after human failure."¹¹

The Mosaic sacrificial system further institutionalises forgiveness as a communal and relational process. Sin in the Old Testament is understood not merely as an individual moral lapse but as a disruption of

⁷ Romans 5:8, Ephesians 1:7. RSV.

⁸ Andrew Philip Adega, *Biblical Ethics and Communal Reconciliation in African Contexts*. (Ibadan: University Press, 2014): 64

⁹ H. Nygren, "Sankera Peace Group Condemns Deadly Attack, Calls for Justice." *Independent Newspaper Nigeria*, 11 Mar. 2025, <https://independent.ng/sankera-peace-group-condemns-deadly-attack-calls-for-justice/>, (Accessed 10 Jan. 2026): 102.

¹⁰ V. Yoder, "Legislative Oversight and Socio-Economic Research." University of Jos Repository. https://irepos.unijos.edu.ng/server/api/core/bitstreams/302898f0-fdb9-4551-a3fb-0786bee95a46/content?utm_source=chatgpt.com, (Accessed 10 Jan. 2026): 49.

¹¹ U. Justin, M. A. Augie, et al., "Fostering Peaceful Coexistence in Nigeria through Communalism as Practice in the Bible and Africa." *Sarcouncil Journal of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences*, (Vol. 01, no. 09, 2022):

communal harmony and covenantal order. Leviticus affirms that, through ritual atonement forgiveness is affected. David Tuesday Adamo explains that, these sacrificial rites were “symbolic mechanisms through which moral equilibrium was restored within the community, ensuring that broken relationships between God, the individual, and the community were healed.”¹²

The prophetic tradition moves forgiveness beyond ritual observance to ethical responsibility and social justice. Isaiah’s exhortation, “Cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment” (Isa. 1:16–17), links forgiveness directly with moral transformation and societal reform. Mercy Amba Oduyoye underscores this connection, asserting that “biblical forgiveness is never detached from justice; it demands accountability, restitution, and the reordering of relationships within the community.”¹³ This understanding closely parallels African ethical systems, where reconciliation is incomplete without moral redress.

The Psalms further personalise forgiveness, presenting it as emotional and spiritual healing. David’s declaration, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven” (Ps. 32:1), portrays forgiveness as liberation from inner turmoil and social alienation. John S. Mbiti explains that, in African spirituality such liberation “restores the individual to full moral and social participation in the life of the community, without which personhood itself remains incomplete.”¹⁴ Consequently, the Old Testament presents forgiveness and reconciliation as divine gifts aimed at restoring moral, social, and spiritual equilibrium.

New Testament Foundations of Forgiveness and Reconciliation

The New Testament universalises and radicalises forgiveness through the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Forgiveness becomes central to the Kingdom of God and a defining mark of Christian discipleship. Jesus’ teaching, “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you” (Matt. 6:14), establishes forgiveness as a moral condition for sustained fellowship with God.

In the New Testament, Jesus’ teachings and sacrifice on the cross demonstrate God’s love and forgiveness, providing a model for human forgiveness.¹⁵ Jesus’ parables further illuminate the radical nature of forgiveness. In the Parable of the unforgiving Servant (Matt. 18:21–35), forgiveness is portrayed as limitless and non-negotiable. Samuel Oyinloye Abogunrin observes that, this teaching “undermines legalistic calculations of justice and confronts both ancient Jewish traditions and African retaliatory customs with an ethic of boundless grace.”¹⁶ Forgiveness here is not constrained by numerical limits but grounded in divine mercy.

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ represents the ultimate act of reconciliation. Jesus’ prayer, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34), exemplifies forgiveness in the face of extreme injustice. Paul articulates the theological depth of this act by asserting that “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself” (2 Cor. 5:19). Kwame Bediako interprets this reconciliation as both spiritual and cultural, arguing that “the cross creates a new moral horizon in which fractured identities and broken communities find healing and coherence.”¹⁷

¹² David T. Adamo, *Africa and the Africans in the Old Testament*. (Kaduna: Wipf and Stock, 2011): 102.

¹³ Mercy Amba Oduyoye. *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa*. (Ibadan: Orbis Books, 2006): 77.

¹⁴ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*. (Ibadan: Heinemann, 1990): 210.

¹⁵ Romans 5:8, Ephesians 1:7. RSV

¹⁶ Samuel Oyinloye Abogunrin, *Ethics in the New Testament*. (Daystar Press, 2001): 94.

¹⁷ Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*. (Edinburgh UP, 2015): 126.

Believers are further entrusted with “the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5.18), transforming forgiveness into an ethical vocation. Jean-Marc Ela maintains that this mandate “positions the church as a moral agent within society, called not only to preach reconciliation but to actively embody it in contexts of violence, injustice, and social fragmentation.”¹⁸ Thus, the New Testament frames forgiveness and reconciliation as transformative practices rooted in Christ’s redemptive love and oriented toward communal renewal.

The Nature of God’s Forgiveness

The nature of God’s forgiveness is one of the most profound theological concerns in Christian thought, touching directly on questions of divine character, justice, mercy, and the restoration of broken humanity. In Christian theology, forgiveness is not merely an emotional response or juridical concession; it is an expression of God’s very being.¹⁹ Scripture and theological scholarship consistently affirmed that, God’s forgiveness is gracious in origin, costly in execution, restorative in purpose and transformative in effect. This is done in so many ways which includes;

(I). God’s Forgiveness as Revelatory of Divine Character: The foundational biblical articulation of divine forgiveness appears in God’s self-disclosure to Moses. Exodus 34:6–7 offers one of the most extended and authoritative descriptions of God’s nature thus:

The LORD passed before him, and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the

children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.”²⁰

This passage establishes forgiveness as intrinsic to God’s identity rather than a reaction to human repentance alone.

Divine forgiveness flows from steadfast covenantal love indicating that God forgives because God is faithful to Himself. Karl Barth interprets this divine self-revelation as decisive for Christian theology, insisting that forgiveness belongs to God’s freedom. “God’s grace is not a quality which He acquires in relation to man; it is His eternal being. God is gracious in Himself, and therefore He forgives. Forgiveness is not an exception in God’s conduct but the rule which corresponds to who God is.”²¹ Thus, forgiveness is not an interruption of divine justice but the mode through which divine love operates within history.

(ii). Forgiveness as unmerited and prevenient Grace: A defining aspect of God’s forgiveness is its gratuitous nature. The Pauline epistles repeatedly stress that forgiveness is granted apart from human merit. Ephesians 1:7 presents forgiveness as grounded entirely in divine generosity: “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us.”²² The language of “riches” and “lavishing” underscores excess rather than calculation. Forgiveness, therefore, is not proportionate to sin but overwhelms it. St. Augustine deepens this insight by arguing that forgiveness precedes moral transformation rather than follows it: “It is not because we are good that God loves us, but because God loves us that we are made good. He forgives sins not as a reward for righteousness, but in order that righteousness may be born in us.”²³

¹⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*. Translated by R. H. Fuller, (SCM Press, 1995): 127.

¹⁹ Jean-Marc Ela, *My Faith as an African*. (Kaduna: Orbis Books, 2008): 158.

²⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*. Translated by R. H. Fuller, (SCM Press, 1995): 128.

²¹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*. vol. V. Part 1. - Church Dogmatic IV.1, (T and T Clark, 2021): 351.

²² Romans 3:25-26. RSV.

²³ Augustine, *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Love*. Translated by J. F. Shaw, (Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1887): 32.

Here, forgiveness is creative, it produces holiness rather than responding to it. This understanding decisively counters moralistic or legalistic interpretations of divine pardon.

In Nigerian theological reflections, Anyam, Tyosenda and Saluun agrees with this Augustinian trajectory by emphasising that, God's forgiveness in African Christian experience is understood as initiatory grace, a divine act that restores dignity before moral repair is complete. In his reflections on reconciliation theology²⁴ Anyam, Tyosenda and Saluun presents forgiveness as God's way of re-establishing communal belonging before ethical perfection, a view resonant with African communitarian ethics where restoration precedes judgement.

- (iii). Forgiveness and the Demands of Justice: A major theological tension arises in reconciling forgiveness with divine justice. Scripture addresses this tension directly in Romans 3:25-26, thus: "Whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus."²⁵ This presents forgiveness as costly rather than permissive. Sin is neither denied nor trivialised; it is confronted through sacrifice.

Miroslav Volf articulates this when he said: "Forgiveness flounders because I

exclude the enemy from the community of humans and I exclude myself from the community of sinners. But no forgiveness is possible without the will to embrace, to open one's arms even for the wrongdoer."²⁶ Forgiveness, therefore, does not negate justice but transcends retributive logic.

Similarly, Anjov Terfa Kahaga, writing from a Nigerian Christian ethical perspective, interprets God's forgiveness as justice healed by mercy. In his theological reflections on post-conflict Christian communities,²⁷ Anjov argues that, divine forgiveness neither erases wrongdoing nor perpetuates vengeance; instead, it restores moral order by reintegrating the offender into a healed community, reflecting God's own reconciling action.

- (iv). Forgiveness as Relational and Restorative: The Christian scriptures consistently present sin as relational rupture rather than mere legal offence. Consequently, forgiveness aims at restoration. Isaiah 1:18 captures this vividly thus: "Come now, let us argue it out, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool."²⁸ The imagery of cleansing emphasises renewal and restored intimacy with God.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer warns against reducing forgiveness to abstract declaration that: "Forgiveness without repentance would be meaningless, but repentance without forgiveness would be despair. Forgiveness creates the new life in which obedience becomes possible."²⁹ Forgiveness, therefore, inaugurates ethical

²⁴ Damian Tersoo Anyam, Tyosenda, Moses Terwase and Saluun, Patricia Mwuese. "An Assessment of the Ethical Implications of Body Dumping for Tiv Communities in Benue State" in *Journal of Philosophy, Politics and Social Sciences* (JPPSS), (2025): 17.

²⁵ Romans 3:25-26, RSV.

²⁶ Volf Miroslav, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, (Nssuka: Abingdon Press, 1996): 125.

²⁷ Terfa Kahaga Anjov "The Nature of Tiv Metaphysics in the Light of Challenges and Development" *Proceedings of the XXiii World Congress of Philosophy*, (2018): 48.

²⁸ Matthew 3:2, Acts 3:19, RSV.

²⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*. Translated by R. H. Fuller, (SCM Press, 1995): 43.

responsibility rather than abolishing it. African ethical theologians, including Anyam, Anjov, Tyosenda and Saluun and others situate this restorative dimension within communal frameworks. Forgiveness is not merely vertical (God-human) but horizontal (human-human), reflecting the African worldview in which divine mercy must heal communal fractures.

Scripture affirms both the availability and the conditional reception of forgiveness. 1John 1:9 states that: "If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The condition here is not merit but open confession as truthful self-disclosure before God.³⁰ Lewis clarifies the role of human freedom in receiving forgiveness: "God forgives us our sins, but He does not compel us to accept forgiveness. To refuse forgiveness is to cling to the very chains from which God seeks to free us."³¹ Thus, forgiveness is universally offered but personally appropriated.

The scripture teaches that forgiveness is a fundamental aspect of God's character (Exodus 34:6-7, Psalm 86:5, 1John 1:9). God's forgiveness is rooted in His love, mercy, and justice, providing a model for human forgiveness. The cross of Christ is the ultimate expression of God's forgiveness, demonstrating His love and mercy towards humanity (Romans 5:8, Ephesians 1:7). Through Christ's sacrifice, believers are forgiven and reconciled to God.

Reconciliation is a key theme in the Christian scriptures, emphasising the restoration of relationships between God and humanity, and among humans (2 Corinthians 5:18-20, Ephesians 2:14-16). Reconciliation involves repentance, forgiveness, and new creation. Thus, repentance is a crucial aspect of forgiveness and reconciliation, involving a change of heart and behaviour. True repentance leads

to forgiveness, healing, and restored relationships. The Bible also presents forgiveness and justice as interconnected, with forgiveness not negating accountability or justice.³² Forgiveness can lead to restoration and healing, rather than ignoring injustice.

Significance of Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Forgiveness and reconciliation are ethically significant because they address the pervasive realities of sin, violence, and social fragmentation. Spiritually, forgiveness restores fellowship with God and renews moral integrity. The Johannine affirmation, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins" (1 John 1.9), presents forgiveness as essential to spiritual wholeness. Bolaji E. Idowu explains that, such restoration is central to holistic salvation, which "embraces moral renewal, spiritual healing, and reintegration into the community."³³

Socially, forgiveness interrupts cycle of vengeance and violence. In African societies marked by ethnic conflict and political instability, forgiveness becomes a vital ethical resource. Desmond Tutu famously asserts that "without forgiveness, there can be no future," emphasising that reconciliation is not sentimental idealism but a pragmatic necessity for survival.³⁴ Similarly, Matthew Hassan Kukah argues that, in pluralistic societies such as Nigeria, reconciliation is indispensable for nation-building because "unresolved historical grievances continue to reproduce violence and mistrust across generations."³⁵

Within African communal ethics, reconciliation is prioritised over retribution. Mbiti notes that traditional African justice systems focus on "the restoration of broken relationships rather than the infliction of

³⁰ Exodus 34:6-7, Psalm 86:5, RSV

³¹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*. (New York: Harper One, 2021): 114.

³² Romans 3:25-26, 2 Corinthians 5:21, RSV.

³³ Bolaji E. Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*, (SCM Press, 2023): 88.

³⁴ Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, (Doubleday, 1999): 165.

³⁵ Matthew Hassan Kukah, *Religion, Politics and Power in Northern Nigeria*, (Kaduna: Spectrum Books, 1999): 68.

punishment for its own sake.”³⁶ Accordingly, this approach aligns closely with Christian ethics, which seeks communal healing and moral regeneration. Forgiveness therefore promotes peace, social cohesion, and ethical renewal. At the personal level, it cultivates virtues such as humility, patience, and empathy, challenging believers to transcend personal injury for the sake of communal well-being.

Forgiveness and reconciliation remain crucial in contemporary contexts. In the area of transitional justice, post-conflict societies grapple with forgiveness and reconciliation.³⁷ In the context of personal healing, individuals seek forgiveness and reconciliation in relationships and personal struggles, and in the context of Interfaith dialogue, forgiveness and reconciliation are key themes in interfaith discussions and peace building efforts.

Evaluation of Christian Ethics of Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Despite its ethical appeal, Christian forgiveness has been criticised for its potential misuse, particularly when it is detached from justice. Some African scholars caution that forgiveness can be manipulated to sustain oppression. Mercy Amba Oduyoye warns that “calls for forgiveness that ignore structural injustice risk becoming tools for silencing the wounded and preserving unjust power relations.”³⁸

However, authentic Christian ethics does not separate forgiveness from truth and justice because they are connected and they are inseparable. Miroslav Volf insists that “reconciliation requires the naming of wrongdoing and the moral acknowledgement of guilt; there can be no

genuine embrace without truth.”³⁹ Nigerian ethicist Gregory Onah reinforces this position, arguing that, forgiveness must involve accountability and restitution, otherwise it “degenerates into moral trivialisation of evil and undermines the dignity of victims.”⁴⁰

Moreover, Christian forgiveness is voluntary rather than coerced. It empowers victims by freeing them from resentment while still affirming moral responsibility. Victor Igbum further clarifies that, “forgiveness in Christian ethics is not an erasure of memory but a disciplined moral choice that transforms suffering into the possibility of renewed relationship.”⁴¹ When properly applied, forgiveness becomes a transformative force capable of healing individuals, communities, and societies.

The Christian ethical principles of forgiveness and reconciliation are rooted in the Bible and shaped by theological perspectives and contextual challenges. It operates on key aspects such as God's Forgiveness which is a fundamental aspect of Christian theology, demonstrated through Jesus' sacrifice. Christians are called to forgive others, reflecting God's forgiveness.⁴² On the side of restoration of relationships, reconciliation involves restoring relationships, promoting healing and peace. On Justice and Mercy, reconciliation often involves balancing justice and mercy, addressing harm and promoting restoration and on Process or Event, reconciliation can be a process or an event, requiring effort and commitment from all parties.

Conclusion

It is important to note that, the Bible acknowledges the complexity of

³⁶ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, (Ibadan: Heinemann, 1990): 207.

³⁷ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 108.

³⁸ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa*. (Ibadan: Orbis Books, 2006): 82.

³⁹ Volf Miroslav, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, (Nssuka: Abingdon Press, 1996): 34.

⁴⁰ Gregory Onah. *Foundations of Christian Ethics*. (Nsukka: Spiritan Publications, 2022):101.

⁴¹ Victor Terna Igbum, *Christian Ethics and Social Responsibility in Africa*. (Makurdi: Spectrum Books, 2012):116.

⁴² Victor Terna Igbum, *Christian Ethics and Social Responsibility in Africa*, 118.

forgiveness and reconciliation, recognising the pain, hurt, and injustice that can make forgiveness difficult (Matthew 5:38-42, Romans 12:17-21). However, God's strength and grace enable believers to forgive and pursue reconciliation. Forgiveness and reconciliation yield numerous benefits, including healing, peace, and restoring relationships (Psalm 32:1-5, Matthew 5:9). These values are essential for individual and communal well-being of people like those in Sankera area, reflecting God's character and promoting a culture of love and forgiveness.

The example of Jesus Christ on the cross is a pivotal event in Christian theology, demonstrating God's love and mercy towards humanity. According to the Bible, Jesus' sacrifice on the cross provided forgiveness for humanity's sins, reconciling us to God (Romans 5:8, Ephesians 1:7, Colossians 1:20). Jesus took our place, bearing the punishment for our sins, so we can receive forgiveness and righteousness (Isaiah 53:5-6, 1 Peter 2:24), this is a good example that Sankera people can emulate in order to experience peace and development in the area.

Jesus' teachings on forgiveness are central to the New Testament, emphasising the importance of forgiving others as a reflection of God's forgiveness (Matthew 6:14-15, 18:21-22). Jesus' parables, such as the Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18:21-35), highlight the consequences of not forgiving. In appraising Christian ethics, forgiveness and reconciliation emerge as demanding yet redemptive virtues. They call all Christians (Sankera area) to embody God's reconciling love within complex social realities, balancing mercy with justice and compassion with accountability. The Christian ethical principles of forgiveness and reconciliation are complex and multifaceted, shaped by biblical teachings, theological perspectives, and contextual challenges. This evaluation highlights strengths and significance of these ethical principles.

The nature of God's forgiveness, as revealed in Scripture and articulated by theologians across traditions, is profoundly gracious, morally serious, and relationally restorative. It flows from God's eternal

character, confronts sin without denial, satisfies justice through love, and restores broken relationships. Nigerian theological voices such as Damian Anyam, Terfa Anjov, Moses Tyosenda and Patricia Saluun further enrich this understanding by grounding divine forgiveness in communal restoration and ethical renewal and this is a call that Sankera people ought to receive. Ultimately, God's forgiveness is not an escape from responsibility but the foundation upon which transformed life and reconciled community are built.

Recommendations

1. Christian ethical principles of forgiveness and reconciliation are vital for the people of Sankera for personal and communal healing, restoration and peace building. While challenges and complexities exist, these principles offer transformative power for the people of Sankera. These principles are recommended for the Sankera people of Benue State for the restoration of peace in the area.
2. By embracing biblical teachings, theological perspectives, and contextual sensitivity, the people of Sankera can embody forgiveness and reconciliation there by promoting justice, mercy and love.
3. To embrace forgiveness and reconciliation, the people of Sankera must use contextual understanding. That is to say, they must approach forgiveness and reconciliation with sensitivity to cultural, social, and power dynamics.
4. The people of Sankera should have ground understandings of forgiveness and reconciliation in biblical teachings and Jesus' example which the Sankera people ought to embrace in order to restore back the lost glory of their society.
5. The people of Sankera should have relational emphasis on restoration and healing in applying these ethical principles of forgiveness and reconciliation to restore peace in their land.
6. The people of Sankera area are encouraged to seek wisdom and discernment in applying these principles

in complex situations like theirs. These biblical principles are sacrosanct to building a united and cohesive society among Sankera people of Benue State if properly applied.

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