

# Matthean Jesus and forgiveness in light of national healing, peace and reconciliation in Zimbabwe, 2008–2017

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The history of Zimbabwe is characterised by a series of challenges, which, at different turning points, manifested themselves through violent conflicts, since its independence in 1980. Faced with the challenges associated with violence, socio-political, economic and religious conflicts, civil unrest and polarisation of the Zimbabwean society from 2008 to 2017, this article discusses the relevance and applicability of Jesus' ethics with special focus on the Matthean Jesus and forgiveness in a bid to bring national healing, peace and reconciliation. The article stresses that the application of Matthean Jesus' ethics is vital for the Zimbabwean society because it paves way for peace, healing and reconciliation. Among other factors, the Matthean Jesus' ethics call for victims of political violence to unconditionally extend forgiveness to their offenders as demonstrated by the Matthean Jesus who forgave mankind's sins through his sacrificial death on the cross. Over and above that, there should be an honest implementation of justice and truth telling by the Zimbabwean government through willingness and commitment to institute the rule of law and curb all forms of lawlessness. Moreover, it is imperative that there should be a formation of an independent truth, justice and reconciliation commission to deal with truth telling, acknowledgement of past wrongs, and restorative and transitional justice issues in Zimbabwe.

**Keywords:** Zimbabwe; Reconciliation; Forgiveness; Healing; Peace; Matthean Jesus; Ethics.

## Introduction

The history of Zimbabwe is characterised by a series of challenges, which, at different turning points, manifested themselves through violent conflicts since its independence in 1980. The issue of achieving sustainable peace and development has remained a challenge because of the lack of comprehensive approaches to human rights violations (Machakanja 2010:1). Faced with the challenges associated with violence, socio-political, economic and religious conflicts, civil unrest and polarisation of the Zimbabwean society from 2008 to 2017, this article discusses the relevance and applicability of Jesus' ethics with special focus on the Matthean Jesus and forgiveness in a bid to bring national healing, peace and reconciliation.

## Matthean Jesus

Sim (2010:2) purports that Matthean Jesus is whereby Jesus is portrayed as a role model in the Gospel of Matthew. From the very beginning, the Christian tradition has viewed Jesus as the perfect role model, whose life and teachings are to be emulated by his followers. In other words, the Matthean Jesus is a portrayal and understanding of Jesus by the Matthean community or the writer of the Gospel of Matthew.

## Jesus and forgiveness

Jesus' stance on forgiveness in Matthew can be deduced from the following passages in Matthew: 'And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors' (Mt 6:12).

The petition for the forgiveness of debts, our sins, is an appeal that God, as the Father of the disciples, will graciously forgive them their sins and so enable them to forgive one another (Stock 1994:103). The thought that divine forgiveness is bound up with human forgiveness is widespread in Judaism, but there is, in the opinion of Stock, no case where human actions are taken up in this

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way into a central prayer text (Stock 1994:103). According to Talbert (2010:89), forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors (Mt 6:12) ('Forgive your neighbour the wrong he has done, and then your sins will be pardoned when you pray' – Sirach 28:2) points to the daily life of disciples in this world. Matthew 18:23–35 seems to speak of an eschatological forgiveness and its link to disciples' forgiveness within history. There may well be both a present and a future reference here. Do not bring us into the time of trial, but deliver us from the evil one (Mt 6:13). Again, this could refer to testing in the present time (Mt 26:41) or to the great testing at the end of history (Mt 24:4–26). This lengthy prescription (Mt 6:9–13) is followed by the typical basis (Mt 6:14–15).

Basis: 'For if you forgive others their trespasses, your father in the heavens will also forgive you. If you do not forgive others, neither will your father forgive your trespasses' (Mt 6:14–15, 18:35) (Talbert 2010:89). The Lord's Prayer causes the auditors to see what their needs really be – that is to see prayer differently. As such, in changing their perceptions, it alters their dispositions and intentions. Character is being purified in light of a higher righteousness:

Lord, how often will my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times? (Mt 18:21–35)

Acceptance of suffering and service by the disciples in analogy to Jesus stands behind the instructions that Jesus gives to his disciples throughout the section on community life (Stock 1994:293). His followers are not to insist on their own prerogatives when these prerogatives cause offense to others (Mt 17:24–27, 18:5–14); rather, they are to humble themselves like little children (Mt 18:1–4, 19:13–15). The disciples are not to orient their lives around response to personal hurt, but they are to forgive others freely (Mt 18:21–35). In this narrative, the focus shifts again, this time to the brother who is not *recalcitrant*, but who sins often and therefore needs forgiveness often (Stock 1994:294). As guilt is readily admitted, forgiveness remains on one-to-one level. In the context of Chapter 18, and as the closure of the chapter that dealt with the relations of community members with one another, it serves as a vivid illustration of the preceding sayings, above all of the one about unrestricted forgiveness (Mt 18:21–22). The two debtors find themselves in an extreme situation (cf. Mt 18:26, 29); yet, the greatness of their debts is unequal. The reaction of the first, to whom an enormous debt is forgiven, against his fellow servants, who owes him a small debt, is monstrous, but therein lies the meaning of the parable: it shows that the severe punishment of the first servant is correct.

According to Schreiner (2008:552), those who love family members more than Jesus are unworthy of him, for those who become Jesus' disciples must be prepared to die for his sake (Mt 10:37–39). Only good trees that produce good fruit will be spared on the day of judgement, for people will be judged by every word uttered (Mt 12:33–37). Those who obstinately refuse to forgive others will not be forgiven by God on the day of judgement (Mt 6:14–15, 18:21–35). Jeremias says:

But the deepest secret of this love which characterizes realized discipleship is that they have learnt how to forgive. They extend to others the divine forgiveness which they have experienced, a forgiveness which passes all understanding. (Schreiner 2008:552)

Anything that causes people to stumble or fall away must be removed from their lives. Jesus uses hyperbolic language of cutting off a foot or hand or gouging out an eye (Mt 5:29–30, 18:8–9) to portray the radical steps that must be taken to avoid apostasy. Both anger (Mt 5:21–26) and lust (Mt 5:27–28) must be conquered by believers, and they cannot be allowed to take root in the hearts of Jesus' disciples (Schreiner 2008:552):

Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven'. (Mt 18:22)

In Jesus' answer (which is a historical present), after the question that sets a limit, a number is cited that expresses an utterly unlimited readiness for forgiveness. This unexpected answer has the sound of a proverb, but by its form and succinctness, it carries conviction (possibly Jesus reverses Lamech's vindication song of Gn 4:24).

The community, versed in the Old Testament, knew the song that Lamech, one of Cain's descendants, sang before his wives:

Adah and Zillah: hear my voice;  
You wives of Lamech, hearken to what I say:  
I have slain a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me.

If Cain is avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy-sevenfold. (Gn 4:23)

Cain had rejoiced in Yahweh's protection, no one dare to kill him (Gn 4:15); but if it happened, Cain would be revenged sevenfold. In his pride, Lamech could outdo Cain; he will receive a revenge out of all proportion, unlimited (Stock 1994:295).

Against the example of unlimited revenge, Jesus sets unlimited reconciliation; as it is so rife in the world, it can only be balked where an equally great amount of good is set against it. To the 'natural insistence or right', Matthew's community must make its own the 'totally opposed' command ('I tell you') and form its community life according to it. Natural sensibilities have no place there, where mercy becomes the highest norm of fraternal behaviour (cf. the fifth beatitude Mt 5:7) (Stock 1994:295). The application comes from Matthew 'my heavenly Father', 'do' and 'brother'. It has the community situation reflected in Matthew 18 in mind; every member must forgive every other 'from his heart'. The king (Lord) is now presented as the heavenly Father, who makes his own forgiveness of debt dependent upon the member's readiness for reconciliation (Stock 1994:206).

Two meanings above all are brought home to the community: (1) *The warning against hardness of heart*: If community members do not forgive one another, their eternal salvation

is in danger. Only those will receive forgiveness on the judgement day who have done the same for other members (Stock 1994:297). (2) *The proportion of God's forgiveness*: The king's debt forgiveness in the parable exceeds all human dimensions. But community members must know that they are dependent upon this super-abundant mercy. Everyone heaps sin upon sin, guilt upon guilt, just like the first servant. Thereby, the relationship of the brothers among themselves is raised to an entirely new level, and they are related as persons who live by mercy of the same Lord (Stock 1994: 297).

Once again, Matthew did not only present an earlier tradition but also re-interpreted it to meet the needs of his community. He transformed an earlier saying into a more dramatic dialogue about unlimited forgiveness (Mt 18:21–22). He introduced the story of the unforgiving servant (Mt 18:23–24) to illustrate the Father's attitude toward a disciple who fails to forgive a personal offense (Mt 18:35). 'This evidence reveals Matthew's interpretation and provides an insight into the concrete situation which influenced his arrangement and composition'. The members of his community needed a forceful reminder that they should always forgive a personal offense (Stock 1994:297).

Sande (1997:183) argues that to forgive someone means to release yourself from liability and to suffer punishment or penalty. ὀφείλω, a Greek word that is often translated as 'forgive', means 'to let go, release and to remit'. It often refers to debts that have been paid or cancelled in full (e.g. Mt 6:12, 18:27, 32). People always need to remember God's forgiveness. One of the most important steps in overcoming your unforgiving attitude is to focus your attention on how much God has forgiven you (Sande 1997:195).

The parable of the unmerciful servant vividly illustrates this principle (Mt 18:21–25). In that story, a servant owed the king an enormous debt. When the king threatened to have the servant and his family sold as slaves to pay off the debt, the servant begged for mercy. The king 'took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go' (Mt 18:27). Moments later, the servant saw a man who owed him a much smaller debt. When he demanded payment, the man asked for time to repay it (Sande 1997:195). The servant refused and 'had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt' (Mt 18:30). When the king heard about this, he summoned the servant and said:

You wicked servant ... I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you? (Mt 18:32–33)

Then, 'in anger, his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured until he should pay back all he owed' (Mt 18:34).

According to Reiser (1997:276), it is not really his hardness and lack of mercy that are here held up as a reproach to the servant, but his thoughtlessness and lack of insight. The king expected the servant to draw the simple conclusion that the

one who has experienced kindness and mercy to prevail in his or her own relationships. The fact that the servant did not draw that logical conclusion, and did not see, or refused to acknowledge, the consequence of his own behaviour brings the king to a state of righteous indignation; for the sake of justice, he can do nothing else but withdraw his act of forgiveness and hand this blockhead over to the torture (Reiser 1997:276).

Jesus concludes this parable with these words: 'This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart' (Mt 18:35). The parable illustrates an attitude that is all too common among Christians. We take God's forgiveness for granted, while we stubbornly withhold our forgiveness from others. In effect, we have behaved as though others' sins against us are more serious than our sins against God: Jesus teaches that this is a terribly sinful thing to do, it is an affront to God and his holiness, and it demeans the forgiveness that Jesus purchased for us at Calvary (Sande 1997:195). Jesus' forgiveness to us is unlimited. He is always ready to forgive anyone no matter how sinful we are.

Hauerwas (1983:89) argues that we must remember that our task is not to forgive, but to learn to be the forgiven. Too often, to be ready to forgive is a way of exerting control over another. We fear accepting forgiveness from another because such a gift makes us powerless and we fear the loss of control involved. Yet we continue, 'Forgive our debts'. Only by learning to accept God's forgiveness as we see it in the life and death of Jesus can we acquire the power that control.

It is true, of course, that in a sense to be a 'forgiven people' makes us lose control. To be forgiven means that one must face the fact that his or her life actually depends on the hands of others. When we exist as a forgiven people, we are able to be at peace with our histories, so that now God's life determines our whole way of being – our character. We no longer need to deny our past, or tell ourselves false stories, as now we can accept what we have been without the knowledge of our sin destroying us (Hauerwas 1983:89).

Here we see the essential links between learning to live as a forgiven people, accepting our historicity, and being at peace with ourselves and with one another, for we are able to have a past only to the extent that we are able to accept forgiveness for what we have done and have not done but which we must claim as our own if we are to have a worthy history. Our sins as human beings are inexorably part of us, but we now no longer need to deny it. As we learn to locate our lives within the kingdom of forgiveness found in Jesus' life, death and resurrection, we should always acquire those virtues of humility and courage that are necessary to make our lives our own. Forgiving should be our lifestyle if we would need to imitate Jesus Christ. As human beings we should know that no one is perfect; we sin today and need forgiveness from others, and tomorrow someone sins against us and need forgiveness from us.

We can also draw lessons from the parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Mt 18:23–35). The parable is written in superb koine Greek, free of Semitisms, and it was apparently composed by Matthew himself. The parable is subdivided into three scenes or 'acts', such as we often find them in Jesus' parables and similitudes. In the first scene, a 'servant' (*doulos*) is brought before a 'king' (Reiser 1997:273). The servant is apparently a high official. He owes the king 'ten thousand talents'. To the ears of Jesus' hearers, that sum had to sound like something out of a fairy tale; it would immediately carry them into the atmosphere of the level of society in which people played with such fantastic sums (Reiser 1997:274). It is most probable that the servant could never produce such a sum. The king's intention to have him sold into slavery together with his wife and children was a routine legal procedure in the Ancient Near East. Such a seizure of the person served 'as a means of putting pressure on the debtor himself, his family, and his friends'. However, when the servant begs for indulgence, desperately promising to pay back 'everything', the master has pity and not only releases him from being sold, but beyond that, with almost unbelievable generosity, forgives him the whole debt (Reiser 1997:274).

The second scene forms a sharp contrast to the first. The same man who had just been forgiven a debt of 'ten thousand talents' has scarcely left the king's presence when he encounters a fellow servant who owes him the sum of 100 denarii, ridiculous in comparison. He seizes him by the throat and demands: 'Pay what you owe!' We find this formula in Latin in Petronius' satyr icon, where one person boasts: 'no one has ever said to me in a forum: "Give back what you owe!" (*nemomihī in forodixit: "Red de quod debes"*)'. The plea for a delay in payment, which the tormented servant utters in the same words that his creditor had just spoken on his own behalf, does not move him. He has him thrown into prison 'until he would pay the debt' (Reiser 1997:275). In the third scene, the king takes the unmerciful servant to task and, in his rage, hand him over to the torturers 'until he would pay his entire debt'.

The Matthean Jesus in this parable is teaching the importance of the golden rule that 'we should do unto others what we wish them to do to us'. The master practised justice. Furthermore, this story teaches that the victims of injustice should be treated fairly, and perpetrators of violence must also face justice. Another lesson drawn from this parable is that Jesus was a man of nonviolence, hence the reason why he taught about that parable of an unforgiving servant.

## Application of the Matthean Jesus' ethics of non-violence and forgiveness in Zimbabwe, 2008–2017

It is important to note that for purposes of clarity, we will give a brief background of the socio-political environment that was prevalent in Zimbabwe from 2008 to 2017 for us to appreciate the efficacy of the application of the Matthean

Jesus' ethics in the Zimbabwean context. The first decade of the 21st century marked the beginning of a new epoch in the socio-political history of Zimbabwe. This was insinuated by the formation of a formidable opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), in 1999, which challenged the ruling party, the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) that had enjoyed power since independence in 1980. The period from 2000 to 2008 was associated with unprecedented tumult that engulfed the country characterised by a plethora of socio-political challenges, which include the worst hyper-inflation, severe poverty and unprecedented political woes that include abduction, torture, intimidation, victimisation, selective application of the rule of law and murder of alleged members of the opposition MDC.

These socio-political and economic challenges were significantly reduced for a period of 5 years (2008–2013) during the tenure of the Government of National Unity (GNU). During this era, there was the formation of the Organ for National Healing, Reconciliation and Integrations (ONHRI). This organ was meant to promote national healing, peace and reconciliation in Zimbabwe. Be as it may, there were arguments as to whether the national healing and reconciliation project should be led by politicians given the politics of partisanship that characterised the political landscape of Zimbabwe since independence. Indeed, this organ did not yield the desired results. Moreover, the post-GNU era saw the resurgence of the socio-political and economic challenges that were rampant during the pre-GNU era. By the end of 2014, it was evident that the Zimbabwe economy was in deep trouble again, after the marginal recovery under the GNU, but with little sign that the government would address the problems. The solution was evident to virtually all except ZANU-PF (Research and Advocacy Unit 2017:5). It was obvious that Zimbabwe bought more than it sold out of the country, financed the government by increased borrowing and spent most of the fiscus on recurrent expenditure in paying government employees, thus increased debt at an alarming rate and fostered the informalisation of the economy at remarkable speed (Research and Advocacy Unit 2017:5). It is imperative to note that intra-party and inter-party violence resuscitated at alarming levels. For instance, ZANU-PF was rocked by serious succession battles, which saw several expulsions from the party.

It is important to note that in the Zimbabwean situation, the strict application of the Matthean Jesus' ethics of non-resentment is problematic because some of the people perceived to be perpetrators of human rights violations continue to hold power or are in strategic positions that obstruct the advancement of the envisioned reconciliation and national healing process. Tom (pers. comm. 18 November 2014) argues that those who are prosecuted are those alleged offenders from the opposition, while perpetrators from the ruling party often get away scot-free. Prosecution is not fairly practised, because even the judiciary system seems to be biased towards the ruling party, giving the impression that it

is not an independent body. The president, probably with the ruling government, decides on who should be judges and this hamstrung the effectiveness of the judiciary. No wonder there is an outcry for the independence of the judiciary by opposition parties and the international community.

Chirandu (pers. comm. 09 June 2014) argues that some rich perpetrators of political violence simply pay bribes and they get off scot-free. According to Steven (pers. comm. 13 July 2015), the persecuted in most cases in Zimbabwe would end up nursing their wounds whilst behind bars because when they report cases of political violence, they end up being arrested instead of the perpetrators of the violence. The aggrieved would, therefore, fear going to report the violence, which makes it very difficult for the victims to get medication because the doctors would first ask for a police report before attending to the victim. The perpetrators of violence aligned to the ruling party are sacred cows, because they are often not prosecuted. According to Barson (pers. comm. 12 December 2017), Zimbabwe has a dark history of impunity, perpetrators of violence have not been prosecuted because most of the political violence has been state-sponsored and is highly institutionalised. The law enforcing agents, like Zimbabwe Republic of Police (ZRP), have cited shortage of duty officers and lack of transport as reasons for not bringing to book those engaged in violence. Many perpetrators are skilled at manipulating the system effectively to further their aims to punish the victims; hence, they walk scot-free. Kongola (pers. comm. 19 December 2017) asserts that it depends on which political party the perpetrators are affiliated to. If they are from the ruling party, it is unlikely that they would be prosecuted. This is the area where the noble process of national healing, peace and reconciliation fails. For Musimwa (pers. comm. 15 October 2017), perpetrators are not prosecuted as most of them bear high ranks in political parties. The statements above suggest that for Zimbabweans to apply Jesus' non-violence, repentance, forgiveness and justice will take time because the perpetrators of violence are walking scot-free.

The gospel of Matthew retells the drama of scapegoating but reveals its demand for violence as a fraud. Acknowledging that all history is dominated by violence, the Matthean Jesus says:

Therefore I sent you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify; and some you scourge in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, that upon you may come all the righteous bloodshed on earth, from the blood of innocent Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Truly, I say to you, all this will come upon this generation. (Mt 23:34–36; Chamburuka & Chamburuka 2016:206)

These views are also found in the early Christianity as they remembered Jesus condemning violence and urged Christians to make peace and to suffer violence without retaliation. In Matthew 22:15–22, when Jesus encouraged the Pharisees to pay taxes to Caesar, it was a way of preventing violence for Jesus knew that the Pharisees perceived him as a

political leader. By so doing, Jesus was able to promote peace and prevent political violence.

With the above insights, reconciliation is a tough and slow moving process in Zimbabwe. It requires a decisive beginning, creative enough to bring former enemies to a point where they are willing to explore a shared solution to the conflict, which often has the capacity to consume a society in violence but not to bring peace. It requires a commitment to an inclusive regime of human rights, as an incentive to deepening peace.

Its goal is a society within which enemies begin to engage one another as fellow citizens and even friends (Horsley 1987:21). Chitando (pers. comm. 05 May 2012) argues that:

[O]ur values system should correspond to ethics of Jesus because those who are called to follow Christ should also imitate Jesus' ethics. However, there is need for truth telling, justice and reconciliation, for us to have national healing. (p. 5)

The notion of non-resentment and forgiveness is applicable to the Zimbabwean situation of national healing, peace and reconciliation in Zimbabwe. As we appreciate the Matthean Jesus' ethics, we need to consider a close parallel that is enunciated by Mahatma Gandhi's theory<sup>1</sup> of non-violence, which stresses that the best solution to conquer them is to give them love. The theory successfully led to the independence of India. Therefore, we cannot dispute that violence is the most primitive reaction of a human being, but if we act in non-violence, we disarm the oppressor (Chamburuka & Chamburuka 2016: 207). However, this approach as demonstrated by the teaching and life of the Matthean Jesus involves sacrifice, perseverance and determination.

National healing demands justice but what is happening in Zimbabwe is that the perpetrators of violence are let off scot-free and the law of Zimbabwe is silent about that (Gadzikwa pers. comm. 28 December 2017):

In Bikita one of our close relative lost their live stocks, and the one who destroyed them is free and not prosecuted and this is more painful I tell you. (Gadzp. ikwa pers. comm. 28 December 2017:7)

The other challenge is that the victims are being victimised by their relatives. For national healing to take place in Zimbabwe, the government should not take part in the calling for healing. Neutral organisations should be active on this issue such as churches. An example is the issue of *Gukurahundi*, which took place in Matabeleland and the people are seeking justice, but this issue is being brushed aside, main reason being that the causers are currently the leaders of the nation. So they are just sweeping the issue under the carpet, and this is reviving the wounds of the victims because they thought that their healing is

1. Mahatma Gandhi has come to be known as the Father of India and a beacon of light in the last decades of British colonial rule, promoting non-violence, justice and harmony between people of all faiths (see [http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/hinduism/people/gandhi\\_1.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/hinduism/people/gandhi_1.shtml)).

now coming through the new government of President Mnangagwa. It is important to note that some people were being used by the political parties to cause violence but later on dumped by their parties with nothing. The trauma of economic hardships makes people kill each other, fight each other and ignore their families. The environment of Zimbabwe has given a desperate situation to the people of Zimbabwe. One cannot talk of national healing in such environment (Gadzikwa pers. comm. 28 December 2017).

One of the tenets of Matthean Jesus is non-violence. However, Gadzikwa (pers. comm. 28 December 2017) argues that there is no peace in Zimbabwe. We are talking of a new government that is not a new government at all.

We can safely say we have a new government with the same old people. This current government led by Mnangagwa was not voted by the people of Zimbabwe because it came into power by force using the military. I might not be in for people. Most of them have a tainted history. Maybe we should just give them the benefit of the doubt and see what will happen after elections in 2018 (Gadzikwa pers. comm. 28 December 2017). This is because the people we are dealing with are just the other faction of the same party which is ruling ZANU-PF. They do not represent the people but only their party. The system might not change necessarily because people are the same. The Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front has failed to bring peace and reconciliation because this new government, instead of bringing together the two factions of the same party G40 (former president Mugabe ZANU-PF supporters) and Lacoste (current president Mnangagwa ZANU-PF supporters), are busy chasing them away from the party and prosecute only people from G40. They are not even mentioning the opposition parties. The confusion is still in their party, which is the ruling party. So how can a party that is failing to bring peace and reconciliation upon itself manage to bring peace and reconciliation to the whole nation? Therefore, as Zimbabweans we still have a lot of work to do in order to effectively implement the Matthean Jesus' ethics.

Mnangagwa was heard on television (30/12/17) saying *chinhu chine rudzirwacho*, meaning a 'thing has its kind', insinuating that ruling has a designated people to rule; not every party should rule except the ZANU-PF. As we stand, there is fear that the elections of 2018 will not be free and fair (Gadzikwa pers. comm. 28 December 2017). Taringa (pers. comm. 17 December 2017) is of the opinion that Mnangagwa has an opportunity to bring unity because by December 2017 he has managed to reconcile with white farmers, he has also managed to pass a parliament bill of national healing, healing and reconciliation, which will deal with challenges that were experienced in the post-independence era.

Ruzivo (pers. comm. 16 December 2017) argues that the political terrain in Zimbabwe is quite unstable at the moment.

There are still fights happening in some parts of Zimbabwe. Therefore, talking of national healing is quite difficult until

the political terrain stabilises. Maybe after the 2018 elections will we realise a temporary national healing, peace and reconciliation. This is because as Zimbabwe has gained independence in 1980, people have been uniting for some short periods before getting divided again.

According to Ruzivo (pers. comm. December 2017), unity is an ideal that one should strive for: it can never be realised ultimately. It is like the life of being a Christian; you always thrive for it. 'Being a Christian is utopia because you keep striving for it without totally achieving it until you die' – this can be applied to the national healing of Zimbabwe (Ruzivo pers. comm. 16 December 2017). Reconciliation is not a panacea for the rest of life but it rather registers the desire that we want to have peace and live peacefully. It does not mean that if people has reconciled, they have forgotten. Reconciliation sometimes only comes because people would just want to benefit from the system. Ruzivo (pers. comm. 16 December 2017) argues that 'I am influenced by Karl Max theory which states that there is a thesis which is followed by anti-thesis and then synthesis'. For him, the Zimbabwe thesis was in 1980, when we got our independence, which was then followed by an anti-thesis in 1987 where we re-united by the means of Unity Accord and then Unity Government in 2009 came later. We will continue in this cycle as a nation. Peace will come for a short period of time, then we fight again and unite and peace comes again.

Ruzivo (pers. comm. 16 December 2017) asserts that Jesus' ethics can be applied only in a certain period. When we strive to make order, our order will never be permanent. Following the above thought-provoking input from Ruzivo (pers. comm. 16 December 2017), we cannot rule out that the Matthean Jesus' ethics are still applicable in Zimbabwe. What is needed is political will on the part of the ruling party as well as developing robust ways of deconstructing the culture of political violence upon the citizenry. The church and civic organisation should lose sleep in preaching and teaching Matthean Jesus' ethics by drawing lessons from countries like South Africa where peace, healing and reconciliation were achieved to a greater extent in the post-Apartheid era.

Tutu (1999:271) asserts that in relations between individuals, if one asks another person for forgiveness you may be spurned; the one you have injured may refuse to forgive you. The risk is even greater if you are the injured party wanting to offer forgiveness. The culprit may be arrogant, obdurate or blind, not ready or willing to apologise or to ask for forgiveness. He or she thus cannot appropriate the forgiveness that is offered. This is the case in most parts of Zimbabwe where perpetrators of political violence label the victims of political repression as traitors of the revolution (independence), puppets of the West and saboteurs of the ruling party who deserves to be punished by any means possible. Hence, the political mindset and ideology of perpetrators of violence becomes an impediment for a practical application of the Matthean Jesus' ethics of forgiveness. In forgiving, people are not being asked to

forget. On the contrary, it is important to remember, so that one should not let such atrocities happen again. Forgiveness does not mean condoning what has been done. It means taking what happened seriously and not minimising it, drawing out the sting in the memory that threatens to poison our entire existence. It involves trying to understand the perpetrators, and so have empathy, to try to stand in their shoes and appreciate the sort of pressures and influences that might have conditioned them (Tutu 1999:271).

Forgiving means abandoning your right to pay back the perpetrator in his own coin, but it is a loss that liberates the victim. In the commission, people were heard speaking of a sense of relief after forgiving. Tom (pers. comm. 18 November 2014) asserts that one can bring national healing, peace and reconciliation by making perpetrators of political violence to apologise and ask for forgiveness to those whom they wronged and to the public through print media and/or through television or radio. Chirandu (pers. comm. 09 June 2014) is of the opinion that healing can come through preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ, preaching about unity and by bringing harmony among the political parties, churches and societies or communities. Cay2 (pers. comm. 23 February 2015) advocates for tolerance regardless of differences in political parties and ethnic orientation. Zodwa (pers. comm. 12 December 2017) argues that national healing can be brought through clinical counselling of the victims as well. If the process is carefully executed, it will lead to confessions by both the perpetrators and victims of political violence and bring the most needed national healing, peace and reconciliation in Zimbabwe.

Mavedzenge (pers. comm. 20 October 2017) contends that engaging in dialogue and asking for forgiveness by perpetrators of political violence are crucial in Zimbabwe. However, political leaders should be sincere enough to practice what they say on political platforms upon which they condemn violence. According to Kongola (pers. comm. 22 December 2017), church organs should facilitate and initiate meaningful programmes in national healing, peace and reconciliation in Zimbabwe. This can be achieved through organising workshops of training for trainers in matters of national healing. These workshops will induct participants with the necessary skills on how aspects like counselling sessions are conducted with special focus on cases of political violence. The trained trainers will be mandated to go to their respective districts and provinces where they will also train others who will also do the same, and the chain goes on until one have many skilled counsellors, peace builders and peace ambassadors in each community. It is important to note that the Matthean Jesus' ethics will be emphasised in these trainings; however, the trainers should also apply a multi-faith approach so that participants who are not Christians may not resist the programme or end up castigating it as a Christian proselytisation agenda.

We are instructed to love our enemies, including those who have wronged us and are unrepentant (Wolterstoff 2013:214). Here is what the *Kairos* document, issued in South Africa in

1986 by theologians opposed to apartheid, says on the matter: The biblical teaching on reconciliation and forgiveness makes it quite clear that nobody can be forgiven and reconciled with God unless he or she repents their sins (Wolterstoff 2013:214). When he or she repents, we must be willing to forgive seventy times (Mt 18:21–35), but before that we are expected to preach repentance to those who sin against us or against anyone.

Reconciliation, forgiveness and negotiations will become our Christian duty in South Africa only when the apartheid regime shows signs of genuine repentance (Wolterstoff 2013:214). A further question is whether it is even possible to forgive the unrepentant wrongdoers and if it is possible, whether it is morally permissible. Swinburne (1989:85–86) makes the point well that unless the wrongdoing was trivial, it is wrong for the victim 'in the absence of some atonement at least in the form of apology to treat the (act) as not having been done'.

Be that as it may, the cross breaks the cycle of violence. Hanging on the cross, Jesus provided the ultimate example of his command to replace the principle of retaliation ('an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth') with the principle of non-resistance ('if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also'; Mt 5:38–42). By suffering violence as an innocent victim, he took upon himself the aggression of the persecutors. He broke the vicious cycle of violence by absorbing it, taking it upon himself (Chamburuka & Chamburuka 2016:211). He refused to be sucked into the automatism of revenge, but sought to overcome evil by doing good, even at the cost of his life (Chamburuka & Chamburuka 2016):

Jesus' kind of option for non-violence had nothing to do with the self-abnegation in which I completely place myself at the disposal of others to do with me as they please; It had much to do with the kind of self-assertion in which I refuse to be ensnared in the dump redoubling of enemies' violent gestures, and be reshaped into their mirror image. (p. 211)

However, the crucified Messiah is not a concealed legitimisation of the system of terror, but its radical critique. Far from enthroning violence, the socialisation of him as victim subverts violence. Secondly, the cross lays bare the mechanism of scapegoating. All the accounts of Jesus' death agree that he suffered unjust violence. His persecutors believed in the excellence of their cause, but in reality they hated without a cause and to say that he was an innocent victim is not to say that he was an arbitrarily chosen victim. In a world of deception and oppression, his innocence, his truthfulness and his justice were reasons enough for hatred. Jesus was a threat, and precisely because of his threatening innocence, he was made a scapegoat. Instead of taking the perspective of the persecutors, the gospels take the perspective of the victim; they constantly reveal what the texts of historical persecutors, and especially mythological persecutors, hide from people: the knowledge that their victim is a scapegoat (Volf 1996:292).

Jesus did not wait until those who were nailing him to the cross had asked for forgiveness. He was ready, as they drove in the nails, to pray to his father to forgive them, and he even

provided an excuse for what they were doing. If the victim could forgive only when the culprit confessed, then the victim would be locked into the culprit's whim, locked into victimhood, whatever her own attitude or intention (Tutu 1999:272).

Jesus could have avoided suffering, but in obedience to his mission of communicating God's love, he chose the path that inevitably made him one of the victims. As such, he suffered in the same way as many others.

Stripped of all human dignity, exhausted by continuous pain, helpless before his executioners and the jeering onlookers, deserted by friends and by his God, Jesus was reduced to sheer victim. Yet, his suffering did not, as suffering often does, turn him in on himself and deprive him of the spiritual strength to be concerned for others (Bauckham 2011:148). On the contrary, his loving concern reached all the people around him as he hung dying: his fellow victims on the crosses beside him, his mother in her grief, even his executioners, for whom he prayed for forgiveness. Because he suffered out of love and loved in his suffering, the crucified Jesus was God's loving solidarity with all who suffer victimisation (Bauckham 2011:148). Tutu (1999) gives an analogy in trying to explain the need for a perpetrator to confess.

Imagine you are sitting in a dank, stuffy, dark room. This is because the curtains are drawn and the windows have been shut. Outside the light is shining and a fresh breeze is blowing. If you want the light to stream into that room and the fresh air to flow in, you will have to open the window and draw the curtains apart; then that light which has always been available will come in and air will enter the room to freshen it up. So it is with forgiveness. (p. 272)

The victim may be ready to forgive and make the gift of his or her forgiveness available, but it is up to the wrongdoer to appropriate the gift to open the window and draw the curtains aside. He or she does this by acknowledging the wrong he or she has done, so letting the light and fresh air of forgiveness enter his or her being (Tutu 1999:272). According to Jesus (Mt 18:22), we should be ready to do this not just once, not just seven times, but 70 times seven, without limit provided, it seems Jesus says; your brother or sister who has wronged you is ready to come to confess the wrong they have committed yet again.

Tutu's conception of forgiveness above is shared by Taringa (pers. comm. 14 October 2012), who maintains that for the issue of peace and reconciliation in Zimbabwe to be applicable to Jesus' ethics, reconciliation is only sustained by the victim forgiving the perpetrator. He argues that the power of forgiveness comes from the victim. Taringa (pers. comm. 14 October 2012) also stresses that Jesus on the cross was the one who uttered the words of forgiveness and not the perpetrators. Therefore, for him reconciliation can only be achieved if and only if it is advocated by the victim, not churches and any other organisations and ministries. It requires a fair measure of humility and unconditional love to achieve this mammoth task of forgiving one who offended you. The victim, we hope, would

be moved to respond to an apology by forgiving the culprit. In essence when the victim initiates forgiveness, that move will disarm the perpetrator. The approach appears to be unrealistic to many people but it is effective and it paves way for healing by confronting the source of trauma.

Tutu (1999:272) further asserts that once the wrongdoer has confessed and the victim has forgiven, it does not mean that is the end of the process. Most frequently, the wrong has affected the victim in tangible, material ways. Apartheid provided the white people with enormous benefits and privileges, leaving its victims deprived and exploited. If someone steals a pen and then asks forgiveness, unless he or she returns my pen, the sincerity of his contrition and confession will be considered to be nil. Confession, forgiveness and reparation, wherever feasible, form part of a continuum (Tutu 1999:272).

We concur with Chitando (pers. comm. 05 May 2012) who argues that in the Zimbabwean context, the perpetrators need to come out and be heard asking for forgiveness and then compensate whatever loss has been incurred in the victim. Chitando (pers. comm. 05 May 2012) asserts that the perpetrators have to compensate; especially the victims who lost their body parts and those who lost their beloved ones must be assisted, maybe with school fees for the children of the bereaved or with artificial legs or hands or eyes. This process will greatly show the depth of regret for evil deeds.

The call for justice in relation to the Zimbabwean scenario is also shared by Trevor Saruwaka (pers. comm. 20 October 2012), the Member of Parliament (MP) of Mutasa Central Region. He argues that for being a victim, the issue of turning the other cheek applied in the past, but now the victims need justice. He reiterates that as long as the perpetrators are walking scot-free, victims will not sit down and watch. Saruwaka (pers. comm. 20 October 2012) argues that there is a need for those people to be judged, sentenced and be jailed, so that peace and reconciliation prevails. If justice is not done, people will wait for an opportunity to rule because to forget about it, is impossible. This conception shows the need to have a robust application of the national healing, peace and reconciliation in Zimbabwe. Saruwaka (pers. comm. 20 October 2012) asserts that during the GNU, it was impossible to implement peace, healing and reconciliation programmes because the Organ on National Healing Reconciliation and Integration (ONHRI) was not working. Although it was created, it lacked necessary resources for it to function as expected by the people of Zimbabwe. Furthermore, Saruwaka (pers. comm. 20 October 2012) argues that ONHRI must not be superintended by politicians, but it must instead be led by independent officers, such as churches, civic organisations or better still, an independent commission.

However, the challenge now is that some of the churches in Zimbabwe have been infiltrated by the ZANU-PF. Be that as it may, it is important for the churches as a community to unite and be free from partisan affiliation and instead be actively engaged in the process of national healing.

Magaya (pers. comm. 06 September 2012) opines that Jesus is very unique. He was certainly non-violent but it does not mean that he applied docility and passivity to perpetrators. This is because Jesus as a man stood for justice.

By saying 'turn another cheek', it means to reduce one's dignity to the perpetrator. Magaya (pers. comm. 06 September 2012) stresses that non-violence will leave the perpetrators naked, because you will be saying 'yes destroy our homes, beat us and torture us so that your shamelessness will be visible' (Magaya pers. comm. 06 September 2012).

Moreover, Magaya (pers. comm. 06 September 2012) argues that by 'turning another cheek we end up having no cheeks if we do not apply justice'. He further says that 'an eye for an eye we end up having every one blind'. For him, an eye for an eye is not good, whereas a pacifist approach is also not accepted (Magaya pers. comm. 06 September 2012). He argues that as Christians in Zimbabwe, there is a need to have to come out in the open, and march with our bible, and talk about peace, truth and justice for Zimbabwe to be healed from the past ills of political violence.

Magaya (pers. comm. 06 September 2012) agrees with Saruwaka (pers. comm. 2012) that the problem in Zimbabwe is that some of the church leaders are now affiliates of political parties. Magaya (pers. comm. 06 September 2012) gives an analogy that: 'If a dog has been given a bone, it will not bark hence making robbers do whatever they want'. Therefore, it is imperative for church leaders to be true ambassadors of Jesus Christ in order to be prophetic and become the voice of the voiceless in Zimbabwe. In essence, if the church is compromised politically, this will jeopardise the application of Matthean Jesus' ethics among the grass roots in villages and high density areas that were most hard hit by political violence.

It is important for the people of Zimbabwe to learn from their mistakes. It is evident that many people in Zimbabwe have been affected in one way or the other by political violence, especially the violence that happened between 2008 and 2009. For instance, Matingo (pers. comm. 27 December 2017) from Manicaland Province argues that many people suffered several problems, which include, but are not limited to, psychological disorders/trauma-like dementia, severe stress, post-traumatic disorders and other bipolar disorders, unrest, loss of life; some were orphaned leading to early marriages; and child-headed families causing school drop-outs. Ncube (pers. comm. 28 December 2017) from Masvingo Province asserts that MDC-T supporters were the most affected by political violence from June 2008 up to the inception of the GNU. He argues that most of these people are now living in fear; they lack freedom of speech; some are still homeless and disabled; and even more tragically some are now widows or orphans.

According to Mutimhodyo (pers. comm. 23 November 2017), political violence in Zimbabwe has caused the disintegration

of the families; it impeded development and some of our Zimbabwean citizens are now asylum seekers in neighbouring countries (such as South Africa, Namibia, Lesotho, Botswana, Zambia and Mozambique), and some have gone overseas. Chitombo (pers. comm. 19 December 2017) alludes that loss of property and lives and hatred in families are some of the effects of political violence. Tendai (pers. comm. 19 April 2016) argues that political violence causes economic decline and social conflicts resulting in high rate of crime.

Machakanja (2010:11) argues that reconciliation should aim at addressing the most obvious human rights abuses and the root causes of the conflict. The argument is that the success of any reconciliation and national model would depend on the extent to which it is inclusive and consultative of all key stakeholders at all levels of society. Conflict analysis is incomplete if it is not geared towards transforming all aspects of conflict as described earlier. To transform a conflict is to get to its root causes and find agreeable alternatives to factors that contribute to or perpetuate injustice, insecurity, aggression, marginalisation of a particular community and oppression (Opongo 2006:80). In order to undertake this process, one would have to identify the core of the conflict, the emerging needs, interests and positions, and eventually make a conflict impact assessment to evaluate how efforts towards conflict transformation are affected by the ongoing conflict and vice versa (Opongo 2006:81).

Barson (pers. comm. 12 December 2017) asserts that justice ought to be applied in the process of national healing, peace and reconciliation in Zimbabwe through creating a mechanism that monitors human rights abuses and political violence. The commission must be all inclusive, and there should be public ratification and commitment by senior government leaders to commit to peace, as well as the signing and ratification of United Nations charters on peace and reconciliation and national healing. It is worrisome to note that to date Zimbabwe has not committed itself to stop torture among hundreds of nations that have committed themselves against torture of any kind.

For Mavedzenge (pers. comm. 20 October 2017), a neutral body of non-partisan people should lead the reconciliation process or have representation from all affected parties, including victims. Those who killed and committed atrocities should face the wrath of the law regardless of their political affiliation.

## Conclusion

From the discussion above, it has emerged that the application of Matthean Jesus' ethics is vital for the Zimbabwean society because it paves the way for peace, healing and reconciliation. Among other factors, the Matthean Jesus' ethics call for victims of political violence to unconditionally extend forgiveness to their offenders as demonstrated by the Matthean Jesus who forgave mankind's sins through his sacrificial death on the cross. Over and above that, there should be an honest implementation of justice and truth-telling by the Zimbabwean

government through willingness, and commitment to institute the rule of law, and cab all forms of lawlessness. Moreover, it is imperative that there should be a formation of an independent truth, justice and reconciliation commission to deal with truth-telling, acknowledgement of past wrongs and restorative and transitional justice issues in Zimbabwe.

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